C/Can
City Cancer Challenge

C/Can Digital Health Discovery Forum

Highlights from Regional Dialogues in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America

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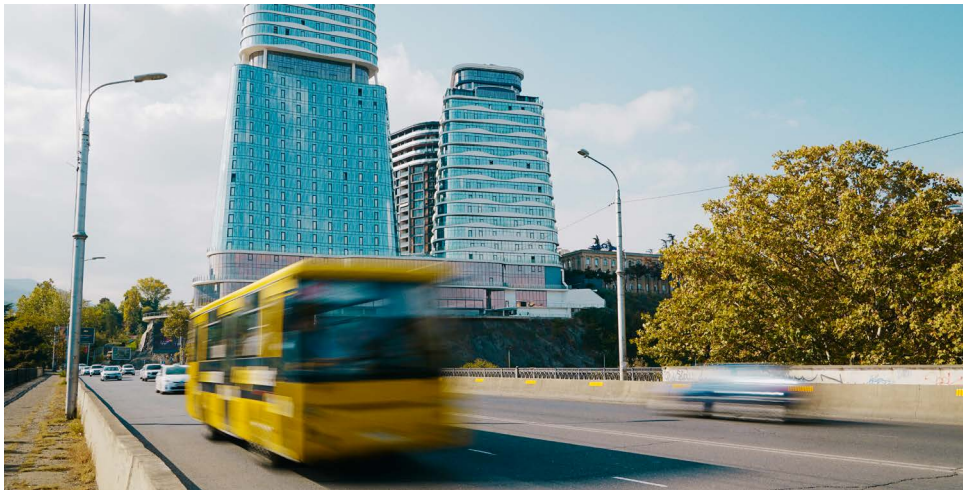


About City Cancer Challenge

City Cancer Challenge Foundation (C/Can) supports cities around the world as they work to improve access to equitable, quality cancer care.

C/Can leads a city-based partnership initiative that aims to improve access to quality cancer care in cities around the world by transforming the way stakeholders from the public and private sectors collectively design, plan, and implement cancer solutions.

The approach is built on the core principle that cities can drive impact at national level by crafting data-driven solutions with the support of a network of global, regional, and local partners that reflect an understanding of the unique local context.

C/Can was launched by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) at the 2017 World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos. It was established as a standalone Swiss foundation in January 2019.

