

# Health Information Technology: The Foundation for Health Reform

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In addition to many insurance market reforms, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) promotes investment in new patient-centered and cost-effective models of health care delivery. Successfully incorporating these new models into the health care system depends on electronic data collection and sharing of health information.

Health information technology (health IT) is a foundational component of a more patient-centered, effective and efficient health care system in which women and their health care providers have access to the information they need anytime, anywhere.

Health IT ensures health care providers have access to the information they need about their patients. It can also engage women and support them in their roles as patients, mothers and caregivers. For example, a mother can use a home computer to pull up her children's immunization records and send them to school or an after-school or sports program – all without leaving home or even picking up the phone. Caregivers have an easier time coordinating appointments, medications and treatments for their loved ones. The ACA's fundamental support for health IT will help women and families through:

- ▶ **Anytime access to health information online.** Convenient access to real-time electronic health information is essential to women's ability to manage health and care for themselves and their loved ones. Health IT can also reduce duplicative tests and improve medication management, and it is something patients and caregivers want.<sup>1</sup> Easy online access to information like insurance claims and medical records can also help women estimate their expected health care costs and select insurance plans and providers that best meet their family's needs and health history.
- ▶ **The ability to securely send health information where it's needed.** Women and families can better coordinate their care when they are able to securely download health information and send it to other providers, mobile apps, personal health records or other secure places of their choosing.
- ▶ **Better coordinated care across providers.** Electronic sharing of summaries of care for patient referrals or care transitions ensures direct provider-to-provider communication, increases patient safety, improves outcomes and helps avoid unnecessary and duplicative services.

- ▶ **Modern, more efficient communication tools.** Secure email enables women and families to ask health-related questions, share concerns and provide pertinent information to their providers. This is particularly critical for workers who are not able to take time away from work to attend to their health care needs or those of family members. For many women, every moment spent away from work jeopardizes economic security and job stability; health IT helps ease that burden.

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- ▶ **Reminders for care sent in the most effective and accessible ways.** Reminders about preventive and follow-up care help women and families stay healthy and keep their medical appointments.

Achieving success in reforming the health insurance market and the delivery and financing of health care will depend on health IT and on the secure, efficient exchange of electronic health information.

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1 In a recent National Partnership for Women & Families survey, among respondents who had online access to their medical record, 86 percent use it regularly, and 55 percent use it three or more times per year. The survey report can be found at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/health-care/HIT/engaging-patients-and-families.pdf>

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The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [www.NationalPartnership.org](http://www.NationalPartnership.org).

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