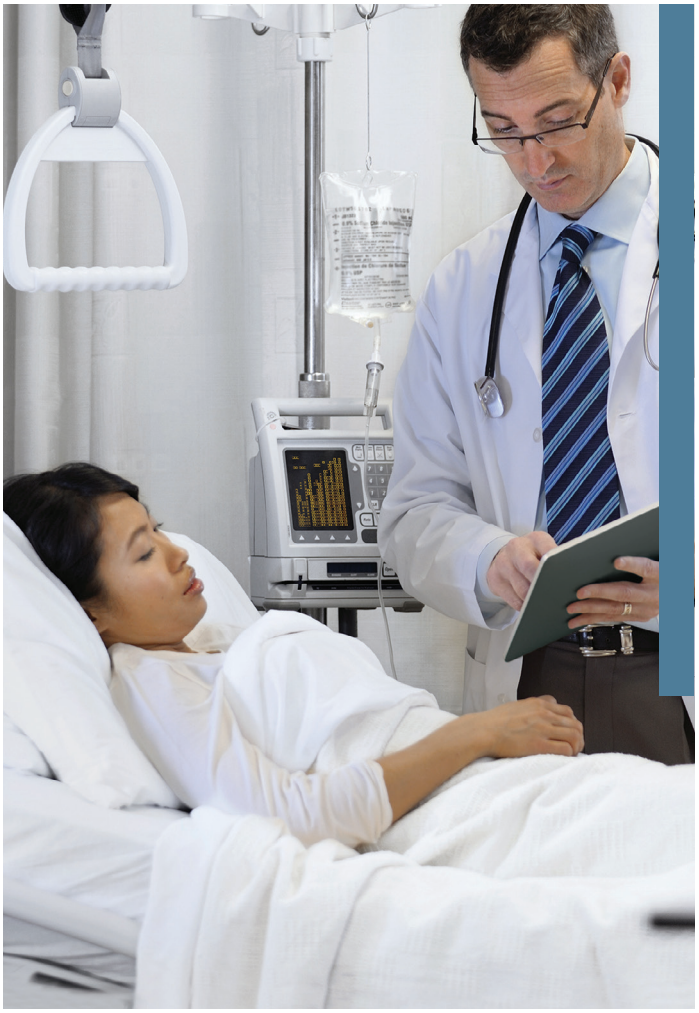
Health and Well-Being

Health Informatics



Technology is revolutionizing the way health care works and the ways health is measured. Health care informatics draws on the fields of engineering, computer science, communications, and organizational theory to integrate and streamline medical care—making it safer, more collaborative, and more effective. Advancements like new sensor technology transform how caregivers monitor patients, and patients monitor themselves. Electronic health records give us powerful new tools to document information from clinical encounters, share it with other providers, and use it to conduct cutting edge research that improves patient care.

NORC partners with state and federal agencies, insurance companies, and others to conduct program evaluations, provide technical assistance, and assists in strategic planning activities in health IT and informatics. NORC also develops and tests new tools and techniques for gathering, interpreting, visualizing, and sharing health care data—clinical, financial, and operational—while protecting patient privacy and confidentiality.

Representative Projects

Patient Centered Outcomes Research (PCOR) Resource Center

With funding provided by the Office of the Secretary PCOR Trust Fund (PCORTF) and administered by the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), multiple agencies and projects are working to develop a sustainable data infrastructure to facilitate patient-centered outcomes research (PCOR), research that generates evidence-based clinical practices and empowers patients to make informed decisions. NORC serves as the designated PCORTF Resource Center for these projects, supporting PCORTF awardees, HHS, and the PCOR community. Our activities span technical assistance, communication and knowledge synthesis and dissemination such as building learning communities and a portal for stakeholder knowledge sharing, and operational support to ASPE. NORC also highlights PCORTF awardees work within HHS and in the broader PCOR community, and communicating their accomplishments with regard to building PCOR data infrastructure.

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Privacy and Security Blueprint, Legal Analysis and Ethics Framework for Data Use and Use of Technology for Privacy

In a joint effort by the Office of the National Coordinator (ONC) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC), NORC in partnership with George Washington University (GWU) addresses the dual need to make robust health data available to researchers, while protecting patient privacy. In particular, patient-level data are essential to understanding and improving health outcomes and must be made available in a way that both ensures patient privacy and provides sufficient information to enable meaningful research. Current laws and policies around the use of patient-level data for research are nuanced and at times conflicting, which creates confusion for researchers, providers, and patients. To address these issues, NORC and GWU is (a) developing a privacy and security data infrastructure blueprint to highlight gap areas; (b) conducting a legal analysis and developing an ethical framework that balances individual privacy rights with data use, sharing, and disclosure necessary for PCOR; and (c) identifying standards that would allow researchers to better capture individual consent and preferences for research.

Clinical Decision Support/Patient Safety Tool Project

With funding from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), NORC is applying the power of clinical decision support (CDS) systems to improve patient care for community-acquired pneumonia, a prevalent and potentially deadly illness that is prone to diagnostic errors. CDS systems can encompass a number of tools and interventions, such as computerized alerts and reminders, clinical guidelines, and patient-specific reports, to assist providers in proper testing, diagnosis, and disease treatment. To better address the diagnosis and treatment of pneumonia in ambulatory care, NORC is developing a CDS tool that adapts an existing assessment tool, CURB-65, into the CDS environment. This allows providers electronic access to the assessment in an environment that automatically calculates a risk and severity score, coupled with decision making support. The combination of CURB-65 and CDS shows great promise for improving provider adherence to clinical guidelines, reducing diagnostic errors, and improving patient outcomes related to pneumonia.

Start a conversation. Contact us.

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NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions.

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