

Europe – Africa Health Summit: ‘Improving Access through Telehealth’

26th May 2021



Welcome Speeches

[Dr Amit N. Thakker](#), President, Africa Healthcare Federation

There is a largely **shared consensus on the enormous potential of digital health solutions to increase access to good quality health and care services**. In parallel, it is becoming increasingly evident to any actor in the digital health field that multi-stakeholder collaborations and partnerships are extremely powerful to maximise impact and scalability.

When we speak about digital health, the spectrum is broad and involves everything from solutions to payment mechanisms, logistics and access related aspects. **The pandemic has undoubtedly triggered an unprecedented explosion of digital health and particularly of telehealth solutions**, which are the subject of this summit.

Concerns about raising costs linked to digital health implementations are gradually disappearing as an increasing number of successful deployment cases across the world demonstrate that, along with benefits in terms of access and quality, **telehealth solutions may also improve efficiency and affordability**. Nonetheless, crucial issues related to regulatory compliance and technology appropriateness still need to be tackled to dissipate reluctancies.

Departing from telehealth, the intent of this first event is to **open the floor for a constructive discussion** which can eventually lead to the identification of key topics to be further addressed in a series of subsequent round tables.

[Brian O'Connor](#), Chair, ECHAlliance

The ECHAlliance have developed a substantial network in Europe and beyond with the mission to help address the **need to take action and learn by doing**. We are firmly convinced that COVID-19 has evidenced that it is **time to leverage solutions that have been available for a long time** and now with the pandemic have reached impressive maturity.



In the immediate wake of the pandemic, every health system had to implement or rapidly scale a telehealth program, though the enormous potential is still underexploited as sub-optimal integration, lack of adequate procurement schemes, and the strain posed on healthcare professionals remain important challenges.

We are pleased to initiate this series of appointments aimed to **build a reliable collaboration bridge between European and African health sectors** with a view to accelerate progress and generate a fertile ground for business opportunities.

Chief Guests

High level representatives from the African Union Commission and the European Commission brought their views and plans from the policy perspectives.

[Bakari Nyari](#), Monitoring & Evaluation Expert, Division of Health Systems, Diseases & Nutrition, African Union Commission

The African Union (AU) has been at the forefront of the challenge of facing the COVID-19 pandemic since it broke in the African territories.

The restriction of movements of goods and people have limited the capacity for delivering healthcare services in an efficient manner and unveiled the utmost need for a shift to digital and inclusive technologies. To reach this goal, there are several pressing challenges to address e.g., reducing the barriers in the availability of devices, decreasing hardware and infrastructure costs, securing an adequate policy framework and a **harmonized approach** across the African region.

For this reason, the AU Commission undertook to develop a comprehensive [Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa](#) building on several other frameworks and initiatives and aiming to contribute to the achievement of the [Agenda 2063](#) and the Sustainable Development Goals. Digital health is undoubtedly one of the critical sectors of the strategy, which is rooted in a series of key pillars:

- Large-scale baseline assessment programmes to validate the use, acceptance and effectiveness of digital health technologies across Africa
- Multi-stakeholder and public-private partnerships as enablers to foster implementation
- Focus on strengthening the capacities of systems, professionals and organizations to deliver a better response to health emergencies such as COVID-19
- Adoption of accountability mechanisms
- Promotion of knowledge creation through R&I

Overall, the strategy is the framework to advocate for the large-scale adoption of emerging digital health technologies.

[Gabriella Fesus](#), Head of Unit, Social Inclusion & Protection, Health & Demography, European Commission

The European Commission International Partnerships Directorate-General (DG INTPA) is at the forefront of the EU external relations and global cooperation efforts. Specifically, the Social Inclusion and Protection, Health and Demography Unit has been actively engaged in a series of actions intended to strengthen the resilience of health systems, having the **achievement of universal health coverage** in the partner countries at the top of its priorities.

To fulfil such objectives, the Unit recognises the unprecedented opportunity offered by digital health technologies and in particular the deployment of telehealth.

Digital transformation is indeed a central topic in the current programming work that the European Commission is carrying out to design the funding strategies and plans for the next seven years.

As a concrete example, the [Digital4Development \(D4D\) Hub](#) launched in December 2020 with the aim to develop new international partnerships on digital transformation and advance multistakeholder dialogue across continents and countries. The D4D Hub is the key tool to have a [Team Europe](#) in action, with unprecedented levels of coordination between EU institutions, advancing multi-stakeholder dialogue to leverage expertise and resources and share best practices. As the D4D Hub's first operational regional component, the "AU-EU D4D Hub" advances new digital partnerships and investments for a fair and inclusive African digital economy. Thus, **D4D Hub is a key enabler for digital health scale up and implementation.**

Panel

After the policy statements by the Chief Guests, we moved into the Panel discussion with outstanding examples of successes in telehealth implementation across four countries, Belgium, Scotland, Kenya and South Africa.

[Charles Kamotho](#), Founder & CEO, [Daktari Africa](#)

Telemedicine in Africa is relatively young and the whole continent is indeed a perfect ground for its flourishing due the large share of population living in rural areas, over 30% of the population living more than two hours away from a healthcare facility and doctor-to-patient ratios considerably lower than the global average. Another factor is the largely young and tech-friendly population which would ease the large-scale implementation of telehealth.

Daktari Africa positions itself in this promising market offering teleconsultation services for a large variety of Non-Communicable Diseases and also mental health care support.

In spite of the promising forecasts, there are a number of **issues to be tackled in order to create the appropriate environment for telehealth growth**, such as fast-tracking legislations and policies to regulate and protect the stakeholders involved and integrating telehealth in standard healthcare delivery pathways, creating more innovative microinsurance products to support the shift of the market target on telehealth patients, and lowering costs for mobile and internet access.

