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PRESS CONTACT

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The Texas e-Health Alliance is committed to continued advocacy on local, state, and national digital health issues.

DIGITAL HEALTH PLAN 2021

The Texas e-Health Alliance serves as the state's leading advocate, from local communities to the national level, for the use of health information technology to improve the health care system for patients.

TeHA has been proactively working to pass legislation related to digital health for the last 10 years and is widely recognized as a thought leader at the intersection of healthcare, technology, and public policy. Our members and partners have been on the front lines of the response to COVID-19 and, based on those experiences, we offer these recommendations to policymakers as they move towards debating these issues in the 2021 legislative session.

DATA INTEROPERABILITY

The pandemic has made clear the need to move aggressively towards a real-time public health reporting system. In 2015, the legislature passed **HB 2641** (Zerwas/Schwerner) which changed public health reporting laws to promote bidirectional interoperability and established the use of nationally recognized standards in HHS systems, including those for public health, planned or procured after September 1, 2015. We have seen our first major success with this approach in the implementation of ImmTrac2, which fully supports real time data exchange, as appropriate, between the state and providers. Steps to accelerate towards full adoption of the HB 2641 framework could include leveraging federal funds (such as CARES Act funds) for needed upgrades, and aggressively reviewing and advancing procurement schedules and timelines for replacing aging systems.

INFRASTRUCTURE

In addition to standardization of protocols and processes, the state will need invest in replacing legacy systems and building a more modern data architecture for state agencies. The final budget adopted by the Legislature in 2019 included a rider directing the Health and Human Services Commission to develop an Information Technology and Data Services Modernization Plan that outlines how, over the next 10 years, HHSC will transition to a modern, secure, integrated and IT environment.

That plan, which was delivered to the Governor and the Legislature in October 2020, serves as a roadmap for moving away from the unsustainable current patchwork of old systems. In addition to modernizing state systems and architectures, the work being done by the Governor's Broadband Development Council created by **HB 1619** (Price/Perry) in 2019 on broadband access should be a critical component of keeping Texans connected to their schools, healthcare providers, state government and workplaces.

INNOVATION

While this is expected to be a tight budget session, with many difficult decisions ahead, policymakers should also be opportunistic in promoting public policy that supports the use technology in healthcare. TeHA worked with large coalitions of stakeholders to pass **SB 1107** (Schwertner/Price) in 2017, which expanded telemedicine options for providers through changes at the Texas Medical Board, and **SB 670** (Buckingham/Price) in 2019, which significantly increased the number of telemedicine services available to Medicaid clients through Medicaid health plans.

Prior to the pandemic, the passage of these bills was credited with opening up the telemedicine marketplace, empowering providers, and bringing more options for services to patients. As the Legislature evaluates the lessons learned from the state response to COVID-19, that will include the opportunity to evaluate preserving the way telemedicine was used to provide access to healthcare, while removing any remaining unnecessary or artificial barriers to these services.



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