

# Picking up the pace of healthcare innovation

The Covid-19 pandemic has galvanised the development of more than 120 health technology innovations that have been piloted or adopted in Africa of which nearly 60 of the technologies were ICT-driven, 25% were based on 3D printing and 10.9% were robotic.



Source: [@everythingispossible](#) [123rf](#)

South Africa was the country with the most innovations (13%). This is according to an analysis by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Traditionally innovation in healthcare has unfolded slowly and carefully, with governments, private healthcare funders, regulators and other stakeholders taking a cautious approach to introducing new technologies to the market.

## Scalable solutions

However, the COVID-19 health crisis has forced the sector to pick up the pace of research, development, and technology innovation to save lives and safeguard economies.

Dr Benji Ozynski, director of business development at Wits Healthcare Innovation (WHI), a division of Wits Health Consortium, says that the pandemic has shown that it is possible to move quickly and safely in bringing new solutions to healthcare challenges to market.

WHI catalyses the creation of scalable solutions to South Africa's most urgent healthcare problems through innovation drives, events and research.

"Rapid mobilisation of innovations during Covid-19 shows that we can create solutions for real-world problems at a rapid clip when necessary. Others can be seen in how the pandemic has helped to speed up adoption of robotics and telehealth in many parts of the world," he says.

He adds that a more down-to-earth example is how quickly government and private medical schemes managed to build the systems and processes to support South Africa's vaccine rollout.

## **WHI initiatives**

Among the initiatives in which WHI is involved, is the Endeavor South Africa and UK-South Africa Tech Hub Ecosystem. WHI and its advisors ran five 'Speed Dating' sessions for 15 of South Africa's health tech startups for this programme.

WHI has developed a clinic booking system for public health clinics which improves clinic waiting times and continuity of care for patients. Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre has partnered with WHI and BetterWork to build on health innovation and digital transformation strategy at the hospital

The organisation is also conducting research projects with Envisionit Deep AI, one of South Africa's health tech startups, to validate their AI-based mammography and breast ultrasound screening algorithms.

It is also looking at the evaluation of the effectiveness of patient generated data and self care by leveraging the technology of Abby Health Stations and Amazon Web Services to provide quality healthcare to those who have never had the opportunity.

## **Multidisciplinary approach**

"As we move to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals, innovation and technology have a key role to play in making healthcare more accessible, affordable, equitable and patient-centred," says Ozynski.

"We believe that a multidisciplinary approach is key to unlocking innovation beyond the pandemic. The urgency driving Covid-19 interventions needs to be sustained into the future to address the many critical, systemic health challenges we faced before 2020."

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