

mHealth to see big growth, barriers

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July 24, 2013

<http://www.healthcareitnews.com/news/mhealth-see-big-growth-barriers?topic=16>

Current low sophistication of mHealth tech poised to change if policies properly align

A new mobile health trends report released Wednesday underscores the mid- to low sophistication of current mHealth application technology but also emphasizes the explosive growth and integration headed for the market .

The Research and Markets mHealth trends report shows the industry poised for a compound annual growth rate of 61 percent by 2017, to reach a value of \$26 billion. This revenue, researchers project, will be derived predominantly from mHealth hardware sales and services.

Study findings also estimate that some 50 percent of mobile users will have downloaded mHealth applications within five years.

Report findings point to the three phases of mHealth development: the initial trial phase, the commercialization phase and the integration phase. Currently, the industry is entering into the commercialization phase, characterized by the mass development of solutions, new business models and a focus on private companies, consumers and patients, the report finds. "In this phase, mHealth applications will become an integrated part of doctors' treatment plans. In this phase health insurers will become the main payer, especially for the more advanced mHealth solutions," according to a report summary.

The Food and Drug Administration is slated to issue mHealth regulations in October 2013.

However, some industry groups are pushing back against these soon-to-be regs. Nearly 100 organizations, including medical trade associations and electronic health record vendors, wrote to policymakers June 18, urging regulators to slow down the course on mHealth regulation, particularly until a mandated federal workgroup finishes working on a report to guide Congress on the issue, as *Healthcare IT News* Senior Editor Diana Manos reported in late June.

However, Brad Thompson, representing the mHealth Regulatory Coalition, also wrote a letter to policymakers in June, calling for the release of regulations as soon as possible.

Mobile app developers need regulations now in order to know if their product needs FDA approval, Manos reported. Without it, they could be breaking a federal statute if they go to market. "It's unconscionable to not have regulations," Thompson said.

Without these regulations, many say the mHealth integration phase be be a significantly slower than initial projections.

Healthcare IT News Senior Editor Diana Manos contributed to this story.