



## NHIN Watch

Perspective: Arizona Health-e Connection on a roll

Source: Patty Enrado, NHINWatch.com

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Last week, September 26, Arizona Health-e Connection was awarded the 2007 Innovation Award by the Council of State Governments for its best practices, innovation and the ability of its model to be duplicated in other states looking to drive health information technology, or HIT, adoption and initiatives.

National recognition gives confidence and momentum to the nonprofit group as it begins to work through the roadmap (pdf) that had its roots in a steering committee appointed by Governor Janet Napolitano. eHealth Initiative brought in national experts to help Arizona Health-e Connection develop its roadmap.

In late August, the nonprofit group selected Brad Tritle as its newly appointed executive director. His main goal will be to keep all stakeholders focused on the strategic planning process and dedicated to the "public good" of the group's mission.

Considering that a plethora of stakeholders, including payers, medical societies, consumers, large employers and government agencies have a hand in shaping Arizona Health-e Connection, Tritle's task is no small feat.

While keeping so many entities on the same page is a challenge, having everybody come to the table from the beginning is crucial to the success of the Arizona Health-e Connection - and any other organization with similar goals, said Tritle.

Among the stakeholders having a permanent seat at Arizona Health-e Connection are the Governor's Office, the Department of Health Services, the State CIO's office, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (or AHCCCS, the state's Medicaid program), the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association, the Arizona Medical Association and the Arizona Osteopathic Medical Association. "There's an incredible amount of goodwill among the members," Tritle said.

As the organization moves forward, it plans to expand its membership to allow a larger number of people to become involved.

Tritle said the organization will focus on three key areas: educational outreach, HIT adoption and initiatives, and helping to adjust current HIT statutes and identify new standards and statutes that need to be in place.

Arizona Health-e Connection is not a health information exchange. In fact, Tritle said the organization wants to keep statewide infrastructure to a minimum. Early discussions are centered on how best to deploy a Web portal to serve as the infrastructure.

One of Arizona Health-e Connection's roles is to support standards-based regional health information organizations. Indeed, it is providing support to the Southern Arizona HIE and the Medicaid HIE. AHCCCS received a \$12 million grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in January to develop an HIE by the end of 2008 and have the majority of its members participate in the HIE by 2010.

Arizona Health-e Connection is currently wrapping up its privacy project. The state, along with 33 other states and territories, are being funded by the Department of Health and Human Services to identify barriers to health information exchange. The organization is currently defining the state legislative agenda for 2008-2009 with recommendations on a list of state statutes that need to be amended and the addition of new statutes to allow the exchange of health information in Arizona.

Expect to hear more from the Arizona Health-e Connection in the coming months. What it has accomplished thus far and its roadmap will likely be duplicated in other states, if the 2007 Innovation Award is any indication.