Google teams up with WHO to spark digital health app development globally

Article

The news: Google is working with the **World Health Organization (WHO)** to build an open-source software development kit (SDK) that allows **Android** developers to create health apps

and cracks open access to healthcare services in low- and middle-income countries.

How it works: The open-source SDK will let Android apps store info offline, which addresses connectivity issues in many countries. At the same time, it'll help improve clinical decision making, data exchange, emergency services, and global public health overall.

Healthcare providers around the world use Android apps on their phones to guide clinical decision making—offline data will allow them to access that data efficiently, even during critical times, like when emergency services are needed.

Why it matters: Around half of the world population doesn't have access to basic healthcare services—and that's expected to be exacerbated by an impending global shortage of 18 million healthcare workers (mostly in low- and middle-income countries), per WHO.

The pandemic laid bare the stark differences in COVID-19 response between countries that had coordinated healthcare infrastructure versus countries that did not. An open-source SDK like Google's could help level the playing field by improving care coordination and healthcare access.

The bigger picture: This partnership is one of the first efforts to extend interoperability on a global scale.

- This will allow healthcare providers to glean community-wide data, better understand health trends, and deliver more targeted care—which ultimately improves overall population health.

- Not to mention, access to new troves of data and a means of standardized data exchange can help fast-track healthcare research and innovation in a way that was not previously possible.
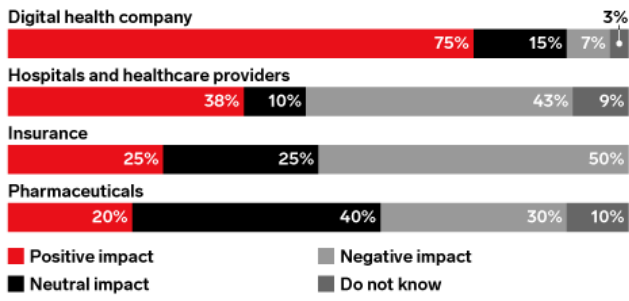
What's in it for Google? This initiative will help the tech giant get another leg into digital health developments on a global scale.

- Its main competitor Apple is already making strides with its Apple Watch, electronic health record-integrated Health app, and major health system partnerships.

- While Google is still pursuing digital health opportunities in the US, it faces far less competition in the global market, where Android is king among mobile phone users.

Dig deeper: *Check out our newly released Mobile Health Apps for Disease Management report to learn more about how apps are being used to improve health, increase access to care, and reduce costs.*

Business Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on the Digital Health Industry Worldwide, by Segment, May 2021

% of respondents in each group

Digital health company
Positive impact	Neutral impact	Negative impact	Do not know
75%	15%	7%	3%

Hospitals and healthcare providers
| 38% | 10% | 43% | 9% |

Insurance
| 25% | 25% | 50% | |

Pharmaceuticals
| 20% | 40% | 30% | 10% |

■ Positive impact   ▧ Negative impact
■ Neutral impact   ▨ Do not know

Note: n=293
Source: Research2Guidance, "2021 Global COVID-19 Survey," June 1, 2021

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