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Healthcare Technology Featured Article

February 22, 2013

Report: Healthcare IT Can Reduce Service Delivery Disparities for Minorities

A report issued at a White House Summit argues that healthcare IT can bring more equality to America's healthcare system. The report, entitled "Equity in the Digital Age," delivers four major areas in which healthcare IT can maximize benefits for all Americans.

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"Communities of color, those who do not speak English well, and immigrants all have experienced barriers to the healthcare system that have led to disparate access and treatment," said the report.

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"It will be important to understand their challenges with navigating the systems of today and tomorrow to ensure that they do not experience further disparities."

The first step to relieving disparities is to increase access to healthcare IT in underserved communities. A major element of increasing access is the utilization of mobile technology. For many people of color and people with low English proficiency, home Internet access is not a reality.

However, cell phone Internet access is steadily rising in these communities because people need a flexible solution when they work multiple jobs or spend a lot of time away from home.

A second step to eliminating disparities involves increasing the quality of patient care while guarding patient privacy. Collecting demographic data matters because providers can use race, primary language and ethnicity to identify differences in utilization and health outcomes.

Patient data can also be collected into a library of materials in many different languages that can explain medical information to both patients and their caregivers. Data collection efforts should coordinate with local health departments to facilitate the development of stratified aggregate health data.

Finally, barriers to online application and enrollment for health insurance can be eradicated by providing Web portals that adjust according to the language proficiency, health literacy and cultural norms of their users.

Online applications should be able to handle complicated mixed-race households, and insurance companies should reach out and educate underserved populations.

Consumers Union, the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network, the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum and the National Council of La Raza collaborated to produce the report.

The White House summit was sponsored by the not-for-profit ZeroDivide

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along with the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health and the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT.

Edited by [Brooke Neuman](#)

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