

Blockchain and Healthcare Innovation: A City, Academia, and Technology Firms Join Forces to find Blockchain Solutions to Address Public Health Challenges

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As the excitement around blockchain technology continues to grow in the healthcare sector, there is an increasing realization that blockchain has the capability of addressing many of the data and information-related challenges that the healthcare world has been focused on for years – such as providing access to comprehensive interoperable electronic health records and ensuring data continuity for patients who receive treatment in multiple healthcare settings. As this realization has taken hold, healthcare stakeholders and constituents are seemingly trying to “make up for lost time” with new blockchain initiatives being announced on a regular basis seeking to turn theoretical applications into real-world blockchain solutions.^[1]

As further evidence that the healthcare industry is on blockchain overdrive, on June 3, 2019, the Austin Blockchain Collective, an organization that represents some 140 blockchain and crypto companies with a presence in Austin, Texas, [announced](#) the creation of the Austin Blockchain Collective Healthcare Working Group (the “[Working Group](#)”). The Working Group’s initial membership includes various blockchain and cryptocurrency companies, including Abstrakt, DeepHive, and Factom, as well as the Dell Medical School at The University of Texas at Austin (“[Dell Med](#)”). Dell Med plans to utilize its knowledge of academic medicine to help the Working Group’s other members adapt blockchain technologies to wide variety of healthcare challenges. Together this Working Group aims to leverage its collective understanding of data science and health informatics to come up with innovative healthcare solutions.

Dell Med previously partnered with the City of Austin to pilot a blockchain solution, named the “MyPass Initiative,” to solve the problem of health data fragmentation caused by a lack of physical identification among the homeless population in Austin. A loss of physical ID can result in fragmentation of an individual’s health record. Utilizing emergency medical services at multiple locations, which occurs frequently among the homeless population, compounds the fragmentation issue.^[2] Dell Med and its partner, the City of Austin, observed that emergency service providers often had trouble tracking homeless individuals’ health records, which in turn made it more difficult to provide these individuals with a high level of care.^[3]

The MyPass Initiative aims to use blockchain technology to help solve these data fragmentation and quality of care problems by collecting electronic health records and identification documents from homeless individuals and storing them on a permissioned blockchain run by the City. The City can then provide participating homeless individuals with a unique identifier to access their health records on any computer network hosting the platform. This structure allows doctors, nurses, and emergency personnel working at a variety of locations to access an individual's complete health record without a physical ID. Being able to access a complete health record enables these providers to give homeless individuals a higher quality of care.^[4]

Solutions like the MyPass Initiative show the potential of blockchain to resolve complex healthcare challenges facing stakeholders and patients alike. Partnerships like the Working Group, as well as the Synaptic Health Alliance (a consortium of five major healthcare companies focused on the use of blockchain to foster innovation in healthcare which we featured in a [January 31, 2019 blog post](#)) will continue to form as more organizations explore how to adopt blockchain technology to the healthcare industry.

For additional details on blockchain and its application in the healthcare industry see our prior blog post, "[How Blockchain Can Impact Healthcare](#)."

[1] See Alaric Dearment, [It's not about what blockchain can do in healthcare, but what it's already doing](#), MedCityNews; Uli Brödl, [Testing blockchain technology for clinical trials in Canada](#), IBM; Mackenzie Garrity, [Blockchain developer creates network for diabetic patients with Arizona ACO, Boehringer Ingelheim](#), Becker's Hospital Review

[2] See, Tomio Geron, [Homeless People May Get Help From Blockchain](#), The Wall Street Journal.

[3] See Danny Crichton, [Austin is piloting blockchain to improve homeless services](#), TechCrunch.

[4] Daniel Fisher, [It's on the Blockchain: Austin's New Digital ID System](#), Data-Smart City Solutions, Harvard Kennedy School, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation.

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