



Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) Health Direct

FAQs for Non-VA Partners

What is U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) VLER Health Direct (also referred as VA Direct)?

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

How is VA using Direct?

VA is using Direct for provider-to-provider messaging which allows messages containing health information to be shared between authorized VA staff and trusted non-VA health care partners. The referrals and health information that VA staff has been faxing, mailing, or delivering by hand can be sent using Direct. Specific uses include referral authorizations, maternity tracking, home health coordination, and mental health care coordination, among others.

How do I know VA Direct is secure?

VA Direct 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 security protocols are

higher than many others in the industry. This means that some non-VA 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?

VA and non-VA 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 are required to share Direct messages with VA?

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

Is VA Direct a member of DirectTrust?

VA Direct is in the process of becoming DTAAP (Direct Trust Agent Accreditation Program) accredited and anticipates completion by early 2015.

How can our organization start the process to get connected with VA Direct?

To start the process for connecting with VA Direct, please contact VA Direct's program manager at VaDirectInfo@va.gov.

Five Phases for Non-VA Partners to Engage With VA Direct

Establish the Partnership

Testing

Production

Training

Monitoring/ Improving

Establish the Partnership

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

Testing

6. Also upon the concurrence of the VISN/VAHCS, VA's Partner Integration team meets with the non-VA partner to discuss the IT (information technology) process and planned timeline.
7. VA's Partner Integration team and the non-VA 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 non-VA partner review the testing results for approval to proceed to production.

Production

9. After approval, both VA Direct and the non-VA partner move the software capability to production. The non-VA partner and VA Direct perform production software validation.

Training

10. The non-VA partner and VA Direct begin their respective training and support programs with the identified end users.

Monitoring/Improving

11. The non-VA partner and VA Direct team monitor performance while sustaining and maturing Direct messaging between the organizations.
12. The non-VA partner and VA Direct team share information with each other regarding technology updates (e.g., upgrades), planned outages, changes in workflow, strategic direction, etc.

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