

The use of digital health interventions has the potential to improve healthcare delivery and sustainability, bringing about many exciting advancements in the treatment and management of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Despite the continuous need for services by people living with NCDs, factors such as distance, cost, mobility, displacement and emergencies can compromise service delivery. The pandemic has only worsened the situation, as health facilities were occupied with COVID-19 patients and NCD patients were required to stay home to avoid severe symptoms, increasing stress and anxiety at a time when mental health services were also affected.

However, the 21st century's challenges have led to the development of digital health innovations, like the 2012 Be He@lthy, Be Mobile initiative launched by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), using mobile phone technology to help governments scale up 'mHealth' services for NCDs and their risk factors. The pandemic has further accelerated the use of digital health interventions, including hotlines, online assistance, mobile phone apps, and many more. These innovations have shown potential in reducing the interruption of NCD and mental health services, making it necessary to continue scaling up digital health technology.

To fully engage with this promising future, partnerships between governments and the private sector, academia, IT specialists, and other stakeholders are needed, along with the development of a regulatory framework for successful joint ventures. This includes scaling up the use of digital health interventions within health systems and exchanging experiences with other countries.

In 2018, WHO Member States approved a resolution on Digital Health, recognizing the value of digital technologies in providing healthcare access without financial hardship. Taking action in this area is crucial in reaching the 2030 goal of reducing premature deaths from NCDs by one third and promoting mental health and well-being.

While digital technology should not replace in-person consultation, it is crucial in times of crisis and will continue to provide healthcare access where it is limited or unavailable. Collaboration between public and private sectors, people and technology, is necessary to create a healthier

future for all.

Mobile health (mHealth)

The use of mobile technology for public health purposes is known as mobile health or mHealth. It helps to prevent, manage and treat noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and their risk factors by offering both health care support to patients and technical support to health providers. This includes the use of text messages and mobile phone applications.

To combat the impact of NCDs, mHealth should be considered a component of a broader NCD strategy, not a standalone programme. The convenience and broad reach of mobile phones make it an ideal tool for mHealth, as nearly everyone has access to a mobile phone and the coverage extends to even remote areas. mHealth aims to: promote health literacy; improve NCD prevention; improve disease self-management; educate patients; directly provide services to patients; offer technical support; and help governments in the implementation of national NCD policies.

To be successful in implementing mHealth, several key factors must come into play, including: a supportive environment; partnerships; governance and programme management; resource allocation; toolkits and handbooks; health and technical content; monitoring and evaluation; sustainability; and effective communication, advocacy and promotion.

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