# Evolution of Meaningful Use

The Altarum Institute is pleased to provide our perspective on functional definition and clarity for the term "Meaningful Use" as it is used in the HITECH Act in the hopes of furthering the goal of improving health and health care in America. This discussion is both timely and necessary as the definition of meaningful use will be the driving force behind guiding health care stakeholders to improve the "quality, efficiency and safety of health care".

The HITECH Act identifies three required elements for incentive payments:

- *Providers must implement a CCHIT-Certified EHR.* To date, the focus of CCHIT has been on interoperability – a broader mandate to include patient safety, usability and the support of evidence-based medicine should be pursued.
- *The implemented system must exchange information*. The valid exchange of information should be defined in clinically relevant terms and include the ability of systems to incorporate and display information from outside sources.
- *The implemented system must impact the quality of care by demonstrating improved outcomes*. As many outcomes cannot be effectively measured in the increments of time required to process incentive payments – demonstrating the potential for improved outcomes should be defined as both the incorporation of evidence-based decision support tools and over time, the contribution of ontologically organized outcome data to an ever-evolving internet evidence base.

While defining meaningful use is critical to the success of our Nation's investment in HIT, equally important is the process to allow that definition to evolve over time. This process can be particularly enhanced through providing opportunities for stakeholders to submit innovative uses of health information technology (HIT) for inclusion.

## Fostering Innovation

The definition of meaningful use will ultimately influence the direction of industry innovation, the amount of resources required, the engagement of providers, and the development of workflow changes and software capabilities. Altarum recommends that DHHS adopt a process that encourages innovation in this developing industry by allowing for the definition of meaningful use to evolve over time.

Central to this effort is the ability for providers to submit their innovative uses of HIT to DHHS to be considered for inclusion as "meaningful use" and qualification for incentives. An approach which is not overly prescriptive will ensure the responsibility for defining attributes of meaningful use doesn't fall on a small subset of stakeholders; nor is reflective of a particular moment in time. In order for definitions and incentive mechanisms to be effective in the future they must be flexible enough to allow for innovation in practice, changes in technological maturity and recognize the potential of outlier or unique situations. DHHS must balance the need for the definitional clarity required to influence behavior with definitional flexibility to incorporate an evolving understanding of the role of technology in leveraging health information.

At a high-level, the mechanism to allow providers to submit meaningful uses for consideration should include at least the following three requirements:

- A clear description of the innovative use of HIT
- A methodology for implementation which describes potential workflow and outcome impacts and milestones
- A proposed verification method or metric that demonstrates the connection between HIT use and improvement in practice or health outcomes

In an effort to define key tools and processes to manage this aspect of the HITECH Act, Altarum recommends the use of the following structures to develop and disseminate evolving best practices:

- **Regional Extension Centers (RECs):** the RECs will be in a unique position to report on the innovative uses of HIT that can be replicated nationwide. The RECs will also be able to share strategies toward successful and innovative uses of HIT and provide support, training and troubleshooting at the point of need.
- **The Health Information Security and Privacy Collaboration (HISPC).** HISPC has grown over time to include 44 states and territories. Each participating organization has been officially designated by the governor, established a multi-stakeholder steering committee, and has connected with every HIT initiative within their state. There are multi-state collaborations to address provider education, consumer empowerment and standards, among others. This proven and inexpensive framework should be replicated to support the evolution of "meaningful use".