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For U.S. health care providers

# Digital Strategy Planning Guide

Four steps for a successful digital health launch

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# Introduction

## What is digital health?

Digital health includes categories such as mobile health (mHealth), wearable devices, telehealth and telemedicine, and personalized medicine. The rise of digital health tools has created opportunities to improve our ability to accurately diagnose and treat disease and to enhance the delivery of health care for individuals.

Digital health helps incorporate all facets of health into health care—not just medicine and treatment, but lifestyle and social factors. It addresses where and how care can be delivered, on a continuum from the patient’s home to the acute care facility.



## How can I use this guide to advance digital health strategy?

It can be difficult to navigate digital health, since it touches every aspect of care. We put together this digital strategy planning guide to help you assess the maturity of your digital health strategy, determine your strengths and weaknesses, decide on next steps, and evaluate your ongoing performance.

# 1. Measure market readiness

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Digital strategy needs to fit within your organization's overall mission. Consider what the biggest demands are for your patient populations and specific service lines, how (or if) digital health will help you meet those demands, and whether there will be sufficient volume and revenue to support the program.

- Evaluate regulatory obstacles and reimbursement opportunity.
- Calculate if your market supports the introduction of digital health by evaluating clinical and consumer demand as well as current offerings from competitors.

# Measure market readiness (cont.)

## Regulatory obstacles and reimbursement opportunity

Use these questions to assess the feasibility of digital initiatives in your market. Ideal markets minimally restrict digital practices and are supported with public and private payer reimbursement and/or payment flexibility under state innovation or value-based arrangements.

	Does your market...	Yes	No	Notes
Regulatory	Allow providers to treat patients for the first time virtually?			
	Mandate that providers see a patient in-person before giving them an online prescription?			
	Have a law in place governing informed consent procedures for telehealth?			
	Participate in the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact?			
	Have a council to guide the development of digital health protocols?			
	Support a statewide telehealth network or collaborative?			
	Participate in a health information exchange (HIE) or other data-sharing forums?			
	Have a broadband collaborative (e.g., the FCC's Rural Health Care Program)?			
Reimbursement	Reimburse live, audiovisual virtual visits?			
	Reimburse asynchronous store-and-forward?			
	Reimburse patient monitoring services?			
	Have a commercial parity law in place mandating equal coverage for virtual versus in-person services?			
	Offer payment for telehealth services delivered in the home or school setting?			
	Offer grant funding to further telehealth investment?			
	Sponsor care transformation models (e.g., patient-centered medical homes, school-based interventions)?			
	Participate in value-based payment models?			

## Measure market readiness (cont.)

### Feasibility—trends, preferences, and competition

In the most favorable markets, current collaborations already connect patients and providers. A large share of consumers are already familiar with technology and in need of more reliable, easier care access. The presence of competitor programs indicate the market's ability to sustain digital health services.

	Does your market...	Yes	No	Notes
Competitors	Participate in telehealth hub-and-spoke networks?			
	Belong to local or regional care collaboratives like stroke, ICU, or cardiac care transfer networks?			
	Use preferred post-acute care provider arrangements?			
	Compete with organizations that have launched telehealth in your market?			
Consumers	Care for patients with reliable access to smartphones and other mobile devices?			
	Care for patients with reliable access to home internet and broadband connections?			
	Serve patients who struggle with finding reliable transportation?			
	Have a payer mix that skews more toward Medicare and/or Medicaid?			
Providers	Manage physician shortages across several service lines?			
	Work with clinicians who are supportive of new technology?			

### CONVERSATION GUIDE

How to talk to physicians about telehealth

[Read now](#)

## 2. Audit your resource needs

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Implementing a new digital offering will likely require additional funding, capital, equipment, staffing, and IT bandwidth. You might already possess some of these resources or have staff champions to lead the way, but it is important to ensure this support can last over the long term.

- Solicit service line leaders' input to create a list of investments prioritized by ROI and contribution to goals.
- Evaluate your IT infrastructure to determine if it can support the integration of new digital health modalities and if your EHR system is interoperable with new modalities.
- Construct a digital health team that will be dedicated to strategy, implementation, and ongoing performance monitoring.
- Establish guidelines for clinical staff to use the digital modalities in their daily practice and share feedback.
- Calculate whether your organization is financially able to support the up-front costs of implementing your strategy.

# Audit your resource needs (cont.)

## Digital health resources

Use this table to assess your infrastructure, equipment, and staffing to support new offerings.

