

GOVERNMENT DATABASES, DOCUMENTS AND WEB SITES IN HEALTH AND MEDICINE

by Elaine Skopelja, MALS
Indiana University School of Medicine,
Indianapolis, Indiana



OVERVIEW OF GOVERNMENT HEALTH INFORMATION SOURCES

Print sources are gradually being replaced by electronic

Within the last few years, the United States government has initiated a major effort to make government publications available in electronic format. Although there are still print materials produced, the trend for publicly available materials or those designed for mass distribution has been to make electronic copies available for printing or downloading. In some cases, the electronic version is the only version, leading to some concerns about future access to electronic-only materials and the archiving of such documents. In fact, there now exists the possibility that documents may be easily and permanently removed from public access, because of the electronic-version only policy. However, the trend towards having electronic-only versions will likely continue.

Locating the right agency

Although the Department of Health and Human Services (and its sub-agencies) would seem to be the most logical choice for health or medical information, other agencies also produce important materials on health-related topics. Often, different agencies will cover, for example, food-borne illness or food poisoning. However, within that topic, one agency may concentrate on, for example, food handling research, another on the medical care of food poisoning, and still another on environmental factors in foodborne illnesses. Therefore, although health portal sites have made it easier to locate materials, it is still helpful to have some idea of the purpose of each agency to help pinpoint specific topics or aspects of topics. Another feature of many of these sites is that the information will be divided into sections by educational or knowledge levels, such as Patients/Consumers/Public versus Health Professionals.

INFORMATION PORTALS AND HUBS

The federal government has recently discovered that there is a large amount of redundancy in docu-

ments among different agencies. To remedy this, various agencies have created redundant, cross-agency portal or hub sites. They do cover a portion of many of these government sites, however, government agencies are huge websites that do not seem to be indexed to any depth by general search engines. They are a large part of the “invisible web” as mentioned by Gary Price on his website, <http://invisible-Web.net>.

The following list of portals for health-related topics is assembled in a subjective order of usefulness.

GENERAL HEALTH AND MEDICINE PORTALS

MedlinePlus <http://medlineplus.gov>

MedlinePlus is a database designed to assist in locating authoritative health information by providing carefully selected links to web resources with health information on over 600 topics. Each topic page has links to pre-formulated searches of the PubMed Medline database to locate the latest professional articles on that specific topic. Also included are medical dictionaries, drug information, and a medical encyclopedia. There is a Spanish interface with many Spanish-language records. MedlinePlus also links to authoritative organizations associated with each topic page.

HealthFinder <http://healthfinder.gov>

HealthFinder is a Federal U.S., developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services together with other federal agencies. It links to carefully selected information and url's from over 1,800 health-related organizations. The best things about HealthFinder are its Spanish interface at <http://healthfinder.gov/espanol> and its Kids interface at <http://healthfinder.gov/kids>.

Combined Health Information Database (C.H.I.D.) <http://chid.nih.gov>

C.H.I.D. is a bibliographic database produced by health-related agencies of the federal government. C.H.I.D. provides titles, abstracts, and availability information, but not full-text access, for health information and health education resources on sixteen topics. In addition to professional journal and article citations,

C.H.I.D. also lists health promotion brochures, patient education materials and program descriptions that are not indexed elsewhere.

Federal Health Information Centers and Clearinghouses

<http://www.health.gov/NHIC/Pubs/clearinghouses.htm>

The federal government operates many clearinghouses and information centers that focus on specific topics. Their services include distributing publications, providing referrals, and answering inquiries. In addition, many offer toll-free numbers.

Consumer.gov for Health

<http://www.consumer.gov/health.htm>

As a subset of FirstGov, <http://www.firstgov.gov>, FirstGov for Consumers focuses on health related sites. FirstGov claims to have the most comprehensive search of government information anywhere on the Internet and is the official U.S. gateway to all government information. It has three major subdivisions, citizens, business and government employees.

GPO Access

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html>

GPO Access is a service of the U.S. Government Printing Office that provides free electronic access to a wealth of important information products produced by the federal government. The information provided on this site is the official, published version, and is funded by the Federal Depository Library Program. GPO Access provides applications to search for items available in federal depository library collections, and to locate depository libraries using a state abbreviation or area code.

Federal Consumer Information Center

<http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/>

The Federal Consumer Information Center (F.C.I.C.) is the result of a merger of the Consumer Information Center (C.I.C.) and the Federal Information Center (F.I.C.). The merger combined the C.I.C. (www.pueblo.gsa.gov), the *Consumer Information Catalog*, and the Pueblo publication distribution program. It offers print and online publications on a wide variety of topics. The health section has only a few topics.

