

CT Health Information Exchange Connects with Major Providers

Christopher Jason

CTHealthLink added Yale New Haven Health and UConn Health to its expanding list of provider connections.

CTHealthLink (CTHL), a physician-led health information exchange (HIE) established in partnership with the Connecticut State Medical Society (CSMS), added two significant health systems to its network, Yale New Haven Health and UConn Health.

"The connections to Yale New Haven and UCONN are important milestones for Connecticut physicians and their patients," Robert Aseltine, MD, UConn Health professor and chair of CTHL Advisory Board, said in a statement. "These connections allow Connecticut healthcare providers to gain access to critical patient data from hospitals, clinics, and practices, data that are needed to provide safe and comprehensive care to their patients."

Yale New Haven Health and UConn Health join CVS Health and Minute Clinics, the Veterans Administration (VA), DaVita Health, the Department of Defense (DoD), Fresenius Medical Care, and Premise Health on CTHealthLink's list of connections. The two organizations also join the state's public health registries.

Additionally, the HIE has connected to the Carequality interoperability network and is a KONZA National Network member, enabling patient data exchange from across the country.

"Data sharing across providers and facilities is particularly important when patients are transferred from their home communities to receive care, which is becoming more common as COVID-19 strains hospital capacity," Aseltine continued. "Having immediate access to a patient's full medical record under these conditions may save lives and significantly improve health care for Connecticut patients."

Adding two more connections increases patient data exchange and interoperability across the state, triggering a more effective response to certain health emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Connecticut cannot wait any longer for the meaningful exchange of patient data," said Jeffrey Gordon, MD, chair of the CSMS Council. "In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, Connecticut physicians are facing unprecedented hurdles to providing quality medical care."

"Physicians throughout Connecticut must have the ability to coordinate not only COVID -19-related medical care, but also COVID-19 vaccinations. The time for health data exchange to be operational in Connecticut is not tomorrow, but today," Gordon continued.

The three-year-old HIE enables clinicians, hospitals, and other healthcare providers in the HIE network to exchange patient health records, utilize data analytics tools to improve patient outcomes, and streamline clinical processes. It also grants patients access to their respective health records.

In May, the state of Connecticut signed CTHealthLink as the first member of the state's health information exchange.

Over the past decade, state leaders found it was not easy to launch a statewide HIE. In fact, the state attempted to launch the HIE four times before adding CTHealthLink, costing the state millions of dollars.

Now established, experts say the HIE will reduce costs and improve care by eliminating the chances of duplicative testing, link several providers without going through the process of establishing a connection with each facility, and identify health trends.

It also presents financial benefits for the state. Health systems utilizing Medicaid and Medicare services can only receive payments if they can show that they are improving the quality of care and reducing hospital readmissions. Better care coordination, enabled by a functional HIE, could help organizations accomplish those clinical quality metrics.

Looking forward, the two organizations plan to improve patient care, boost interoperability throughout the state, and enhance Connecticut's healthcare delivery system.

Since the HIE is still in its early stages, Aseltine said it will expand upon partnerships with other national exchanges in a way that provides a powerful demonstration of the scale they can achieve together.

"This echoes how important health data exchange is for physicians across the state of Connecticut," added Layne Gakos, JD, General Counsel of Connecticut State Medical Society.

"We're excited to be where we are right now and to be the first one that's up and running. It's taken a lot of work. But it's been rewarding, and we believe it's going to be rewarding moving forward as the state moves forward in developing its HIE."