	Specific technology needs	Do we need it?	Do we have it?	How will we acquire it?	Total cost	Source of funding
Basic IT infrastructure	Broadband wired network					
	Wired network dependencies					
	Robust network management system and process					
	Robust wireless network, enterprise-wide					
	Cellular network access, enterprise-wide					
	Integrated enterprise EHR					
Virtual care infrastructure	Variety of devices for hub-and-spoke locations: desktops, tablets, laptops, etc.					
	Webcams/videoconference equipment					
	Digital-enabled medical equipment: stethoscopes, otoscopes, scales, etc.					
	Remote bedside monitoring equipment					
Software	Applications for use cases under consideration, including static and mobile platforms					
	Mobile device middleware					
IT department	Technical expertise for technologies employed					
	Help desk/hotline					
	Specialists in medical device management					



# Audit your resource needs (cont.)

## Staffing resources

Use this table to assess your clinical and administrative personnel.

	Responsibilities	FTEs required	FTEs available	FTEs to hire	Total cost	Source of funding
Administrative staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage administrative tasks such as licensing, grants</li> <li>Serve as liaisons between hub hospitals and spoke hospitals</li> </ul>					
Nurse coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train staff at spoke sites on technology</li> <li>Assist with intake and triage</li> <li>Monitor incoming patient data and alert physicians as necessary</li> </ul>					
IT staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain data repositories and infrastructure</li> <li>Troubleshoot day-to-day technology problems</li> <li>Pull reports on outcomes data</li> <li>Innovate using technology</li> </ul>					
Administrative director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify expansion opportunities and potential partners</li> <li>Lead working group from administrative standpoint</li> <li>Oversee virtual care initiatives</li> </ul>					
Medical director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assist with recruiting partners</li> <li>Develop virtual care workflows, products</li> <li>Lead working group from clinical standpoint</li> <li>Identify physician champions</li> </ul>					
Physician champion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead service line adoption efforts</li> <li>Communicate important information to key stakeholders</li> </ul>					
IT leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate IT staff dedicated to virtual care</li> <li>Support virtual care innovation efforts</li> </ul>					
Nurse leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate nursing staff dedicated to virtual care</li> <li>Communicate important information to key stakeholders</li> </ul>					

### 3. Assess potential partnerships

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If your organization lacks internal expertise or capability for a digital health initiative, it may make sense to outsource these solutions to an external vendor. Seek out external firms that will serve as a true partner to align efforts.

- ❑ Evaluate potential vendors/partners based on their past performance and cultural fit with your organization and determine whether vendors/partners can meet your technological and support needs.
- ❑ Develop a partnership contract or plan that dictates the responsibilities of each partner and helps assign shared risk.
- ❑ Assign leaders to manage partnerships and head up communication with external actors.

# Assess potential partnerships (cont.)

## What will the partnership look like?

Use these questions to define your partnership with a potential vendor, including what your mutual expectations are, how the relationship will be managed, and whether the vendor will fit with your organization's culture.

	Questions to consider	Answer
Defining expectations	How will our input (clinical, operational, business, marketing) be integrated into the initial design of the offering?	
	Will our organization be a consultant or involved in the daily development of the offering?	
	How can we co-brand this partnership?	
	What is the timeline for testing and launching the program?	
	Who will own the rights to the offering?	
	Who is the main point of contact, and what are our expectations for communication?	
	What documentation will we need from the vendor?	
	What plans does the vendor have in place to prevent data breaches or equipment breakdowns?	
	What legal protections does the vendor require, and are we able to comply with those protections?	
	What are the vendor's patient-informed consent procedures, and are they up to our standards?	
How will services that run through the vendor's tool be billed? Who will pay for services, a payer or patient?		
Measuring success	What will the metrics be for evaluating the performance of the program?	
	How often and when will we evaluate progress? Will we hold them via email, phone, or in-person meetings?	
	What are the internal process metrics for this project? What has the vendor used to evaluate progress in the past? What do we usually use?	
	As the organization grows, how will the vendor scale the offering appropriately and attend to new needs as they arise?	

# Assess potential partnerships (cont.)

## Prioritizing vendor capabilities

Make sure the vendor has the necessary technical capabilities before developing a targeted RFP.

	Capability	Importance (High, Medium, or Low)	Vendor 1	Vendor 2
Customization	Does the vendor allow for customization?			
	Does the vendor provide any peripheral measurement devices we might need?			
	Can multiple devices be integrated with the offering?			
	Are the devices offered by the vendor wireless/Bluetooth enabled?			
	Does the vendor have experience implementing features like e-messaging, video visits, online diagnosis, behavior tracking, group chat, device integration, etc.?			
Automation	Does the technology offered by the vendor automatically map patient encounters to their EHR?			
	Is the automatic update of records reliable?			
	Does the vendor offer cloud-based updates for ease of installation?			
Capital management	Will the vendor host the software on their servers?			
	Will the vendor monitor the servers?			
	Will we need to provide additional staff to monitor or maintain the servers?			


