Reflecting on 2023 fills us with gratitude for the multitude of fruitful partnerships and remarkable organizations we have been honored to work with.

Among our highlights was a partner roundtable in South Africa. It was a memorable and energizing gathering of government entities, community health organizations, technical partners, and academic institutions. Together, we delved into the pressing community health needs and explored how health education could propel our shared goals forward. The roundtable reminded us all of the power of collaboration. It was humbling to witness firsthand how each participant emphasized the importance of mutual support in advancing their organizational missions. We were thrilled to serve a convening role.

Reflecting on the discussion, all of our partners emphasized the indispensable role of Community Health Workers (CHWs) in promoting health equity and the need for increased training support. We echo their calls for national standards for CHWs to assure quality across populations. We discussed the imperative of focusing on digital literacy to bridge the digital divide, the value of adaptable content in meeting diverse organizational needs, and the vital importance of open-access content in advancing health equity. We were reminded of the centrality of community involvement and co-creation that fosters trust and adoption.

These observations reaffirmed our commitment to prioritizing the co-creation of resources for high-impact community health needs and the training of CHWs. We are inspired to be part of a movement that advances professional standards for CHWs and digital literacy. The launch of our Common Childhood Illness open-access CHW training course, created in collaboration with Lwala Community Alliance, Philani Maternal, Child Health and Nutrition Trust, and One to One Africa, marks a significant advancement in comprehensive professional training for CHWs. We eagerly anticipate further progress in this direction.

Our newly launched website enhances transparency in accessing and utilizing our free open-access materials, ensuring they can be seamlessly integrated into any training platform. All our educational and evaluative endeavors are co-created with multiple partners and community members, underscoring our commitment to collaborative solutions that address community needs and drive health advancement.

Our research and evaluation team plays a pivotal role in ensuring our focus remains on impactful work in our communities. Their findings shape best practices for digital learning, guiding our efforts toward greater efficacy and relevance.

Collaboration is at the core of our identity because we understand that true progress in advancing health equity lies in working together with our communities. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to you for being part of this transformative journey. Together, we are making a difference that has impact far beyond our individual efforts.

With profound gratitude,

Charles and Aarti
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Imagine:

AN EXPECTANT MOTHER
seeks help because she learned from a video how to recognize
danger signs during pregnancy.

A COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER
provides life-saving care after completing a digital course on
treating childhood illnesses.

A RURAL INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY
increases their vaccination rates after a campaign dispels
myths about immunization in their local language.

In each case, health education made the difference.

IN 2024 AND BEYOND,
we reaffirm our commitment to reaching communities worldwide
with engaging, evidence-based, and actionable health information.
Expanding knowledge, improving health.

At Digital Medic, we believe access to health education is a human right. Everyone should be able to make informed decisions about health, whether caring for themselves or others. Our mission is to improve the health of global communities by advancing the field of health education, building capacity for the health workforce, and expanding information equity worldwide.

**LEARNING DESIGN**
We co-create high-quality, accessible, and scalable resources for health worker training and community education.

**RESEARCH AND EVALUATION**
We investigate the factors that make health education effective and scalable through research and evaluation.

**GLOBAL COLLABORATION**
We are driven by community needs and global health priorities. We work closely with ministries of health, nongovernmental organizations, and other health stakeholders in all content creation and research studies.
Looking ahead

With the continuing global health workforce shortage that perpetuates unequal access to care, continuous health training and education are needed more urgently than ever.

This need was emphasized in 2023 by the World Health Organization when it strengthened its resolution to support countries in building their health workforce capacities. Education is one of three key action areas outlined by the WHO’s Public Health and Emergency Workforce Roadmap Steering Committee.

In our annual collaborator survey, 100% of respondents said health education and training were a priority in the coming years, with these top five focus areas:

- Maternal and child health
- Nutrition
- Neonatal health
- Vaccination
- Childhood illness

The lifetime reach of our health education content surpassed 40 million learners across 190 countries.

Our training materials directly supported over 17,000 community health workers and other care providers through our collaborators.

We created over 100 new videos, job aids, and audio files on maternal and child health, routine immunization, mental health, oncology, and other high-need health topics.

We worked on 15 research studies with 9 collaborators, all focused on digital health education initiatives and how to make them more effective and scalable for low- and middle-income communities.
Community Health Roundtable

In October 2023, the Digital Medic team hosted a roundtable discussion with community organizations, governmental agencies, and technology collaborators in South Africa. We heard three recurring themes as we discussed health worker training and community education:

Training and education are essential to health equity. Everyone agrees that high-quality training and education for health workers and community members are essential to supporting communities to address their health needs.

Collaboration is key. Success comes from working together. Organizations should not have to start from scratch whenever they need health education — sharing resources is more efficient and impactful.

Open access is critical as digital access remains a challenge. Digital Medic resources are open-access and platform-agnostic, free for anyone to view and download on any device. Collaborators confirmed this flexibility is critical to suit the varying needs of learners in different contexts. We are committed to retaining our open-source strategy, facilitating the broad availability of learning resources.

