

Federal Health Agencies Are Digitizing for Data

Efforts to Optimize Health Data Access Supports More Efficient Care and Better Health Outcomes

As the health sector continues on its digital transformation journey, agencies are adopting innovative technologies that analyze quality data to better inform providers and researchers, and improve overall health outcomes. These kinds of programs are contributing to cancer treatment, COVID-19 spread prevention and improved patient care.

Government and industry leaders spoke at a recent FedInsider [webinar](#) about how they're using technology-enabled data collection to produce valuable analytics for better decision making for health. The following are some of the most important aspects of their discussion.

Data Challenges in Government

Federal health agencies share a common goal of providing better health outcomes to citizens and are modernizing legacy systems to do so. However, they are facing transformation challenges around people, processes, technology and in achieving end user efficiency.

"You have the right tools; but do they have the right methods of interacting and analyzing and sharing?," noted senior vice president of strategic consulting at ICF Byron Caswell.

Data distribution, collection, and ownership also raise obstacles, especially when considering the various types and formats of health data and streamlining them to generate meaningful analytics.

"The kind of consistency across data sources and across the collection entities is really required to make good inferences with it," Caswell added. "It also brings a big challenge about data governance and ownership provenance, stewardship, and data that is collected and owned and shared from local territorial to commercial entities."

Overcoming these challenges will allow health officials to make decisions regarding clinical research, healthcare delivery, and policy. The scale and breadth of the COVID-19 pandemic also brought its own set of challenges, said Alan Sim, chief data officer for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The pandemic highlighted how fragile and underfunded the public health infrastructure is, especially at the state, local and tribal level.

"Their systems haven't been updated, with many still using paper and fax machines instead of electronic or cloud-based data management systems," Sim said. "We have

FEATURED EXPERTS:

■ **Dr. Jonas Almeida**
*Acting Chief Data Officer,
National Cancer Institute,
Division of Cancer
Epidemiology & Genetics*



■ **Mamatha Pancholi**
*Chief Data Officer,
Agency for Healthcare
Research & Quality, HHS*



■ **Dr. Partha Bhattacharyya**
*Chief Data Officer,
Office of Data Resources
& Analytics, National
Institute on Aging*



■ **Dr. Alan Sim**
*Chief Data Officer,
Centers for Disease Control
& Prevention*



■ **Byron Caswell**
*Senior Vice President,
Strategic Consulting,
ICF*



identified the need to repair and replace the infrastructure of road highways and bridges; we need consistent and sustainable funding to ensure that our public health systems are also properly rebuilt, modernized, and managed optimally to respond to future pandemics and emergencies."

Data's Part in Digital Transformation in Healthcare

Mamatha Pancholi, chief data officer for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, said that while the industry has deployed new technologies like artificial

