

CMS Seeks Industry's Help with Assessing the National Health IT Infrastructure

Posted At : August 24, 2009 2:59 PM | Posted By : Deniece Peterson

Related Categories: Health Care, Federal, State & Local, Contract Opportunities

If you're tracking the federal and state and local (S&L) health IT markets like GovWin, you know that our work is never done. As if by design, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released an **RFI** for an assessment of the nation's health IT infrastructure on the same day GovWin's Industry Analysis team published its latest reports, "**Health IT Transformation: FY2009-FY2014 Federal Market Forecast**" and "**Health IT Transformation: FY2009-FY2014 State and Local Market Forecast**."

In both reports, we discuss the fact that, regardless of the makeup of the final health care reform legislation, health IT will be a major investment area **IF** there is major progress in standards and interoperability. Without it, the information exchange that makes electronic health records such a cost saving factor will be impossible.

Although work has been done in this area with Health Information Exchanges (HIEs) and the National Health Information Network (NHIN), CMS wants to take a step back and perform a "national scan of the electronic infrastructure available among all entities sharing a role in the reporting of measures...to potentially support meaningful EHR use in the near term and the broader exchange of health information expected with health care reform." Similar to stimulus money given to the National Telecommunications Information Agency (NTIA) to perform a national broadband inventory, CMS wants ideas for how to gain a baseline inventory for current health IT infrastructure as well as for developing a national strategic framework for the future national health information infrastructure. It's the first step in an uphill battle to first determine the level of infrastructure that already exists and then determine the best approach for filling the gaps.

Using funding provided as part of the stimulus package, CMS' National Gap Analysis and Readiness Assessment for the Health Information Technology Infrastructure to Enable the Electronic Exchange of Quality Measures as Part of EHR RFI - that's a mouthful - asks for industry's help in determining the options, tasks, level of effort, deliverables and timelines required to:

- Generate an initial infrastructure framework (to include a summary of existing work products produced by various organizations currently involved in health IT, such as the Federal Health Architecture (FHA), Medicare/Medicaid/CHIP programs, Healthcare Information Technology Standards Panel (HITSP), Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT), Nationwide Health Information Network (NHIN), and various public testimony and white papers).
- Convene a team of health IT experts from the public and private sectors to validate approaches.
- Describe how the infrastructure would accommodate the service variables within an EHR that would be of interest to payers of health plans; information that should be required within EHRs; data flow between providers, plans and payers; and transaction standards for data exchanges.

Implications

Contractors have until October 1 to respond to this RFI, which is the first step in what amounts to one of the most important element of health care cost savings: broad exchange of health data. Contractors have the opportunity to help shape the roadmap for national health IT implementation - from processes and policies to applications and technology. Contractors should be prepared to address standards, privacy/security, capacity planning, and how the government can leverage its existing health IT infrastructure and service-oriented architecture investments in this initiative.

Contractors that have been active in previous NHIN trials and health IT workgroups have a leg up. Although NHIN is still a work in progress, it can offer direction in what to do and what *not* to do moving forward.