

Implementing High-Quality Primary Care

Rebuilding the Foundation of Health Care

ADVANCE DIGITAL HEALTH

Well-designed health information technology (HIT) is essential to making high-quality primary care more accessible, convenient, and efficient for patients, families, and interprofessional care teams. The digital tools routinely used in primary care, such as electronic health records (EHRs) and patient portals, collect health information to help primary care teams make diagnoses, coordinate and deliver care, track progress, and communicate among team members. Despite their potential, today's electronic health data present challenges. Primary care teams must spend long hours documenting care and reviewing and gathering information from specialists, hospitals, pharmacies, and other sources.

The report *Implementing High-Quality Primary Care: Rebuilding the Foundation of Health Care* outlines objectives to make high-quality primary

care available to everyone in the United States. To improve care coordination and advance HIT for primary care, changes are needed to **design digital health that serves patients, their families, and the interprofessional primary care teams**.



DIGITAL HEALTH

Design information technology that serves the patient, family, and interprofessional care team.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Develop the Next Phase of Digital Health

Well-designed digital health tools should improve the care delivery experience of patients and primary care teams. For example, EHRs should serve as the hub of patient information, make it easier for people to receive care, and seamlessly provide clinicians with the information they need to deliver the right care at the right time, but there is room for improvement. Vendor policies, inconsistent data storage and architecture, and limited mechanisms for efficient data transfer limit EHRs interoperability and the current dominance of the market by a few informatics vendors has locked clinicians and practices into existing systems and stifled innovation.

ACTION: The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) should **develop the next phase of digital health**, including EHR, certification standards to:

- Align with the functions of primary care, supporting the relationship among clinicians, care teams, and patients;
- Account for the user experience of clinicians and patients to ensure that health systems are truly interoperable;
- Ensure equitable access and use of digital health information systems that support equitable care and deliver national standards;
- Include highly usable automated tools that make sense of data, identify clinically important data, and inform care;

- Ensure that base products meet certification standards with minimal need for local modification to meet requirements; and
- Hold HIT vendors and state and national support agencies financially responsible for failing to meet the standards.

Comprehensive Patient Data System

A national, comprehensive, and aggregated patient data system would enable primary care clinicians, teams, patients, and families to easily access the comprehensive data needed to provide whole-person care. Creating and implementing this change will require new policies and authorizations as well as innovation by vendors and state and national support agencies.

ACTION: ONC and CMS should **plan for and adopt a comprehensive aggregated patient data system** to enable primary care clinicians and interprofessional teams to easily access comprehensive patient data needed to provide whole-person care.

- This data source needs to be usable by any certified digital health tool for patients, families, clinicians, and care team members.
- ONC and CMS could accomplish this through a centralized data warehouse, individual health data card, or distributed sources connected by a real-time, functional health information exchange.

CONCLUSION

Digital health technology creates opportunities to improve care coordination and support primary care relationships among individuals, families, clinicians, and communities.

The use of telemedicine and other technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the benefits of digital health, improving primary care access and offering more scheduling flexibility. However, changes to the marketplace, aggregated comprehensive patient data, and revised federal standards are needed to strengthen the role of HIT to support the implementation of high-quality primary care.



What Is High-Quality Primary Care?

High-quality primary care is the provision of whole-person, integrated, accessible, and equitable health care by interprofessional teams who are accountable for addressing the majority of an individual's health and wellness needs across settings and through sustained relationships with patients, families, and communities.

To download a free copy of the full report and other resources, please visit nationalacademies.org/primarycare.