

Spotlight on: Alaska –Touting the benefits of EHRs and HIE through public service announcements

May 2013

❖ **The Challenge**

To increase public knowledge and comfort level with EHRs and HIE.

❖ **The Approach**

Customize national patient engagement messaging for local television and radio public service announcements to educate the public about the value of EHRs and HIE and, by extension, help provider organizations prepare to field patient inquiries.

❖ **Lessons Learned**

- Build consumer engagement into HIE project schedule early on in the process
- Conduct pre-market research to understand attitudes about EHRs and HIE
- Establish interdepartmental and cross-organization partnerships
- Use a positive and consistent message (i.e., EHRs are “safe, secure and life-saving”)
- Define objectives. Alaska set out to: 1) raise awareness of EHRs/HIE and 2) encourage patients to talk to health care providers for more information and to see if they are participating in health information exchange
- Request feedback from all stakeholders, from front-line staff to board members
- Maximize budget, existing materials, and resources
- Test messages in specific markets
- Develop metrics to define, measure, and drive success

With a spring 2013 go-live date for the Fairbanks health information exchange (HIE) pilot approaching, hospital staff at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital expressed concern about patients’ awareness of electronic health records (EHRs) and HIE. Building this awareness rapidly was essential because patients were going to be given the ability to “opt-out” of having their health information exchanged through the HIE infrastructure by submitting a non-consent form. Alaska’s health information technology (HIT) leaders in the [Department of Health and Social Services](#) (DHSS) and at the [Alaska eHealth Network](#) (AeHN) decided to communicate the value EHRs and HIE provide patients by leveraging the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology’s (ONC) [consumer awareness video](#) and script to complement and extend their existing communication efforts (e.g., website content, e-newsletters, videos, and brochures). Recognizing that the messages must appeal to consumers in Alaska while staying within a tight budget, the team sought a cost-effective way to customize and develop a series of public service announcements (PSAs). Three PSAs air on the radio and one airs on television. Three months into the consumer awareness campaign, the PSAs have aired more than 1,000 times. The 447 TV ads and 563 radio ads averaged out to \$19 and \$11 per spot, respectively. To help other states and HIE entities replicate this innovative and promising approach for tapping mainstream media to engage consumers, we spoke with some of Alaska’s state and local health care leaders as well as staff in the DHSS public information office who created the PSAs.

Ground-up Approach

Alaska’s health care leaders have emphasized patient engagement from the outset of their HIE planning process. The state’s [HIE plan](#) includes patient engagement as one of its strategic imperatives; to that end, AeHN and DHSS staff have communicated with patients and consumers using email, newsletters, Twitter feeds, and Facebook posts. [AeHN’s website](#) includes patient-specific content that answers questions related to HIE, such as “What is HIE?” and “Why is HIT important to me?” Patients can also obtain information from brochures located in physician practices. AeHN placed opinion pieces in [Anchorage and Fairbanks newspapers](#), issued [press releases](#) highlighting HIE achievements, and ran

commercials describing AeHN's mission and HIE. These activities built awareness and garnered favorable media attention, but AeHN recognized—primarily by talking with providers at various in-person meetings and conferences—that something else was needed to increase consumer awareness.

Grassroots Voices and Open Communication

The admissions staff at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital were the first HIE system users to vocalize the need for more HIE consumer awareness. The hospital was poised to launch a pilot offering query HIE services to its providers later in spring 2013. However, Fairbanks staff were concerned that patients, wary about their privacy, might opt to not share their information before fully understanding the value of HIE. Banner Health, the non-profit organization that operates Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, escalated the staff's concern to AeHN in a weekly regional extension center (REC) meeting. AeHN staff took this information to the state's HIT coordinator in DHSS and opened a discussion about how they could better prepare consumers for HIE.

The collaborative effort between a team of DHSS and AeHN staff took two months and resulted in a series of PSAs broadcast throughout a significant portion of Alaska (See **Figure 1** below for more detail). The specific process they employed is described in the remainder of the brief.

Customizing the Message

Both DHSS and AeHN staff knew they needed to employ new, higher-touch mechanisms to inform consumer decisions about HIE. Due to past successes creating PSAs, and given that many Alaskans rely on the public broadcasting stations for news and often for communications where no telephones exist, AeHN and DHSS staff quickly identified that producing a series of radio PSAs would fulfill the need and stay within the budget. After viewing the animated patient engagement videos ([here](#) and [here](#)) created for ONC around the same time, they believed that creating a television PSA using the same files would be another effective tactic for reaching consumers.

