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CASE STUDY

DIGITALLY ENABLED TRANSFORMATION AT SCALE:
Insights from a Province-wide Integrated Care System

Alberta Health Services

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is the provincial health authority responsible for delivering healthcare services across Alberta, Canada. It is the country's first and largest province-wide integrated care system (ICS), covering all aspects of care, including primary, acute, inpatient, mental health, community, and allied health. AHS' geographic reach is responsible for delivering services to over 4.5 million people.

THE CHALLENGE | Transforming healthcare at scale using technology

AHS faced challenges that included with fragmented data sharing and management, poor coordination of care pathways across departments and hospitals, and multiple legacy solutions with over 2,000 active total applications. The health system strategized to digitally transform and revolutionize its healthcare ecosystem within five years to enhance patient care, streamline workflow processes, and improve overall operational efficiency.

To do this, **AHS needed to reduce the number of active applications and standardize clinical dashboards and workflows to create a cohesive digital platform.** Connect Care, a transformative five-year project with the aim of revolutionizing information exchange between individuals and healthcare providers throughout the entire province, was launched in 2019. Its objective was to make health records effortlessly accessible from any location across 800 facilities, including ambulatory, acute, mental

health, cancer, and community-based care sites. Ensuring seamless interoperability and data exchange between different systems was an essential part of the transformation.

Part of the challenge was to ensure the 120,000-person staff, each with distinct roles and responsibilities, could use Connect Care at HIMSS level 6 and adapt to new ways of working across the geographically dispersed footprint. This involved bringing healthcare professionals (HCPs) together from across the province to agree on standardized approaches to care and reduce variation.

"We partnered with [Healthtech] to enhance our launch process and provide comprehensive support to our users. By having a dedicated team available during launches, we could offer valuable at-the-elbow support to our users. This ensured they felt fully supported and helped them adapt to a new way of working seamlessly."

Jeremy Theal, Chief Medical Information Officer, Alberta Health Services

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THE SOLUTION | Reimagining technology adoption

AHS chose to procure Epic's EHR for the digital transformation project. **To ensure a successful launch, AHS also partnered with Healthtech, a Nordic Global Company, for advisory and training support due to its extensive expertise in assisting providers with successful Epic implementations**.

The project, which began in 2018, involved the initial build, training curriculum design, and a detailed analysis of AHS' existing and future requirements for systems and workflows. Early collaboration with stakeholders, including clinicians and IT professionals, was fundamental to the project. Governance arrangements were underpinned by a team with clinical and design expertise to manage the flow of EHR improvement. AHS also recognized that effective training and communication were instrumental in shifting the perception of EHR implementation from being solely an IT project to a collective effort of the entire system. This collaborative approach fostered a shared understanding of the change and the importance of working together.

Working alongside AHS, Healthtech identified potential pain points and challenges. By addressing these concerns, focusing on training needs, and involving key stakeholders, AHS created a solid foundation for a smooth implementation process. Nine launch cycles were planned to implement the new Epic solution across various care domains, including acute care, long-term care, home care, population health, public health, workplace health and safety, supportive living, and the prison system. This approach ensured staff across the province were equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to embrace the new change with confidence.

These cycles, which took place every six months, provided hands-on learning and access to best practices, case studies, and real-life scenarios. For example, patients were invited to some of the direction-setting sessions which allowed clinicians to hear first-hand about how to improve the patient experience and standardize workflows.

During the implementation stage in 2019, Healthtech embedded an expert within AHS to provide ongoing oversight and advisory services to the training team for three years. To support long-term adoption and implementation, 'super users' were deployed as champions of the solution, actively promoting its benefits and providing feedback to Healthtech and AHS.