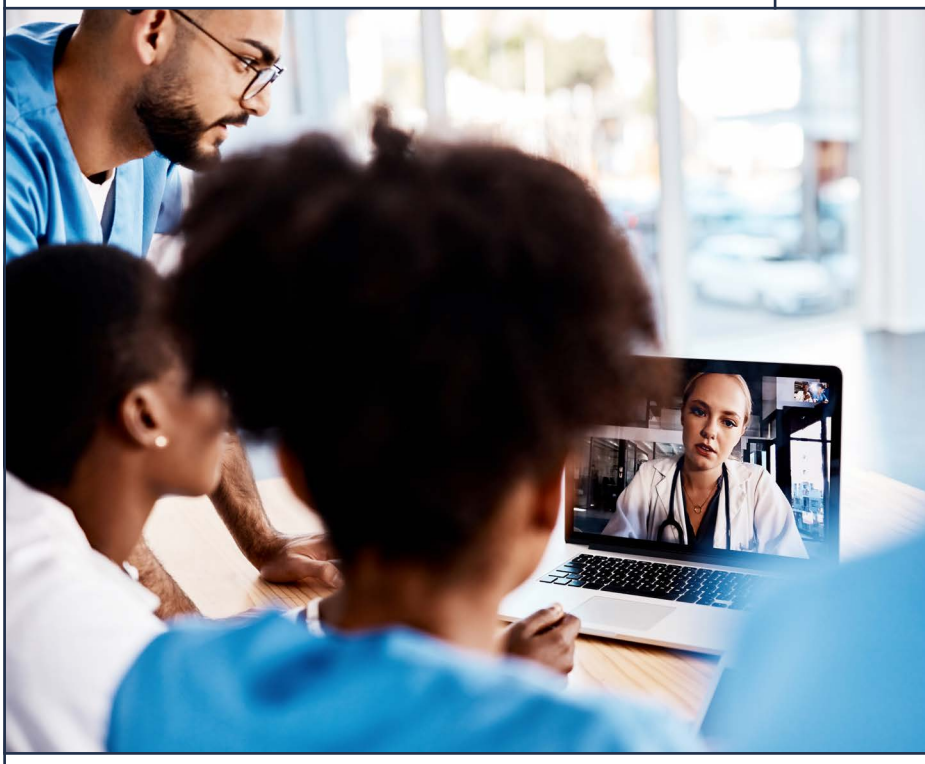
01

Leveraging digital health solutions for sustainable cancer care in cities

In June 2020, with support from a core group of partners, and as part of C/Can's commitment to respond to emerging city needs and support efforts to "build back better" following the Covid-19 pandemic[1], C/Can launched the Digital Health Discovery Forum.

The first phase of work from June to September 2020 focused on a core set of objectives:

1. To map digital health solutions that are being deployed to deliver effective and efficient cancer care, and identify opportunities to pilot/scale up solutions in response to emerging needs in cities;
2. To assess the state of local digital health innovation ecosystems; identify key barriers to uptake of digital health innovations, and what other enabling conditions including policy/regulatory, are required to accelerate their positive impact on cancer care;
3. To foster city-to-city learning and exchange of knowledge and good practices; and
4. To identify which other stakeholders can accelerate innovative approaches to cancer care.



1 World Health Organization (2020) *COVID-19 significantly impacts health services for noncommunicable diseases*. Available at: https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/01-06-2020-covid-19-significantly-impacts-health-services-for-noncommunicable-diseases (accessed 7 July 2020)

02

Regional expert dialogues

"Through the Digital Health Discovery Forum, C/Can aims to identify innovative ways of improving cancer care, and understand how successful solutions can be scaled across the regions where we work. Bringing together thought leaders and innovators, these dialogues are creating new opportunities for collaboration and partnership around digital health that can make a difference in improving access to quality cancer care."

— Dr Susan Henshall, CEO, City Cancer Challenge

From August to September 2020, a series of virtual dialogues brought together experts from across sectors to discuss emerging innovations that respond to cancer care gaps in each region. This report provides a high-level summary of the key discussions and insights gathered during the dialogues, highlighting common trends and region-specific themes.

Asia

20 participants from:
Australia, India, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, USA, Vietnam

Africa

13 participants from:
Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, USA

Latin America

16 participants from:
Brazil, Chile, Colombia, México, Paraguay, Peru, USA

Eastern Europe

15 participants from:
Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Germany, Switzerland, UK, USA

03

Common threads:

the importance of a multisectoral, evidence-based and localised approach

Multisectoral collaboration is key to uptake and scale-up of digital health solutions

Engaging stakeholders across sectors, including government officials, academics, civil society representatives, industry executives, healthcare professionals and patient representatives was considered an important driver for successful implementation of digital health solutions for cancer care. The following were also highlighted as particularly relevant: international organisations such as WHO, ITU and the EU; other non-oncology stakeholders including technology, internet and telecommunications providers; and media and community-based organisations that can help increase patient awareness.

Critical areas for multisectoral collaboration identified included: building digital health literacy among healthcare professionals and patients; securing government buy-in and support for the systematic development and scale up of digital health solutions; and exploring how to support governments in developing and harmonising enabling regulatory frameworks for digital health solutions, particularly those governing the use, transmission and security of patient data.

Understanding and addressing challenges and limitations of digital health solutions

Despite the existence of sophisticated technological approaches, significant challenges to the uptake of digital solutions remain. These include regulatory and policy-related barriers as well as operational considerations, for example ensuring interoperability and connectivity of emerging solutions and existing systems to overcome fragmentation, particularly in cancer services. Bandwidth and technological infrastructure can be a major challenge in many contexts, in particular for patients in rural or marginalised communities with limited access to the internet or smart devices. Cultural barriers to accepting digital forms of healthcare, and vast differences in levels of technological literacy, also affect the level and quality of connectivity and local access.

