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Territory Continues on Path Toward Health Information Exchange; Findings of First Environment Scan to be Published January

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The findings of the first phase of a mandatory environment scan for potential and or identified providers to the Health Information Exchange (HIE) that began on November 15 will be made available to all the participants in January 2022.

A Health Information Exchange allows healthcare providers and patients to securely access and share a patient's vital medical information via an electronic transmission – improving the speed, quality, safety, and cost of patient care.

In January 2020, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centre for Medicare and Medicaid Services (HHS-CMS) awarded the U.S. Virgin Islands \$14.9 million in federal funding to implement an HIE for approximately 29,000 Medicaid recipients living in the territory. The project is under the Office of the Governor.

Dec. 2 is the final date to submit a response to the survey which is being conducted via email. The V.I. Department of Human has contracted the CommunityHealth IT, known CommHIT to conduct the first-ever Digital Security Environmental Scan (DSES) of USVI health-related entities to inform the development of the HIE.

The official launch of the DSES or survey was on held Friday in the Ritz-Carlton Ballroom on St. Thomas. The launch was entitled "Creating Connections: USVI Health Information Exchange (HIE) Event for Medical Providers and Healthcare Leaders."

Michelle Francis, director of the office of Health Information Technology explained that the environmental scan is a foundational step in the development of any HIE and for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS') HIE certification.

"It provides a clear understanding of the gaps, needs, and areas of vulnerable connections in the USVI healthcare system (physicians, offices, clinics, hospitals, relevant government agencies)," she said in her opening remarks.

Medicaid is the sponsor of the environmental scan and according to Gary Smith, medicaid director at the Dept. of Human Services, the main focus of an environmental scan is to ensure that providers to the systems are of the capacity and capability to connect to the Medicaid system.

"This is going to transform the way that we provide healthcare in the territory. It is going to be transformational for all of our health facility, for our physicians, for our partners, stakeholders, and most importantly for the members that we serve – our most vulnerable population in the Virgin Islands," he said.

"This scan will let us know what changes and or enhancements need to be made to your system to get us to where we are going... We also know that at the completion of this scan, the result will tell us exactly that," Mr. Smith added.