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## **BAUCUS SAYS COLLABORATION IS KEY TO HEALTH I.T. IMPROVING CARE, LOWERING COSTS**

*Finance Chairman Says Government, Providers, Health IT Vendors Must Work Together to Ensure  
Systems Communicate Seamlessly*

**WASHINGTON** – In a Senate Finance Committee hearing today, Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) said that health care providers, technology vendors and the government must work together to create a seamless health information technology (HIT) system that improves the quality of care and lowers costs. He added that hospitals and clinics in rural states like Montana must have the same access to HIT others do. Today's hearing built on [one held last week](#), which featured the administration's perspective on the importance and growth of HIT.

**"We have to do more to make sure health information technology systems are improving care and bringing down costs. These new technologies have to be able to share data and information seamlessly,"** Senator Baucus said. **"Rural, critical access hospitals in states like Montana have more trouble than others getting the up-front capital necessary to install HIT. And hospital-based rural health clinics are ineligible for incentive payments to help them afford technology. Those are problems we have to solve to make sure everyone benefits."**

In 2009, Congress passed the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act, known as HITECH. Under the law, Medicare and Medicaid give providers financial incentives to adopt HIT and to put it into "meaningful use." The law outlines three stages of meaningful use, with each stage increasing the sophistication and integration of the technology.

Stage one, which began in 2011, focuses on physicians adopting electronic health records and collecting data from those records. Stage two, set to begin in 2014, will focus on sharing electronic health information among hospitals and physicians. Stage three will focus on ensuring the information improves patient outcomes.

Senator Baucus said that with stage two approaching, providers and the government have to ensure HIT is in fact improving the quality of care patients receive. He said their work should focus on ensuring HIT systems can communicate with each other to share information and data.

Senator Baucus also said that critical access hospitals in states like Montana often face additional problems getting investment capital and access to HIT. And he added that rural, hospital-based health clinics are currently ineligible for federal HIT incentive payments. These clinics are managed by critical access hospitals, and in many cases, they are the most accessible source of health care for people who live in rural areas.

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