Health information exchange (HIE) is one of the primary benefits that can be derived from adopting health information technology. With HIE, electronic health records can be shared easily among doctors without getting lost or delayed; hospital discharge instructions can be provided to health care providers and their patients instantly; and emergency room providers can have access to the health record of a patient who is unconscious.

Health information exchange gives providers the ability to offer better and more coordinated care for their patients.

To provide an early, practical, and accessible option for HIE, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has supported the Direct Project initiative. Adopting lessons from the information technology (IT) sector, the Direct Project invited private companies (including several competitors) and public sector entities to work together, on a volunteer basis, to respond to the need for a leading-edge HIE option.

About the Direct Project

The Direct Project was launched in March 2010 as a part of the Nationwide Health Information Network. The Direct Project aims to:

- Drive rapid innovation by employing the principles and practices embodied in President Obama's Open Government directive.
- Create an easy-to-use tool, with uniform requirements, that will support HIE for the most common clinical information needs, all while delivering a useable result for providers.

About the Direct Project Pilot Programs

In February 2011, two pilot projects were launched—one in Minnesota and the other in Rhode Island—for easily and securely transmitting personal health information via the Internet. The launch of these programs means that safe, Internet-based transfers of most-used health information is on its way to becoming a reality in the United States. This will:

- Enable existing electronic exchanges to become more standardized and convenient; and
- Allow many more providers, and many more data transactions, to take advantage of the HIE benefit.

Other Direct Project pilot programs have plans to go live nationwide as federal agencies, commercial providers and other health care organizations implement this easy-to-use tool for secure health information exchange.

For More Information About:

- The Direct Project, visit http://directproject.org
- Health IT, visit http://healthit.gov