Federal CIO Praises Data Leadership, User-Centered Design at Health Agencies

The federal health care community is hitting target goals outlined in the Federal Data Strategy.

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As federal agencies officially begin to leverage data as a strategic asset, per the direction of the Federal Data Strategy and several legislative directives, Federal CIO Suzette Kent said agencies focused on health care delivery are already well-positioned leaders in applying data in meaningful ways for the citizens they serve.
At Wednesday's AFCEA Bethesda’s Health IT Summit, Kent highlighted several advantages that agencies with health-driven missions have in the data realm — such as using data to achieve human-centered design integration in a variety of programs and protecting the health data of their beneficiaries.

“In this community, the recognition of the value of individual data and the rules around protecting it are the highest,” Kent said.

User-centered design is also a pillar of the President’s Management Agenda, the White House’s long-term vision for modernizing the federal government. While the agenda measures overall progress across agencies in meeting its goals, Kent revered the way health-driven agencies have already integrated this into its mission.

“User-centered design was a priority for the President’s Management Agenda, but that is a priority this community has always had: centering the person that you’re serving, understanding and getting the resources to a patient and a caregiver,” Kent said. “These are important concepts that we want to be thoughtful about as you modernize systems to ensure that those who are using those tools everyday, [that] we’re designing with them in mind.”

As Kent applauded the work of the federal health IT community, she also said that in the coming year she wants to emphasize further investments in cybersecurity efforts to further protect the privacy and data of citizens, as well as skilling the federal IT workforce to diversify and improve agencies’ missions.

“We’re going to continue to make investments in identity management,” Kent said. “I only mention that here again back to link the importance of privacy and protection of information, so those are conversations that we’re going to continue to elevate as we go through this year.”

In supporting workforce investments, Kent visited an organization that 3D-prints ears and prosthetic parts for health care applications. She discovered that the organization used to focus on hiring IT specialists, but now look for clinicians, chemists, biologists and other health care professionals to increase their scope of perspective and work.
“The solutions and some of the things that we are able to do, both with envisioning how we might solve the problems and the solutions against those problems take a different mix of skills that we had in the past,” Kent said. “Those are some of the things that we’re aspiring to understand as we go forward and how we bring the right skills to the problems that we’re trying to solve.”

Kent linked that statement back to the Federal Data Strategy, which has a focus on getting the federal workforce equipped with the diverse skills necessary to successfully leverage data as a strategic asset and serve citizens — in the health care space and beyond.

“There’s a myriad of programs that cross that spectrum of coming in, using new technology, how we grow our leaders, how we merge strategic thinkers, and how we position our workforce to interact with the citizens that they’re serving — whether it’s a patient, whether it’s a doctor,” Kent said.