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12 facts about the Health and Social Care Network

12 facts about HSCN

The Health and Social Care Network (HSCN) is the new data network that connects all NHS organisations and more than a million NHS employees in England, replacing the N3 network formerly managed by BT. UKCloud Health has put together 12 facts about the HSCN and UKCloud Health's support for public and private sector organisations as they make the move to HSCN.

1. HSCN is the new data network for health and social care

HSCN is a new data network that aims to provide safe, reliable, flexible and efficient information sharing between health and social care organisations, who will be able to obtain network connectivity from multiple suppliers.

2. HSCN will replace N3 by 2019 – but earlier migration is recommended

Organisations that currently use N3 (which is now called the 'HSCN Transition Network' and for which central contract arrangements ceased on 31 March 2017) have until 2019 to migrate to HSCN, but NHS Digital is encouraging early adoption, as it is more cost-effective for public and private sector organisations that want to benefit from straightforward access to health and social care information and services. Migration can be quick, with the right support.

3. HSCN is a building block for the future of health and social care

N3 was designed over 10 years ago, in times of very different requirements. Having listened to industry, and realising that greater connectivity and information sharing was essential to achieving its paperless aspirations and the integrated care ambitions of the Five Year Forward View, the NHS is putting in place network arrangements that will support better information sharing between health and social care providers. For example, HSCN connects with PSN and JANET networks, which are in use across the public sector.

4. HSCN is more advanced than N3

N3 was considered slow and legacy technology; HSCN will support modern services such as VoIP, virtual desktop infrastructure and video consultations. Waiting for BT to make changes to the network core to allow organisations to exchange data will no longer be required.

One key difference between N3 and HSCN is the presence of a central Peering Exchange, which provides a high performance environment to enable the efficient transfer of information across the network. This means that the size of the connection is dependent on that provided by one of several Consumer Network Service Providers (CN-SPs), who offer different levels of connection speed. Healthcare organisations choose which CN-SP they work with, and are not stuck with a single provider.

5. Health and care organisations pay for the kind of connectivity they want

Whereas N3 came with a convoluted payment process, access to HSCN will be paid for by health and social care organisations themselves, so that they can determine their own connectivity arrangements. The NHS is managing central funding support and offers a range of procurement options.

6. HSCN comes with multiple benefits

HSCN will help enable the delivery of better, more informed care; reduce costs and foster innovation; and be more reliable and secure.

HSCN provides the standards, infrastructure and services that will support the interoperability required to enable health and care organisations to create shared networks and integrated ICT services. Data can be sent securely between organisations, helping staff across health and care work together and supporting regional collaboration. And by providing rapid access to reliable data, HSCN will also support remote and mobile workforces at the point of care.

Costs are expected to be lower, as HSCN is provided by multiple, competing suppliers and using standards that are largely aligned to existing industry practice. Network connectivity will cost about the same as standard broadband connectivity, and less than it did with N3. Organisations will have a wider choice of services that feature the latest technology and innovation.

The centrally managed security capabilities of HSCN should protect the NHS against cyber attack, as well as support high levels of network reliability and availability – all crucial elements in the delivery of care.

7. Migration to HSCN from N3 is taking place at scale

As noted, organisations still on N3 have until 2019 to make the move to HSCN, with different arrangements in place for public and private sector users. As there were 1,200 customers reportedly on the N3 network, as well as different contracting authorities who have 14,000 different connections connecting to 51,000 different organisations, migration is not a small task; but with the right support and advice, the transition can be smooth. NHS Digital offers advice for both sectors in planning the migration.

8. There are multiple ways to access HSCN

For both public and private sector, access to HSCN is much more straightforward than was the case with N3. However, when considering HSCN access, the first question to ask is if your organisation needs a HSCN connection.

You may be able to use an existing Public Service Network (PSN) connection, or work with a health or social care organisation that has an existing connection. UKCloud Health provides HSCN connectivity to applications and systems hosted within UKCloud. As other healthcare providers are also looking to use HSCN, the advice is to coordinate plans via CCGs or STPs in the region.

The NHS and public sector have three different procurement options, by working with NHS Digital, collaboratively with other organisations, or individually.

Private sector suppliers should work with CN-SPs to progress HSCN connectivity.

9. Although security is improved, information governance issues remain

Information governance expectations for organisations to connect to HSCN are lower than for N3, making it easier to provide services on HSCN. However, NHS organisations will be expected to decide whether a service has suitable IG around it, and UKCloud Health has existing processes in place to provide such assurances.

HSCN will not automatically encrypt any data, or guarantee the security of data or communications by default. This means that Patient Identifiable Data (PID) needs to be encrypted before transfer, using UK sovereign data centres – something which UKCloud Health can also help with.

10. UKCloud Health is here to help with HSCN access and migration

UKCloud Health is a firm advocate of the possibilities unlocked with HSCN, and is supporting its customers with migration as it finalises its own HSCN connections. This implementation is due to be finished by January 2018, and all N3 customers should be migrated by March 2018.

UKCloud Health is also advising interested parties which are keen to take advantage of the new opportunities that are emerging, so do get in touch with us now to see how we can help.

"The cloud can provide the system-wide infrastructure that can underpin key initiatives such as integrated care," said Joanna Smith, CIO at Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS Foundation Trust. "The more normal using the cloud becomes, the more we will break down barriers and realise the full potential of this exciting technology."

11. Working with UKCloud Health on HSCN comes with many benefits

UKCloud Health is a longstanding provider of access to multiple public sector networks, with many years' experience in understanding how to share information and services in the most effective and efficient way possible for organisations of all sizes.

As well as UKCloud Health's usual high standards of service, its expertise in areas such as GDPR, and its commitment to exceeding expectations, UKCloud Health can offer rapid turnaround on resilient, multi-gigabit HSCN connectivity, with a team of experts on hand to guide you through the process.

UKCloud Health customers will continue to benefit from it's UK sovereignty and ability to safely host PID on UK soil, whilst also gaining from UKCloud Health's vast experience around PID assurance. UKCloud has the accreditations required to assure the quality of our systems and processes, including ISO, PGA, and N3 Aggregator.

UKCloud Health can provide access to multiple clouds to meet varying workload requirements, with options including Enterprise, Cloud Native and Oracle clouds.

Working with UKCloud Health also means being part of a burgeoning health and care ecosystem of cloud-savvy partners and customers, and presents an opportunity to work with companies that have a significant footprint in health and care, such as Genomics England, Docman and Egton. UKCloud Health is also proactively engaging with other organisations to grow this ecosystem, including companies involved with electronic patient records, medical imaging, and Internet of Things-based healthcare apps.

12. UKCloud Health can work with organisations of all sizes

Whether you want to start small and deliver a low-cost proof of concept with a quick turn-around time on new applications and services, or you want to work at scale to drive health and care transformation, UKCloud Health has the experience, the team and the technology to help.

Contact us to see how we can help you make the most of HSCN.

info@ukcloudhealth.com

ukcloud
health

E info@ukcloudhealth.com
T 01252 303 300
ukcloudhealth.com

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