

THINC

Taconic Health Information Network and Community

Abstract

THINC RHIO, Inc. is a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to improving the quality, safety, and efficiency of health care for the benefit of the people of the Hudson Valley region in New York State. The primary purpose of the THINC RHIO is to advance the use of health information technology (health IT) through the sponsorship of a secure health information exchange (HIE) network, the adoption and use of interoperable EHRs, and the implementation of population health improvement activities, including public health surveillance and reporting, pay for performance, public reporting and other quality improvement initiatives.

The THINC RHIO is governed by a multi-stakeholder Board of Directors and comprised of a broad range of stakeholders from the public and private sectors, including physicians, hospitals, safety net providers, payers, employers, laboratories, public health authorities, quality organizations, state government representatives, community business leaders, a consumer advocacy group, and others in the health care industry.

The THINC RHIO includes five committees: (1) Privacy and Consumer; (2) Security and Technology; (3) Quality and Clinical; (4) Public Health and (5) Financial Oversight.

The THINC RHIO organizational structure includes two anchor partners, MedAllies, a health information service provider, and the Taconic IPA, which represents over 3,000 physicians in the Hudson Valley. MedAllies manages all technical aspects of the THINC RHIO, including the day-to-day implementation and operations on behalf of and under the direction of the THINC RHIO. The Taconic IPA provides staff support to the THINC RHIO and coordinates the evaluation and research activities.

The collaboration to create a community-wide health information exchange was launched in 2001. In late 2001, Taconic IPA completed the initial plan for the deployment of a HIE model among MVP Health Care (a regional, not-for-profit payer), Vassar Brothers Medical Center, The Kingston Hospital, MDS Laboratories, and 50 Taconic IPA physician groups. In 2002, project stakeholders established a pilot program that provided a foundation for continued growth of the collaboration. By 2003, additional hospitals joined the data exchange and physician usage of the system nearly doubled.

In July 2004, THINC was one of nine projects selected from over 130 applications to receive funding from the Foundation for eHealth Initiative's Connecting Communities for Better Health Program. In September 2004, Taconic IPA won a three year \$1.5 million grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Health Care Research and Quality (AHRQ) to expand and evaluate the THINC collaboration. Currently, the evaluation component of the AHRQ-funded project is assessing differences in HEDIS measures associated with EMRs, electronic prescribing, clinical messaging, and paper based systems.

In November 2005, the THINC RHIO was formally incorporated and began work with IBM to create one of four federally funded prototypes for a nationwide health information network (NHIN). The collaboration with IBM will significantly enhance and expand the THINC RHIO's ability to collect, aggregate, measure, and create reports on data from providers and payers.

In May 2006, the State of New York selected the THINC RHIO as a recipient of a \$5 million, two year HEAL NY Phase 1: HIT award. The HEAL NY Phase 1 funding will allow the THINC RHIO to expand deployment of the NHIN prototype and expand the use of certified EHRs by physicians.

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Currently, the THINC RHIO is developing and implementing solutions to address the key components necessary for successful and sustainable health IT adoption, including:

- Ensuring patient privacy of health information, strengthening security of health IT systems, and building privacy and security requirements into the business and technical aspects of the THINC RHIO organization
- Engaging consumers to participate in the RHIO and to adopt health IT.
- Enabling clinical care and population health improvement priorities to drive the technology priorities of THINC RHIO by:
 - overseeing the implementation of the NHIN prototype and adoption of interoperable EHRs;
 - implementing a regional pay-for-performance program to accelerate quality improvement; and
 - establishing a bidirectional public health surveillance and reporting system among the local and state public health authorities and the clinicians and providers across the region.