

APIs That Connect to Certified EHR Technology on the Rise

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The number of APIs that integrate with certified EHR technology is expected to continue to climb as more developers meet Cures Act requirements.

ONC research has found an increase in the number of application programming interface (API) adoption that integrate with certified EHR technology, which should increase patient access to health information, according to a [HealthITBuzz blog post](#) written by ONC's Christian Johnson and Vaishali Patel.

The ONC 21st Century Cures Act Final Rule, published in 2020, built upon previous federal initiatives to enhance patient access to personal health information through standards-based API adoption.

APIs make it easier patients to use smartphones, tablets, and desktop apps to access their personal health information from [certified EHR systems](#).

ONC survey data has revealed a rapid uptick in healthcare providers enabling patient data access through APIs. In 2019, about 7 in 10 non-federal acute care hospitals enabled this capability, which is a two-fold increase compared to 2017.

New ONC research also found an increase in APIs that integrate with certified EHRs. Johnson and Patel said they expect this upward trend to continue as more certified health IT developers meet requirements of the Cures Act Final Rule.

"As the number of apps that connect with EHRs increases and the functionality of these apps becomes more robust, we believe this will increase demand and use by patients," Johnson and Patel explained.

ONC and the greater health IT community are working to make patient health information available in the most convenient, user-friendly format, Johnson and Patel said.

[Access to personal health information](#) is expected to encourage patient engagement, which could improve patient outcomes.

Previous ONC research revealed that one of the most common reasons patients don't access their electronic personal health information was because they did not feel like they had a medical reason to do so. However, Johnson and Patel noted that patients should shift their perspective to think more proactively when it comes to accessing their EHR data.

"While healthy individuals may think they currently do not have a medical need to electronically access their health records, it is impossible to predict when a medical emergency – and the need for these records – may arise; the convenience to do so is a substantial benefit," they wrote.

Johnson and Patel said that patient education about the benefits of electronic access to health records could help increase patient portal and health app use.

"Healthcare providers having conversations with their patients and encouraging them to use these tools has been shown to increase uptake," they noted.

When the Cures Act Final Rule API provisions go into effect on December 31, 2022, patients should be more readily able to access and manage their health information, Johnson and Patel said.

Equally as important as patients' ability to electronically access their health information is their understanding of keeping their information secure, the pair added.

Johnson and Patel explained that while HIPAA provides for the privacy of health information, as well as the right of access, the decision to access, use, or share one's personal electronic health information is up to the individual.

"ONC continues to take steps to protect health information, including a number of security-related capabilities in the 2015 Edition Standards and Certification criteria, and we encourage the development of digital health products that demonstrably protect patient health information," Johnson and Patel concluded.