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U.S. HHS Unveils New 'Healthy People 2020' Goals



The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has unveiled 'Healthy People 2020', America's new 10-year goals and objectives for health promotion and disease prevention. The HHS has also launched "myHealthyPeople," a new challenge for technology application developers, who are being called on to create apps for healthcare professionals to track state and community-level health data.

Healthy People 2020, focuses on prevention, shared decision-making between patients and providers, personalised self-management of health conditions and "meaningful use" of health IT. The initiative's overarching goals include attaining high quality, longer lives free of preventable disease, disability, injury, and premature death; and eliminating health disparities and improving the health of all groups. "This milestone in disease prevention and health promotion creates an opportunity to leverage information technology to make Healthy People come alive for all Americans in their communities and workplaces," HHS Chief Technology Officer Todd Park says in a press release. The Healthy People initiative is grounded in the principle that setting national objectives and monitoring progress can motivate action, and indeed, in just the last decade, preliminary analyses indicate that the country has either progressed toward or met 71 percent of its Healthy People targets.

The myHealthyPeople challenge, according to Park, "will help spur innovative approaches to helping communities track their progress using Healthy People objectives and targets as well as develop an agenda for health improvement." Applications should be easy to access through any fixed or mobile computing platform and are suitable for users on the front lines of prevention efforts even if they are not technologically adept.

Unlike earlier versions of the goals, the 2020 set reflects an awareness that natural and man-made disasters, such as the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Hurricane Katrina and H1N1 flu pandemic, can happen. It calls for all-hazards preparedness for any public health emergency.

HHS officials also see health IT adoption presenting the industry with a new set of issues. "Social media and emerging technologies promise to blur the line between expert and peer health information" the Healthy People 2020 framework report says. "Monitoring and assessing the impact of these new media, including mobile health, on public health will be challenging."

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