

# hearScreen mHealth solution first winner of SA Innovation Fellows Competition

Philips South Africa has announced that the winner of its first South African Innovation Fellows Competition is the hearScreen mHealth solution, created by Professor De Wet Swanepoel of the department of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology at the University of Pretoria.



Professor De Wet Swanepoel, creator of the hearScreen mHealth solution

The Innovation Fellows Competition was launched in August this year, in collaboration with the Innovation Hub in Pretoria, with the goal of unlocking local talent and addressing regionally relevant challenges in healthcare.

The hearScreen mHealth solution makes widespread systematic hearing testing possible by providing a cost-effective, sustainable smartphone application that provides clinically valid tests and can be operated by generalist health personnel (eg community healthcare workers) along with cloud-based data management and referral systems linking patients to services.

Recent WHO estimates indicate that there are 360 million persons in the world with disabling hearing loss (5.3% of the world's population). The prevalence of disabling hearing loss in children is greatest in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Approximately one-third of persons over 65 years are affected by disabling hearing loss with the prevalence being highest in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. With less than one hearing health provider to every million people in Africa, prospects for affected individuals are dire. Access to systematic hearing screening services is also unavailable in Sub-Saharan Africa.

"We are extremely honoured that Philips has recognised our hearScreen mHealth solution as an innovation that can help many people live more fulfilling lives," said Swanepoel. "Winning the competition will help us make widespread systematic hearing testing possible, particularly within underserved communities, through this cost-effective, sustainable solution that can be operated by laypersons in primary health care contexts."

The hearScreen mHealth solution was selected as the winner from an impressive top five and will receive R200,000 as a research and development grant towards the development and production of the technology. Swanepoel will also undergo a one-year fellowship during, which Philips will assist him by offering business advice on how to launch, market, and sell his product. During this time, Eddine Sarroukh, Head of Research, Philips Africa will be his mentor.

## Other finalists

- iMobiMama, an IT platform and Mobile Kiosk from Carol Thomas that can increase access to maternal care.
- A low-cost portable mechanical non-invasive continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) ventilator from Sudesh Sivarasu that is mechanically operated and can be used to tackle Asthma in children aged five to 10 years old.
- Ragesh Pillai, whose aim was to tackle the challenge of improving diabetes management through a software service designed to facilitate remote monitoring and communication between patients and their care givers at low cost.
- Dean Hodgskiss's solution aimed to increase the capacity of healthcare workers and medical equipment at primary healthcare sites through the utilisation of a mobile communication app specifically developed to operate effectively under the challenging African telecommunications conditions.

Each of these finalists received a cash prize of R12,000.

"In the beginning of the year, Philips South Africa conducted an Innovation Research study, which indicated that 60% of South Africans consider themselves to be innovators. We launched the competition to support South Africans in showcasing their own tangible innovations that can fundamentally change and improve the lives of other," says JJ Van Dongen, senior VP and CEO Philips Africa. "We were delighted by the response to the competition and the quality of work submitted by the top five finalists was inspirational. We are now looking forward to turning the winning entry into a healthcare solution that will make an impactful difference in the lives of affected people across Africa."

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