NE Health Information Exchange Expands SDOH Data Platform

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Following Nebraska's social determinants of health data implementation, six additional states jumped on board.

Nebraska Health Information Initiative (NEHII), Nebraska's statewide health information exchange (HIE), announced it's expanding its behavioral health data platform, which includes social determinants of health (SDOH) data, to six additional states, including Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

The HIE will connect those rural states to the Unite Us platform. This social services network aims to connect health and social care providers to enhance care coordination and delivery across the six states.

"NEHII is thrilled to be expanding our partnership with Unite Us into six new states, to enable better support and health outcomes for all Americans," said Jaime Bland, president and CEO of NEHII.

According to a common statistic, SDOH impacts roughly 80 percent of an individual's health goes beyond clinical care and is impacted by SDOH.

Identifying and integrating SDOH data into the EHR can help find answers to a state or region's most critical issues. However, most health systems face interoperability issues when implementing SDOH data into their respective EHR systems.

Through this partnership, citizens from all seven states can access nutrition services, employment and benefits, and housing. The platform is accessible to both healthcare and social services providers, and they can view healthcare data and outcomes data on the platform.

"We know patients don't seek care in a single institution, let alone a single state, especially along our borders," continued Bland. "Statewide infrastructures for health and social care are more crucial than ever as COVID-19 continues to devastate the nation. We're eager to help additional states combine their clinical and social care data in one secure location to provide patients and providers a more comprehensive view of their longitudinal health record."

Using one streamlined workflow, NEHII intends to address SDOH to avoid duplicative care, boost workflows, track results, and develop long-term, sustainable care models. Looking forward, NEHII said it hopes it can add additional HIEs, health systems, and Medicaid departments to the platform.

"Our ultimate goal is to help all Americans lead healthier lives, and this extended partnership with NEHII enables providers to better address whole-person needs, including nonmedical issues and social determinants of health," said Taylor Justice, president of Unite Us.

This six-state expansion comes after HIE and network launched Unite Nebraska in June. The pair expect all networks to go live by August 2022.

A recent *JAMA Network Open* study offered a key example of how providers can use SDOH data integrated into the EHR for purposes beyond social services referral.

Researchers developed an SDOH screening tool, measuring common SDOH factors and deployed it with nearly 5,000 high-risk US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) patients. The SDOH screener integrated into the EHR and researchers used it for risk analysis to predict hospitalization.

Overall, SDOH integration helped estimate hospitalization at both 90 and 180 days. Researchers directly correlated the results to the integration of resilience, marriage status, smoking status, health literacy, medication insecurity, and health-related locus control.

Following the study, researchers recommended integrating specific SDOH data into the EHR, including marital status, health-related locus control, smoking status, health literacy, resilience, and medication insecurity.