PSAs are often the only realistic opportunity for non-profit groups to communicate a message through mass media. They are also a good option, as AeHN Executive Director Rebecca Madison advised, in markets where satellite television has not reached saturation, because they reach a large audience and the public generally views them as positive and credible sources of information.¹

Working through their ONC project officer, DHSS staff obtained the source files for a nominal fee from the [California communications firm](#) that created ONC's videos. Alaska did not have to pay for, or negotiate, licensing because ONC had already purchased and licensed the videos. DHSS paid for the company's labor costs to put the source files on DVDs and upload them to a file transfer protocol (FTP) site. The state's HIT coordinator then handed the files off to DHSS' public information office for scripting and development.

'Find out what the public really needs in terms of a message'

Recognizing that first and foremost, Alaska culture values privacy, especially in the rural areas, DHSS and AeHN staff determined that positive, fact-based messages would be the best way to educate consumers about EHRs and HIE. To determine specific messaging requirements for Alaska's consumers, Public

Figure 1: PSA Campaign Vitals

- **Market size:** Fairbanks North Star Borough (7,366 square miles); public radio and TV coverage also reaches Nome and Barrow, an area of over 313,732 square miles
- **Development time:** Two months
- **Source file cost:** Music stems (~\$250)
- **Media contract:** \$15,000 to Alaska Broadcasters Association (ABA) to air three radio ads and one television ad from Feb. 1 to Aug. 1, 2013
- **Public Information Office fee:** \$5,000 (covered creating the ads, responding to media inquiries, placing the ads and other campaign tasks).
- **Software:** Apple Final Cut Pro X (video editing); Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop (custom tree illustration); Adobe Flash (building the animation)

Information Officer Laura Carpenter said they had to “find out what the public really needs in terms of a message.” AeHN and DHSS staff tapped their collective experience to come up with the tagline that EHRs are “safe, secure, and life-saving.” DHSS staff used this message and adapted the existing ONC video transcripts and older AeHN video transcripts into three PSA scripts for radio—one of which would be combined with ONC video footage to air on television.

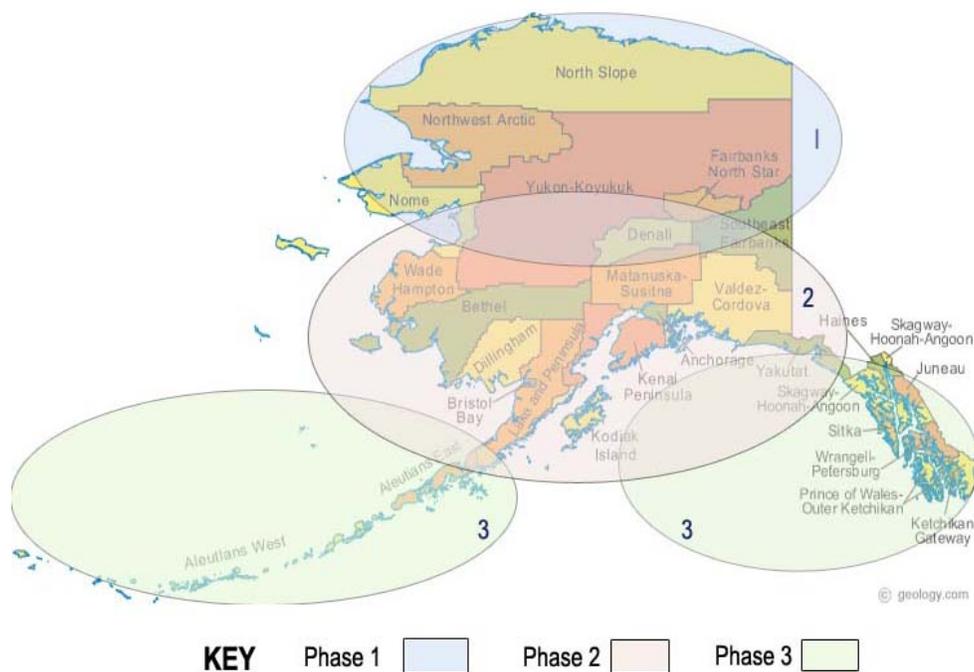
- [PSA 1](#) – Presents a mother’s perspective on providers having access to her child’s medical information in an emergency and is meant to appeal to parents and patients (radio)
- [PSA 2](#) – Borrows language from ONC’s videos on EHRs and HIE and is intended to educate consumers about the value of EHRs and HIE (airs as radio and [TV ad](#))
- [PSA 3](#) – Delivers a specific message for consumers about AeHN and its effort to set up a statewide exchange, beginning in Fairbanks (radio)

The final scripts were reviewed and approved by all the state’s partners, including AeHN’s board of directors, Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, Tanana Valley Clinic, Tanana Chiefs Clinic, and the American Indian/Alaska Native National REC.

