

Texas' White Space Strategy

Supporting Health Information Exchange in Rural Texas

THSA



TEXAS HEALTH SERVICES AUTHORITY

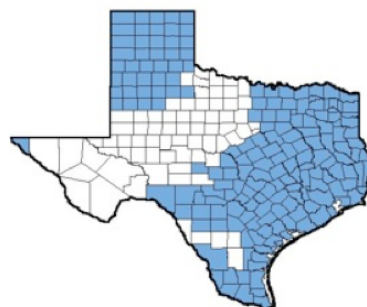
Fact Sheet and Q&A

VISION

To enhance health care quality and effectiveness for all patients, the health care sector should be supported by an infrastructure made up of interoperable, electronic health records composed of standardized, structured data elements that are exchanged among authorized health care organizations and providers across secure regional and statewide networks.

MISSION

The Texas Health Services Authority will promote and coordinate the development of a seamless electronic health information infrastructure to improve the quality, safety, and efficiency of the Texas health care sector while protecting individual privacy.



Introduction

This Fact Sheet offers Texas health care providers basic information regarding the Texas “White Space” strategy, which is designed to enable connectivity in rural areas of Texas to ensure that all Texas providers have the opportunity to participate in electronic health information exchange (HIE). Following is a brief explanation of the purpose, history and status of the Texas HIE initiative; an explanation of the White Space strategy and the role of health information service providers (HISPs); and answers to frequently asked questions.

Texas HIE Background

In March 2010, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) received an award from the Office of National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) for funding through the State Health Information Exchange (HIE) Cooperative Agreement Program. The purpose of this program, which was created by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, is to fund state planning and implementation of electronic health information networks to support higher quality, safer, and more efficient health care. Texas’ allotment through this program is \$28.8 million over the four years of the program.

The HHSC is serving as the fiscal agent for this funding and the Texas Health Services Authority (THSA), under contract with HHSC, is serving as a convening entity to ensure broad input from stakeholders, such as consumers, hospitals, health plans, and physicians, on the development and implementation of HIE in Texas.

In November 2010, ONC approved the strategic and operational plans developed by the THSA. These plans, which will guide the implementation of HIE services in Texas, outline and support the implementation of the following three key strategies:

- ◆ General state-level operations administered jointly by THSA and HHSC to support a transparent and collaborative governance structure to coordinate the implementation of HIE in Texas, develop policies and guidelines, and provide statewide HIE services.
- ◆ Local HIE grant program to partially fund planning, development, and operations of local and regional HIE networks.
- ◆ White space coverage to provide at least minimal HIE connectivity through Health Information Service Providers (HISPs) to regions of the state without local or regional

Q&A

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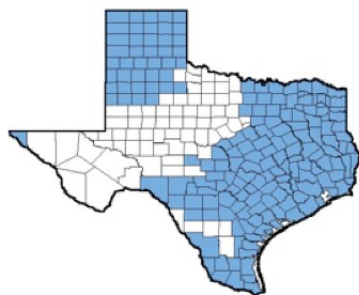
What is health information exchange (HIE)?

The electronic movement of health-related information among organizations according to nationally recognized standards.

Why is Texas implementing HIE?

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides incentives for eligible Medicaid and Medicare providers and hospitals to encourage adoption of electronic health records (EHRs). In order to fully qualify for these incentives, providers and hospitals must make “meaningful use” of the EHRs by exchanging clinical health data across secure networks. Implementing HIE statewide will help to ensure Texas providers and hospitals are eligible to receive billions in meaningful use incentive payments over the next decade. In the long-term, Texas has an opportunity to leverage technology to improve the quality, safety, and efficiency of the Texas health care sector while protecting individual privacy.

What is Texas’ White Space Program?



The THSA established a marketplace of qualified HISPs to provide lite HIE connectivity services to physicians and hospitals located in counties that do not have a local HIE, otherwise referred to as the “White Space” in Texas. These HISPs must provide the electronic capabilities for the transmission of all clinical transactions necessary for meaningful use of electronic health records in accordance with recognized federal and state standards. Initially, this includes the transmission of clinical care summaries and lab results.

\$2 million in total funds is available to support the White Space strategy. All HISPs participating in the marketplace are eligible to receive a subsidized payment from the THSA based on the number of eligible hospitals and physicians located in the identified White Space counties that each HISP is able to connect. The subsidy, or voucher, is in the amount of \$400 per White Space physician connected and \$5000 for each White Space hospital connected. There are about 160 hospitals and 3000 physicians located in the Texas White Space counties.

What counties comprise Texas’ White Space region?

Andrews, Archer, Baylor, Borden, Brewster, Brown, Callahan, Clay, Coke, Coleman, Comanche, Concho, Cottle, Crane, Crockett, Culberson, Dawson, Dimmit, Duval, Eastland, Ector, Erath, Fisher, Foard, Gaines, Glasscock, Hardeman, Haskell, Hood, Howard, Hudspeth, Irion, Jack, Jeff Davis, Jones, Kent, Kimble, Knox, La Salle, Loving, Martin, Maverick, McCulloch, McMullen, Midland, Mitchell, Nolan, Palo Pinto, Pecos, Presidio, Reagan, Reeves, Runnels, Schleicher, Scurry, Shackelford, Somervell, Stephens, Sterling, Stonewall, Sutton, Taylor, Terrell, Throckmorton, Tom Green, Upton, Ward, Wichita, Wilbarger, Winkler, Young, and Zavala.

