



Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Direct Messaging

FAQs for Community Care Providers

What is VA Direct Messaging?

VA Direct Messaging is a secure email-like system that allows a VA staff member and a participating community care provider to send and receive health information. Direct Messaging takes the place of staff faxing, mailing, or delivering by hand patient referrals and health information.

How is VA using Direct Messaging?

VA is using Direct Messaging in various scenarios including:

- Referral Management**
 A community care provider and VA sending/ receiving referral documentation and reports for consults/ procedures for care performed in the community.
- ADT (Admission, Discharge, or Transfer) Notification**
 A community care provider notifying VA when a Veteran has an ADT event at a community care facility.
- LTC (Long Term Care)/ Home Health Care**
 A LTC facility (or home health care organization) and VA sharing Veterans' health data (e.g., C-CDA (Consolidated-Clinical Document Architecture), forms, other documentation) to improve continuity of care.
- Transitions of Care**
 A community care provider and VA sending and receiving health data (e.g., C-CDA) for Meaningful Use as well as for other clinical purposes.

Any health information that VA staff faxes, mails, or hand-delivers to community care providers can be sent using VA Direct Messaging.

Once a community care provider can send a Direct message to one VAHCS (VA Health Care System), can the community

care provider connect with other VAHCSs?

Yes. When a community care provider connects to the VA Direct Messaging system, a community care provider can share Direct messages with any VA Direct Messaging user at any VAHCS nationwide.

What security standards does VA Direct Messaging follow?

VA Direct Messaging follows [Direct specifications](#), is accredited by DTAAP (Direct Trust Agent Accreditation Program), and complies with the HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) Security Rule. In addition, as a federal entity, VA Direct Messaging conforms to the FISMA (Federal Information Security Management Act) and additional federal standards. Each community care provider should reach out to its Direct HISP (Health Information Service Provider) to confirm its status of technical connectivity with VA as well as to confirm if the HISP meets [Direct specifications](#) and [federal security guidelines](#).

Is VA Direct Messaging a member of DirectTrust?

VA Direct Messaging is a [member of DirectTrust](#) and has full DirectTrust accreditation.

What agreements (i.e., business agreement, Memo of Understanding) or costs are required to share Direct messages with VA?

VA does not have separate agreements for Direct Messaging. If an organization would like VA to review and sign an agreement, please contact VA Direct Messaging's Program Manager at VADirectInfo@va.gov. There is no cost to other organizations to share Direct messages with VA.

How can a community care provider start the process to get connected with VA Direct Messaging?

To start the process for connecting with VA Direct Messaging, please contact VA Direct Messaging's Program Manager at VADirectInfo@va.gov.

Phases to Share Direct Messages Between Community Care Providers and VA

**Identify
Community Care
Provider**

**Gather
Information**

**Conduct
Business
Validation**

**Complete
Workflow and
Training**

Monitor/ Improve

Identify Community Care Provider

1. VA becomes aware of a community care provider (e.g., non-VA hospital or clinic) that has Direct Messaging capabilities and meets federal standards.

Gather Information

2. The community care provider and VA discuss if VA has previously connected with the provider's HISP, the provider's software interface, the closest VAHCS, mutual use case(s) for Direct Messaging, etc. If VA has not successfully connected with the provider's HISP in the past, then VA would then begin the partner integration process with the respective HISP.
3. Once the HISPs are connected, both VA and the community care provider assess whether to proceed with a simple business validation. The validation process quickly confirms connectivity and determines the payload types (e.g., C-CDA, .pdf) before message sharing by end users. Decision factors on whether to proceed with business validation include HISP connection status, VAHCS interest, applicable use cases, etc. Even after technically connecting with a HISP, VA Direct Messaging prefers to do a simple business validation with the community care provider using test data in the respective production environments.

Conduct Business Validation

4. If both organizations agree to move forward with business validation, then a VA Direct Messaging Business Validation

team member contacts the community care provider to introduce her/ himself and explains VA's business validation process.

5. The community care provider and VA Direct Messaging Business Validation team member perform the business validation on the agreed-upon date and time. After completing the validation, the VA Direct Messaging team member sends a message to the community care provider team member with a synopsis of the validation results (including if any validation(s) failed) and next steps (if applicable).

Complete Workflow and Training

6. Once a successful connection is established, then a VA Direct Messaging team member works with the VAHCS and community care provider to establish the timeframe for implementation, to determine the workflow for the agreed-upon use case, and to register/ set up/ train respective end users. Implementation timeframes depend on resource availability of staff from the community care provider and the VAHCS.

Monitor/ Improve

7. The community care provider and VA Direct Messaging teams monitor usage and value while sustaining, maturing, and expanding use cases of Direct Messaging between the organizations.

How does VA share Direct addresses?

Dependent on the use case, VA exchanges Direct addresses of VA end users needed by connected community care providers. VA is working towards participation in [DirectTrust's Directory](#).

Does VA use individual or group Direct addresses?

Each individual VA user has her/ his own Direct addresses. VA also has group Direct addresses which VA users frequently use.