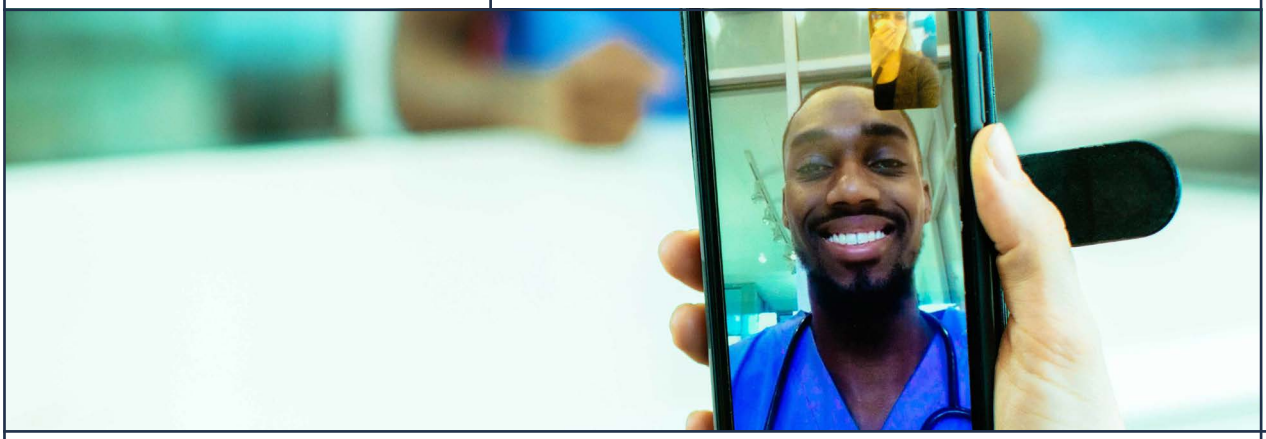
Sometimes “simpler can work better” and it is therefore essential to consider how to leverage what already exists. Innovative and digital solutions should not widen gaps in access to healthcare, but should aim to foster equitable support and access for all.

Ensuring effective data protection and governance

The challenge of maintaining data privacy and protection as innovative digital solutions are piloted and scaled was emphasised throughout the dialogues. Sound national policies, local resources and supranational alignment are thus needed to ensure the effectiveness of regulatory frameworks governing data collection, storage, security and sharing. These frameworks should support the potential patient and health system benefits of using and learning from the data collected, while ensuring appropriate data security.

Need for evidence and exchange of lessons learned to leverage effective practices

Given the broad range of existing initiatives highlighted in each region, there is a need for assessing and sharing lessons learned on successes and failures of digital solutions. Despite the wealth of digital efforts, local innovative solutions are often being developed and implemented in silos. As a result, the exchange of knowledge and learning cannot be fully leveraged to expand good practices in other contexts. Comprehensive mappings and a meta-analysis of efforts are needed to help generate an evidence-base for effective solutions that can be replicated, including across regions and countries with similar socio-cultural and economic settings.



04

Regional highlights

Highlights from the Asia Dialogue (5 August 2020)

Adapting to local contexts: there is no 'one-size fits all' solution

Practical examples of digital health solutions in the region ranged from telemedicine, telepathology and virtual tumour boards in Myanmar and India, to the provision of remote psycho-social support for cancer patients in Australia, online patient navigation systems in Malaysia, and to AI, machine learning and big data solutions being scaled in Japan.

Since cancer care needs and the level of readiness for digital approaches are diverse across the region, responses should be based on sound assessments of the particular conditions in each setting. Adapting digital health solutions to fit local needs and contexts will be critical, and can be informed by the sharing of learnings and best practices.

Supporting training and education opportunities

The region offers a number of ongoing digital health solutions with potential for scaling that serve a dual purpose of supporting service delivery and providing educational opportunities for cancer care professionals at the same time.

More generally, the recent and effective shift towards online training for healthcare students and professionals could serve as a model for other contexts, provided this is specifically adapted to local realities, and cultural factors are taken into account.

Highlights from the Africa Dialogue (3 September 2020)

Responding to cancer care gaps with innovative solutions

Opportunities to adapt and scale digital health solutions in response to key cancer care gaps in the region included: a shortage of trained healthcare professionals to manage the growing cancer burden; fragmentation of healthcare services and lack of interconnectivity between cancer care providers; and limited patient access to information on cancer symptoms and how to access care, resulting in late-stage presentation at medical facilities.

Broad spectrum of solutions emerging in the region

A breadth of digital health solutions is emerging across Africa to address these gaps. Examples included: platforms to support patient navigation in Nigeria or Tanzania; an innovative software platform to ensure interoperability of health information systems in Rwanda; online learning opportunities and AI to support task-shifting in different settings; remote planning for core cancer services including radiotherapy and palliative care in Malawi and Nigeria; telemedicine and mobile health awareness campaigns such as in Kenya; and the use of virtual tumor boards, for example in Ghana.

