

Dept. of Health Services: Comprehensive electronic health records system in use at all seven state facilities

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Sand Ridge Secure Treatment Center in Mauston is now using an electronic health records system, marking the end of a multiyear transformation in how the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) provides services and supports at the seven state facilities for people living with psychiatric disorders and intellectual disabilities. DHS Connect, a program built by DHS staff with components supplied by Cerner, supports doctors, nurses, and other staff to document and access critical information to make care decisions, ensure safety, and improve the treatment experience.

“This milestone is the result of eight years of hard work by dedicated teams of DHS staff and partners to upgrade technology at all of our facilities to better meet the needs of the people in our care,” said DHS Secretary-designee Karen Timberlake. “We now have a modern recordkeeping system that will better support our staff and our partners in delivering high-quality services and supports well into the future.”

DHS Connect puts DHS on a single electronic health record for the first time, replacing paper records that were supplemented by a variety of facility-specific electronic applications.

The transition to DHS Connect began in November 2018, with the first deployment at Winnebago Mental Health Institute in Oshkosh. Mendota Mental Health Institute in Madison began using the system in March 2019, followed by Central Wisconsin Center in Madison in June 2019. Deployments were paused in the second half of

2019 to allow for critical system updates to be completed. Despite challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, Northern Wisconsin Center in Chippewa Falls began using the system in July 2020, followed by Southern Wisconsin Center in Union Grove in November 2020. The Wisconsin Resource Center in Oshkosh began using the system in April 2021.

Planning for an electronic health records system for the state facilities began in 2013. Cerner was selected as the supplier in 2016, following a competitive bidding process. The contract with Cerner was signed in 2017, which kicked-off the build process for what became known as DHS Connect.

The DHS Office of Electronic Health Records Systems Management was created in 2016 to manage this project, including the procurement, development, implementation, and ongoing maintenance of the technology.