

# SA healthcare leaders optimistic about country's healthcare

Despite South Africa experiencing more Covid-19 cases than any other country on the continent - grappling changing variants, hard lockdown measures, capacity and over-crowding issues - most healthcare leaders have expressed optimism about the future, as healthcare moves towards value-based care, digital transformation and future-proofing care with sustainable solutions.



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With a focus on patient-centred healthcare enabled by smart technology, their vision is shaped by a fresh emphasis on partnerships, sustainability and new models of care delivery, both inside and outside the hospital.

Healthcare leaders are also confident in the ability of the country's healthcare system.

## Future Health Index 2021

This is according to Royal Philips, global health technology company and its Future Health Index (FHI) 2021 South Africa report: *A Resilient Future: Healthcare leaders look beyond the crisis.*

Now in its sixth year, the Future Health Index 2021 report is based on proprietary research across 14 countries, including South Africa, representing the largest global survey of its kind analysing the current and future priorities of healthcare

leaders worldwide.

Feedback from healthcare leaders – including executive officers, financial officers, technology and information officers, operating officers and more – explores the challenges they have faced since the onset of the pandemic, and where their current and future priorities lie, revealing a new vision for the future of healthcare.

The optimism of the healthcare leaders is in contrast with the findings from the *Future Health Index 2020* report where younger South African healthcare leaders were less likely than those across many of the other countries surveyed to have a positive perception of the healthcare system in their country.

## Three key trends

In this year's report, healthcare leaders in South Africa identify three key trends that are shaping the future of healthcare namely, future moves towards value-based care, digital transformation and future-proofing care with sustainable solutions.

With that said, roughly half of the respondents cited the current healthcare crisis as one of the top external forces impeding their ability to prepare for the future, in addition to technology infrastructure limitations (33%).

Although some South African healthcare leaders have been forced to deprioritise their shift toward value-based care as a result of Covid-19, it is still a key focus within the country's healthcare sector.

Roughly two-thirds of South African healthcare leaders also believe that the current healthcare policies and plans in their country are contributing to building a resilient healthcare system.

"While re-prioritizing was needed for a while, South African healthcare leaders recognise the importance of value-based care and are either currently pursuing or plan to pursue a shift toward value-based care in the future.

"This will be a positive change for South Africa as less than 20% of the population has access to private healthcare," says Romulen Pillay, managing director, Philips South Africa.

One such leap in future-planning is a three-step approach to digital transformation including telehealth and remote patient monitoring solutions, increased investment in artificial intelligence (AI) and partnerships and collaborations with other healthcare facilities.

## Covid-19 drives telehealth and remote monitoring

Roughly half of South Africa's healthcare leaders are currently investing most heavily in telehealth (48%), ahead of other health technologies including digital health records (34%) or AI (15%).

Additionally, about a quarter of South African healthcare leaders are currently investing most heavily in remote patient monitoring solutions, such as cardiac implant surveillance or vital-sign sensors at home, which have become increasingly essential because of Covid-19.

They are investing in these technologies today at higher rates than healthcare leaders across many of the other countries surveyed (26% vs. 18% 14-country average).

## Investment into technology

In three years' time, roughly a third of South African healthcare leaders (38%) believe their hospital or healthcare facility will most need to invest in implementing predictive healthcare technologies, such as AI and machine learning, to be prepared for the future.

This is a significant growth from just 5% who say their workplace most needs to invest in these technologies today.

## **A catalyst for continuous innovation**

Roughly one-third of South African healthcare leaders believe their hospital or healthcare facility needs to prioritise strategic partnerships and collaborations to successfully implement digital health technologies.

About a quarter also feel that their workplace most needs to invest in strategic partnerships three years from now to be prepared for the future (27%).

By cooperating with partners across the wider healthcare ecosystem, healthcare leaders can continue to foster innovation within their hospitals and healthcare facilities.

Even with a clear view to the future, South African healthcare leaders also acknowledge that staff's lack of experience with new technologies is a barrier impeding their ability to prepare for the future.

The top barriers for the adoption of digital health technologies include lack of training (29%), legacy systems (29%), and technology infrastructure limitations (27%).

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