

Bridging the AI Divide: Policy Pathways for Equitable Access to Imaging AI Across Academic and Community Settings

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Purpose

To support policies that give all radiology practices, including community and rural sites, a fair opportunity to participate in imaging AI development and validation so that every patient can benefit from reliable AI tools.

Methods/Materials

We examined structural barriers that limit participation in AI development across practice settings. Large academic centers have the storage, computing power, and technical staff needed for AI projects. Many community hospitals and safety-net institutions do not. Without these resources, smaller practices are often excluded from AI research, which means training data may not reflect the patients they serve. This imbalance risks worsening existing health disparities. Programs such as NIH Bridge2AI and ACR AI-LAB show that cross-institution collaboration is possible while maintaining privacy.

Results

We highlight several practical policy steps that can make participation more achievable for all sites:

- 1. Federated Learning Networks: Allow community sites to contribute to model development without sharing raw patient data.**
- 2. Cloud-Compute Access Credits: Provide subsidized or grant-supported access to secure computing so smaller practices can run and evaluate AI tools.**
- 3. Data Storage Credits: Offer affordable, secure storage options for imaging studies needed for AI validation and multi-site collaboration.**
- 4. Data Literacy and Workforce Training: Create ACR-led programs that teach essential skills in dataset preparation, validation, governance, and bias assessment.**
- 5. Incentivized Data Partnerships: Recognize and credit community sites that contribute data and clinical expertise to national AI efforts.**

Conclusions

Expanding access will diversify datasets, improve model generalizability, and reduce algorithmic bias. Supporting community institutions creates a stronger and more representative radiology AI ecosystem. Radiology AI will be safest and most effective when participation is broad and inclusive. Policies that lower technical barriers and encourage collaboration can help ACR lead a national effort to close the AI divide and ensure that all patients benefit from equitable imaging AI.

References

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