



The HEALTHeLINK coalition was formed two years ago.

John Hickey / News file photo

## WNY coalition gets \$16.1 million medical-records grant

By Jerry Zremski

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WASHINGTON — A coalition of Western New York hospitals and insurers today won a \$16.1 million federal stimulus grant aimed at boosting the use of electronic medical records in the region.

The grant is the largest of 15 nationwide aimed at cutting health costs by making it easier for hospitals, doctors and insurers to share electronic information rather than relying on paper patient records.

The money will go to HEALTHeLINK, a coalition formed two years ago that includes Catholic Health System, ECMC, BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York, Independent Health, Kaleida Health, Roswell Park Cancer Institute and Univera Healthcare.

Vice President Joe Biden and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius were set to officially announce the grants at a White House event this afternoon.

"These pioneering communities are going to lead the way in bringing smarter, lower-cost health care to all Americans through use of electronic health records," Biden said in a statement.

Other grant recipients include Minnesota's Mayo Clinic and Pennsylvania's Geisinger Clinic, both considered national models for high-quality, cost-efficient health care, as well as other newer community-based consortiums from around the country.

"Because of their early efforts, doctors across the country will one day be able to coordinate patient care with the stroke of a key or pull up life-saving health information instantly in an emergency — and for the residents of these communities, that future is about to become a reality," Biden said.

In Western New York in particular, the effort will concentrate on setting up electronic registries and point-of-care alerts and reminders, as well as telemedicine solutions for diabetic patients, the White House announcement said.

In addition, the money will be used to decrease preventable emergency room visits, hospitalizations and re-admissions for patients with diabetes and congestive heart failure or pneumonia, and to improve immunization rates among diabetic patients.

The grant comes through the Obama administration's "Beacon Communities" program, funded through last year's federal stimulus bill.

"The most important health care innovations are those that are designed and tested by providers and community leaders all across the country," Sebelius said. "The Beacon Community Program will tap the best ideas across America and demonstrate the enormous benefit health IT will have to improving health and care within our communities."