What is a HISP?

A health information service provider, or HISP, is an organization that supports the secure transport of structured or unstructured data (e.g., simple text and PDF, semi-structured text, and highly structured messages and documents) on behalf of the sending or receiving organization or individual.

Q&A

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Why should an eligible hospital or physician consider using a HISP?

All HISPs qualified by the THSA offer simple and affordable secure clinical messaging solutions for the transport of clinical information between providers. The services offered by each qualified HISP enable hospitals and physicians to achieve federal HIE Stage 1 electronic health record meaningful use requirements by facilitating electronic lab results delivery and facilitating electronic exchange of patient care summaries across unaffiliated organizations.

How were the HISPs qualified?

The THSA issued a [Request for Qualifications \(RFQ\)](#) with the expectation that we would receive responses from multiple HISPs, at least some of which were capable of serving all or a portion of the physicians and hospitals in the White Space counties.

Applications were evaluated for quality, cost, readiness, coverage, and stated willingness to deliver core services, implement required interoperability and privacy and security policies and standards, and participate in program evaluation. “Readiness” means that we expect that qualified HISPs are capable of supporting HIE services today, and particularly those services that are required to enable physicians and hospitals to achieve federal HIE Stage 1 meaningful use requirements: facilitating electronic lab results delivery and facilitating electronic exchange of patient care summaries across unaffiliated organizations.

HISPs’ applications in response to the White Space RFQ were evaluated using a multi-step process. In the first step, a team of reviewers from THSA and HHSC reviewed each response against a list of requirements from the RFQ and scored each response based the extent to which the HISP appeared to be capable of meeting those requirements. The THSA and HHSC then issued clarifying questions to those prospective HISPs who appeared to be capable of meeting the threshold requirements. Based on the answers to those questions, certain prospective HISPs were selected to proceed to the final stages of the evaluation process, which included an interview, live demonstration, and a technical capabilities test.

Where can I find information on the qualified HISPs?

Additional information on the HISPs, including profile and pricing for services, can be found on the THSA website at: www.thsa.org/white-space.aspx.

Who pays for HISP services?

All HISPs participating in the marketplace are eligible to receive a subsidized payment from the THSA based on the number of hospitals and eligible physicians located in the identified White Space counties that each HISP is able to connect. The subsidy, or voucher, is in the amount of \$400 per White Space physician connected and \$5000 for each White Space hospital connected.

The voucher is intended to act as a subsidy, and the HISPs may not charge participating physician or hospitals for any services until the voucher funds have been expended on those services. However, once those funds have been expended, HISPs may charge physicians and hospitals directly for their services, in accordance with the HISP’s published pricing available on the THSA website.

Q&A

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Do hospitals and physicians located in White Space counties need to sign up for a voucher number?

Yes, hospitals and physicians located in the White Space counties should request a voucher number from the THSA. **Additional information on requesting a voucher can be found at www.thsa.org/white-space.aspx.**

Are hospitals and physicians located in other areas of the state eligible to participate in the White Space Program? Do they need to sign up for a voucher number?

No, hospitals and physicians in other areas of the state are covered by a local HIE funded through the Local HIE Grant Program. Those HIEs are supporting the development of community network services to enable hospitals and physicians to achieve federal HIE Stage 1 electronic health record meaningful use requirements. Additional information on the Local HIE Grant Program can be found at: www.thsa.org/resources.aspx.

How will the voucher numbers be used?

In order for a qualified HISP to receive a payment for connecting a hospital and/or physician in rural Texas, the following must occur:

1. Hospital/physician requests a voucher number from the THSA;
2. The THSA verifies the eligibility of hospital/physician and assigns the hospital/physician a voucher number;
3. Hospital/physician selects and contracts with a qualified HISP;
4. The qualified HISP reports the voucher number of the connected hospital/physician to the THSA and requests payment; and
5. THSA verifies the voucher number and makes a payment to the HISP.

How does a hospital/physician apply for a voucher number?

Please follow the steps below to apply for a voucher number:

1. Determine if you are eligible for a voucher. A list of White Space counties is available above.
2. Request a voucher number by completing the voucher number application process at: <http://thsa-whitespace.org>
3. THSA will notify hospitals/physicians and provide a voucher number to all qualified applicants.

Does a hospital/physician have to have an Electronic Health Record to participate in the White Space Program through a HISP?

Not necessarily. If a HISP offers services utilizing Direct protocols, all a provider needs to connect with others is an email account. Using Direct, either structured data from an EHR or unstructured data (e.g., PDF copy of a patient record) can be emailed from sender to recipient via encrypted email.

