

RERC-ACT D2 Project: Health Quest

The Surgeon General's conference and report - *Closing the gap: A national blueprint to improve the health of persons with mental retardation* (U.S. Department of Health, 2002) reported that significant health disparities exist for individuals with intellectual disabilities as compared to the general population. Many reasons were identified as contributing to these disparities. Subsequently, Healthy People 2010 was introduced which presents a national health agenda describing health and well-being goals for all Americans, including Americans with disabilities, resulting from the inter-agency cooperation and vision of the Disability and Health Group of CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities along with the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute in Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). A primary purpose of this report was to encourage professionals in the field of developmental disabilities to take action to help reduce or eliminate this significant national health care issue.

The RERC-ACT Health Quest project is in direct response to this call for action. Assessing personal health and communicating personal health status to family members, care givers, and health care providers can be a particular challenge for individuals with intellectual and cognitive disabilities. The Health Quest system is an Internet supported tool designed to enable individuals with intellectual disabilities to assess personal health status and then to provide instructions on how to respond to health related events (e.g., treating minor cuts and burns) as well as personalized health care instructions for preventative health care. The system is being built upon a successful approach which employs an innovative combination of audio, video and pictures to enable individuals with cognitive disabilities to independently complete personal health assessments which can then be automatically delivered via the internet to relevant caregivers or family members. In addition to health related assessments, the system utilizes a customizable design approach which will allow different types of health related assessments to be performed and instructions to be delivered. The Health Quest system will provide greater independence and self-direction for individuals with intellectual and cognitive disabilities in assessing personal health status and accessing self-care instructions for specific health-related needs.

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