



## Frequently Asked Questions

For Patients and Clients of San Mateo County Health System

ENGLISH

### What is SMC Connected Care?

San Mateo County Connected Care (SMC Connected Care) is the Health Information Exchange (HIE) for the electronic sharing of health-related information for patients and clients receiving services from the San Mateo County Health System.

The ability to exchange health information electronically is key to improving healthcare quality, safety, and efficiency in the United States. SMC Connected Care manages the sharing of health-related information among electronic health record (EHR) systems within the Health System. This is done through a secure, encrypted data exchange using standards developed specifically for healthcare. The only people who can access and view a patient's information will be the patient's healthcare treatment team and designated staff.

Sharing health information electronically eliminates the need for faxing, copying and hand-carrying your health record from provider to provider.

SMCHS participating divisions include the San Mateo Medical Center (SMMC), Public Health, Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS), Aging and Adult Services, Family Health Services, and the Mobile Clinic.

### How does SMC Connected Care benefit me?

There are multiple ways in which SMC Connected Care will benefit you and leave you with the highest confidence and satisfaction in your healthcare. These benefits include saving you time, improving your overall care and experience, potentially reducing costs, and enhancing your privacy through the highest security standards.

- **SMC Connected Care Saves Time:**  
With SMC Connected Care, physicians and other qualified health professionals will have quick access to your health information compiled from multiple participating health organizations. When health providers are not connected electronically to the health information they need, they are forced to spend time searching and requesting paper documents by calling and faxing for information—this can mean less time spent with the patient and potential treatment delays. With SMC Connected Care, providers will no longer have to “chase” information. They will already have the important health information they need to make informed decisions about your treatment plan.

- **SMC Connected Care Improves Care:**  
With consistent health information delivery provided by SMC Connected Care, physicians and other providers will get results and reports in one compiled format, which makes your health information more complete. As a result, your care is improved through reduced errors and improved treatment recommendations. It also means you don't have to remember the details of every hospital visit or medication you've been prescribed when you see a new doctor. All of this information will be stored in SMC Connected Care.
- **SMC Connected Care Reduces Cost:**  
With more streamlined and comprehensive information, quality of care improves and duplicate tests and procedures are reduced. In this way, SMC Connected Care saves you time and can reduce your out-of-pocket expenses for unnecessary medications, radiology tests, lab tests and hospitalizations.
- **SMC Connected Care Enhances Privacy:**  
Your privacy is very important to the San Mateo County Health System. Our use of electronic health information requires enhanced security protections beyond what is required for paper records. Therefore, your health information and privacy are more secure than ever.

## How will SMC Connected Care protect my private information?

SMC Connected Care utilizes the highest technology security standards available in the industry today to protect your health information.

Federal and state laws protect your privacy by determining who can access your data. These laws mean that your health information will never be provided to anyone other than your health care team or authorized providers.

Because your health information is transferred electronically, SMC Connected Care will track where your health information has been sent to ensure that only your healthcare team providers are viewing your information. Every time a clinician accesses your personal health information, an audit trail is recorded. The Health System cares about your privacy, and this type of accountability provides an additional layer of security for your health information.

Your health information is encrypted into a type of technical language that can only be

translated, or decrypted, by someone who has the authority to do so. Therefore, only authorized providers will be able to read your health information.

### Will my immigration status be shared via SMC Connected Care?

No. Immigration status is not recorded in a health record and therefore cannot be shared via SMC Connected Care. SMC Connected Care will only share medical and treatment information. Additional information such as your home or mailing address will not be shared with anyone outside of San Mateo County Health System without your explicit permission by signing a release of information. Further, immigration status is never a condition of treatment.

### Do I have to share my healthcare information?

You are not required to share your healthcare information. You may refuse to allow your information to be shared in SMC Connected Care at any time. Your choice to refuse to share your information via SMC Connected Care will not affect your access to care with the San Mateo County Health System in any way.

### What are my SMC Connected Care participation options?

Participation in SMC Connected Care is voluntary. As a patient/client of San Mateo County Health System, we encourage you to make important decisions about your health information according to your preference. Below you will find your options for participation in SMC Connected Care:

- **Opt In/Participate:** You are automatically included in SMC Connected Care and do not need to do anything to be a Participant. When you have an appointment with your care provider, your information will be securely transmitted to SMC Connected Care and will only be visible to providers of your treatment.
- **Opt Out/Withdraw:** When you Opt-Out/Withdraw, none of your health information will be included in SMC Connected Care. In an emergency, a provider will not be able to access any part of your medical record via SMC Connected Care. If you opt-out/withdraw and change your mind, you will have the option to opt-in/participate at any time.
- **Partial Opt Out/Withdraw:** When you partially Opt-Out/Withdraw, your health information will only be accessed in an emergency, such as a visit to the Emergency Room. In that event, your emergency care provider will be given access to view your health information for emergency purposes only. If you Opt-Out/Withdraw and

change your mind, you will have the option to Opt back In/Participate at any time.

