

An Interoperable 2016

As quickly as the holidays came and went, 2016 has already started. And the New Year will be important for a whole host of reasons—especially for health information technology.



A few weeks ago, Kenneth Corbin of [CIO](#) reported that policymakers anticipate lots of movement on Capitol Hill in the coming year regarding health IT regulation and legislation. [Interoperability](#), which is the exchange and interpretation of data between systems, is the gold standard for health IT initiatives and a major focus for legislators in the coming months. Why is this important? Interoperability is necessary in order for electronic health records to be efficient, effective, and ultimately, provide better care. A good example of this is Michigan's [myHealthButton](#), which provides a consolidated view of information retrieved and presented from different systems within the state.

And it seems legislators are starting to understand how crucial the issues of interoperability and efficiency truly are. Some policymakers are even going so far as to create a rating system for health IT platforms to keep agencies and contractors accountable for the IT solutions they provide. According to Corbin:

“The Senate Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions Committee has convened six hearings on the subject, and members of that panel are trying to advance legislation that would establish a health IT rating system, allowing users to evaluate systems on the common criteria of interoperability, security and usability.”

An interoperable health care network presents a litany of challenges, but it is by no means impossible according to National Coordinator for Health IT Karen DeSalvo. To make interoperability more achievable, the government should provide economic incentives to encourage health care IT vendors—who might normally be competitors—to work together toward compatible systems. In DeSalvo’s opinion, the government’s role can’t be overly prescriptive, but should nudge the health care industry toward setting common standards.

With all the chatter about interoperability, it seems as though Congress has made a New Year’s Resolution to drive progress in health care IT, and to its credit, the federal government is already making strides. Just before the New Year, the [Department of Defense joined a platform](#) that will allow it to share medical records with providers near the Pentagon, where thousands of employees live.

We are excited to see how the Congressional discourse and decisions shape the industry in the coming months. And regardless of how this shakes out, we can all agree that more efficient systems that foster better care is a step in the right direction.

How do you think policymakers have performed regarding health information technology this year? Where do you see health IT policy headed in 2016? Let us know by joining the conversation on Twitter. Find us [@CNSICorp](https://twitter.com/CNSICorp).