Africa is Primed for Adoption of Telehealth



Healthcare Overview

- 1.3bn people – 16% of global population, 23% of disease burden
- 60% live in underdeveloped rural areas
- 5% of GDP is spent on Health vs. 10% global average
- Per capita spend is at \$83 vs \$1,110 global average
- Medical Insurance penetration at below 10%

Opportunity for Telehealth

- 30% of pop. is at least 2 hrs from a health facility
- Young, tech-friendly population (med age: 18 yrs)
- Surging mobile subscribers (477mn in 2019)
- 2.1 doctors per 10,000 vs 17.0 global average

View Presentation [Here](#)

For more information, visit: <https://daktariafrica.com/>

Emmanuelle Blin, Founder & CEO, Tech Care for All

We move into another core topic at the centre of the debate nowadays, which is the lack of continuous medical education and digital skills and literacy development programs by listening to the experience of Tech Care for All.

Having realised that the COVID-19 disruption has created a world where Health Care Professionals (HCPs) are now ready and eager to take advantage of medical online training, in January 2020 they created the Medical Learning Hub (MLH), an online marketplace for healthcare training based on a concept similar to the travel platform business model (e.g., Booking.com). The marketplace is an online community of engaged HCPs (today 75,000 registered users) for training on content, experience sharing and skills development.



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For more information, visit: www.tc4a.com and www.medicalearninghub.com.

Sheraan Amod, Found & CEO, Recomed

“There are decades when nothing happens, and then there are weeks when decades happen”

Sheraan Amod, CEO, Recomed

Recomed is currently the largest and fastest growing online healthcare booking platform in Africa that provides matching services to link consumers and providers and allow easy and quick appointment booking.

Around the beginning of April last year, Recomed suddenly saw a drop from 55,000 online bookings a month to 24,000 online bookings due to the sharp decrease of physical consultation. This was accompanied by a parallel huge increase in the use of teleconsultation modalities also thanks to the quick release of regulatory hurdles that until then had not allowed for telehealth consultation as a service entitled to insurance reimbursement. In this sense, COVID-19 showed what external factors can do in disrupting the conditions of a market.

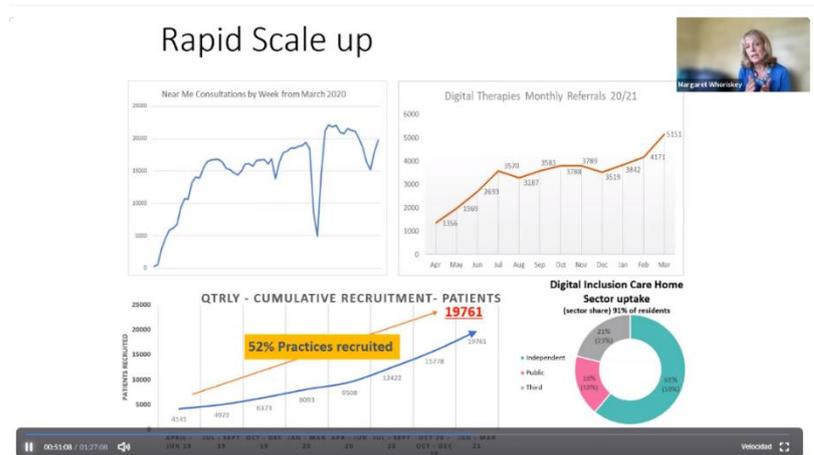
Over the last 15 months, the company has then specialised in also providing telehealth booking services, offering different solutions to doctors and finding innovative integration pathways to connect their platform with existing teleconsultation providers. This is definitely only the start of exciting innovations coming ahead and well beyond video consultation where deep understanding of the context and needs of patients, doctors and nurses will make the difference.

For more information, visit: <https://www.recomed.co.za/>

Margaret Whoriskey, Head of Technology Enabled Care & Digital Healthcare Innovation, Digital Health & Care Directorate, Scotland

The Technology Enabled Care (TEC) program is focusing on creating the conditions to enable a shift from reactive interventions to earlier and preventative interventions and facilitate scale up and acceleration of the mainstreaming of digital health services. This requires identifying gaps, recognising local differences specifically when it comes to translating successful experiences to remote and rural areas, and enabling cross-sector leadership and collaboration between health and care.

With the pandemic disruption, the video consultation [NearMe](#) program experienced a sharp increase from 300 to 2,000 consultations a week. In parallel, remote monitoring programs were already in place before it witnessed a spectacular acceleration, with more than 50% of GPs now using this system to monitor patients with chronic conditions such as hypertension. Also, inclusion of those patients at risk of digital exclusion have been targeted with dedicated actions carried out to reach older patients and dwellers of nursing homes.



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For more information, visit: <https://tec.scot/>

Discussion and key conclusions

The panel was followed by an interactive Q&A session and interactive discussion focusing on the key issues for scaling up. Hot topics that emerged from the discussion converged on the **need for substantial and durable funding streams for sustainability of telehealth models** especially for rural areas of Africa, which represent low margins and broad areas to reach for insurers. Also, where online medical training is concerned, the core issue that is perceived as the key enabler to make initiatives such as MLH flourish is the **speed to which we realise the value of the marketplace model**. Panellists agree that, in general terms, technology is not the issue anymore. COVID-19 brought a significant disruption in the ways services are provided and this requires **an in-depth redesign of processes** which cannot be done without taking into consideration **cultural aspects** as well. **Skills and leadership** are another key issue along with governments' commitment to promote telehealth as a default option. Lastly, the recognition of the **centrality of the policy context** as a strong enabler has been indeed the driver for the active engagement of Regional Economic Communities, countries and stakeholders in the design of the African Union digital transformation strategy.

View the Summit Recording Here

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