## How do I “Opt Out/Withdraw” of SMC Connected Care and where do I return the form?

There are four options available should you choose to Opt Out/Withdraw from SMC Connected Care. Please note: *No action is required if you choose to Opt In/Participate in SMC Connected Care.*

- Option 1: Complete the Opt Out/Withdraw form online  
You can Opt Out/Withdraw from SMC Connected Care by visiting our website at [www.smchealth.org/connectedcare](http://www.smchealth.org/connectedcare). Select the form called “Opt Out/Withdraw Form”. Complete the form and hit “Save”.
- Option 2: Fax a completed Opt Out/Withdraw form  
You can Opt Out/Withdraw from SMC Connected Care by visiting our website at [www.smchealth.org/connectedcare](http://www.smchealth.org/connectedcare). Select the form called “Opt Out/Withdraw Form”. Print the form. Or, during a clinic visit request, ask that the registration staff person print the Opt Out/Withdraw form for you. Complete fully. Fax form to:  
**(650) 573-3626**  
**Attn: SMC Connected Care**
- Option 3: US Mail a completed Opt Out/Withdraw form  
You can Opt Out/Withdraw from SMC Connected Care by visiting our website at [www.smchealth.org/connectedcare](http://www.smchealth.org/connectedcare). Select the form called “Opt Out/Withdraw Form”. Print the form. Or, during a clinic visit, request that the registration staff person print the Opt Out/Withdraw form for you. Complete fully. Use US Mail to return the form to the following mailing address:  
**Health IT – SMC Connected Care**  
**HLT 362**  
**225 37<sup>th</sup> Ave.**  
**San Mateo, CA 94403**
- Option 4: Deliver a completed Opt Out/Withdraw form to the San Mateo County Clinic where you receive your care  
You can Opt Out/Withdraw from SMC Connected Care by visiting our website at

[www.smchealth.org/connectedcare](http://www.smchealth.org/connectedcare). Select the form called “Opt Out/Withdraw Form”. Print the form and complete fully. Bring completed form to the San Mateo County Clinic where you receive your care and give to the registration staff person. Or, during a clinic visit, request that the registration staff person print the Opt Out/Withdraw form for you. Complete fully. Give the form back to the registration staff person.

Content that we cannot read will be returned. It will take up to three business days to process your request. You will receive a letter via US mail confirming your Opt Out participation selection.

You can easily opt back into SMC Connected Care by visiting our website at [www.smchealth.org/connectedcare](http://www.smchealth.org/connectedcare) and filling out the “Opt Back In Form”. You may turn the form in using your choice of the processes listed above.

### What are the risks if I Opt Out/Withdraw?

If you choose to opt out of SMC Connected Care, your healthcare team may not have all of the information to provide you the safest and most effective health care.

### How is my health information used in SMC Connect?

Just like your health information in the paper record, your health information in SMC Connected Care is protected by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) Privacy Rule.

Under this rule, your health information can only be shared with:

- Other doctors and hospitals for treatment purposes
- Insurers for billing purposes
- State and federal health reporting agencies (such as immunization and cancer registries), as required by law

When a healthcare provider is seeing you for treatment, he or she can receive information about your health history from other healthcare providers who have treated you in the past.

If you receive care in the emergency department or are admitted to or discharged from a hospital, SMC Connected Care can notify your doctors about that event. In the event of an

emergency, health care providers can also use SMC Connected Care to communicate among themselves to design the best plan for your ongoing care.

### Can my information be used for other purposes without my consent?

It's important to understand that your health information can't be given to your employer, used for sales or advertising, or used for any other purpose without your signed permission.

San Mateo County Health Services is committed to safeguarding the privacy of our patients and clients. Only healthcare providers with an authorized medical treatment reason, a release of information signed by you, or other legitimate business needs as defined in Federal and State regulations can see your information.

### What will it cost me?

Participating in SMC Connected Care is free. What's more, by improving quality of care and reducing duplication of tests and procedures, SMC Connected Care actually helps lower the cost of care for everyone in the community.

### What type of health information is exchanged and who can see it?

The information shared with your healthcare providers may include:

- Demographic Information including but not limited to
  - Name
  - Birthdate
  - Sex
  - Primary Language
- Emergency Contact
- Primary Care Provider
- Advanced Directive
- Medication list
- Known Allergies
- Encounters or Healthcare Visit History (e.g., clinics, emergency rooms, hospitals). This may include visit dates, diagnosis and healthcare provider information.
- Laboratory Test Results
- Healthcare Team Providers
- Immunizations

## How will you protect sensitive information like HIV status and substance use treatment information?

Sensitive health information will continue to be protected as it is now. Only authorized healthcare providers are able to view sensitive healthcare information. SMC Connected Care has an added level of protection for this information where clinicians must provide a reason they need to review this information. All views of sensitive health information are audited and brought to the attention of Quality Management staff for review of appropriateness.

In the event of treatment for medical emergencies, Federal and State regulations do NOT require a separate patient/consumer signed release of information. That means that clinicians in a medical emergency are authorized to review all clinical information that they need to provide appropriate care. If they access health information via SMC Connected Care, they must still provide a reason for viewing sensitive health information. Their “need to know” is authorized based on their providing treatment in an emergency.

## Can I request a copy of my information in SMC Connected Care?

Not yet. SMC Connected Care is San Mateo County Health System’s first step toward consolidating medical information which gives essential information to providers. The ability for patients to request a copy of their information via SMC Connected Care has not yet been developed, but will likely be an option in the future.