HLB's Digital Health Blog

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ASTP/ONC Announces Nationwide Behavioral Health Interoperability Pilots

ASTP/ONC announced on February 2, 2026, the selection of nine nationwide pilot programs aimed at improving the interoperable exchange of behavioral health data. Launched in coordination with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the pilots will test real world implementation of the USCDI+ Behavioral Health dataset and the FHIR Behavioral Health Profiles Implementation Guide in varied behavioral health settings. A central focus of the pilots is addressing persistent barriers to behavioral health data sharing, including patient consent and heightened confidentiality requirements, while supporting more integrated behavioral and physical health care workflows.

The pilots will run through the end of 2026, with results expected to inform future updates to federal interoperability standards, implementation guidance, and ONC policy initiatives, including development of a Behavioral Health Information Resource anticipated in 2027. For providers, health IT developers, and health information exchanges, the initiative underscores continued federal emphasis on expanding electronic health information exchange for behavioral health while balancing privacy protections. As behavioral health interoperability remains a priority across multiple federal agencies, these pilots may signal the direction of future regulatory and enforcement activity in this area.

Congress Extends Key Telehealth and Digital Health Programs in Funding Bill

On February 3, Congress was able to avert a government shutdown, in particular providing funding for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) which included digital health provisions and extensions of expired programs. The final funding bill included:

- a two-year extension of the telehealth waivers (through December 31, 2027),
- a delay of the in-person visit requirement for mental health services via telehealth for three years (through January 1, 2028),
- allow telehealth cardiopulmonary rehabilitation services through Jan 1, 2028,
- a five-year extension of the Hospital at Home program (through September 30, 2030), and require the hospital-at-home study be shared with Congress, and
- a three- year extension of the virtual diabetes prevention program (through December 31, 2029).

In addition to the extensions, the funding bill included provisions requiring providers use a telehealth modifier beginning January 1, 2027, and requires HHS issue guidance on delivering telehealth services to individuals with limited English proficiency in one year.

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Notable, Congress also included a provisions requirement an assessment and report to Congress on wearable medical devices in 18 months. The report on wearables includes a review of the potential for such devices to accurately prescribe treatments, an examination of artificial intelligence to augment such capabilities and policy options to enhance the benefits while mitigating challenges.

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