

# Maine set to launch \$6 million RHIO project

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Maine is set to launch a 24-month demonstration of a statewide electronic health-record network that officials say will reduce medical errors, speed critical treatment of patients, serve as a backup to individual physicians' records and ultimately save taxpayers \$50 million in annual medical expenses.

The project, called HealthInfoNet, will begin during the week of Feb. 11 and is expected to cost \$6 million, said state officials during a news briefing. The electronic network will allow Maine healthcare providers to create a shareable medical-records database containing information about individual patients' prescriptions, health conditions, laboratory test results, treatments and surgeries. Physicians will be able to access and use the records to determine the best course of treatment for patients as well as avoid costly test duplications and life-threatening medication errors, state officials said. In addition, state public-health officials plan to

use the database to track emerging diseases and infection patterns.

"Two thousand healthcare providers, including one-third of Maine's physicians and 15 rural and urban hospitals will participate in the demonstration project," said David Howes, vice chairman of the not-for-profit HealthInfoNet, which is a public and private partnership. The state's four largest hospital systems—Central Maine Healthcare Corp., Eastern Maine Healthcare Systems, MaineGeneral Medical Centers and MaineHealth—as well as rural provider 56-bed Franklin Memorial Hospital, primary-care provider Martin's Point Health Care and the Maine Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will participate in the project.

HealthInfoNet has raised \$4 million to date to fund the project, with \$2 million coming from the Maine Health Access Foundation and another \$1.1 million coming from the four participating hospital systems and Martin's Point Health Care. The HealthInfoNet board is currently developing a plan to fund the network once it's up and running, said Devore Culver, executive director of the organization. The formula will likely include subscription fees from participating providers.

The state has tapped 3M Health Information Systems and Orion Health to build and operate the medical-records network, and officials expect it will take roughly 12 months to get the system up and running. Physicians and patients participating in the demonstration project will have access to the network in early 2009. Participation in the network will be voluntary for Maine residents, and patients will eventually be able to manage their information for accuracy and grant providers select access to their records.

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