national government
SERVICES

TOP TAKEAWAYS

3 Ways Agencies Can Make Healthcare More Accessible

It's easier than ever to access healthcare information online. However, with so much available data, how can federal agencies ensure users have access to the right information? Moreover, what can agencies do to make the user's experience a positive one? Experts sought to uncover answers to these critical questions during the "Enhancing the Healthcare Experience with a Human Centered Approach" webcast hosted by GovExec and sponsored by National Government Services.

00 Intro

On Aug. 10, GovExec TV's George Jackson spoke with federal healthcare experts about what it means to approach federal health services from a patient's perspective. Whether that's making Medicare applications easier to find or securing patient records in the cloud, public servants are finding new ways to make healthcare more accessible for citizens. Here's how they're getting started:

01 Organizing the Data

There's a lot of data out there—data that is only actionable if it's organized. Imagine you have a question about the lettuce you're buying at the store, or the medication you just picked up. Now, you could sort through the 8,138 miles of shelves of data stored at the Food and Drug Administration, or you could simply scan the barcode on the item's packaging that tells you what you need to know. When organizing and storing healthcare data, it's personalized details that go a long way, said FDA Chief Information Officer Vid Desai.

Analytics teams sort through those miles and miles of data points to identify trends and isolate bad data. If the data is low quality or has bias, or there's data missing,

IT experts can note that for decision-makers to avoid making poor choices with inaccurate information.

"That organized data gives us direction that then, as human-centered design experts, we validate," said National Government Services Agile and Human Centered Design Practices Director Rita Breen.

Although, simply having the data is not sufficient, Breen noted. To make a real difference in human-centered design, experts need to pair the data with empathy. "Great, we have this data. Now it's time to go out and talk to the people to make sure we're understanding what the data is really telling us," Breen said.

When organizing and storing healthcare data, it's personalized details that go a long way.

VID DESAI • FDA CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

> **I think they are setting the bar higher because we are going to show up differently. As federal contractors, there's a need for connection, a need to deliver better services and products. That's not going away.**

RITA BREEN • DIRECTOR OF AGILE AND HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN PRACTICES • NGS

02 Prioritizing User Experience

People are accustomed to having information at their fingertips, and when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, they looked to the federal government for guidance. "One of the largest things exposed by the pandemic was the lack of manpower," said Andrea Fletcher, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Executive Director of the Digital Service. "There was a real lack of access and feasibility of getting services quickly from the government that people needed."

Quality healthcare can't be effective unless the people who need it can access it easily. Fletcher said this means considering the data indicating specific needs of the beneficiaries and finding ways to continue providing services that work for them.

If getting federal services is a burdensome process, then the care isn't accessible. Fletcher noted that asking

questions like, "Could a visually or hearing impaired person navigate this website?" or "Would someone elderly trying to sign up for Medicare be able to understand and fill out this form?" are key to understanding user experience and navigating changes to design.

Once human-centered design experts gain enough data about beneficiary needs, they can begin to find ways to make healthcare more accessible and improve that user experience.

People want to know their healthcare needs are taken care of and that their wellbeing is a priority for the federal government. "I think they are setting the bar higher because we are going to show up differently," Breen said. "As federal contractors, there's a need for connection, a need to deliver better services and products. That's not going away."

03 Modernizing Tools

To maintain that human connection with patients and ensure the security of their data, agencies are focusing on modernized approaches to design and cybersecurity.

Desai said the healthcare environment is complex, therefore, change should be made incrementally. With agile software development, teams can identify specific pain points and respond quickly by adapting to the customer's accessibility needs.

By targeting smaller areas of improvement at a time, slowly the entire system will begin to improve.
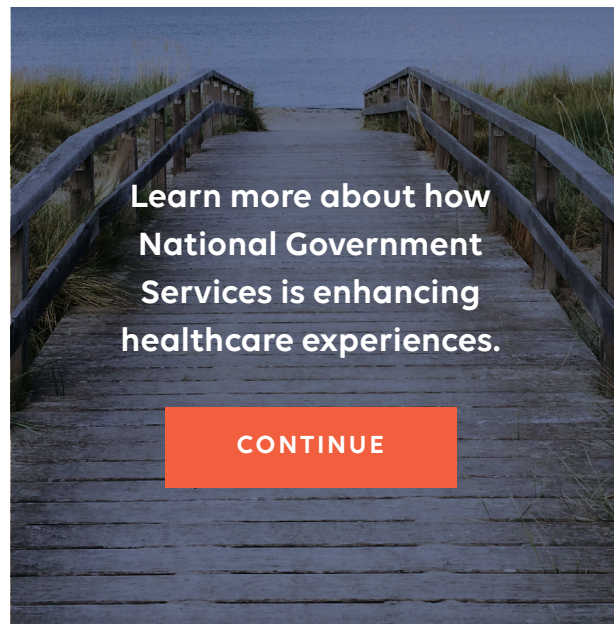
"Agile really is the right type of approach at this time to solve the big problems we have around healthcare," Desai said.

This one-step-at-a-time approach to phasing out legacy systems is what IT experts use to transition to zero trust architecture that protects user data.

"We deal with people's health records so we want to make sure as we move from mainframes into the cloud, that we're providing the most secure services that we can," Fletcher said.

Implementing zero trust is costly, and time consuming; it's a multiphase, multiyear process that requires a massive shift of legacy systems and design. However, experts say the transition is worth it to keep user data protected.

"Number 1 is security and making sure we have the technical capabilities to deliver a secure service," Fletcher said. "That's how we make a difference."

Learn more about how National Government Services is enhancing healthcare experiences.

CONTINUE

We deal with people's health records so we want to make sure as we move from mainframes into the cloud, that we're providing the most secure services that we can.

ANDREA FLETCHER • EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE DIGITAL SERVICE OFFICER • CMS