

U.S. Patients' Access to Health Information



The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has published its [2020-2025 Federal Health IT Strategic Plan](#), which focusses on individuals' access to their electronic health information.

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According to Donald W. Rucker, MD, National Coordinator for Health IT, the new plan "reflects the federal government's commitment to making patients' electronic health information accessible on their smartphones".

The main goals of the plan are:

- Promotion of health and wellness through enhanced individual access to information, safe health IT practices, and integration of health and human services information
- Enhanced delivery and experience of care with incorporating health IT into clinical practice and patients' life, decreasing bureaucratic burden, facilitating competition, efficient use of resources and availability of qualified workforce
- Creation of a secure, data-driven ecosystem supported by the use and transfer of individual and population-level data
- Connection of healthcare with health data by developing infrastructures for data use, sharing and communication.

The new document builds on the previous health IT strategic plan for 2015-2020. It was developed in collaboration with over 25 federal organisations that regulate, purchase, develop and use health IT, as well as coordinate activities across the public and private sectors. Besides, about a hundred public comments were considered during the development of the document.

With the aim to support the access, exchange and use of electronic health information, the plan outlines a set of goals, objectives and strategies, which "highlight the importance not only of EHI [electronic health information] but also of the capabilities enabled by health IT, including public health surveillance, telehealth, and remote monitoring".

The key principles outlined in the Plan include:

- Putting individuals first by focussing on person-centred, holistic approach to care
- Focussing on value through activities that improve health and care quality, efficiency and access
- Building a culture of secure access to health information by various stakeholders
- Putting research into action to translate evidence into clinical practice
- Encouraging innovation and competition to develop better health IT solutions
- Being a responsible steward by developing health IT policies through open, transparent, and accountable processes with the involvement of the private sector.

The plan is intended to be used for prioritising resources, coordinating efforts, directing the private sector in its investment decisions, and assessing the progress with concrete indicators.

"With this Plan, the federal government demonstrates its ongoing coordinated focus on the interoperability of EHI and the reduction of provider burden. It emphasizes product and price transparency, allowing individuals to select the technology they wish to use to access and control their information, while opening up entirely new business models for the health app economy," says Rucker in his preface to the document.

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