



**STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

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BILL LEE
GOVERNOR

RALPH ALVARADO, MD, FACP
COMMISSIONER

May 13, 2024

Mr. Alan Levine
Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer
Ballad Health
303 Med Tech Parkway, Suite 300
Johnson City, TN 37604

RE: Ballad Health's ("Ballad") Proposal to Modify the Region-Wide HIE ("HIE") Plan to include funding for EPIC system Community Connect ("Community Connect") for East Tennessee State University clinics ("ETSU clinics")

Mr. Levine,

This letter is in response to your request to the Tennessee Department of Health ("TDH") under Section 3.06(c) of the Fourth Amended and Restated Terms of Certification, dated July 1, 2023 ("TOC") to modify the current HIE Plan. The plan modification seeks the inclusion of \$5,093,455 towards the cost of implementing Community Connect at the ETSU clinics.

TDH recognizes the goal of the HIE Plan under TOC Section 3.05(a) as "to prevent Independent Physicians and other healthcare providers in the Geographic Service Area from being disadvantaged by a lack of access to patient electronic health information necessary for the management of their patients, and to further facilitate better patient care and coordination of care for the Population" and the policy of TOC Section 3.05(b) is "that patient health information should be readily available to healthcare providers in the Geographic Service Area; that cost should not be a barrier to providers obtaining such information; and that any transfer of such information should be for the benefit of the patients in the Geographic Service Area[.]" We believe Community Connect will further these goals and policies to provide greater accessibility of patient electronic health information to providers and patients in the community and by assuring transfer of such information as a benefit to the patients, while preventing cost from being a barrier.

The Certificate of Public Advantage ("COPA") Monitor has reviewed your submission. Following his review, he has submitted his recommendation to approve the proposed plan amendment. In our review, we have relied upon the representations in your request regarding the benefit of Community Connect to the community and that the implementation of Community Connect will be compliant with all associated regulations.

It is the responsibility of TDH to ensure good stewardship of COPA community investment dollars. We note, however, that final amounts credited towards the HIE Plan monetary commitment will need to

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meet the standards set forth in Sections 3.01 and 3.05 of TOC. We reserve to the COPA Monitor's discretion the approval of specific milestones and metrics to demonstrate sufficiently to the public the benefits the community is receiving as a result of this investment.

Your request states that implementation of Community Connect would extend benefits to providers and patients across the Ballad service area, such as integration of analytics for population health and leveraging of electronic decision support to make informed decisions in alignment with best clinical practices. The request further states that strengthening Ballad's partnership with community healthcare providers will expand access to specialty care and broaden research and training opportunities for clinicians within and outside the general service area.

Although your request addresses the benefits of Community Connect to all community healthcare providers, the actual amendment request with a specific funding proposal addresses the ETSU clinics alone and presents specific applications and modules within Community Connect that will be extended to ETSU clinics under the proposed amendment. We recognize the value of the ETSU clinics to the community as a large medical practice associated with an important state university system within the Ballad area and we are thus favorable to this specific implementation, but we strongly encourage Ballad to propose additional amendments to expend any dollars remaining within its HIE Plan commitment to extend Community Connect to other community healthcare providers or to connect with other regional or state-wide HIEs, or Qualified Health Information Networks ("QHINs") on a national level.

Therefore, **the modification request is approved, and the HIE Plan shall be amended as of the date of the letter to include the requested funding of up to \$5,093,455 towards the implementation of Community Connect in the ETSU clinics.** The validation of actual expenditure and final cost creditable to the HIE Plan will be made by the COPA Monitor in the annual HIE Plan expenditure reconciliation.

Thank you for your continuing efforts to serve the needs of your community and patients. TDH is confident that granting this request will provide benefits to the community as contemplated in Section 3.05 of the TOC. We appreciate this important project as well as your efforts to comply with the plan modification process.

Please let my staff know if you have any additional questions or need further clarification.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Alvarado', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ralph Alvarado, MD, FACP
Commissioner

cc: Julie Bennett, Chief Legal Officer
Ballad Health

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Marvin Eichorn, EVP, Chief Administrative Officer
Ballad Health

Karen Seiden, COPA Compliance Officer
Ballad Health

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Virginia Department of Health

Joe Hilbert, Deputy Commissioner for Governmental and Regulatory Affairs
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