Digital healthcare **is here –**

What are the **ingredients** for **success?**

Why digital healthcare?

Digital healthcare combines the key benefits of traditional primary care – like an ongoing relationship with a doctor – with the convenience and ease of the virtual world.

Unlike early telehealth offerings that focused on urgent care, new digital healthcare offerings holistically incorporate all pillars of health care, including primary, urgent and episodic (ear infections, sore throats), preventative (various types of screening), and chronic care. Rather than connecting patients to an unfamiliar "doctor in the cloud", it focuses on continuity of care and personal relationships.

Digital healthcare gives people better access to healthcare without replacing in-person care completely. With a hybrid model that takes a virtual-first approach, people are able to first access healthcare online and then when needed turn to in-person visits later on. This solution creates better access to care for patients by giving them immediate access to medical advice, and additionally provides a cost-saving benefit by putting psychological distance between patients and A&E.

The pandemic fast-tracked digital healthcare

COVID-19 was a key adoption driver for digital healthcare, leading to important changes in two key areas.

Patient behaviour: Previous negative experiences had created significant resistance to the idea of telehealth. When other options were unavailable during the pandemic, many patients discovered its significant advantages.

In addition, more virtual care modalities that went beyond urgent care were developed to meet the growing demand.

What are the ingredients for digital health success?

Digital health programs show incredible promise. However, the increased awareness generated during COVID-19 doesn't guarantee success, and there are still significant barriers to successful adoption that must be overcome. Incorporating the following elements into your program can help.

Growth in telehealth usage peaked during April 2020 and has since stabilized

Telehealth claims volumes, compared to pre-Covid-19 levels (February 2020=1)[1]

38X

McKinsey & Company report, July 2021
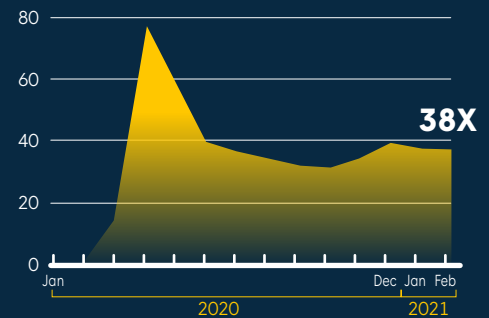
1 Offering a variety of models

Building the best offerings for the audience you plan on addressing is key. Each segment needs to be approached with a relevant and tailored digital healthcare offering - what works for parents of children with chronic illnesses is not necessarily going to work for seniors in care homes.

Working with patients to ensure that the digital health programs you are building actually address their needs is also something that must be taken into account. Tweaking and adapting the programs can be done successfully only when you are open to feedback and request it regularly.
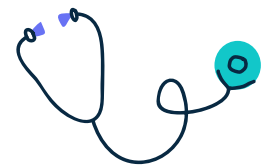
Digital healthcare programs that take these factors into account will make those plans Digital healthcare programs.

2 Building trust

In order for digital healthcare to really be utilised, it needs to be trusted by patients and, no less important, by physicians. Both sides have been disappointed by telehealth offerings that don't include diagnostic tools. Phone and video don't do enough to replicate the experience on an in-person visit, and they're missing key diagnostic necessities like common exams - actually looking inside patients' ears to diagnose ear infections, or listening to patients' heart and lung sounds to get a full picture of their physical health.

Continuity of care is also key to building trust - creating a central location for members to get virtual care instead of sending them to a variety of different locations will create a streamlined and smooth experience for users who will feel more comfortable and trusting of their care.

3 Behaviour change

Digital healthcare requires a paradigm shift in healthcare consumption which demands significant behavioural change from both patients and physicians. During COVID-19 lockdowns, patients started to adapt to the idea of not physically seeing their doctor. They got used to visits being replaced by a phone call, or a video call. But that doesn't mean they liked the experience. In order for digital healthcare to truly succeed, consumers need to be educated on the benefits of this alternative healthcare opportunity, reminded and encouraged to use it as a default and not as a backup option.

This can be done in a variety of ways - communications that emphasise the benefits of virtual care, use of real diagnostic equipment in remote offerings, and of course building up that trust between the patient and the solution.
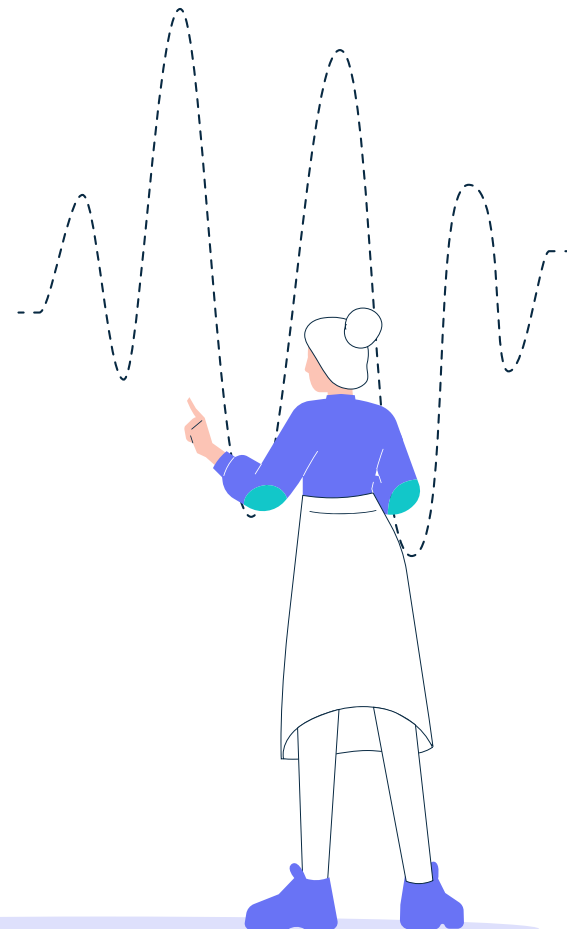
4 Diagnostic tools

Digital healthcare that relies on voice or video calls alone will never be strong enough to provide the same benefits as in-person doctor visits. When creating a hybrid healthcare program, utilising diagnostic tools to actually let doctors remotely examine patients will create more accurate and trusted diagnoses. This methodology will enable your digital solution to be used as more than just a triage service to give members answers to basic questions while still requiring in-person visits for formal diagnoses and prescriptions. Remote physical exams will enable true ED diversion and true trust in the system and diagnoses, from both a patient and a physician perspective.

5 Integrated technological solutions

Digital healthcare covers a broad range of services including triage, urgent care, chronic care management, remote monitoring, preventative care, and more. Requiring care teams and patients to use different tools for each 'type' of care creates a fragmented solution with low usability levels on both sides. The various services need to be integrated into one seamless platform to enable a broad digital approach.

Not only must your digital platform be robust enough to cover different modalities, but it must also integrate into existing platforms and technology so that data remains centralised and shareable by the different clinicians who may need to be involved in one patients' care. The digital healthcare solution needs to be platform-agnostic and have the ability to be integrated into different platforms across providers.

The bottom line

By integrating these five key ingredients into your digital healthcare offering, you'll be able to create digital healthcare. In the long run, this methodology will also enable even broader virtual opportunities, with additional use cases and specialities easy to integrate into your overall digital healthcare strategy.

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