
Closing the Digital Gap in Women's Health



Digital health technologies (DHTs) are reshaping healthcare delivery across the globe. By enhancing access to services, enabling remote monitoring and supporting personalised care, these tools are particularly transformative for women. A recent scoping review of 80 studies has shown that DHTs significantly improve women's health outcomes, empower them in decision making and help advance gender equality. However, these benefits are not evenly distributed. Barriers such as affordability, digital literacy and cultural constraints continue to limit their reach, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Bridging this gap is essential for achieving equitable health outcomes and realising the full potential of digital health in supporting the Sustainable Development Goals.

Improving Women's Health Through Digital Access

DHTs have been shown to play a critical role in advancing maternal and reproductive health, mental wellbeing and chronic disease management. Mobile applications are the most prevalent modality, enabling women to track pregnancies, manage medication and receive tailored health advice. These tools have helped increase screening rates, encourage healthier behaviours and improve attention to personal health issues. In contexts where traditional healthcare services are less accessible, digital platforms offer a crucial alternative for reaching underserved populations.

Women using DHTs reported greater autonomy in managing their health. Applications supporting mental health, such as those aimed at treating postpartum depression or managing anxiety, provided psychological relief and improved self-image. In some cases, instant messaging platforms supported continuity of care between postpartum visits, offering women a sense of connection and control. For those undergoing pregnancy termination, digital tools offered safe, private and emotionally supportive experiences. Across various domains, these technologies allowed women to navigate health-related decisions more independently and confidently.

Fostering Empowerment and Reducing Gender Inequality

The review found that DHTs are not only clinical tools but also instruments of empowerment. By offering access to health information, financial literacy resources and skill-building content, digital platforms have strengthened women's agency. These tools have been linked to increased self-confidence, informed decision making and improved communication within households and communities.

DHTs also fostered social inclusion. They helped women connect with peers, healthcare providers and support networks, reducing feelings of isolation and stigma. In several studies, participants reported improved understanding of their rights and greater confidence in advocating for their needs in healthcare settings. Digital tools also enabled women to initiate conversations on topics like family planning, breastfeeding and reproductive rights, contributing to shifts in traditional gender norms.

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Some platforms provided financial benefits, such as access to affordable services and tools to manage healthcare expenses. While these effects were less frequently reported, they highlight the broader economic implications of digital health access. Taken together, these findings suggest that DHTs can be powerful vehicles for social transformation when thoughtfully implemented.

Barriers to Access and Use

Despite promising outcomes, access to DHTs remains unequal. Financial barriers are among the most significant, with high device costs, © For personal and private use only. Reproduction must be permitted by the copyright holder. Email to copyright@mindbyte.eu.

expensive data plans and subscription fees limiting uptake, particularly in LMICs. For many women, these costs are prohibitive and widen the digital divide. Affordability must therefore be a key consideration in digital health policy.

Technological barriers also persist. Poor internet infrastructure, limited digital ownership and low technological literacy affect engagement. Cultural and gender norms can further restrict access, particularly in settings where women's use of technology is monitored or discouraged. Privacy concerns, fear of violence and lack of safe spaces to use devices are additional deterrents. These barriers are compounded by demographic factors such as age, education and language, which can exclude women from digital platforms altogether.

Moreover, DHTs are sometimes perceived as impersonal or too complex to use. This perception reduces engagement and underscores the need for user-centred design that accounts for varying levels of literacy and comfort with technology. Without inclusive development and targeted interventions, these tools risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than resolving them.

DHTs offer a compelling opportunity to enhance women's health, autonomy and social inclusion. They have demonstrated effectiveness in maternal care, mental health, chronic disease management and reproductive health. Moreover, they empower women by supporting informed decision making, strengthening communication and providing access to essential resources.

However, the digital gender divide remains a significant challenge. Financial, cultural, technological and systemic barriers continue to limit women's access and engagement with digital tools. To unlock the full potential of DHTs, stakeholders must prioritise inclusive design, equitable access and policy frameworks that address these barriers.

Investment in infrastructure, education and community-based services is essential. Policies should promote affordability, enhance digital literacy and ensure privacy and safety for users. Engaging women in the development and implementation of DHTs is also crucial to ensure that technologies respond to their specific needs and realities.

By closing the digital gap, healthcare systems can better support women's health and wellbeing while advancing broader goals of gender equality and social equity. Only through such collective and inclusive efforts can DHTs fulfil their promise of transforming care for all women, everywhere.

Source: [The Lancet Digital Health](#)

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