



## Business Roundtable™

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As the CEO of Verizon, I come to the health care reform discussion with a particular point of view, rooted in my experience in the communications industry and our company's direct, daily contact with our customers.

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Over the last two decades, innovation, technology, and competition have transformed the communications industry and reinvigorated whole sectors of the economy. Information technology has revolutionized the interaction between customers and providers. And the norms of the electronic marketplace – personalization, control, price transparency, and 24-by-7 availability – have become part of the customer's expectations.

That's not the case in health care.

A first step towards putting the customer at the center of our health care system is implementing a nationwide, interoperable health IT system that empowers patients and gives them greater, more effective, interaction with their doctors and other health care providers.

Fewer than 10 percent of hospitals have electronic records. In fact, 90 percent of health-care transactions are conducted by paper, fax and phone calls – putting the medical system radically out of synch with the way business is conducted in every other sector of the economy. As a result, as many as 98,000 people each year die unnecessarily because of preventable medical errors<sup>i</sup> – more than the number who die from breast cancer, AIDS, or motor vehicle accidents.<sup>ii</sup> Health IT can help prevent many of these deadly errors.

Health IT legislation that would do just that has been introduced in both the House and the Senate and is supported by Democrats and Republicans alike. The "Wired for Health Care Quality Act" was introduced last June in the Senate; a similar bill — the "Promoting Health Information Technology Act" — has been introduced in the House of Representatives.

In addition, efficiencies and improved health outcomes from health IT could save \$165 billion a year<sup>iii</sup> - enough money to insure 37 million

individuals, more than three-quarters of the 47 million uninsured Americans as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>iv</sup> These savings come from avoiding duplicate and unnecessary lab tests and radiology screenings, more efficient use of health care professionals' time, reduced expenditure on unnecessary drugs, and other direct and indirect cost savings.

So how do we make health IT a reality?

I was privileged to serve as a member of the federal Commission on Systemic Interoperability, which spent a year studying this very issue. In our report to Congress, we spelled out straightforward policy reforms that could remove the financial, regulatory and technical barriers to a system of interoperable electronic health information. One is that Congress must establish procedures to define the uniform, interoperable standards that these technologies require.

Along with my peers at Business Roundtable, I have been actively advocating with both chambers and administration to pass and ultimately sign health IT into law as quickly as possible. Every day that goes without widespread access to health IT, we lose 250 American lives and \$452 million to preventable errors and inefficiencies. We just can't afford to wait any longer.



Ivan Seidenberg  
Chairman and CEO, Verizon Inc.  
Chair, Business Roundtable Consumer Health and Retirement Initiative

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<sup>i</sup> Institute of Medicine, "To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System," November 1999.

<sup>ii</sup> Commission on Systemic Interoperability, "Ending the Document Game," 2005.

<sup>iii</sup> Rand Health, "Extrapolating Evidence of Health Information Technology Savings," 2005

<sup>iv</sup> Census Bureau. *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2006*. August 2007.