Arizona Health-e Connection:
10 Years of Advancing Health Through
Information Technology

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What began in a small office with the Arizona Medical Association is today a statewide resource that is improving healthcare across the state. Arizona Health-e Connection (AzHeC), Arizona’s statewide health information exchange (HIE), has become an increasingly valuable resource for providers as the market shifts to value-based payment requiring more complete patient information and better care coordination.

Here are a few recent milestones for AzHeC:

• In 2016, participation in the statewide HIE grew from 77 to 250 participants – an increase of 225 percent. A key factor driving this growth was the elimination of participation fees for community providers in October 2015, as well as the integration of physical and behavioral health information in the HIE.

• AzHeC is currently receiving ADTs (admissions, discharges & transfers) from Arizona hospitals representing approximately 90% of all statewide discharges. Community providers can “subscribe” to real-time alerts of these ADTs to improve the care coordination for their patients.

• The statewide HIE saw a significant increase in data received from participants, increasing from 6.4 million transactions monthly in December 2015 to 10.1 million transactions monthly in December 2016. The HIE now contains clinical information on more than 7 million patients.

It has been quite a journey for AzHeC and the journey began with a roadmap.

In 2005, through an executive order of Governor Janet Napolitano, a broad community coalition came together to create a roadmap to guide the coordination and development of health information technology (HIT) and health information exchange (HIE) in Arizona. The result was the initial strategic plan for HIE/HIT in Arizona entitled the Arizona Health-e Connection Roadmap that, among other plans and initiatives, called for the creation of a non-profit, public-private organization to coordinate health information technology development in Arizona. The new non-profit was incorporated in January 2007 and took on the name of the statewide roadmap.
Here are some of the key HIT/HIE developments in AzHeC's first 10 years:

**The advancement of electronic health records (EHRs)**
Through an $11.9 million grant, AzHeC operated the Arizona Regional Extension Center and assisted more than 3,200 providers with the adoption and meaningful use of EHRs. Today EHR adoption is well above 85% statewide, and through the EHR Incentive Program of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), more than $650 million has been brought into the state for participating hospitals and providers.

**E-prescribing and the e-prescribing of controlled substances (EPCS)**
Through grant-funded programs, AzHeC has advanced the use of e-prescribing by Arizona physicians and pharmacies, with the statewide e-prescribing rate rising from below 10 percent in 2007 to more than 60 percent today. In addition, AzHeC was a part of the collaborative community effort to support legislation that in 2012 made the e-prescribing of controlled substances (EPCS) legal in the state. The rate of EPCS adoption has steadily increased since.

**The advancement of HIE and patient rights**
In 2011, AzHeC helped lead a collaborative community effort to support successful legislation that removed barriers to HIE and created regulations to afford and give notice to patients of their rights regarding the sharing of their health information through a health information organization (HIO). The result is a “patient rights process” developed and implemented by AzHeC that provides patients across the state a notice (like a HIPAA notice) when their providers begin to participate in the statewide HIE.

**Upgrade of HIE technology and new HIE services**
In 2014 AzHeC formally affiliated with Health Information Network of Arizona (HINAz) and recognized that the statewide HIE required an upgrade to its technology platform. In less than a year, AzHeC went through a selection process and migrated to a new technology platform that went live in April 2015. The technology upgrade provided new services such as alerts and notifications that could provide immediate benefits to users. The result of the upgrade has been a rapid growth in participation and use of the statewide HIE.

**Integration of physical and behavioral health information**
In February 2016, the AzHeC Board approved a strategy of integrating physical and behavioral health information in the statewide HIE. Later in 2016, AzHeC began to work with Arizona’s three regional behavioral health authorities (RHBAs) to integrate and connect their behavioral health providers to the statewide HIE. Today there are more than 80 behavioral health provider organizations participating in the statewide HIE, allowing the secure sharing of more complete information on patients.

As AzHeC’s second employee, I know how the way we began has played such a key role in our ability to succeed in our first 10 years. Those early years and the original statewide collaborative effort were very important. Through our Board structure and our outreach activities, we have always maintained broad community representation and support, and that support has helped lead us through some difficult challenges and will sustain us in our next 10 years.