

Healthcare IT News

Published on *Healthcare IT News* (<http://www.healthcareitnews.com>)

[Home](#) > IT helps combat healthcare disparities

IT helps combat healthcare disparities

By *Bernie Monegain, Editor*
Created 02/21/2013

The use of health IT could not only help to improve the quality of care, but also eliminate disparities in care among communities of color, according to a new report released today at a White House Summit hosted by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, Office of Minority Health and ZeroDivide.

The report, "[Equity in the Digital Age: How Health Information Technology Can Reduce Disparities](#)," by the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network, or CPEHN, the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, or APIAHF, Consumers Union and the National Council of La Raza offers policy recommendations for how advancements can best improve health in all communities and highlights the importance of improving access to new technologies in underserved areas to avoid exacerbating existing disparities.

[See also: [Scorecard reveals wide disparities in care across the country](#).]

"We have a great opportunity to improve quality of care, enhance patient participation and understanding, and reduce health disparities nationwide through the use of HIT," said Ellen Wu, executive director of CPEHN, in a news release. "As we embrace a comprehensive strategy to bring our healthcare system into the Digital Age, we must acknowledge that technology gaps exist for communities of color, immigrants, and people who do not speak English well. If we are not careful, we risk widening the gulf between the haves and have-nots in our healthcare system."

According to the report, one area where HIT holds the potential for dramatic improvement is in data collection and analysis, where enhanced demographic information could help pinpoint disparities and lead to a more culturally and linguistically appropriate workforce and provision of services.

"Gathering data on race/ethnicity and language needs at enrollment, combined with a robust system of [electronic health records](#), has the potential to change the healthcare experience in our communities," Kathy Ko Chin, president and CEO of APIAHF, said in the news release. "For example, detailed demographic information on Asian American and Pacific Islander patients and their language needs can help hospitals determine staffing needs such as the number of interpreters and what languages they speak and make translated materials available much more easily."

The report cautions that while electronic portals for enrollment in public programs like [Medicaid](#) should improve program participation, it is important to construct these portals in a way that

avoids creating additional barriers for some populations.

[See also: [Latino groups aim to cut disparities with health IT.](#)]

"Technologies must account for the needs of those most vulnerable to enrollment challenges and barriers, including mixed status families," said Jennifer Ng'andu, director of Health and Civil Rights Policy Projects from NCLR, in a statement. "With two laws and significant resources devoted to bringing more of healthcare online, we have a major opportunity to narrow insurance gaps, simply by reshaping the technology in a manner that recognizes that one size does not fit all in a country where the American family is increasingly diverse."

The report also discusses the need for security to prevent the misuse of health data. It references a set of principles developed by a cross section of California consumer, patient, and civil rights organizations in 2010 to maximize the benefits of [health information exchange](#) while assuring the privacy and security of electronic records.

"We must be careful that new technologies preserve the privacy and security of patients' health information and avoid any misuse of data collected," said Mark Savage, senior attorney for Consumers Union, the policy arm of *Consumer Reports*. "Communities of color, people who use languages other than English, and immigrants comprise at least 30 percent of our nation's population. We need to make sure that the critical benefits of HIT reach all consumers and patients and that these systems are designed to garner their trust and meet their diverse needs."

Source URL: <http://www.healthcareitnews.com/news/it-tool-end-healthcare-disparities>