

How HealthIE Georgia Is Linking Providers and Improving Outcomes in Rural Georgia

HealthIE Georgia, a regional health information exchange (RHIE) serving rural Georgia communities, is taking an innovative, multi-pronged approach to improving the health of the communities it serves. It begins with the creation of digitally connected care communities anchored by the local hospital and includes programs targeting opioids, behavioral health and women’s health. Technology, including connectivity, ADT alerts and telehealth, are an integral part of achieving success.



That’s in addition to strong growth and adding new hospitals to its network. HealthIE Georgia has either recently added or is in the process of onboarding the following hospitals: Bacon County Hospital, Clinch Memorial Hospital, Elbert Memorial Hospital, Stephens County Hospital, Liberty Regional Medical Center and Coffee Regional Medical Center.

Since joining the RHIE in 2015, Executive Director Mark Renfro has obtained \$25 million in grants to support the implementation of technology connections between hospitals, private physicians and other community care providers, and the launch of a range of programs.

“In order to manage chronic conditions, physicians need comprehensive patient information available in real time,” says Renfro. “That’s why we were the first to pilot GaHIN’s ADT alerts – patients can’t afford to wait three or four days after a hospital discharge for their doctor to follow up. Through grants, we are able to defray technology costs that would typically be higher due to lower volume in small rural markets.”

Creating Care Communities

At the heart of HealthIE Georgia’s initiatives is creating care communities around rural hospitals. Whether it’s primary care physicians, specialists, rehab centers or other community health resources, the RHIE seeks out local resources and assists them with connecting to Georgia’s HIE network.

Not only does this help to build a comprehensive patient record, it also allows providers to access information if the patient is treated at another facility if they are traveling or referred to an out-of-town specialist.



Renfro and his team are currently working to gain more support for GaHIN's [Electronic Lab Results](#) program to deliver seamless access without faxing or waiting for a mailed copy.

Opioid Response Program – The opioid crisis has hit rural communities especially hard. Thanks to a [federal grant](#), HealthIE Georgia was able to hire Knicole Lee, DNP, APRN, FNP-BC, who is also an Assistant Professor at Valdosta State. The connections between hospitals and providers has been a key element in reducing unnecessary and duplicate prescriptions as well as identifying those most in need of help.

Women's Health – Georgia ranks 49th out of the 50 U.S. states in terms of maternal mortality rates (Louisiana is 50th). HealthIE Georgia is launching women's health programs to help change that statistic in the areas where it operates.

Behavioral Health – Exchange of data around behavioral health can be especially difficult, but critical in providing appropriate and timely care. The RHIE is actively seeking to link Community Service Boards (CSBs) with other providers to improve outcomes. It is also helpful that GaHIN is connected to the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities.

Leveraging Technology

Telehealth – One of the silver linings in the COVID-19 crisis has been the wider use of telehealth due to federal easing of restrictions. HealthIE Georgia is sending out practitioner students from Valdosta State to help patients as well as physician offices use the technology. This may mean an in-person visit to a patient's home to help them conduct their first visit or demonstrating to patients while they are at the doctor's office so they can use it for follow-ups.

ADT Alerts – It may seem that in a small community everyone knows everything about local happenings, but that's not the case, especially when it comes to follow-up care. With ADT Alerts, physicians are notified when their patients are admitted, discharged or transferred so they can proactively reach out to coordinate care and ensure the patient is following directions. HealthIE Georgia has signed up 11 hospitals for GaHIN's ADT Alerts program.