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**Outlining a New Place-Based Approach to Health Information Management:
The Digital Town Square**

Abstract:

This paper outlines a new place based approach to health information management for chronic disease prevention and health promotion. Specifically, the paper details the conceptual and technical framework underpinning a new place based health data platform called "The Digital Town Square" (DTS). The DTS is a web-based infrastructure designed for using, sharing and expanding health and related information and research evidence that supports a place-based social and environmental determinants approach to health and well-being (cf. Schultz and Northbridge 2004). The DTS reflects current international, national, state, and local government understandings that health is shaped by the places we live, work and play (World Health Organisation 1997). The DTS also acknowledges and engages multiple sources of health related data and information via local health partnerships and networks.

The DTS system is designed to foster an online community comprising the general public, service providers and policy makers. It provides the necessary platform to share valuable intellectual property which is otherwise likely to remain in silos. The system consists of public and private web domains which control access to various modules including a health decision support system (based on a geospatial health data), predictive modelling data for at-risk patients, a service directory, online learning programs, public surveys and social and professional networking tools. Such diverse resources will be used to inform local policy, development, service planning and models of health care delivery.

The place based approach to information management featured in the DTS is significant because it makes use of new and existing evidence-based resources and partnerships to effect lasting positive change in the health status of a specific geographical area. The DTS is a joint initiative of the Logan-Beaudesert Health Coalition and Griffith University. The DTS offers a sound evidence base and portable infrastructure model that can be readily adapted to any developed community with a unified approach to health promotion and service delivery.