

BUILDING TRUST IN HEALTHCARE: THE GUTHRIE CLINIC'S PATH TO HITRUST e1 CERTIFICATION

[The Guthrie Clinic](#), a leading healthcare provider in Pennsylvania, has embarked on a path to achieving HITRUST e1 certification, seeking to strengthen its cybersecurity posture. Working alongside [Baker Tilly](#), a leading advisory, tax, and assurance firm, Guthrie is laying the foundation for improved data security practices. This case study explores Guthrie's journey, the challenges faced, and the steps taken toward certification.



About Guthrie

Guthrie is a nonprofit healthcare organization that offers comprehensive medical services through a network of hospitals, outpatient centers, and physician offices. Serving thousands of patients annually, the organization is committed to providing the highest standard of care while ensuring the privacy and security of patient data.

As a healthcare entity, Guthrie faces complex regulatory requirements and the ever-growing need to protect sensitive healthcare data. To ensure its systems are both secure and compliant, Guthrie recognized the importance of getting a reliable assurance, like HITRUST certification.

Identifying the need for HITRUST

Guthrie's decision to pursue HITRUST certification stemmed from several factors, including the increasing threats to healthcare data security and the desire to meet evolving industry standards. It recognized that a comprehensive and unified framework was necessary to address the full scope of security risks and compliance requirements.

Guthrie's security and management teams were looking for a certification that would provide tangible assurance to patients, vendors, and other stakeholders. HITRUST, with its robust and widely recognized framework and trusted assurance, stood out as the ideal solution.

"We wanted to pursue a certification, and we chose HITRUST as it's based on a unified framework. A SOC report is just a validated report, whereas the HITRUST certification is a certification. So, we wanted the best of the best."

– Tamara Lauterbach, Manager, Cybersecurity GRC & IAM, The Guthrie Clinic



Collaborating with Baker Tilly

To understand and navigate the HITRUST certification process, Guthrie turned to Baker Tilly, an assessor with expertise in HITRUST and healthcare risk management. The collaboration was a natural fit, given that Baker Tilly has a proven track record of helping healthcare organizations achieve certification.

Baker Tilly's role has been pivotal in guiding Guthrie through the preparatory steps of the certification journey, offering strategic insights, identifying gaps, and ensuring that all required controls are in place. Its experience and expertise have been instrumental in ensuring that Guthrie approaches the process methodically, starting with a foundational approach and expanding over time.



Readiness assessment

The first step in the certification process was a readiness assessment conducted by Baker Tilly in April 2024. This assessment helped Guthrie understand how its security posture compared to the 44 key controls required for [HITRUST e1 certification](#). The assessment provided a clear view of its strengths and identified areas of improvement. Baker Tilly conducted a reevaluation in the fall of 2024 to determine the progress.

Guthrie is taking the crawl, walk, run approach. To begin with, it is setting up the baseline infrastructure to ensure critical security. It will expand the scope as the organization becomes more familiar with the controls. It is now undergoing the final phase of the e1 validation assessment.

Role of internal teams

Guthrie's internal teams, including IT, compliance, and security departments, played a crucial role in ensuring meeting HITRUST's requirements. The organization's internal Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC) team worked closely with Baker Tilly throughout the process, conducting internal audits and building out necessary documentation and policies. The human resources, legal, and privacy departments also supported the process.

A significant challenge was getting the broader team onboard with the importance of HITRUST. Many employees were unfamiliar with the HITRUST framework and its implications. The teams worked diligently to educate staff, ensuring everyone understood the importance of security and compliance for the organization's overall success.

"It's been a blessing in disguise as we have really started to change the culture here at Guthrie and make people recognize the importance of security," said Tamara.

Benefits of the HITRUST e1 certification

Guthrie aims to increase trust and enhance relationships with stakeholders, including patients, vendors, and business partners, by demonstrating a commitment to safeguarding sensitive health data with HITRUST certification.

"HITRUST certification is the best course of action to show and measure security and control maturity," Tamara added.

Guthrie anticipates that achieving HITRUST e1 certification will lead to improved risk management and a more structured approach to compliance, which will ultimately help streamline operations and reduce the likelihood of security breaches.

With the increasing threat of breaches and ransomware, HITRUST helps to implement the best security practices and strengthen defenses. The certification will offer reassurance to patients that their data is safe, giving them the utmost feeling of security.



Advice for other healthcare providers

From its experience so far, Guthrie has learned that the HITRUST certification process requires careful planning, a strong internal team, and the right external partners. It's important to understand the scope of the certification process and ensure that all internal teams are on the same page about the objectives.

Teams must approach the HITRUST process with patience and a clear understanding. It's essential to define goals early and assess the current state to chart a realistic path forward. Organizations can begin with a readiness assessment to lay out objectives and allocate resources strategically. They can start with the e1 as it's an easier lift. They should work closely with an experienced external assessor like Baker Tilly to ensure they are thoroughly prepared before moving into the validation phase.

Future plans

Looking ahead, Guthrie plans to expand the scope of its HITRUST certification. Guthrie is focused on data centers and infrastructure. It plans to include more facilities and applications as part of its long-term security and compliance strategy. This phased approach will ensure that HITRUST compliance is sustainable and integrated throughout different areas of the organization.

Once the e1 certification is achieved, Guthrie also plans to pursue higher levels of HITRUST certification, such as the i1, in the future.

Conclusion

The Guthrie Clinic's journey toward HITRUST e1 certification highlights the importance of a structured, methodical approach to healthcare compliance and security. With Baker Tilly's guidance and Guthrie's commitment to continuous improvement, the teams at Guthrie are poised to achieve certification and reap the benefits of enhanced trust, security, and operational efficiency.

"We are excited to move forward, achieve our certification, and see our hard work moving in the right direction," Tamara concluded.