Highlights from the Latin America Dialogue (4 September 2020)

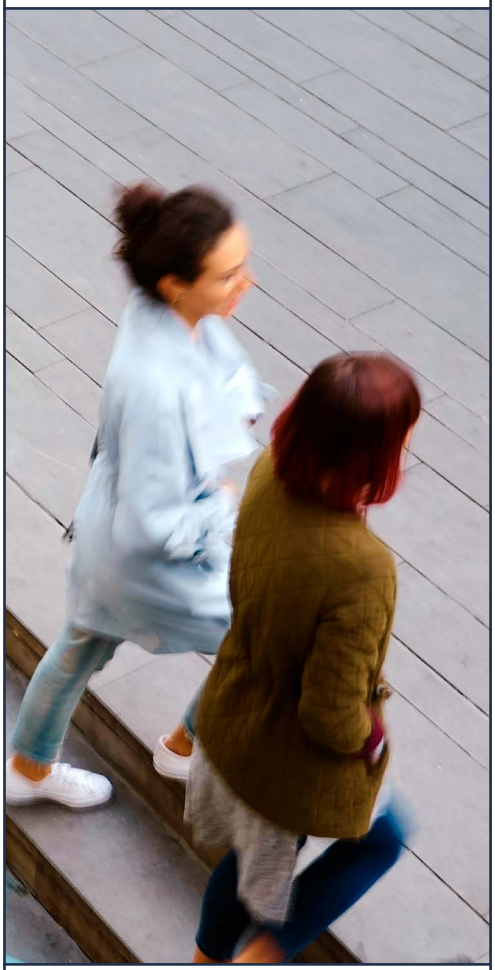
Transformations in telehealth across the region

In many Latin American countries, digital health initiatives have emerged in the following areas: communication with patients and among healthcare providers; health education and training using virtual platforms and seminars; and standardised reporting such as a multi-stakeholder collaboration on pathology reporting in Paraguay. A number of countries have also developed norms or normative frameworks on telehealth to various degrees, ranging from specific guidelines in Argentina, Chile or Colombia, a Telehealth Department in the National Health System in Mexico, to a plan for telemedicine on cancer in Chile.

Ensuring a patient-centred approach

A crucial point raised was the need to maintain focus on cancer patients, since digital health solutions can empower patients with increased awareness, autonomy and decision-making capacity, including through better access to their own data and general health information. In this context, patient safety and data security were also highlighted as a fundamental aspect.

Highlights from the Eastern Europe Dialogue (8 September 2020)



Building transparency, trust and confidence

The dialogue emphasised the centrality of building trust and transparency through public engagement, education, consent mechanisms, early and consistent patient engagement and end-user involvement, as well as robust data privacy and security systems. The creation of trust and confidence in digital health solutions by ensuring that all stakeholders, and in particular end-users including patients and healthcare professionals, understand their objectives and the related use of data, is essential for their success.

Effective digital solutions can be simple

Interesting initiatives across the region included: telemedicine such as e-prescriptions and e-referrals in Estonia, patient navigation platforms, the use of aggregated population data for cancer research, as well as e-learning and online drug databases to empower healthcare and service providers in Estonia and Romania.

Not all digital solutions need to be complex or highly sophisticated to have a wide-reaching impact and effectively serve patients. Technology solutions can be deployed in many different ways, for example as information webinars with a broad reach, or the provision of online patient guidance materials which are simple, accessible and easy to implement.

05

Next steps

As a next step, C/Can and an expanded group of partners are reviewing the outcomes of this process to agree on, and prioritise, the most impactful solutions for cities seeking to improve cancer care for patients based on city needs identified. This will require further collaborative efforts to map existing gaps and solutions, determine how best to accelerate implementation at scale across multiple cities, identify which individuals and organisations need to be involved and agree on what resources are needed.

Please read the *Discovery Forum Call to Action* or contact Isabel Mestres, Director of Global Public Affairs at mestres@citycancerchallenge.org for more information.

C/Can extends its sincere appreciation to all the chairs, panelists and participants for their interesting and valuable insights, as well as C/Can partners for their contribution to this project: Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS), Icon Group, Merck & Co. (MSD), Roche, and Varian Medical Systems.

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