

How can healthcare systems boost innovation and facilitate the adoption of digital interventions?

An example of a UK based regional model created to drive the adoption of digital innovation is one that Yinka Makinde, Programme Director at DigitalHealth.London outlines

NHS England is the executive non-departmental public body that oversees the budget, planning, delivery and day-to-day operation of the commissioning side of the National Health Service (NHS) in England for the Department of Health and Social Care.

Following previous failed attempts to modernise the NHS through mandated large-scale national IT programmes, the NHS in recent years has committed through the [Five Year Forward View Plan](#), a number of targeted work programmes designed to leverage the potential of technology and innovation, enabling patients to take a more active role in their own health and care while also enabling NHS staff and their care colleagues to do their jobs. This approach includes the nomination and rewarding of [Global Digital Exemplar](#) healthcare organisations operating at an advanced level of digital maturity. The [NHS Digital Academy](#) builds transformation capability amongst the CIO and CCIO professionals in the health system, whilst the [NHS Digital Tools library](#) lists 70 digital health 'apps' that have gone through an evaluation process by NHS England.

Funding pots are being created and ringfenced by NHS England to incentivise the implementation and adoption of digital tools across provider

organisations such as the [GP Online Consultation Fund](#) and the more recently announced [£487 million technology fund](#) for STPs (Sustainability Transformation Partnerships).

A regional example of where digital innovation is being assisted is in London. Funding from NHS England, the [UK Office for Life Sciences](#), the London based [Academic Health Science Networks](#), [MedCity](#) and the European Regional Development Fund has been aggregated to create and run a digital health hub – [DigitalHealth.London](#) – bringing together connected health solutions that radically improve the delivery of healthcare, to patients living in London.

For the supplier

[DigitalHealth.London](#) (DH.L) acts as the 'front door' to assist high potential digital health companies, often at minimal cost, to navigate the complex London health care system and its customer base, increasing their ability to forge the right partnerships that lead to new contracts and pilot opportunities with healthcare provider and commissioner organisations. The companies selected for close support have the potential to solve the real problems faced by the [health] system. The 'hub' provides a market place for exchange and exploration between the buyers and sellers, often

brokered through DH.L, which is seen as a trusted and impartial broker. Companies engaging with DH.L can access services and resources to boost their knowledge about how the health system works and are given a much sought after platform in front of potential customers and investors. To date, DH.L has closely supported an estimated 600 digital health companies with face to face contact over the last two or more years.

For the buyer

DH.L also works closely with the 'buyer' – the health care providers and commissioners that are scouting for potential solutions and need support in driving up the adoption of the innovations being deployed within their organisations and across their communities. NHS decision makers and change makers are increasingly working with DH.L to facilitate the right connections and sharing of knowledge. To date, DH.L has engaged directly with circa 460 healthcare professionals/ clinicians through its initiatives over the last two or more years. Notably, the agency focuses much of its time and resources on helping to drive forward adoption where multiple NHS organisations are working on a similar project.

One recent example is Digital Outpatients. With more than 100 million

outpatient appointments every year, the NHS has a major opportunity to introduce more efficient and patient-focused digital outpatient services. Across the country, there are many examples of GPs, hospital trusts and community services innovating with the latest digital technology to reduce pressure on outpatient services, improve patient experience and save resources.

In London, more than 20 London trusts opted to form two new digital outpatient collaboratives focusing on virtual consultations and streamlining outpatient processes. Facilitating the collaboratives, DigitalHealth.London has linked the collaboratives to the expertise and resources they need to implement solutions in their health-care organisations; whether it's managing change, planning and evaluating projects or sharing results and learning. Each 'forum' providing opportunities for networking and shared learning between the NHS providers. This model also starts to offer the NHS stakeholders:

- The skills to be more effective at enrolling (vital for achieving adoption): through better influencing, storytelling, developing stronger business cases, improved benefits articulation.
- The skills and awareness to develop a basic level of commercial literacy in the context of working more effectively with suppliers.

Building an environment supporting validated solutions

The key to all of this is, of course, a landscape that is built to provide the 'plumbing' so to speak, that creates the foundations for validated innovation, which is repeatable and scalable across a region. Seeded in London as a result

of a number of exploratory pieces of work in the preceding two to three years, to which DigitalHealth.London has contributed, a working group led by NHS England and including MedCity, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), Public Health England and DigitalHealth.London is developing guidance and standards to address and streamline support on this issue. This has been convened against a backdrop of increasing pressure for therapeutic digital health tools being considered for commission and adoption to demonstrate safety, effectiveness and offer economic value.

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The project, titled 'Evidence for Effectiveness' (EfE), aims to make it easier for innovators and commissioners to understand what 'good' evidence for digital tools looks like, whilst meeting the needs of the NHS and patients.

Developing technologies is a collaborative process and this project is bringing key parties together, including innovators, commissioners and other stakeholders to understand their needs and experiences. The goal is to develop a digital health tool which will advise on appropriate evidence generation and a set of standards for generating evidence of effectiveness and economic impact.

The framework will include clear requirements for data standards, information governance and technical

safety standards, as well as guidelines on how the effectiveness of digital therapeutic products are evidenced and evaluated.

Creating these standards and a regulatory framework will:

- Enable better NHS commissioning, with commissioners being better equipped to know what to ask developers and what to expect back;
- Provide guidelines for digital health innovators and clinical innovators on how to work with the NHS and the standards expected of them and;
- Facilitate a functioning market, leading to a minimum standard of higher quality health products and tools with a clear pathway for procurements.

Digitalhealth.london as an example of a model for driving the adoption of digital innovation, now in its third year, is starting to see the impact of its multi-pronged interventions at the supplier, buyer, policymaker and regulatory levels.



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