

North Carolina Health Information Exchange Patient FAQs

What is a health information exchange (HIE)?

A health information exchange (HIE) is a secure electronic network that uses state-of-the-art technology to ensure that medical professionals can access their patients' most up-to-date health information and get the best possible health care. North Carolina's HIE is called NC Health Information Exchange (NC HIE). Regions, communities, and hospital systems may also form HIEs.

What does health information exchange mean for me?

NC HIE helps doctors, hospitals and other health care providers share medical information for patient care quickly and securely through an electronic network. When your health care providers are connected to a health information exchange, they have access to the most up-to-date medical information, which helps them provide you with safer and more efficient care. Additionally, the information is shared in a more protected way than paper-based files, faxes and mail.

How do I participate in NC HIE? Is there a fee?

You automatically become a member of NC HIE when you visit a participating doctor or hospital. There is no cost to the patient.

What health information is shared through my NC HIE record?

Your NC HIE record contains prescriptions, allergies, lab and test results, image reports, conditions, diagnoses or health problems and medical visit notes.

What health information about me will not be shared?

Your NC HIE record does not contain information from substance abuse or mental health treatment facilities. NC HIE may include information that may indicate a sensitive health condition. For example: If a patient shares mental health or substance abuse information with a primary care provider or in a hospital emergency room, this information may be included and viewed in NC HIE by other providers caring for them.

Who is able to see my health information?

Only members of your health care team with correct identification and unique passwords can use NC HIE. This may include your doctor, nurses, medical assistants, pharmacists and other clinical staff involved in your care. Before they can view your record, they must confirm that they have a treatment relationship with you and a need to see your information.

What if I do not want to participate?

If you choose not to participate in NC HIE, you may opt out. This process can be done over the phone during business hours at 1-855-926-1042, or through mail by filling out and sending in the Patient Opt Out Form available at www.nchie.org/patients. Important: Your NC HIE record can be shared for public health purposes as permitted by both HIPAA and NC law (for example, reporting cases of communicable diseases).

Can I make changes to who can see my information?

You can change the way you participate in NC HIE at any time by calling toll free 1-855-926-1042. Patients in North Carolina have several options:

1. Full Opt Out – no information will be visible in the NC HIE network
2. Organization Opt Out – information from xyz organization will not be visible in the NC HIE network
3. Provider Opt Out – information from xyz provider will not be visible in the NC HIE network

Why does NC HIE need personal information for the opt out process?

To ensure patient identity, NC HIE requests certain information to make a patient match. This includes full name, sex, birthdate, and last four digits of the social security number. The information will never be sold and you will not be added to any mailing lists.

What happens if there is an emergency and a doctor needs my information, but I have opted out?

In an emergency, medical professionals caring for you can access your NC HIE record. In such cases, the provider will “unlock” your record and must provide a reason why (for example, “patient came to ER in unconscious state”). Your NC HIE record is especially important in an emergency situation because in many cases, the patient is unable to inform medical professionals of allergies, medications, problems, etc. NC HIE always keeps a record of who views your information and can provide a record of this upon request.

I previously opted out of NC HIE but I changed my mind. How can I be a part of NC HIE again?

This is called rescinding your opt out. Simply call NC HIE at 1-866-926-1042 to rescind your previous decision to opt out. You can also print and fill out the Patient Opt Out Form from the NC HIE website and mail it to NC HIE.

How can I find out who has viewed my NC HIE record?

You can request a report of who has accessed your health information at any time by contacting NC HIE. In addition, you will receive a report from NC HIE if your information was accessed in an emergency situation or other unanticipated health event and you were unable to be notified ahead of time.

Will my medical information be posted on the internet?

No. NC HIE and its participating providers take your privacy and the security of your healthcare information very seriously. Health care providers are only allowed to access NC HIE using a secure login and transmission of your information is encrypted. Providers are also only allowed to access your information if they have a treatment relationship with you.

How can I find out if my doctor or local hospital is taking part in NC HIE?

Visit our Participating Healthcare Organizations page for a full list of those participating.

What if I receive care at a health care organization that is not participating in NC HIE, what happens to my records?

Only providers who are participating in NC HIE can access and include information in the system. If your provider does not participate in NC HIE, they will continue to update your medical record in their own system, and they will share your medical records as they always have, by mail, email or fax. However, the goal is that all providers in North Carolina will participate in the future.

What if there is a mistake on my record, how will I get that fixed?

Your NC HIE record includes information created by the health care providers caring for you. If you know of an error, please let your provider know about that, so that they can update the information. Once they do this, it will be automatically updated in NC HIE.

How often is the system checked for security failures or hackers?

Security tests are performed on an ongoing basis, to make sure that the records remain secure. Visit www.nchie.org for more information about our privacy and security policies and practices.

Is it against HIPAA rules for you to have shared my information?

No. HIPAA does not require patient consent when information is used to support treatment, as is the case with NC HIE. In its contract with participating organizations NC HIE is defined as a business associate under HIPAA. This allows NC HIE to act as a “virtual medical record department” to collect and store medical records, and allow authorized providers to review and upload records. Having a third party manage medical records is common practice.

How is my information protected?

NC HIE’s advanced computer security keeps your information safe and secure, and NC HIE only allows authorized medical professionals involved in your care to access your information. In addition, your health information is also protected by state and federal laws.

Can the system be breached?

Any unauthorized access of information through NC HIE is considered a breach. This is against both state and federal laws. Anyone who violates these laws is subject to civil and criminal penalties. NC HIE keeps a record of who views your information. You can request that record from NC HIE by contacting 1-866-926-1042.

How will I know if a breach of my information occurs?

As required by law, NC HIE will notify the patient in the event of a breach.

How can I make a complaint if I feel my information has been accessed inappropriately?

If you feel your information has been accessed inappropriately, please call NC HIE immediately at 1-866-926-1042.

If I leave the system, what happens to my information?

If you choose to stop participating in NC HIE, no more information will be visible in the NC HIE network and any information already in the system will be blocked from access.

Will there be a physical back-up of my health information in case there is a computer problem?

NC HIE has procedures in place to recover data, including health information, and your health care provider will always have a record of any information they make available through NC HIE.

Who is NC HIE?

NC HIE is an independent, non-profit, North Carolina-based organization. The Board of Directors includes individuals who are active and prominent in the medical community in NC and represent a variety of health care organizations. NC HIE is not owned by insurance companies, health care organizations, or government and is funded by many sources including charitable foundations, NC health care providers, and federal government grants.