

Health Information Exchange Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is a Health Information Exchange (HIE)?

A Health Information Exchange (HIE) allows doctors, nurses, pharmacists, other health care providers and patients to appropriately access and securely share a patient's vital medical information electronically improving the speed, quality, safety and cost of patient care. This sort of exchange activity is permissible under the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (aka "HIPAA") - a federal regulation that allows healthcare providers to securely share medical information pertaining to treatment, payment, and operations. More information on HIPAA is provided below.

NCHIIN's HIE works with Humboldt County healthcare providers to ensure your medical information is shared with your healthcare team and healthcare organizations where you receive care. Most local hospitals, labs, and doctor's offices use different electronic health records and the systems often don't communicate with each other directly. NCHIIN provides a secure health information network to support communication between these community healthcare endpoints. For example, a lab can send your lab results back to your primary care provider using the health information exchange so that the results land in your patient care record at your primary care provider's office. Previously, this sort of activity was handled by fax.

What type of information is transmitted through a Health Information Exchange?

Types of patient information transmitted through the Health Information Exchange (HIE) could include: allergies, visit history, medications, appointments, insurance information, clinical documents, laboratory results, immunizations, and radiology reports. The network also transmits patient demographic information including: name, address, date of birth, gender, phone number, and medical record numbers from the sites of care.

How does a Health Information Exchange benefit me?

The HIE can ensure your health safety by reducing medical and medication errors. The HIE system can eliminate unnecessary and redundant testing for your healthcare providers, thereby improving the quality and outcome of healthcare delivery. The electronic transmission of test results, documents, and other medical data ensures that your care team has your medical information in a timely and secure manner in their electronic health record system at the point of care.

How does NCHIIN protect my data?

Your personal health information is protected by physician-patient confidentiality, federal and state privacy regulations, and advanced technical safeguards. Only those involved in your healthcare can view your data. Electronic records offer the added security of electronic tracking

systems, which provide a history of when records have been accessed and by what organization.

Additional details about how healthcare organizations and health information exchanges transmit, use, and protect your data are included in the Notice of Privacy Practices (NOPP) that you received from your healthcare provider at the point of care.

NCHIIN maintains policies and procedures on how health information exchange (HIE) Participants may use the data within the HIE. These policies and procedures are reviewed and approved by the NCHIIN Board of Directors. NCHIIN adheres to the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (also known as “HIPAA”) and other applicable laws. More information on NCHIIN’s Privacy and Security standards can be found here: <https://www.nchiin.org/hie-privacy-policy/>

What is HIPAA?

HIPAA, which stands for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, is a set of rules and regulations designed to protect the privacy and security of your personal health information. In simple terms, it ensures that your medical details are kept confidential and that healthcare providers and others who handle your health information take measures to keep it safe. HIPAA also gives you certain rights regarding your health information and controls how it can be used and shared by healthcare entities. Essentially, it's a law that helps keep your health information private and secure.

HIPAA also allows for healthcare providers and covered entities to share health information as outlined by the law. Generally, the sharing of information is allowed for the following purposes:

- **Treatment:** Sharing information for the purposes of providing and coordinating patient care. This includes sharing information between multiple healthcare providers involved in an individual’s care.
- **Payment:** Sharing information for the purposes of billing and receiving payment for healthcare services.
- **Operations:** Sharing health information for operations like quality assessment, performance improvement, and training of healthcare professionals.
- **Public Health Activities:** Sharing information related to public health activities such as disease control and public health investigations.
- **Emergencies:** Sharing information in emergency situations to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to public health and safety.

For more information on HIPAA please visit: <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-individuals/index.html>

What are my rights?

NCHIIN is an Opt-out model. This means your information can be shared electronically with Health Information Exchange (HIE) participants for the purposes of healthcare treatment, payment, and operations. NCHIIN participants (organizations like hospitals, labs, provider’s offices, etc.) use NCHIIN to securely exchange health information between points of care and ensure that your healthcare team has your most up to date medical information, test results, and other important data in their electronic health record.

In this model, you have the right to:

- Opt-out of having your information electronically shared with healthcare providers not directly involved with the ordering of your tests and services. In this circumstance care providers will not be able to access components of your health history they were not directly involved in or did not order;
- Change your mind regarding a prior opt-out decision;
- Ask for a copy of your health information;
- Ask for a list of organizations who have received their information through the health information exchange for a period of up to 3 years before your request;
- Talk to your providers at the point of care about your opt-out options;
- Be notified of a breach that affects your individually identifiable health information.

What happens when I opt-out of the NCHIIN HIE?

Patients have the option to opt-out of parts of the HIE. However, care providers will continue to use the HIE to receive medical information, like reports and results of tests they have ordered. If you choose to opt-out, care providers will not be able to access the electronic information in your health history that they did not order, through the NCHIIN HIE.

When you opt-out of the HIE, NCHIIN retains your historical data in the network repository, using advanced security and privacy standards to protect your data. NCHIIN retains this information due to HIPAA data retention requirements and other policies.

We encourage patients to talk with their care providers or NCHIIN staff before making their decision to opt-out.

How do I opt-out of the NCHIIN HIE?

You may opt-out of the HIE by downloading and completing the [NCHIIN Opt-Out form](#).

Once completed, the form must be faxed (707-443-2527) or mailed to NCHIIN at 2315 Dean Street, Eureka, CA 95503.

NCHIIN may take up to 10 business days to implement your request.

Can I opt back into the NCHIIN HIE?

Yes. You may opt back into the HIE by completing the [Opt-In form](#) on the NCHIIN website and faxing (707-443-2527) or mailing the form to NCHIIN at 2315 Dean Street, Eureka, CA 95503.