Barriers related to reliable connectivity, device access, and digital literacy remain substantial barriers to accessing health information. While smartphone and data access are improving globally, we are working together to explore opportunities for more inclusive access models that do not further the digital divide. We will also continue to create resources in hybrid formats, such as printable on-the-job guides, WhatsApp health messages, and mobile-friendly audio files.
Access to Health Education is a Human Right.

Access to evidence-based information when you need it, in a language you understand, and with information you can act on, is essential to health — unfortunately, it is currently not the reality for millions of people worldwide.

“If you search the internet for information about COVID in Kaqchikel there is nothing… people do not have information and do not want to get vaccinated. They have reason to be afraid because fear arises from the unknown, from the lack of information.”

- Focus group participant in Guatemala

We are committed to expanding access to effective and scalable health education. We design our materials to be adaptable across diverse contexts, languages, and geographies. We are well-positioned to take advantage of the explosion of AI-based translation and other technological advances to continue expanding access to more communities.

In 2023, our open-access resource library grew to contain over 800 videos in over a dozen languages, plus infographics and job aids. All materials align with global best practices and are freely available to the global community through our website, mobile app for iOS and Android, and YouTube channel.
KEY MOMENT

In 2023, Advocacy Training for Community Health Workers gained global recognition as a valuable open-access resource by both the Digital Public Goods Alliance and Digital Square at PATH.

We created this course with the Community Health Impact Coalition and an advisory group of community health workers (CHWs) from around the world. Community-based organizations, ministries of health, and CHW advocates have since adopted it and are using it to elevate the voices of frontline health workers in global decision-making.

With this new recognition, we hope more health workers will develop the skills and strategies to promote the health issues most important in their communities.
Community Health Worker Training

BRIDGING THE GLOBAL TRAINING GAP

CHWs are frontline care providers who typically live in the communities they serve. They are the most trusted and proximal care providers for millions of people around the world, especially in low- and lower-middle-income communities. Yet, CHWs receive substantially less formal education and training than other health professionals.

The role of CHWs is increasingly advancing and professionalizing. CHW organizations and governments will need formal curriculum and programmatic support as the role continues to evolve. Traditional CHW training is done in person, and while invaluable, can also be infrequent, inconsistent, and expensive.

Our team produced multiple new digital resources for CHWs in 2023. These resources are designed to complement existing training, supporting CHW supervisors as teaching tools and enabling CHWs to revisit content outside of scheduled training sessions.

Integrating trained and supported CHWs who consistently provide just 30 life-saving health services in countries with the highest disease burden would save as many as 6.9 million lives annually.
NEW COURSE: CARING FOR SICK CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY

Worldwide, children between two months and five years of age die mainly from illnesses that can often be prevented or successfully treated. Pneumonia, diarrhea, and malaria were responsible for 30% of global deaths among children in 2019. Trained CHWs can help identify the early signs of illness and take action to prevent serious illness, potentially saving millions of lives.

In 2023, we launched a free digital training for CHWs on treating common childhood illnesses. We co-created the content with Lwala Community Alliance, One to One Africa, and Philani Maternal, Child Health and Nutrition Trust. We incorporated input from CHWs throughout the development process to ensure the content reflects their realities and contains actionable guidance.

Through animated lessons, CHWs learn to identify mild signs and symptoms and help caregivers to treat these illnesses at home. They also learn to identify severe signs of illness, as well as danger signs, and when to refer these children to health facilities for urgent medical attention.

Lwala, One to One, and Philani continue to roll out the course with their CHWs with support from Digital Medic. Together we are examining learner engagement and the impact on CHWs’ knowledge, attitudes, and practices.

“

We are seeing this as a great opportunity. I don’t think we will go back to doing the training the way we had done them before, because the outcomes are great. The post-test was much better this time around, and the CHWs are excited with the content.”

– Hellen Gwaro
Director of Programs at Lwala Community Alliance in Kenya
EXPANDING ADVOCACY TRAINING

Together with the Community Health Impact Coalition and CHWs from around the world, we created a digital course on advocacy, storytelling, and technology — core skills to help CHWs professionalize their occupation, champion their own well-being, and share the health issues most important to their communities. In the past two years, thousands of CHWs have completed the training, and the course continues to be rolled out across organizations and governments worldwide.

In 2023, the Ugandan Ministry of Health announced plans to incorporate the Advocacy course into its national CHW training curriculum. With support from the Ministry, Nama Wellness Community Centre launched the course in-person in Uganda. Our printable Facilitator Guide and Student Workbooks have aided these in-person sessions, and we are now working together on a case study to explore how to optimize hybrid CHW training.

