



## Social Security Awards \$20 Million in Contracts For Electronic Medical Records

Written On February 2, 2010 By [Bob Kraft](#)

This press release was issued by the Social Security Administration this week. I hope it will achieve the stated purpose of speeding up the almost unbearably long process of reaching decisions in disability claims.

Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, today announced that 15 healthcare providers and networks have received \$17.4 million in contract awards to provide electronic medical records to the agency. These electronic medical records, which will be sent through the Nationwide Health Information Network (NHIN), will significantly shorten the time it takes to make a disability decision and will improve the speed, accuracy, and efficiency of the disability program.

“Using health information technology will improve our disability programs and provide better service to the public,” Commissioner Astrue said. “We’ve seen a significant increase in disability applications. To process them, the agency sends more than 15 million requests annually for medical records to healthcare providers. This largely paper-bound workload is generally the most time-consuming part of the disability decision process. The use of health IT will dramatically improve the speed, accuracy, and efficiency of this process, reducing the cost of making a disability decision for both the medical community and the American taxpayer.”

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The contract awards are funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. They will require awardees, with a patient's authorization, to send Social Security electronic medical records through the NHIN. The NHIN, a safe and secure method for receiving access to electronic medical records over the Internet, is an initiative of the Department of Health and Human Services supported by multiple government agencies and private sector entities.

For the last year, Social Security has been successfully testing health IT to obtain electronic medical records. Disability applications processed with electronic medical records from the test sites in Massachusetts and Virginia have significantly reduced processing times. Some decisions are now made in days, instead of weeks or months. Social Security expects to receive more than 3.3 million applications in fiscal year (FY) 2010, a 27 percent increase over FY 2008.

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