

## **"Inequalities and the Future of Health: Can Digital Health be a Social Good?"**

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The urgent need to integrate digital solutions within national health systems to improve accessibility and quality of care, particularly within marginalized communities, cannot be overstated. How can digital technologies serve as agents of change to equitable healthcare, promoting societal well-being?

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the pivotal role of digital technologies in bolstering public health and shaping policy frameworks. For instance, we observed rapid dissemination of technologies such as telemedicine in providing healthcare access, while health apps have facilitated self-monitoring and testing with early detection of health issues. However, the advent of new technologies increases the risk of accentuating existing disparities as a factor of additional exclusion. Therefore, technological advancements, development, and implementation must be coupled with democratic and inclusive strategies. This approach fosters social engagement and supports locally-driven initiatives, making everyone feel involved and valued in addressing advancement that busted changes for a more resilient (learning) health system.

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) refers to all individuals and communities accessing healthcare needs without suffering financial threats. Evolving into healthy communities implicates a concerted effort to promote equity, interconnecting complementary visions on social and digital determinants of health. Immediate and decisive actions are required to confront the barriers blocking access to healthcare and to mitigate inequalities among marginalized and socially vulnerable groups. Alarming statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO) reveal that in 2021, approximately 4.5 billion people remained underserved by essential health services. The incidence of unpreviued health spending has surged over the years, affecting over a billion people and driving millions into poverty—both extreme and relative. This is a call to action, a reminder of the urgency of the situation and the importance of our role in addressing it.

Effectively addressing health inequalities demands meticulous monitoring to identify more disadvantaged populations and furnish policymakers with robust evidence to guide public health initiatives toward complete access to health services. Improving data analysis and subsequent actions is imperative to identify, understand, and mitigate the obstacles faced by excluded groups, including residents of informal settlements, indigenous communities, and displaced populations affected by economic, environmental, and socio-political upheavals, to access health.

Our team works with community-based interventions, leading recently to the establishment of the concept of Collaborative Laboratories of Sustainable and Healthy Urban Territories (CoLabs of Public Health Innovation). One notable example is the CoLab Maré, an inter-institutional leaving lab, prototyping intervention through digital health transformation integrated with social technologies and participatory methodologies. These health research initiatives are closely intertwined with social promotion and protection activities through collaborative efforts with academia, public agents, and local social organizations. These organizations, being deeply rooted in their communities, play a crucial role in ensuring that the solutions are tailored to their specific needs and contexts.