

# What is a Health Information Exchange?

A **Health Information Exchange (HIE)** is a way to electronically make personal health and medical information securely available among doctors, hospitals and other health care providers when it is needed for care. After patient consent, health information is protected and exchanged under current medical privacy and confidentiality standards. A secure electronic health information exchange allows patients to make sure their health information is available when they need it while seeking medical care or treatment.

## How can a Health Information Exchange improve the quality and safety of care?

Health care providers can access critical medical information through an HIE when they need to provide care. This facilitates continuity of treatment, provides emergency providers with more accurate and complete information, prevents duplication of services and minimizes harm from unnecessary procedures.

### Benefits of a secure Health Information Exchange

- > In an emergency, hospital or emergency department providers can immediately access important parts of patients' medical records.
- > By communicating with other health facilities, health care providers can access the most up-to-date, accurate patient information available, even if the patient is unable to communicate.
- > When patients switch primary care providers, vital information from their previous medical record can be transferred along with them.
- > As patients move from outpatient to inpatient and long-term care, continuity of care can be enhanced through an HIE.
- > Some HIEs facilitate an electronic connection between health care providers and laboratory or diagnostic imaging services.
- > An HIE can help reduce the incidence of duplicative or unnecessary services.

## Health Information Exchange and your patients

According to eHealth Initiative's 2006 survey, patients overwhelmingly support an HIE, as long as they are properly educated about the security features, their rights to privacy and consent and the benefits they can expect from participation in an HIE.

### Patients have the right to consent:

- > Each patient can decide whether he or she wants to participate in a secure HIE. *Patients report that they trust their health care providers over everyone else when it comes to discussing an electronic HIE.*
- > Patients are more likely to agree to share their information when asked by their doctor. *It is best to discuss an HIE and ask for consent during the clinical encounter.*
- > Health care providers should make sure their patients understand what their participation in an HIE could mean for them, especially in the event of an emergency.

**There are many regional HIE initiatives in New York City with the goal of enabling secure information exchange.** For more information about these efforts, please visit [www.nyehealth.org](http://www.nyehealth.org).

**Improve Quality of Care Through Electronic Health Records**  
For more information, visit [www.nyc.gov/pcip](http://www.nyc.gov/pcip)