

North Rural E-Consult Coalition Overview

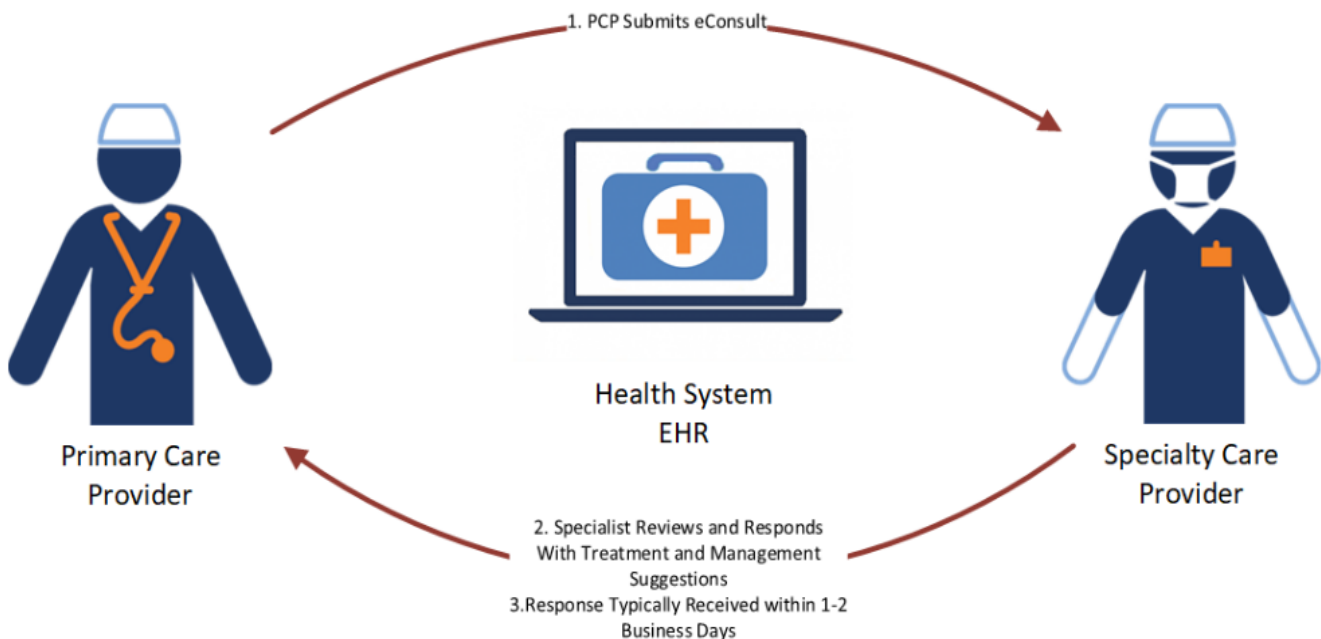
Program Overview

Anthem Blue Cross and California Health & Wellness, Medi-Cal managed care organizations (MCOs) in rural Northern California, are working together to support clinics and health systems in the region by providing no-cost access to electronic consult (e-consult) to improve patient access to specialty care and enhance care coordination between primary providers and specialists. The North Rural E-Consult Coalition (NREC) is a group of community health centers, health systems, physicians' groups, clinic networks and MCOs working together to create an inclusive program to address implementation needs, streamline referral workflows, and improve patient/member experiences. Unique aspects of the Coalition include:

- Payer collaboration to cover costs to make e-consult available to all Medi-Cal patients;
- Organizations working to resolve key issues and disseminate learnings to support program spread;
- Provider champion sharing of the benefits and value proposition of e-consult to facilitate use; and
- Shared tracking of progress and modeling of outcomes to sustain adoption.

What is an E-Consult?

- E-consults are asynchronous communications connecting PCPs with specialists to respond to their clinical questions, often making it possible for patients to avoid long wait times for face-to-face visits that may not be necessary.
- When face-to-face referral visits are recommended following an e-consult, these are enhanced by helping the PCP to provide all necessary tests and patient information in preparation for the visit.
- With most e-consults, the patient's problem can be managed by the PCP using the e-consult response. Patients for whom the specialist recommends a face-to-face visit will be referred to a local specialist.



E-Consult Benefit to Patients

Analyses have shown timelier access to specialty input, decreased utilization and costs, and high patient and provider satisfaction with e-consults. Additional benefits¹ include the following:

- E-consult enables patients in **rural areas to access specialist care** that may not be available locally, **and increases access** to specialists, so the highest acuity patients are prioritized for in-person visits.
- For every specialty visit averted, **e-consults saved patients approximately \$100** in avoided copays, transportation costs, and missed work.
- In a national survey, **81% of patients were satisfied with the specialists' e-consult recommendations** (the same as those with an in-person referral).

Provider Value Proposition

- **High provider satisfaction** (89% of consultants surveyed)
- **Reduction in wait times** for face-to-face visits
- **Resolution of patient issues** without the need for referral, improving efficiency
- **Cost reduction** through avoidance of unnecessary referrals and diagnostics
- **Optimization of specialist time:** patients come prepared with diagnostics, documentation
- **Patient follow-through:** avoided no-shows and increased compliance
- **Patients stay in-network** for visits and procedures

What is Requested of Provider Organizations?

- Commit to participate in monthly NREC Roundtables.
- Convey the value of e-consult to your primary care providers.
- Ask your local specialist providers to join the NREC panel as e-consult responders.
- Share your reporting on referral volume with the NREC to address access needs.

How Does an Organization Get Involved in the NREC?

Contact libby.sagara@bluepathhealth.com to get answers to your questions about the NREC and attend the next roundtable. Monthly roundtables offer opportunities to identify patient/member access needs, address provider questions, discuss implementation needs and define shared metrics for success.

¹ Project CORE: Coordinating Optimal Referral Experiences, aamc.org

² www.confermed.com, 2020