SPECIALIZED HEALTH PORTALS (ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

DisabilityDirect.gov

<http://www.disabilityinfo.gov/>

This site is a new portal to government disability sites.

Gateway to Government Food Safety Information

<http://www.foodsafety.gov>

FoodSafety.gov is a gateway U.S. that provides links to selected government food safety-related information. Not every government U.S. is listed. When more than one government U.S. provides similar information, links will be provided to only one or two of those sites.

Nutrition.gov

<http://www.nutrition.gov/home/index.php3>

Nutrition.gov is a portal to nutrition information across the agencies of the federal government. It links to nutrition and food assistance programs such as the Food Stamp Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, and the School Lunch and Breakfast programs and to federally supported research, reports, and brochures as well as funding opportunities in the federal government. Users can find information on healthy eating, the food guide pyramid, dietary guidelines for Americans, dietary supplements, fitness and how to keep food safe.

Workplace Issues: Wellness in the Workplace

<http://www.business.gov/busadv/maincat.cfm?catid=113>

This site covers issues such as stress, occupational injuries and diseases, job safety, and substance and alcohol abuse in the workplace.

HEALTH INFORMATION ORGANIZED BY RELEVANT AGENCY

Department of Health & Human Services

<http://www.hhs.gov/>

National Institutes of Health (N.I.H.)

<http://www.nih.gov/>

The National Institutes of Health is the federal focal point for medical research in the U.S. The N.I.H. supports research in its own laboratories and the research of non-federal scientists in universities, medical schools, hospitals, and research institutions throughout the country and abroad; helps in the training of research investigators; and fosters the communication of medical and health sciences information. The 27 separate National Institutes of Health Institutes, centers and offices are listed at: <http://www.nih.gov/icd/>. Some of the more well-known centers are the National Cancer Institute, the National Heart, Lung & Blood Institute, and the National Institute on Aging.

National Library of Medicine (N.L.M.)

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/nlmhome.html>

The National Library of Medicine (N.L.M.) is the world's largest medical library. The library collects materials in all areas of biomedicine and health care, as well as works on biomedical aspects of technology, the humanities, and the physical, life, and social sciences.

PubMed (Medline)

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi>

PubMed, a service of the National Library of Medicine, provides access to over twelve million MEDLINE citations back to the mid-1960's and additional life science journals. PubMed includes links to many sites providing full text articles and other related resources.

PubMed Central

<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/>

PubMed Central is a collection of full-text life science journals that is free to users.

TOXNET

<http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/>

TOXNET is a collection of databases on toxicology, hazardous chemicals and related topics. A new feature useful for consumers is Tox Town <http://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov/town/main.html>, an easy-to-use guide to common chemicals in homes, workplaces, schools and the environment.

Centers for Disease Control (C.D.C.)

<http://www.cdc.gov/>

The C.D.C. monitors health, detects and investigates health problems, develops and advocates sound public health policies, implements prevention strategies, and promotes healthy behaviors. C.D.C. plays a critical role in controlling diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis by investigating outbreaks abroad or at home. In today's global environment, new diseases have the potential to spread across the world in a matter of days, or even hours, making early detection and action more important than ever. In addition, by assisting state and local health departments, C.D.C. works to protect the public every day.

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html>

N.I.O.S.H. is the federal agency responsible for conducting research on occupational diseases and injuries, and for making recommendations for the prevention of work-related disease and injury.

National Ag Safety Database

<http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/>

NASD is a national central repository of agricultural health, safety, and injury prevention materials for the agricultural community and especially for agricultural safety specialists

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (C.M.S.) [formerly the Health Care Financing Administration]

<http://cms.hhs.gov>

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (C.M.S.) run the Medicare and Medicaid national health care programs. C.M.S. runs the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S.C.H.I.P.), a program that covers

many of the approximately ten million uninsured children in the United States. In addition, C.M.S. also regulates all laboratory testing (except research) performed on humans in the United States. Approximately 158,000 laboratory entities fall within C.M.S.'s regulatory responsibility. And C.M.S., with the Departments of Labor and Treasury, helps millions of Americans and small companies get and keep health insurance coverage and helps eliminate discrimination based on health status for people buying health insurance.

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (H.I.P.A.A.)

<http://cms.hhs.gov/hipaa/>

Title I of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (H.I.P.A.A.) protects health insurance coverage for workers and their families when they change or lose their jobs. It establishes national standards for electronic health care transactions and national identifiers for providers, health plans, and employers. It also addresses the security and privacy of health data.

Medicare

<http://www.medicare.gov/>

Medicare is the nation's largest health insurance program, which covers over 39 million Americans. Medicare provides health insurance to people age 65 and over, those who have permanent kidney failure, and certain people with disabilities.

