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## **VA Demonstrates its Commitment to Consumer Choice and Access to Data**

*Department of Veterans Affairs Joins NATE and NBB4C Trust Bundle*

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (June 9, 2016)** – The [National Association for Trusted Exchange](#) (NATE) today welcomed its newest member, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). By joining NATE and participating in the NATE Blue Button for Consumers (NBB4C) Trust Bundle, VA is demonstrating its commitment to enabling its Veterans to send their health data to the consumer-facing application (CFA) of their choice.

“When many people feel that getting access to their health information is impossible, VA is leading the way, yet again, demonstrating their commitment to share data when and where it is requested by the Veteran. We congratulate VA Direct Messaging on their vision and their responsiveness to the needs of our Nation’s heroes,” said NATE Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Aaron Seib. “We look forward to the time when all Americans can benefit from the example VA has set.”

Becoming a member of NATE will allow VA to collaborate on policies and procedures for sharing trusted health information with consumers outside of the VA health system through the use of Direct Messaging and other electronic transport protocols. With the majority of Veterans receiving some portion of their care at a healthcare facility that is not part of the Veterans Health Administration, giving Veterans the ability to share their health data with a consumer controlled application enables the Veteran to mediate who has access to their data, one outcome of which is improved coordination of care.

Commenting on its NATE membership, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Under Secretary for Health Dr. David Shulkin stated, “VA is currently testing functionality that enables Veterans to share their health information with providers outside the VA and to integrate their data into a growing number of safe and secure health-related consumer applications. Participating in NATE allows VA to continue to be a national leader in enabling our Veteran patients to take control over their health information and become informed and active partners in their overall healthcare.”

VA has been a long-time supporter of Direct Messaging. In addition to being members of the Direct Project from its inception, they also provided leadership and federal policy subject matter expertise to the Federal Health Architecture’s Directed Exchange Workgroup.

NATE’s trust bundles leverage Direct Messaging protocols for sharing information between provider-controlled electronic health records (EHRs) and consumer-controlled CFAs, so that consumers can then do what they want with their own data.

“The Federal Health Architecture (FHA) congratulates the Department of Veterans Affairs on this important milestone in consumer engagement. It represents yet another step toward the use of technology and health information that is accessible when and where it matters most – information that can be used to achieve the full benefits of person-centered health IT,” said Gail Kalbfleisch, Director of FHA.

VA's NATE membership and trust bundle participation complements VA's current membership with DirectTrust, which provides similar services for provider-to-provider Direct Messaging. Adding NATE's consumer Direct Messaging focus will provide VA with a broader use of Direct to support Veterans' healthcare. Stakeholders interested in pursuing membership in NATE should visit <http://nate-trust.org/membership> for additional information.

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#### ***About National Association for Trusted Exchange***

The [National Association for Trusted Exchange](#) (NATE) is a not-for-profit membership association focused on enabling trusted exchange among organizations and individuals with differing regulatory environments and exchange preferences. NATE brings the expertise of its membership and other stakeholders together to find common solutions that optimize the appropriate exchange of health information for greater gains in technology adoption and improvement of patient outcomes. Consistent with NATE's mission to address the legal, policy and technical barriers that inhibit health information exchange between data holders and healthcare consumers, NATE leads and participates in a number of ongoing and emerging projects focused on exchange via multiple modes of transport, including Direct secure messaging and APIs. NATE's [Blue Button for Consumers](#) (NBB4C) Trust Bundle provides a technical solution to establishing scalable trust among organizations using Direct secure messaging to exchange protected health information between HIPAA covered entities and the consumers that they serve. The NBB4C includes the trust anchors of multiple consumer-facing applications (CFAs) that have elected to adopt a common set of policies and practices that enable consumer mediated health information exchange while upholding personal privacy preferences. Stakeholders interested in participating in NATE's work to support consumer mediated exchange should consider [NATE membership](#) or subscribe to *News from NATE* on the NATE website at <http://nate-trust.org>.

#### ***About VA Direct Messaging***

VA Direct Messaging is one of the components of the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record [VLER] Health program. More information about VA Direct Messaging and other VLER Health Programs is available at [www.va.gov/vler](http://www.va.gov/vler).