

POLICY NEWS

Advancing Pandemic Preparedness and Digital Health Equity

Participating CTA members include AT&T, Best Buy, CVS Health, Microsoft and Northwell Health and more.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified inequities in the U.S. health system. Historically underserved communities—rural, low-income and minority—face unique barriers in accessing quality healthcare, but the pandemic has shown the role health tech can play to address these disparities. Challenges such as uneven access to broadband and technology for connectivity, and laws and regulations that stifle digital health adoption, must be overcome. Digital health tech can play a significant role in mitigating health inequities.

CTA recently released two whitepapers proposing policy recommendations for the use of technology in better preparing for pandemics and mitigating health inequities for Americans. Both efforts were led by technology companies, health systems, medical device manufacturers, insurance providers, public policy organizations and medical societies.

“The pandemic demonstrated the undeniable value of innovation and tech in the face of a health crisis,” said Gary Shapiro, president and CEO, CTA. “American lawmakers have an unprecedented opportunity to learn from this crisis and ensure we’re providing every American access to quality care in the digital age.”

Public Health Tech Initiative

CTA’s Public Health Tech Initiative (PHTI) white paper provides recommendations to better prepare the U.S. for future health crises through adoption of technology. The recommendations were created by a diverse group of digital health companies and health systems convened by CTA.

The initiative’s members include the American College of Cardiology, America’s Health Insurance Plans, Brookings, CVS Health, Facebook, Microsoft, Northwell Health, SSM Health and the Health Innovation Alliance. The effort is co-chaired by Dr. David Rhew, global chief medical officer, Microsoft, and a member of CTA’s Health Division Board; and Dr. Alexander Garza, chief community health officer, SSM Health, and former Task Force Commander for the St. Louis Metropolitan Pandemic Task Force.

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Federal and state **expansion of broadband coverage** to reach rural and underserved areas.

Congress should make select **Medicare telehealth COVID-19 Public Health Emergency waivers and flexibilities** permanent.

Congress should pass comprehensive **federal privacy legislation** for stakeholders not covered by other privacy laws (e.g., HIPAA).

The federal government should partner with industry stakeholders to develop evidence-based guidelines and **industry standards for digital health**.

The federal government should establish a **national early warning system** based on aggregated data from digital tools to identify disease hotspots.

Health Equity and Access Leadership Coalition

The second whitepaper outlines policy recommendations from the HEAL (Health Equity and Access Leadership) Coalition, a group comprising nearly 50 organizations spanning the health ecosystem led by CTA and the Connected Health Initiative. The coalition’s recommendations recognize the opportunity to apply greater use and adoption of trustworthy digital health tools to improve the country’s response to health disparities.

“We’re convening experts and organizations from the frontlines of the pandemic to find solutions to our most pressing digital health challenges,” said Rene Quashie, vice president, digital health, CTA. “The pandemic shined a light on inequity and weaknesses in our health care system that we can no longer afford to ignore. The immediate threats posed to our communities by COVID-19 variants underscore the need for lawmakers to act now.”

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

State and local governments should consider requiring hospitals and health systems to routinely **assess a patient’s ability to access digital services**.

Federal, state and local governments should **develop a network of digital hubs** that can train, educate, and support patients and healthcare providers using various digital health solutions.

Public and private insurers must **prioritize the use of digital health tools** to track and manage conditions and treat patients. ■

The coalition includes CTA members from AT&T, Best Buy Health, Boston Children’s Hospital, Cambia Health, HP, Intel, MLEM, Omron Healthcare, ResMed, University of Virginia Center for Telehealth and more. The coalition is chaired by Dr. Lucienne Ide, founder and CEO of Rimidi, and Dr. Lisa Fitzpatrick, founder and CEO of Grapevine Health. Visit [CTA.tech](https://cta.tech).