



## → The CONNECT Open Source Solution

Leveraging a Federal Investment to Promote Nationwide Health Information Exchange

The CONNECT gateway project is a federal health IT investment in a common solution utilizing existing standards and terminologies that provides a transport gateway and adapter services for Nationwide Health Information Network Exchange (the Exchange) participants. Born out of federal agencies' desire to participate in the Exchange, the Federal Health Architecture (FHA) began development of the CONNECT open source health information exchange (HIE) solution in 2008.



Over the past four years, the CONNECT solution has continued to evolve consistent with the changes to the Nationwide Health Information Network standards and specifications, and today, more than half of the participants in the Exchange deploy CONNECT to meet their HIE needs. CONNECT users include organizations such as the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Social Security Administration, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and numerous private sector and state organizations.

End users who deploy CONNECT benefit from connectivity with approximately 30,000 users participating in the Exchange, with approximately one million shared patients or beneficiaries covered. The Exchange has already expanded significantly in the past year, and that expansion is likely to increase significantly due to a January 2012 change in Exchange governance. The new governance structure allows any organization to participate if they comply with the standards, specifications and governance of the Exchange; they no longer have to be under contract with the federal government in order to participate.

The benefits of nationwide health information exchange using CONNECT are many. For example, because the Social Security Administration allows organizations to electronically submit supporting documentation to the agency through the Exchange using CONNECT, participants are realizing faster Social Security benefits determination (45 percent faster) and expedited benefit payments to the disabled, revenue enhancements among private providers, and improved clinical decision making.

### The Way Forward for CONNECT

CONNECT is in the process of transitioning the open source software from FHA to a private-sector driven, open source community. This new approach for long-term sustainment requires a new governance and operational model, and those models are currently under development through FHA. More details about how this will roll out will be available within the coming year.

As part of the move to the open source community, the CONNECT development team is in the beginning stages of creating a more modular version of CONNECT. This will allow organizations to use pieces of the software without having to use the entire solution, and as a result, only the related portions of the software will have to be updated when new Nationwide Health Information Network specifications come out. This new modular approach is also being pursued with the hopes of promoting more private-sector innovation. If organizations create add-ons, bug fixes or supplemental applications, it will be much easier for them to work with smaller pieces of the solution versus the entire CONNECT code base.

From the beginning, CONNECT was built using open source technologies to promote widespread use, but just as importantly, because the project always was intended to move out to the private sector. As this transition proceeds, FHA will be proactively engaging the 3,000 organizations that have participated in this open source project to date.

To learn more about the CONNECT solution and community, visit <http://www.connectopensource.org>.