Identifying a Target Geography

Fairbanks was selected as the initial area to launch the PSAs, primarily due to its April 2013 HIE go-live date (see **Figure 2** below for the rollout phases). Of note, there are only eight states in the U.S. with a larger square mile area than the regional area of Alaska’s initial PSA rollout (Phase 1). Some DHSS staff believed that phasing the rollout would minimize competition on statewide radio and in the news media, given the large target area.

Figure 2: PSA Rollout Phases



Leveraging the Broadcast Association

With a target market in mind and work on the PSAs underway, DHSS staff contacted the Alaska Broadcasters Association (ABA), which offers lower media buy rates for government and/or non-profit PSAs, to establish a contract. In signing the agreement, DHSS is guaranteed that the ABA will get television stations in the Fairbanks market to donate time and work with the association to air the PSA. Working with the ABA offered the lowest rates, especially in a small market like Fairbanks. The six-month contract

promised the best possible air time and a 3:1 return on educational advertising investment, so the DHSS' \$15,000 contract buys at least \$45,000 of advertising time.

Process and Teamwork

A team of public information officers, a visual information specialist, a communications manager, and a publications specialist followed a fairly linear production process to create the video PSA. (See **Figure 3** below). They looked at the video and scripting, considered the state's goals for the video, and edited it to incorporate the new language and scene—like adding mountains, trees, and contact information—to ensure it resonated with Alaskans.

Creating the video took precise editing to ensure fluid animation and accurate sound. Seamlessly replacing the HealthIT.gov website with the state's specific information, for example, required exact cutting and cropping. It also took several hours to integrate multiple levels of sound (e.g., background music, sound of paper being filed, and birds chirping) at the right time to make the sound and new script flow. After AeHN and DHSS staff decided to work from ONC's videos, the entire project took two months to complete.

Figure 3: Roles and Responsibilities for Developing the PSAs

Executive Director (AeHN)	Editorial/Content Review
HIT Deputy (DHSS)	Editorial/Content Review
State HIT Coordinator (DHSS)	Editorial/Content Review
Public Information Officer II (DHSS)	Wrote scripts and editorial content for traditional and social media; coordinated PSA creation; serves as main PIO contact for DHSS representatives; media buyer
Visual Information Specialist (DHSS)	Edited video and radio PSAs; recorded audio
Public Information Officer (DHSS)	Voice of radio PSAs and assisted with recording and editing elements of radio PSAs
Public Information Manager (DHSS)	Voice of mom for radio PSAs
Publication Specialist (DHSS)	Designed the end cap and animation for video PSA
Communications Manager (DHSS)	Oversight and input

Measuring Impact

Although the impact of the PSAs is still being observed, early anecdotes indicate that the radio and television ads are reaching their intended audience and perhaps beyond. Several providers in Fairbanks who previously indicated they were not interested in participating in HIE have called AeHN to express interest in participating. Some patients have also contacted AeHN and said they do not want their information shared, or asked more questions about HIE—sparking exactly the type of dialogue the PSAs are designed to stimulate. The campaign is already earning media attention. The state recently published a bylined article in the health section of the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, and two television stations in Fairbanks approached AeHN about running a mini-news series on HIE over a three-week period.

DHSS staff will use the ABA's ad run report and dollar value from the bonus ads to help measure success of the PSAs. They may also collect anecdotal reports from AeHN and other partners in Fairbanks to assess message delivery. AeHN plans to administer a survey to assess awareness levels and reactions in the Fairbanks area before airing the PSAs in new markets.

Looking Ahead

After the Fairbanks facilities go live, DHSS and AeHN hope the PSAs will become an educational vehicle that fosters a culture of expectation, meaning that consumers across the state will begin to expect and demand HIE. By ramping up consumer engagement efforts, they also anticipate that more physicians—even those located in small, rural villages—will understand that they can share information with the urban hospitals and clinics. Based on survey results from the Fairbanks market, AeHN and DHSS staff will make modifications to the PSAs and then plan to expand coverage to new markets as HIE services extend statewide.

References and links

To learn more, please contact Paul Cartland at paul.cartland@alaska.gov.

And for more information please visit:

[Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Health Information Technologies](#)

[Alaska eHealth Network](#)

[Public Service Announcement 1 \(PSA 1\)](#)

[Public Service Announcement 2 \(PSA 2\)](#)

[Public Service Announcement 3 \(PSA 3\)](#)

[Public Service Announcement Video](#)

¹ Goodwill, B. "How to Place Public Service Advertising in Your Community: A Primer on Local PSA Outreach." PSA Research Center. Available at <http://www.psaresearch.com/psaprimer.html>. Accessed April 18, 2013.