Fact Sheet

What is the Massachusetts Health Information Highway?
The Massachusetts Health Information Highway (the HIway) enables the electronic movement of health-related information among diverse organizations, such as doctors’ offices, hospitals, laboratories, pharmacies, skilled nursing facilities, and health plans. The HIway facilitates the exchange of clinical information among varied health care information systems, while maintaining the meaning of the information being exchanged, regardless of provider affiliation, location, or differences in technology. Using the HIway can give doctors and other clinicians a more comprehensive understanding of their patients’ full medical histories to inform a more complete delivery of their healthcare.

What are the Primary Benefits of the Massachusetts HIway?
Currently, when doctors need to share health information about a patient with providers or institutions outside their organization, gathering and communicating patient health information can take hours or even days. Sometimes the information is missing or not available at all, leaving providers with an incomplete picture of a resident’s health status. Implementing the Massachusetts HIway is a critical component of enabling the Commonwealth’s collective care community to:

- Positively influence care coordination and delivery due to improved access to information;
- Reduce administrative costs throughout the delivery system;
- Improve public health reporting and analytics;
- Enhance patient care communication among providers;
- Increase patient engagement with providers on care plans.

How is the Health Information Secured?
The transport of patient information via the HIway is inherently more secure than the current practices of faxing and mailing information between unaffiliated providers or institutions. The security of the actual patient health information is addressed via the national “Direct” security standards, which includes authentication and verification of provider endpoints, as well as end-to-end encryption of all health information passing through the HIway. The HIway is in full compliance with all local, federal, and HIPAA privacy and security guidelines, as it pertains to its role as a conduit of protected health information.

How will the HIway be deployed?
The Massachusetts HIway will be deployed in three phases:

- **Phase One**: Provider-directed exchanges of electronic health
- **Phase Two**: Development of disease registries and analytical repositories and automation of the delivery of information to existing registries such as immunization
- **Phase Three**: Query-based health information exchange

How much will it cost?
The Federal and State governments will fund the vast majority of the operating costs for the HIway, with private sector contributions covering the remaining amount. The HIway uses a tiered pricing structure, based on organizational size and level of information technology complexity and capability. For example, a small practice with fewer than 10 providers will pay $5 per month, per provider for web-based HIway services.
What about Patient Consent?
Because of their commitment to patient privacy and control of personal health information, the Massachusetts Legislature requires that providers obtain consent from patients to “opt-in” to the sending of their information over the Massachusetts HIway. It is the responsibility of each provider to obtain patient consent prior to transmitting a patient’s information over the HIway.

With the increased security and auditability of the HIway, as compared to currently accepted practices of faxing or mailing information between unaffiliated providers, we expect that patients will ask providers to join the HIway and will overwhelmingly opt-in to its use.

What is the Golden Spike Event and what is its significance?
The Golden Spike Event marks the “go-live” for the HIway and is intended to raise awareness and encourage provider participation. Participants include a large group of early adopters within the state and represent the whole spectrum of the healthcare system – from large hospitals to solo practitioners; from Boston to the Berkshires.

The Golden Spike is a significant milestone that demonstrates both the viability of the HIway as a means of secure transport of patient health information as well as the commitment of the Massachusetts healthcare community to support its use.

What’s next?
As of October 16th, 2012, the Massachusetts HIway is open to all interested providers, hospitals, and other organizations within the healthcare community. Healthcare participants can connect to the HIway in one of the following three ways:

- Direct-enabled EHR systems
- Local Area Network Device (LAND)
- Secure webmail portal

For More Information about the HIway, including how to connect, call the toll free number 1-855-MA-HIWAY (1-855-624-4929).