

E-health consultation services in MENA can make up for doctor shortage

Article

The news: A doctor shortage in developing markets like Egypt has been compounded by the pandemic. Health consultation startups like **Esaal** are expanding services and reach through

investments to help tackle poor doctor-to-patient ratios, [per](#) TechCrunch.

Who is Esaal? Esaal recently raised **\$1.7 million** to scale its services and offerings throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

- The need for consultation in the MENA region is only growing. Esaal enables health consultations via smartphone app, text/video calls, and in-person visitations.
- The platform currently charges subscription fees and on-demand consultation fees with plans to make money from in-person visitations in subsequent updates.
- Esaal is also expanding its B2B2BC model where it partners with medium to large companies to provide services to their employees.
- Esaal flourished during the pandemic-induced lockdowns. Its user base expanded by **55% between 2020 and 2021** with over 1 million users.

Why it could succeed: There's a growing mental health crisis among MENA populations, and there's a severe shortage of doctors.

- **35% of MENA citizens experience constant stress and 29% suffer from depression** [per](#) TechCrunch.
- **Egypt's doctor to citizen ratio is 8.6 for every 10,000** and it has only worsened throughout the pandemic, [per](#) the Middle East Monitor.
- Esaal has a roster of 350 consultants covering a broad range of medical issues including anxiety, physiotherapy, pediatrics, and nutrition.
- Other platforms like **Vezeeta, Meddy, and Shezlong** specialize on consultation, mental health, or nutrition exclusively, while Esaal combines all three verticals in an application similar to a super app.

What's next? While based in Egypt, Esaal services seven other countries—namely **Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Palestine, and Iraq**.

Continued growth and success could drum up other health consultation startups in the region, which has a population of [500 million](#) people.