

Press Release



Opportunities and Perils of a National Syndromic Surveillance System

ANDREW EVANS | APRIL 16, 2020

The worst of the COVID-19 public-health crisis appears to be past in some areas of the country, and policymakers' attention is shifting to re-opening society. AAF's Health Care Data Analyst Andrew Strohman reviews a recent proposal for a "national syndromic surveillance system" that may allow the government to track illness outbreaks while simultaneously allowing society to return to more normal patterns of life. Such a tracking system has proven effective in other countries, but it also raises serious privacy concerns, he notes.

Strohman concludes,

The authors of the syndromic surveillance plan stress that while the surveillance system is very much needed for the current COVID-19 response, it will be needed even more for subsequent spikes or entirely novel outbreaks. Having the infrastructure in place not only for further battles with COVID-19, but also for all future outbreaks, would be a welcome relief to individuals and businesses as society navigates how to cope with global upheaval. Using these future protections, though, would have to be balanced to adequately attend to people's privacy, with triggers and strict limitations on when and how such a system could be used. The privacy concerns are serious, and having all-encompassing and unwavering restrictions in place will ensure privacy is maintained, attending to both the short- and long-term well-being of fellow citizens and the world at large.

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