

ABILITY and the Direct Project

Secure communication for healthcare providers across the country

The Direct Project was designed to help healthcare providers and payers communicate securely, with each other and with their patients, to deliver higher quality and more affordable care. For years, ABILITY and other companies have been working with a consortium out of Washington, D.C. to develop a lightweight, web-based system for providing secure clinical messaging for healthcare providers and payers. The first attempt by the [Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology](#) (ONC) was called CONNECT, which was an on-ramp to the Nationwide Health Information Network (NwHIN), a network of networks for health information exchanges, providers and payers.

Although CONNECT worked for large organizations that communicate with federal partners, the ONC identified a need to simplify the approach thereby enabling a larger group of participants.

To continue promoting this initial effort the ONC looked for a public-private collaboration asking private-sector companies to help solve the secure messaging challenge. The result was the Direct Project. ABILITY took a leadership role early on by contributing significant resources toward the Direct architecture, security and trust model, policy guidance, pilot formation, and many other areas.

Uses for Direct

In January 2011, the ABILITY Direct immunization pilot sent the first-in-the-country Direct message containing production data between a Minnesota hospital, Hennepin County Medical Center, and a public health department, the Minnesota Department of Health.

Now, when a hospital, clinic or medical group that is part of the ABILITY network wants to send a health-related message to any other Direct-enabled entity, they can do so easily and securely. As demonstrated by ABILITY at HIMSS11, messages can even be sent from ABILITY members to their patients' personal health record (PHR) within [Microsoft's HealthVault](#), a Direct-enabled entity.

Some other sample uses:

- A family practice physician sends referral information to a specialist.
- A rural clinic transmits immunization data to a public health department.
- A multi-specialty group shares clinical disease surveillance data with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).
- An academic medical center requests verification of eligibility information from a payer.
- A payer requests additional clinical information on a patient from a large hospital.

Direct Advantages

The Direct Project yields these advantages for providers, payers and patients:

- **Direct lifts the burden:** Direct does all the heavy lifting for providers, delivering the services they need for secure exchange of health information.
- **Direct is simple and easy to use:** Users can easily generate a continuity of care document, for example, attach it to a simple Direct message, and feel confident that the document will reach its intended recipient.
- **Direct outperforms fax machines:** Faxes are an important element of the healthcare workflow, but they're not as secure as many would like. If a clinician faxes a patient's record, that record can rest in the receiver's fax machine for anyone to see. A secure electronic exchange, like the one provided via Direct, makes transactions more actionable because they are all electronic and all secure.
- **Direct accelerates action on reported data:** Direct can enable secure communication with statewide Health Information Exchanges.
- **Direct democratizes health information exchange:** Rural or urban providers who may lack the resources to invest in infrastructure can communicate and share health information via Direct.

ABILITY...Investing in the Future of Healthcare

ABILITY is making Direct available to all ABILITY customers and has pledged more than \$50 million over the next year to ensure provider connectivity.

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About ABILITY

ABILITY is a leading provider of high-speed, low-cost data communication services for healthcare organizations. The company's Secure Exchange Software is setting new standards for secure healthcare information exchange, using advanced encryption and authentication technologies that exceed regulatory requirements for Protected Health Information. ABILITY has cost-effective solutions for facilities of all sizes that enable safe, high-speed connections to multiple payers over the Internet.

