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## Healthcare Business News



### Report urges use of IT to reduce disparities

By Joseph Conn

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Health information technology can both benefit patients but also serve as a barrier to patients of color, immigrants and those who don't speak English well, according to a new report by four not-for-profit consumer and minority rights organizations.

Their 24-page report, [Equity in the Digital Age: How Health Information Technology Can Reduce Disparities \(PDF\)](#), was presented at a White House summit on achieving e-health equity held by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology and the Office of Minority Health, both at HHS, and ZeroDivide, a not-for-profit using technology to benefit underserved communities.

According to the report, the use of health information technology must respond to "the needs of all populations to make sure that it enhances access, facilitates enrollment and improves quality in a way that does not exacerbate existing health disparities for the most marginalized and underserved."

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It recommended that mobile technology be leveraged to increase healthcare access for communities of color. The report also made several recommendations about using technology to minimize barriers in health insurance enrollment, which is expected to expand to minority and non-native English speaking populations with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Those technologies include developing online applications "that recognize complex mixed-status households" and web portals that take into account "differences in culture, language, and health literacy among its potential users," the report said.

One challenge is that while 75% of white households have a home internet connection, the number drops to 58% for African-Americans and 55% for Latinos. But recent research, the report said, indicates "the use of mobile technologies and other applications and devices may provide alternative ways to shape HIT strategies."

"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 the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network**, a public policy advocacy group and co-sponsor of the report, in a news release.

"As we embrace a comprehensive strategy to bring our health care 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," Wu said. "If we are not careful, we risk widening the gulf between the haves and have-nots in our health care system."

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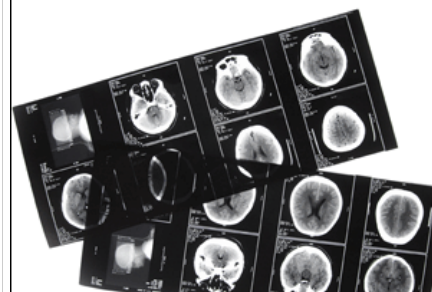
Other sponsors of the report are Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, the National Council of La Raza and Consumers Union.



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