# Assess potential partnerships (cont.)

## Will the vendor provide a high-quality experience?

In addition to offering the technical equipment and expertise necessary to support your digital health care efforts, vendors/partners should also be able to provide a high-quality implementation experience to ensure the program is launched successfully.

	Capability	Importance (High, Medium, or Low)	Vendor 1	Vendor 2
Testing	Will the vendor lead testing of the offering?			
	Does the vendor have established beta testing procedures, metrics, and timelines?			
	Does the vendor employ a user experience (UX/UI) specialist?			
Support	Does the vendor offer training and ongoing IT support for our staff?			
	Does the vendor offer customer service for patients?			
	Does the vendor offer marketing support or materials?			
Liability	Has the vendor successfully responded to equipment breakdowns/software malfunctions/data breaches in the past, or do they have an action plan in place to respond to potential issues?			
	Does the vendor's service include liability and credentialing requirements?			
	Can the vendor ensure HIPAA compliance and a secure platform?			
	Does the vendor warranty their work?			
Financial expectations	Can we afford any up-front costs for office space, training, document management services, or annual maintenance fees required by the vendor?			
	Can the vendor demonstrate strong ROI/improved patient outcomes from past projects?			

 RESEARCH  
**Managing Technology Vendor Relationships**  
[Read now](#)

 WEBINAR  
**The How-to Guide to Digital Health Partnerships**  
[Watch now](#)

## 4. Evaluate your program

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Continue to monitor the processes and outcomes of your digital health initiatives. If they are underperforming, it might be time to reevaluate and make changes.

- ❑ Look at your organization's larger strategic goals and consider where digital capabilities might help achieve those goals.
- ❑ Select metrics based on the goals you hope to achieve, such as increased access or improved experience.
- ❑ Determine a timeline for periodic outcomes measurement and plan for program reevaluation.

# Evaluate your program (cont.)

## Performance metric picklist

After you have released your newest digital health offering, conduct ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the program to ensure that it is advancing your goals and producing the necessary outcomes to justify its expenses. These are our recommendations for measuring the effectiveness of your digital services.

	Category	Suggested Metrics
Service awareness	Website traffic	First-time visits, time spent on site, pages consumed per visit
	Mobile download	Number of new downloads per day/week/month, per patient population
	Social engagement	Followers, shares, geographic reach
	Content consumption	Blog visits and subscriptions, video views, content downloads
	Unaided awareness survey	Percentage of respondents who mention organization without prompting; top-of-mind awareness
	Service requests	Find-a-physician traffic, appointment requests, customer service requests
	Communication conversion	E-newsletter/blog/subscription conversions to appointments
Care access	Sustainable productivity	Number of patients per provider FTE
	Patient capacity	Patients per time period
	Cycle time	Time (in minutes) that a patient spends at an office visit versus e-visit/interaction, from arrival to departure
	Average wait time	Time (in minutes) spent in waiting room from completed registration to physician visit
	Patient processing time	Time (in minutes) to process patient registration, verify insurance, collect billing
	No-show/cancellation rate	Percentage of no-shows/cancellations per time period across network
	Extended availability	Number of appointments scheduled beyond normal business hours
	Same-day availability	Number of same-day appointments scheduled





## Evaluate your program (cont.)

	Category	Suggested metrics
Patient activation	PAM score	Patient responses to Patient Activation Measure (PAM) survey
	Messaging volume	Number of secure messages originated by patients
	EHR/imaging/lab result views	Percentage of patients who have viewed EHR/images/lab reports through a digital tool
	Frequency of communication	Number of interactions via digital tools from patients compared with number of suggested interactions by condition
	Shared decision-making participation	Number of patients who feel they have two-way dialogue with clinicians on discharge survey
	Self-efficacy	Number of patients who respond positively on discharge survey
Patient experience	User drop-off	Number of current active users divided by number of downloads
	Online payments	Number of claims paid through online portal divided by number of total claims paid
	Question volume	Number of questions regarding directions or other information available on digital platform over time
	Treatment adherence	Percentage of patients who adhere to treatment plan before and after introduction of digital tool
	HCAHPS score	Results from standardized survey on patient perceptions





## Related Resources

-  WEBINAR  
Understanding digital health's new normal  
[Watch now](#)
-  INFOGRAPHIC  
Storytelling for digital transformation  
[Read now](#)
-  INFOGRAPHIC  
Mobile initiatives maturity framework  
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-  INFOGRAPHIC  
Visualize your entire digital front door  
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