Medicaid

<http://cms.hhs.gov/medicaid/>

Medicaid is a jointly funded, federal-state health insurance program for certain low-income and needy people. It covers approximately 36 million individuals including children, the aged, blind, and/or disabled, and people who are eligible to receive federally assisted income maintenance payments.

Food and Drug Administration

<http://www.fda.gov>

The FDA regulates a number of products including food items, medical devices like hearing aids or pacemakers, cosmetics, animal food and drugs, over-the-counter and prescription drugs, vaccines, blood products, and radiation-emitting devices like cell phones or microwave ovens.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

<http://www.samhsa.gov>

SAMHSA is the federal agency charged with improving the quality and availability of prevention, treatment, and rehabilitative services in order to reduce illness, death, disability, and cost to society resulting from substance abuse and mental illnesses.

Center for Mental Health Resources
<http://www.mentalhealth.org>

CMHS is charged with leading the national system that delivers mental health services. The goal of this system is to provide the treatment and support services needed by adults with mental disorders and children with serious emotional problems.

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csat2002/csat_frame.html

This center improves the lives of individuals and families affected by alcohol and drug abuse by ensuring access to clinically sound, cost-effective addiction treatment that reduces the health and social costs to our communities and the nation.

Healthy People
<http://www.health.gov/healthypeople>

Healthy People 2010 is the prevention agenda for the nation. It is a statement of national health objectives designed to identify the most significant preventable threats to health and to establish national goals to reduce these threats. It collects data on ten leading health indicators.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
<http://www.dol.gov>

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
<http://www.osha.gov/i/index.html>

OSHA's mission is to save lives, prevent injuries and protect the health of America's workers. To accomplish this, federal and state governments must work in partnership with the more than 100 million workers and their six and a half million employers who are covered by the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
<http://www.usda.gov/>

Food and Nutrition Information Center
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/etext/000033.html#xtocid2381827>

This center provides an extensive list of nutrition, food safety and diet sites from many agencies.

Food Safety and Inspection Service
<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/index.htm>

The FSIS protects the public from foodborne illness.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
<http://www.commerce.gov/>

National Consumer Product Safety Commission
<http://www.cpsc.gov/index.html>

National Technical Information Service
<http://www.ntis.gov>

FedWorld
<http://www.fedworld.gov>

The FedWorld.gov U.S. is a gateway to government information. This site is managed by the National Technical Information Service (NTIS) as part of its information management mandate. It serves as the online locator service for a comprehensive inventory of information disseminated by the federal government. This service assists agencies and the public in electronically locating federal government information, both within and without the National Technical Information Service (NTIS) repository. The NTIS is a broker of federally sponsored scientific, technical and business-related information and reports.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
<http://www.epa.gov>

The mission of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is to protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment—air, water, and land—upon which life depends. The **E.P.A. Online Library System** at: <http://www.epa.gov/natlibra/ols.htm> consists of related databases that can be used to locate books, reports, and audiovisual materials on a variety of topics.

STATISTICS

National Center for Health Statistics (N.C.H.S.)
<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

N.C.H.S. is the federal government's principal vital and health statistics agency. This agency provides data on vital events as well as information on health status, lifestyle and exposure to unhealthy influences, the onset and diagnosis of illness and disability, and the use of health care. A quick index to popular statistics is called FASTATS (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/default.htm>)

Health Statistics (MedlinePlus)
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthstatistics.html>

The Health Statistics page on MedlinePlus collects statistics from many agencies. There is also a "statistics" subheading on most topic pages, e.g. Breast Cancer.

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Code of Federal Regulations
<http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html>

Title 21 covers Food and Drugs, Title 42 covers Public Health.

Federal Register
<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>

The *Federal Register* is the official daily publication for rules, proposed rules, and notices of federal agen-

cies and organizations. The majority of health-related items will be under the Department of Health & Human Services.

INDIANA

Indiana State Department of Health

<http://www.in.gov/isdh/index.htm>

Indiana State Department of Health Data & Statistics

http://www.in.gov/isdh/dataandstats/data_and_statistics.htm

Indiana Code (Title 16 covers health)

<http://www.state.in.us/legislative/ic/code/>

SUMMARY:

Government information on health care and medicine is increasingly available via the web. Since locating authoritative information on health topics is problematic at best, this is good news for users. And, in addition, much of the consumer information and many technical reports and other materials are also available in PDF format. Like much of the Internet, the problem many times is too much information and not enough organization. The cross-agency portals and hubs are an important early step in organizing health information and making it easier to locate relevant materials for libraries and end users.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Elaine Noonan Skopelja MALS
Ruth Lilly Medical Library
Indiana University School of Medicine