NIH’s All of Us Program Teams with Fitbit for Data Collection

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The All of Us Research Program, part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), has launched the Fitbit Bring-Your-Own-Device (BYOD) project. Now, in addition to providing health information through surveys, electronic health records, and bio-samples, participants can choose to share data from their Fitbit accounts to help researchers make discoveries.

According to All of Us research program officials, the project is a key step for the program in integrating digital health technologies for data collection.

The All of Us Research Program, established by the White House in 2015, aims to advance precision medicine by studying the health data of 1 million diverse Americans over the next five years. One aim of the project is to include groups that have been historically underrepresented in research. As of September 2018, more than 110,000 people have registered with the program to begin the participant journey, and more than 60,000 have completed all elements of the core protocol.

The participants are sharing different types of information, including through surveys, access to their electronic health records and blood and urine samples. These data, stripped of obvious identifiers, will be accessible to researchers, whose findings may lead to more tailored treatments and prevention strategies in the future, according to program officials.

Digital health technologies, like mobile apps and wearable devices, can gather data outside of a hospital or clinic. This data includes information about physical activity, sleep, weight, heart rate, nutrition, and water intake, which can give researchers a more complete picture of participants’ health. “The All of Us Research Program is now gathering this data in addition to surveys, electronic health record information, physical measurements, and blood and urine samples, working to make the All of Us resource one of the largest and most diverse data sets of its kind for health research,” NIH officials said.

“Collecting real-world, real-time data through digital technologies will become a fundamental part of the program,” Eric Dishman, director of the All of Us Research Program, said in a statement. “This information, in combination with many other data types, will give us an unprecedented ability to better understand the impact of lifestyle and environment on health outcomes and, ultimately, develop better strategies for keeping people healthy in a very precise, individualized way.”

All of Us participants with any Fitbit device who wish to share Fitbit data with the program may log on to the All of Us participant portal at participant.jionallofus.org and visit the Sync Apps & Devices tab. Participants without Fitbit devices may also take part if they choose, by creating a free Fitbit account online and manually adding information to share with the program.

All of Us is developing additional plans to incorporate digital health technologies. A second project with Fitbit is expected to launch later in the year, NIH officials said, and this project will include providing devices to a limited number of All of Us participants who will be randomly invited to take part, to enable them to share wearable data with the program.

The All of Us research program plans to add connections to other devices and apps in the future to further expand data collection efforts and engage participants in new ways.