> "[Healthtech] managed to maintain a strong partnership with our team, fostering transparency and trust, which enabled us to creatively address resourcing challenges and find effective solutions. This external support ensured a smooth implementation process while fostering the long-term sustainability of skills and knowledge within AHS beyond the go-live phase."
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> *Sean Chilton, Interim Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Clinical Operations, EMS, Primary Health Care and IT*
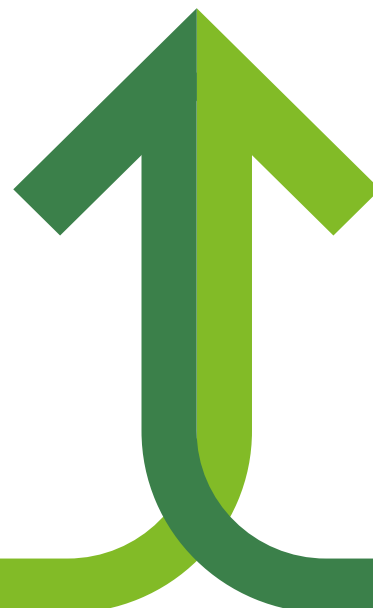
RESULTS AND BENEFITS | EHR implementation success

By November 2024, AHS aims to complete the Epic rollout across the entire province, connecting care services across their healthcare ecosystem for the entire population. Although the EHR is still in its rollout phase, it has already begun to yield several significant outcomes.

Healthcare professionals have a holistic view of patient data with access to patient records in real-time from any location. They can also order tests and track the clinical progress of individuals seamlessly on a unified platform, all of which helps make informed decisions quickly, avoids duplication, and makes collaboration with colleagues more effective across the large geographical footprint. Some noteworthy outcomes include:

• 50% reduction in reported medication-related patient safety incidents.

• 70% reduction in reliance on transcription services.

• 5% cost reduction from preventing duplicate diagnostic lab tests orders.

The enterprise-wide EHR system has enabled digital convergence across the province and resolved AHS' previous challenges with siloed systems. One of the most valuable aspects of a single solution is that staff only need to enter information once, which is then instantly visible across the entire system. As a result, HCPs and administrative staff have reported increased workflow efficiency, reduced documentation time, and improved overall user experience. The key to realizing the benefits of convergence has been creating common ways of working that drive shared benefits, including closely working with clinical leaders to ensure the benefits are truly meaningful for them.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION SUCCESS
Key takeaways of what worked

- **Readiness assessments** enable a clear understanding of goals from the outset and create the foundations for rollouts at scale.

- **Standardization of clinical practice** enables data to flow between clinical services, pathways, and the EHR.

- **A sound governance structure** that allows for timely decision-making at the right levels, in the right place, by the right people is key to effective change.

- **Customized training** and robust post-implementation support are non-negotiable to ensure quick and effective uptake of an EHR.

- **The role-specific upskilling of staff** across the AHS province led to significantly greater engagement in its change management program. Easy-to-digest learning materials, in-person sessions, online courses, and convenient refresher sessions can all be effective ways for people to learn. This empowers staff to use the solutions effectively, helping to increase operational efficiency, enhance patient care, and provide better regional collaboration.

- **Creating a positive risk culture** at the board level enables the right environment for encouraging change, innovation, growth, and resilience among front-line staff.

- **Communication, engagement, and enthusiasm** for the project are crucial to help gain people's commitment to embracing change.

- **Partnerships with strategic advisors** who have proven understanding of the EHR system being deployed and extensive experience implementing large-scale programs of change can help mitigate costly mistakes and expedite the project life cycle.

- **Working with an experienced partner** enables ICSs to accelerate digital transformation, ensuring sustainability via training and knowledge-sharing during and after implementation.

"Thanks to our five-year digital transformation project, AHS has gained valuable key learnings. We recognised the importance of engaging operational departments, involving clinical operations to ensure a successful outcome for the province, and the need for risk-taking. It was important to us to have active engagement, and genuine enthusiasm for the project to help people embrace change. By providing high-quality training and effective communication channels, our staff realised the project is not solely focused on IT. We've cultivated a robust training culture here at AHS, enabling our staff to feel empowered and confident in harnessing the full potential of technology, and to work together as one cohesive system, welcoming the new change as a united front."

Debbie Pinter, Clinical Operations Informatics Officer, Alberta Health Services

About Nordic

Nordic and its Canadian company Healthtech support more than 700 clients in their efforts to harness the power of technology for a healthier world.

Nordic is an award-winning global health and technology consulting company that partners with health leaders around the world to create healthier systems, organizations, and people. Together, our global team of more than 3,300 professionals brings decades of experience across our key focus areas of strategic advisory, digital and cloud initiatives, implementation and support, ERP services, and managed services.

Learn more at **NordicGlobal.com.**

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