HHS Health IT Alignment Policy Overview

Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC)

HHS Office of the Secretary

Purpose

- ONC to Lead a Department-wide management policy to promote greater alignment of health IT-related activities across all related HHS funding (grants, cooperative agreements, contracts) and regulatory/guidance actions

Background

- HHS spending on health IT-related activities has grown dramatically in recent years.

- Public health emergencies further demonstrated the importance of interoperable data to inform the response and to identify and address disparities in care.

- As health IT-related activities begin to play an increasingly prominent role in programs across the Department, it is critical to ensure alignment of activities to avoid data silos and industry confusion.

- Awareness of health-IT activities across the Department is critical for HHS leadership.

Goals

- **On July 20, 2022, HHS instituted policy to align health IT activities across the department**

- **Policy goals are to:**
  - Establish a consistent HHS-wide approach to standard health IT requirements across HHS agencies and programs to eliminate program and data silos and advance the effectiveness and efficiency of Department programs and policies
  - Enable full exercise of HHS authorities to promote cross-agency collaboration and better support each agency's mission
  - Reinforce department goals for nationwide interoperability through consistency in funding and policies related to health IT activities
  - Provide Secretary-level and cross-agency visibility and awareness of significant health IT activities

Scope

- All of HHS (Immediate Office of the Secretary (IOS),Operating Divisions (OpDivs),Staff Divisions (StaffDivs))

- Grants, cooperative agreements, contracts, and rulemaking activities that **involve the adoption or use of health information technology standards and systems, or the interoperability of health information technology**

- Utilization of health IT standards adopted under Section 3004 of the Public Health Service Act will only be required where there are Section 3004 standards that are applicable
  - In cases where there is not an applicable standard, applicants <u>are encouraged to use</u> nonproprietary standards developed by a consensus-based standards development organization, like what can be found in the Interoperability Standards Advisory

Investing in the Department

- **It is critical that we head off further proliferation of ad-hoc health IT programs and data silos that:**
  - Undercut the effectiveness and efficiency of the Department's policies and programs
  - Are costly for federal and state agencies and private sector partners to create and maintain
  - Have no synergies across programs
  - Impose significant burden on health care providers, technology developers, and other health care stakeholders.

- **Policy will allow OPDIVs/STAFFDIVs to work better together to support each agency's mission and Department goals**
  - Identify collaboration/synergy opportunities with other HHS (and non-HHS) agencies
  - Help agencies use full scope of available HHS authorities and capabilities
  - Reinforce Department's health IT and interoperability goals by multiplying the impact of federal purchasing power in the market
  - Provide HHS leadership with Department-level visibility of key health IT activities

Policy Description

Consistent HHS Approach to the Inclusion of Health IT Requirements in Grants, Cooperative Agreements, Contracts, and Policy and Regulatory Actions

1. Institutes a Department-wide management policy to promote greater alignment of health IT-related activities.

2. Directs ONC to engage with HHS agencies to align and coordinate health IT-related activities in support of HHS health IT and interoperability goals.

3. Directs Operating Divisions and Staff Divisions (OpDivs/StaffDivs):

   a. To the extent legally permissible, to include standard health IT language in applicable grants, cooperative agreements, contracts, and rulemaking to ensure alignment of the Department's health IT investments; and

   b. To maximize opportunities to align HHS's health IT requirements and investments by engaging with ONC when the OpDiv/StaffDiv initiates a major health IT-related activity.

Policy Tailored to Complexity of Health IT Activities

Level 1
Inclusion of Standard Health IT Language in Agreements

ASFR developed standard language that, to the extent legally permissible, should be included in applicable grants, cooperative agreements, and contracts released by an OpDiv/StaffDiv:

- Full use of HHS/ONC-certified health IT where available
- Support of HHS-approved standards where applicable
- Use of other HHS-identified or non-proprietary open-industry standards where applicable

ONC will work collaboratively with agencies to modify or supplement this language where necessary to address unique program circumstances

Level 2
Major Activities Review and Technical Assistance

ONC (in collaboration with ASFR & ExecSec) will work with agency liaisons to develop and maintain a Department-wide inventory of major health IT activities:

- HHS funding >$20M annually or >$100M over 5 years
- Economically significant rulemaking/guidance

ONC will provide technical assistance to selected programs in collaboration with agencies

Thank you!

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