

## **VHIE Program Office at CommonWell Health Alliance and eHealth Exchange Annual Conferences**

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The Veterans Health Information Exchange (VHIE) program participated in the CommonWell Health Alliance and eHealth Exchange conferences in fall 2022. VHIE is an active member of both CommonWell and eHealth Exchange, health information exchanges (HIEs) operating at the national level. VA has a longstanding relationship with eHealth Exchange as one of the HIE's founding members, and VA recently began its relationship with CommonWell Health Alliance in 2020.

These national HIEs incorporate and connect health data exchange throughout the entire country and assist in VA's pursuit of future network expansion with Carequality moving forward. VHIE's participation in these conferences provided the opportunity to share successes, align best practices, and continue the work to improve care coordination to benefit VA patients.

At the CommonWell 2022 Fall Summit, presenters provided updates on technical improvements and enhancements to the CommonWell network, along with a strong emphasis on the move towards adoption of the Trusted Exchange Framework and Common Agreement (TEFCA). After over 10 years of the health informatics industry practice of query-based exchange, there is a recent push from CommonWell and other HIEs to adopt the newly established TEFCA, with CommonWell continuing its work to become a Qualified Health Information Network (QHIN).

The 21st Century Cures Act outlined the basis for TEFCA among its wide-ranging impacts on health informatics. The law, enacted in 2016, called on the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) to “develop or support a trusted exchange framework, including a common agreement among health information networks nationally.” The Sequoia Project, deemed the Recognized Coordinating Entity (RCE) by TEFCA, published the draft of the QHIN Technical Framework (QTF) in July 2021.

The QTF supports the core QHIN-to-QHIN exchange, and thus greatly increases interoperability among participating QHINs. CommonWell announced in August 2022 that it would be applying to become one of the first QHINs, and described the importance of TEFCA to the future of interoperability and its potential to improve health data exchange, empower patients and enable greater provider collaboration.

VHIE participated in a federal panel at the eHealth Exchange national meeting. VHIE was one of eHealth Exchange's founding members, and during this panel, Cindy Pan of VHIE reiterated their important and longstanding relationship. eHealth Exchange was originally a federally-funded pilot program backed by ONC as a nationally-integrated HIE. Exchange runs a network made up of a diverse group of organizations, including private and public providers, public health entities and agencies, and academic institutions, among others.

eHealth Exchange, like CommonWell, was among the first to submit their application for designation as a QHIN. eHealth Exchange has been preparing its members for the launch of TEFCA, and will be an active resource for its members wishing to connect to the federally-endorsed TEFCA network. While participation in TEFCA is currently voluntary, the VHIE program discussed its anticipation for VA to become an early adopter of TEFCA.

In the exchange of electronic health information, VA's goal has always been to meet other organizations where they are to enable to seamless exchange of health information. The VHIE program hopes TEFCA will build on the incredible work of strengthening and growing health information exchange capabilities that have been established over the past 10-plus years as an industry. The standard principles and framework presented by TEFCA will better integrate the exchange of electronic health information for providers and health organizations across the country—ultimately increasing care coordination and benefiting VA patients.