



## Veterans Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) Health Direct Messaging

### FAQs for Community Health Care Providers

#### **What is VA (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs) Direct Messaging?**

VA Direct Messaging is a secure email-like system that allows one VA staff member to communicate with and send specific health information to a participating community health care provider.

#### **How is VA using Direct Messaging?**

VA is using Direct Messaging for provider-to-provider messaging which allows messages containing health information to be shared between authorized VA staff and trusted community health care providers. Direct Messaging takes the place of staff faxing, mailing, or delivering by hand patient referrals and health information. Specific uses include referral authorizations; ADT (admission, discharge, and transfer) notifications; and home health coordination, among others.

#### **Is VA Direct Messaging secure?**

VA Direct Messaging complies with federal security guidelines as well as with the HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) Security Rule. VA requires encryption for VA-protected data that is [FIPS \(Federal Information Processing Standards\) 140-2 validated](#).

#### **What security does VA require for Direct provider-to-provider messaging?**

VA requires security certificates that are cross-certified with FBCA (Federal Bridge Certification Authority). Due to

federal regulations, VA Direct Messaging security protocols are higher than many others in the industry. This means that some technical partners may initially be unable to exchange patient information with VA because their certificates do not meet federal security levels.

#### **What does VA require provider-to-provider users (VA and non-VA) to do to authenticate and verify their identities for Direct Messaging?**

VA and community health care users must be identity-proofed at the NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) LOA (Level of Assurance) 3 or higher to comply with federal regulations.

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

VA reviews technical partner's agreements on a case by case basis.

#### **Is VA Direct Messaging a member of DirectTrust?**

VA Direct Messaging has full DTAAP (Direct Trusted Agent Accreditation Program) accreditation for Health Information Service Providers (HISPs) from DirectTrust and the Electronic Healthcare Network Accreditation Commission (EHNAC).

#### **How can our organization 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](mailto:VADirectInfo@va.gov).



## Five Phases for Community Health Care Providers to Engage with VA Direct Messaging

### Establish the Partnership

### Testing

### Production

### Training

### Monitoring/Improving

#### **Establish the Partnership**

1. The VAHCS (VA Health Care System) identifies a community health care provider with which they would like to share Direct messages.
2. The potential community health care provider meets with the VA Direct Messaging Program Manager to discuss the overall process, necessary resources, estimated timing, and lessons learned from earlier pilot sites to achieve production with VA Direct Messaging.
3. The community health care provider submits completed VA Direct Messaging Business and Technical Surveys to the VA Direct Messaging program manager and VA's Partner Integration team, respectively, for review. For transparency, VA Direct Messaging will provide responses to these same surveys regarding VA systems, processes, and policies.
4. The VA Direct Messaging Program Manager contacts the applicable VA VISN (Veterans Integrated Service Network)/VAHCS to assess their interest in pursuing a Direct Messaging relationship with the potential community health care provider.
5. Once concurrence is received from the VISN/VAHCS, VA Direct Messaging and the community health care provider can establish how to implement Direct.

#### **Testing**

6. Also upon the concurrence of the VISN/VAHCS, VA's Partner Integration team meets with the community health care provider to discuss the IT (information technology) process and planned timeline.
7. VA's Partner Integration team and the technical partner exchange certificates and begin testing. If applicable, IT teams resolve technical questions and issues.

8. After completing testing, VA's Partner Integration team and the community health care provider review the testing results for approval to proceed to production.

#### **Production**

9. After approval, both VA Direct Messaging and the community health care provider move the software capability to production. The community health care provider and VA Direct Messaging perform production software validation.

#### **Training**

10. The community health care provider and VA Direct Messaging teams begin their respective training and support programs with the identified end users.

#### **Monitoring/Improving**

11. The community health care provider and VA Direct Messaging teams monitor performance while sustaining and maturing Direct messaging between the organizations.
12. The community health care provider and VA Direct Messaging teams share information with each other regarding technology updates (e.g., upgrades), planned outages, changes in workflow, strategic direction, etc.

**Simple, secure — Connect your community DIRECTly**