# Healthcare systems adopt AI rapidly with careful strategies and ethical oversight



Healthcare systems worldwide are increasingly integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into their operations, with recent data showing a rapid expansion in usage and diverse applications across clinical and administrative domains. This trend, detailed in the "AI Adoption and Healthcare Report 2024" by the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) in partnership with Medscape, highlights that 86% of hospitals and health systems now employ AI technologies— a significant rise from just 19% reported in 2022 by the American Hospital Association.

The adoption surge reflects AI's growing role in addressing key healthcare needs such as clinical documentation, process automation, and data aggregation. Nevertheless, healthcare professionals and leadership are approaching AI implementation with caution due to the complexities involved and the need to ensure safety, efficiency, and ethical use.

Dr Michael E. Matheny, an internist and professor at Vanderbilt University, emphasises the high standards required for AI applications in healthcare, stating to TechTarget, “It’s important for all of us to consider the use of AI in a careful, measured way to respect the need to support patients and communities.” His perspective underscores the critical balance between leveraging innovative technology and safeguarding clinical integrity.

Dr Saurabha Bhatnagar, a Harvard University professor, further elaborates on the challenges health systems face, noting that “healthcare leaders might not know what successful AI implementation looks like” and may mistakenly prioritize costly pilots or off-the-shelf solutions without full consideration of organisational needs. He urges a more strategic approach to selecting and deploying AI.

To facilitate effective AI integration, experts recommend a structured, 10-step framework that healthcare organisations can adopt, involving governance structures, goal-setting, procurement, data privacy, and continuous evaluation:

1. **Map out AI governance:** Establishing a multidisciplinary governance team including IT, data science, executive leadership, and bioethics experts is crucial. This team manages proposal solicitation and ensures alignment with organisational priorities. Dr Brian Anderson, CEO of the Coalition for Health AI (CHAI), notes that proposals may vary from specific AI tools to broader challenges that AI might solve.

2. **Define goals and set expectations:** The governance body assesses whether AI is suitable, choosing the type of AI (e.g., generative AI, neural networks, traditional analytics) and deciding between building in-house or purchasing technology. Anderson explained that in-house expertise influences this decision heavily.

3. **Go to the market:** For health systems opting to buy AI solutions, issuing formal requests for proposals is advised. Anderson recommends leveraging resources like CHAI's AI model registry to evaluate vendors. Importantly, user groups within the organisation should participate in vendor selection to ensure workflow compatibility.

4. **Ensure data privacy:** Dr Matheny highlights concerns around the use of patient and business data, with the trade-off between data anonymisation and utility being a challenge. Anderson suggests deploying foundational AI models on local servers to protect sensitive data.

5. **Explore use cases with easy wins:** The HIMSS report identifies administrative augmentation—such as transcribing clinical notes, reviewing electronic health records, and analysing imaging—as common AI applications. Bhatnagar emphasises AI's role in supporting the transition to value-based care by handling complex data aggregation and analysis.

6. **Solicit stakeholder feedback:** Regular meetings involving both governance teams and business owners ensure ongoing assessment of AI tools’ performance, accuracy, and clinical impact, fostering a culture of continuous improvement as AI usage expands, according to Matheny.

7. **Follow ethical standards:** A Harvard Business Review analysis outlines principles for ethical AI implementation: safety, unbiased algorithms, consideration of vulnerable populations, and transparency to patients. Anderson adds that some AI models intentionally incorporate “justified bias” based on epidemiological evidence—for example, breast cancer risk models tailored to middle-aged black women—but stresses ongoing monitoring to avoid unfair discrimination.

8. **Validate and monitor models:** Validation involves clinical and technical input to confirm that AI models function correctly and provide reliable output. Matheny highlights the potential need for external validation if internal expertise is insufficient but notes that sophisticated models may require institution-specific testing.

9. **Provide training and support:** Anderson stresses that education is essential to empower clinicians and administrators to evaluate AI appropriateness in their specific contexts, urging transparency about model training and encouraging critical thinking among users.

10. **Understand the limitations of AI tools:** Unlike standardised laboratory tests, many AI products have not yet achieved universally accepted benchmarks, prompting a need for caution. “It may be wrong sometimes, and you may need to override it,” Matheny cautioned, contrasting the risk levels between benign scheduling errors and critical clinical decisions like ventilator management.

As AI technologies mature and penetrate various aspects of healthcare delivery and management, these steps provide a comprehensive roadmap for institutions to harness AI’s benefits responsibly. The ongoing dialogue among clinicians, technologists, and governance teams will shape how AI contributes to improving health outcomes and operational efficiencies in the coming years.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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3. <https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-physician-enthusiasm-grows-health-care-ai> - This source confirms the healthcare professionals' cautious yet increasing enthusiasm towards AI, emphasizing the need for safety, ethical use, and clinical validation in AI adoption.
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