

## Special Audio Report Transcript

Headline: States Line Up for Grants Under ONC's Health Information Exchange Challenge Program

Reported/Produced by: Pat McConahay  
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### Text:

I'm Pat McConahay with a look at several states reactions to a new Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT grant program aimed at kick-starting breakthroughs in health information exchange. This is a special report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service from the California HealthCare Foundation.

Applications are in to ONC for \$16 million in grant money to take health information exchange to the next level. Claudia Williams, director of ONC's state health information exchange program, says her agency is funding the new grants because ONC believes states need to move faster in some crucial areas over the next couple of years.

***(Williams): "There are a few really dedicated implementation pilots that could produce models that could be replicated across the country. So these are domains in which we have types of information sharing, for instance, with consumers directly, long-term care providers that maybe needed an additional push and nudge to get going."***

ONC's grant program -- called the Health Information Exchange Challenge Program--aims to help states test solutions for five key areas of health data exchange: achieving health goals through health information exchanges; advancing consumer-mediated exchange; developing enhanced tools for data searches; fostering strategies for population-level analysis; and improving transitions in long-term and post-acute care. According to Williams, the projects that are funded need to be easily and successfully duplicated across the country.

California applied for a grant in all five categories. Jonah Frohlich --who was the deputy secretary for health IT at the California Health and Human Services Agency before becoming managing director of Manatt Health Solutions earlier this month, says he's particularly pleased that transition of care is one of the five focuses of the new grant. However, he wishes something else would get more attention on a national level.

***(Frohlich): "I'd really like on the federal program more of an emphasis on focusing on secure, safe information exchange in the***

***meaningful use criteria and HR certification. I'd like to see a much more forceful direction on standards."***

Marc Overhage, CEO of the Indiana Health Information Exchange, agrees that security is a continued challenge. The key, he says, is finding the right balance between availability of health data and ensuring patient privacy.

According to Overhage, Indiana applied for grants in three of the five challenge areas, focusing on where the state felt it had particular strengths, but also where there were relative gaps.

***(Overage): "For example, the proposal that focused on the quality and efficiency of care leveraging information technology. While we have a very strong and vibrant health information technology base in the state, there's another layer of using and leveraging that technology that we really wanted to focus on."***

Personal health records are another area where Overhage says Indiana sees a lot of promise. He says that the state is fortunate to have a sophisticated provider of PHRs but that overall Indiana has room for improvement.

The state of Massachusetts, which began exploring health IT more than 20 years ago, applied for two grants. Micky Tripathi, CEO of the Massachusetts eHealth Collaborative, says that while he thinks it's great to put more money into this effort, he also sees the grant as a double-edged sword.

***(Tripathi): "There's a lot of sort of planning activities and a real effort to sort of create these foundational organizations to get those projects launched. So the introduction of yet another grant program I think sort of creates more confusion. But more important, what it does is stop all those organizations in their tracks while they apply for these. And so I think that's a challenge."***

Still, Tripathi says he's encouraged that the grant program targets some specific needs and gets grantees to think about the end goal, which isn't just using technology for the sake of technology, but using it to improve healthcare.

ONC's Claudia Williams says that the agency will keep its end goal in mind when it doles out the grant awards in February.

***(Williams): "What I think is really exciting when you think of challenge programs like this is the opportunity not just to fund exciting initiatives in particular places but to be really thoughtful and strategic about how you take the knowledge and results of those initiatives and spread them rapidly and quickly."***

This has been a special report from *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service from the California Healthcare Foundation. If you have feedback or issues you'd like to have addressed, please email us at [ihb@chcf.org](mailto:ihb@chcf.org). I'm Pat McConahay. Thanks for listening.