

National e-Claims Standard Initiative (NeCST) – Healthcare Partnerships in Action

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The National e-Claims Standard (NeCST) Project was initiated in April 2000 as a collaborative effort between the public and private sectors as well as national provider associations. This pan-Canadian, voluntary electronic standard was created in order to address the complex and expensive claims environment. This project is funded in part by the stakeholders and Canada Health *Infoway*, an independent corporation working to accelerate the development of compatible electronic health record systems in Canada.

Throughout the past decade in Canada, e-claim standards and communication protocols have been pioneered and advanced by organizations such as the Canadian Dental Association (CDAnet™) and Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA). They have been working with various health industry stakeholders to facilitate the flow of electronic claims information for patients/clients to their private insurance carriers via their dentist and pharmacist.

Additionally, many provincial and federal sector organizations have introduced e-claim standards and communication protocols that are also widely used by most healthcare practitioners.

However, the absence of a single Canadian national electronic healthcare e-claims standard has created a complex and expensive claims environment, to the disadvantage of many health-

care providers and those in the private and public sector. A single national standard would provide consistency in capturing data and provide the foundation for information exchange throughout the healthcare industry.

The NeCST project is developing a pan-Canadian e-claims standard that will work for all payers (public sector and private) and providers (pharmacy, vision care, chiropractic, physiotherapy, oral health, etc). NeCST has been designed to facilitate all major healthcare business processes used to authorize, compile, submit, adjudicate and pay healthcare invoices submitted by any provider to any payer in Canada.

The NeCST messages include the ability to send and receive information regarding:

- determining the eligibility of a patient/client
- obtaining authorization for services or goods
- requesting coverage extension
- obtaining predetermination
- healthcare services invoice
- adjudication results
- payment and reconciliation

More importantly, NeCST is a voluntary Canadian standard, built on a model of consensus.

BCE Emergis Inc., in conjunction with chiropractic and physiotherapy healthcare

providers, are initial implementers of a subset of NeCST messages for chiropractic and physiotherapy as part of a project with the Workplace Safety & Insurance Board of Ontario (WSIB).

NeCST is based on HL7 Version 3, and was developed and agreed upon by a broad and varied group of stakeholders; this open approach to standard development allows for interoper-

ability between providers and payers. HL7 Version 3 is consistent with the strategic direction of *Infoway* and is key in achieving interoperability. NeCST will interoperate with other HL7 v3 initiatives such as pharmacy clinical messaging in HL7 v3, which could include e-prescribing.

One of the critical success factors of NeCST

Table 1. Members of the NeCST Executive Steering Committee

Public Sector Participants	Provider Associations	Private Sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) • Canada Health <i>Infoway</i> • British Columbia Ministry of Health – representing the Western Health Information Collaborative • Manitoba Ministry of Health – representing the Western Health Information Collaborative • Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care • Nova Scotia Department of Health – representing Health Information Atlantic • Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) • Canadian Dental Association (CDA) • Canadian Healthcare Association (CHA) • Canadian Medical Association (CMA) • Canadian Alliance of Professional Associations (CAPA) representing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canadian Association of Optometrists • Canadian Dental Hygienists Association • Denturist Association of Canada • Opticians Association of Canada • Association des denturologistes du Québec • Association des optométristes du Québec • Canadian Chiropractic Association & Canadian Physiotherapy Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • InterAssure Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada Life • Great-West Life • Sun Life (& Clarica) • Standard Life • National Life • Equitable Life • Imperial Life • BCE Emergis • Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association (CLHIA), representing more than 85 members companies in the life and health insurance industry • ESI Canada/CAPPS • Association for Claims Exchange (ACE), which consists of many life and health insurance companies working together toward electronic claims exchange: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Shield • Johnson Insurance • Liberty Health • AccertaClaim Servicop • Manulife • Beneplan • Claim Secure • Coughlin & Associates • Empire Financial • First Canadian Health • Funds Administrative Service • MDM Insurance • RWAM • Wawanesa • National Association of Blue Cross Plans The national association represents all regional Blue Cross plans in Canada: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta Blue Cross • Pacific Blue Cross • Atlantic Blue Cross • Ontario Blue Cross • Manitoba Blue Cross • Saskatchewan Blue Cross • Quebec Blue Cross

has been the broad participation the project has enjoyed from stakeholders. The project's Executive Steering Committee is composed of the organizations listed in Table 1 (note that many other organizations have participated on other committees and working groups).

NeCST stakeholders share in funding the project through their continued participation at meetings and human resource expertise. During the development of NeCST, there have been more than 100 days of face-to-face meetings. Development and working group meetings will carry on as the project continues. Most working group meetings welcome new participants and any interested stakeholder can attend.

NeCST can provide core encounter information to the electronic health record and to knowledge-based administration and decision-making activities, while affording various benefits to the healthcare system, including potential cost reduction. NeCST has been designed to apply to a wide range of healthcare transactions by expanding on existing leading-edge standards and broadening their functionality to other providers, while enabling the flow of information to support the Canadian electronic health record (EHR).

BENEFITS TO:

The Healthcare Consumer

NeCST can help patients obtain immediate access to services through increased speed and reliability of claims processing and payment, particularly in areas that are currently paper-based.

Additional advantages for healthcare consumers include:

- speed and reliability in claims processing
- reduction in handling of paper claims
- reduction in time delays for answers and payments
- ability to access patient medical data for sharing with appropriate healthcare practitioners when encountering a medical emergency while travelling

The Public Health System

NeCST will integrate with other EHR projects that are also based on HL7 Version 3. NeCST has achieved significant progress in pan-

Canadian standards:

- All messages are based on the same architecture (HL7 v3).
- Pan-Canadian code sets will be used across benefit groups, which will benefit payers that support multiple lines of business.
- The same attributes are used across messages that facilitate clear, fine-grained conformance claims to support interoperability.
- Optionality is reduced, which yields a more specific message to support interoperability.

Implementation of the NeCST Standard requires trading partners to comply with privacy and security legislation.

AND FINALLY

NeCST has been created by a unique collaboration between the public and private sectors as well as national provider associations. Pan-Canadian standards are being successfully developed with the support of diverse public/private stakeholders, and the result has been significant progress toward the electronic health record. NeCST is being designed to facilitate healthcare claims transactions to authorize, compile, submit, adjudicate and pay healthcare invoices submitted by any provider to any payer in Canada that has implemented NeCST.

COMING NEXT

Please look for future articles which will include more information on implementers of this voluntary standard and lessons they have learned. In subsequent articles more information will be provided on the number of organizations and providers that have implemented NeCST.

Want More Information?

- E-mail: necst@cihi.ca
- Canadian Institute for Health Information: www.CIHI.ca
- Canada Health *Infoway* www.infoway-inforoute.ca