

## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **We Can't Wait: Obama Administration takes new steps to encourage doctors and hospitals to use health information technology to lower costs, improve quality, create jobs**

**Cleveland, OH**—Today, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius released a report showing that doctors' adoption of health information technology (IT) doubled in two years. HHS also announced new actions to speed the use of health IT in doctors' offices and hospitals nationwide, which will improve health care and create jobs nationwide.

While protecting confidential personal information, health IT can improve access to care, help coordinate treatments, measure outcomes and reduce costs. The new administrative actions announced today, which were made possible by the HITECH Act, will make it easier for doctors and other health care professionals to receive incentive payments for adopting and meaningfully using health IT.

“ When doctors and hospitals use health IT, patients get better care and we save money,” said Secretary Sebelius. “ We’ re making great progress, but we can’ t wait to do more. Too many doctors and hospitals are still using the same record-keeping technology as Hippocrates. Today, we are making it easier for health care providers to use new technology to improve the health care system for all of us and create more jobs.”

In addition to improving the health care system, data indicate that the national transition to health IT is creating jobs. Over 50,000 health IT-related jobs have been created since the enactment of the HITECH Ac. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of health IT jobs across the country is expected to increase by 20 percent from 2008 to 2018, much faster than the average for all occupations through 2018.

HHS also announced its intent to make it easier to adopt health IT. Under the current requirements, eligible doctors and hospitals that begin participating in the Medicare EHR (electronic health record) Incentive Programs this year would have to meet new standards for the program in 2013. If they did not participate in the program until 2012, they could wait to meet these new standards until 2014 and still be eligible for the same incentive payment. To encourage faster adoption, the Secretary announced that HHS intends to allow doctors and hospitals to adopt health IT this year, without meeting the new standards until 2014. Doctors who act quickly can also qualify for incentive payments in 2011 as well as 2012.

These policy changes are accompanied by greater outreach efforts that will provide more information to doctors and hospitals about best practices and to vendors whose products allow health care providers to meaningfully use EHRs. For example, in communities across the country HHS will target outreach, education and training to Medicare eligible professionals that have registered in the EHR incentive program but have not yet met the requirements for meaningful use. Meaningful use is the necessary foundation for all impending payment changes involving patient-centered medical homes, accountable care organizations, bundled payments, and value-based purchasing.

These efforts will complement existing outreach efforts to doctors and hospitals including the Obama Administration's work to create a nationwide network of 62 Regional Extension Centers. The extension centers are comprised of local nonprofits that provide guidance and resources to help eligible health care providers participate in the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs and meaningfully use health IT.

Also released today, a new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) survey found 52 percent of office-based physicians in the U.S. now intend to take advantage of the incentive payments available for doctors and hospitals through the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs. EHR incentive payments for eligible health care professionals can total as much as \$44,000 under the Medicare EHR Incentive Program and \$63,750

under the Medicaid EHR Incentive Program. The CDC data also show the percentage of physicians who have adopted basic electronic health records in their practice has doubled from 17 to 34 percent between 2008 and 2011 (with the percent of primary care doctors using this technology nearly doubling from 20 to 39 percent).

To meet the demand for workers with health IT experience and training, the Obama Administration has launched four workforce development programs that help train the new health IT workforce. The training is provided through 82 community colleges and nine universities nationwide. As of October 2011, community colleges have had 5,717 professionals successfully complete their training in health information technology. Currently there are 10,065 students enrolled in the training programs across the nation. As of November 2011, universities have graduated over 500 post-graduate and masters-level health IT professionals, with over 1700 expected to graduate by July 2013.

While improving the health care system, health IT can help keep information private and secure. Federal laws require key persons and organizations that handle health information to have policies and security safeguards in place to protect health information—whether it is stored on paper or electronically.

For more information on how health IT can lead to safer, better, and more efficient care, and for a fact sheet about today's announcement, visit <http://www.healthit.gov/>

For more information about the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs, see <http://www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms>

For more information on the 2011 CDC survey data referenced above, see <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/surveys.htm>

For more information about the HHS Recovery Act health IT programs, see [http://www.hhs.gov/recovery/announcements/by\\_topic.html#hit](http://www.hhs.gov/recovery/announcements/by_topic.html#hit)

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