

## Leveraging Technology and Partnerships in the Pursuit to Connect the Healthcare Continuum in Ontario

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### Objective:

The primary goal of the project was to integrate community health agencies to seamlessly transfer patient information along the continuum of care using a secure, electronic information exchange network.

### Methods:

As the central point of access to information and referrals for a broad range of community-based health and support services, forty-two Community Care Access Centres (CCAC) in Ontario assist, direct and support residents in determining, coordinating and ensuring the provision of services in a variety of settings, including admissions to all long-term care homes, in a creative and collaborative manner.

In 1995, the CCAC in Waterloo Region (CCACWR) began exploring the idea of sharing information electronically to streamline communication and information exchange among their community stakeholders. This group included service providers, hospitals, long-term care homes (LTCH), Public Health, and medical equipment vendors. A Virtual Teams Steering Committee (VTSC) with stakeholder representation became the cornerstone of the initiative, providing a forum to discuss leveraging technology to enhance the quality of care in the community.

The Community Health Information Network (CHIN) is an internet-based technology solution that uses e-commerce security technology and is economical, scalable, expandable, user-friendly and aligned with emerging provincial strategies. Prior to the roll-out of the CHIN, information was exchanged by fax, phone and courier. The CHIN provides functionality in three ways: 1) smart forms with business rules in place to automatically update the databases of receiving organizations, eliminating duplicate data entry; 2) on-line access to standardized, on-demand reports available in real-time; and 3) the ability to create electronic messages that can only be sent to and accessed by a CHIN user. Client information is transferred through the CHIN portal.

This partnership model continues to be reproduced by other CCACs in their communities. A governance model is in place to support the provincial growth of the project. At this, the Management Committee with senior representatives from CHIN CCACs provides strategic oversight to the development and operations of the CHIN beyond the CCACWR. Over the last eighteen months, the number of CCACs and their healthcare providers using the CHIN has tripled.

### Results:

The exchange of information is streamlined along the healthcare continuum, bridging the gap between different IT systems. Significant efficiencies in processing information between healthcare organizations have been achieved. An estimated 50,000 pages of faxes in Waterloo Region alone are eliminated per year, creating less duplication of effort for administration staff. Healthcare staff have access to up-to-date information to support clients and their families making the transition to long-term care, and facilitating bed acceptance decisions with accurate client health information. And, unlike faxing, the CHIN has enhanced security measures in the transmission of the information.

The CHIN application is recognized by other CCACs in Ontario as a viable solution to their own information exchange processes. By Summer of 2005, 30% of all CCACs in Ontario will use the CHIN to exchange information with healthcare stakeholders in their communities.

### Conclusions:

The primary goal was to improve the business processes between community-based health service partners to provide better services to clients and to realize efficiencies in the delivery of services. Technology, coupled with business process changes, has proven to address these information exchange needs.

The scalability and reproducibility of the CHIN solution can link the healthcare provider team in ways not previously possible. Front-line staff are able to increase their attention to serving the client rather than managing the paperwork and partnerships between healthcare organizations are strengthened. With privacy, efficiency and effectiveness, and by utilizing locally-developed technology solutions, the CHIN improves the delivery of healthcare services to clients.