“I used to be not able to speak in meetings … but now through the training, I’m now confident I can speak on behalf of my village, and I can change, and I can reach my voice to the voiceless.”
– Nabbwegamo Habibah
Community Health Worker with Nama Wellness Community Centre

September 15, 2023 launch of the CHW advocacy training in Uganda. Photo credit: Nama Wellness Community Centre and Ministry of Health Uganda

CHW advocacy training session in Lira District with Nama Wellness Community Centre and the Uganda Ministry of Health. Photo credit: Nama Wellness Community Centre
Vaccination remains one of the most effective primary health measures we have. The WHO estimates that vaccines prevent five million deaths each year from diseases like diphtheria, influenza, and measles. Despite their demonstrated safety and efficacy, vaccine hesitancy remains a serious threat to global immunization efforts and avoidable deaths worldwide.

Community health workers play a pivotal role in global vaccination programs. In 2022, we developed a mobile-friendly digital toolkit to equip CHWs with the knowledge and confidence to educate communities about the importance of vaccines, and to guide people through the vaccination process.

In 2023, we translated the toolkit resources into French, Sepedi, Spanish, and Xhosa to reach more CHW learners. This is an exciting expansion to the English toolkit, which has reached over 400,000 learners.
Direct-to-Community Health Education

Health education is essential to health equity.
Access to health education equips communities to take greater ownership of their health, empowering people to make healthier decisions every day for themselves and those they care for.

In the past year, we created new resources for communities to learn about essential nutrition concepts and routine immunization — one of the best tools we have to protect against deadly viruses.

We also expanded our Common Health Conditions video series on YouTube featuring Stanford Medicine experts to include more content on the most-searched health topics in English and Spanish.

Our health education library contains open-access resources on nutrition, pregnancy, vaccination, infectious diseases, diabetes, and many other high-need health topics.

Open-access resources on high-need health topics.

PREVENTING STUNTING WITH GROW GREAT

In 2018, we launched a video series with the Grow Great team in South Africa to prevent stunting and support the healthy development of infants and young children. To extend the reach of this vital health information, we translated the final four videos into additional local languages, including Xhosa, Zulu, Swati, and Sepedi.

We produced the latest video in the series, Rehabilitating Malnourished Children at Home, in 2023. The video follows two characters, Nomsa and Thembi, on a transformative journey as they work towards rehabilitating 18-month-old Lelethu at home. Viewers learn essential tips and insights on supporting malnourished children through proper nutrition and care.
**PROMOTING ROUTINE IMMUNIZATION WITH VILLAGEREACH MALAWI**

In collaboration with VillageReach, we developed three posters that provide information on routine immunization, such as the importance of measles-rubella and HPV vaccines, and the vaccine schedule. These posters support Health Surveillance Assistants in Malawi in delivering standardized, consistent, and high-quality routine immunization care to their communities. The posters are available in English and Chichewa and were printed and distributed to health facilities to complement ongoing health talks through the coordination of Village Reach, the Malawi Ministry of Health Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI), Mothers to Mothers and Palladium Momentum Health.

**COMMON HEALTH CONDITION VIDEOS**

From 2021 through 2023, we released over 120 videos on the most searched-for health conditions on YouTube in English and Spanish. We remain one of the only academic centers in the United States to produce content in Spanish at such scale, helping to fill a critical information gap.

Featuring Stanford Medicine faculty members, the videos aim to combat misinformation by providing evidence-based health information and answering common questions about various health conditions. Topics in this series include mental health, cancer, HIV / AIDS, substance abuse, and more.

*Since 2021, the videos have been viewed over 4.1 million times.*

> I was not aware of HPV vaccine and I will take my child for vaccination when time comes because she is 8 years old. I am very happy with these job aids because each vaccine is well elaborated.”

– Caregiver in Lungwena, Mangochi District
Research and Evaluation

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE BASE FOR DIGITAL LEARNING WITH LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COMMUNITIES.

Global connectivity, device access, and digital solutions are rapidly expanding. We need to work together with underresourced communities to develop, study, and scale health education solutions.

Our research team works with collaborators worldwide to identify opportunities for improvement in health learning. From small-scale community case studies to regional randomized evaluations to multi-country comparative studies, we use quantitative and qualitative methods to rigorously evaluate health worker training and community education.

In 2023, we conducted 15 research and evaluation studies with nine collaborators. These projects ranged from country-specific projects to analyses of global health education initiatives. Through these studies, we aim to establish best practice guidelines that will aid in expanding digital learning approaches globally.

2023 PUBLICATIONS


"Digital done better for everyone - that’s one of the main things we’re working toward in the field of health education."

– Jamie Johnston, PhD
Research and Evaluation Director at Digital Medic
ADVANCING THE FIELD OF SCALABLE DIGITAL HEALTH EDUCATION

When urgency and scale are paramount: How to quickly share essential training with health workers during a global crisis

Massive open-source online courses are a valuable path for widely disseminating timely training for health professionals during public health crises; however, the reach and effectiveness of online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic remain largely unexplored. To address this evidence gap, we worked with Last Mile Health and TechChange to investigate how online courses can be optimized to support knowledge sharing among health professionals, particularly in low-resource settings.

In 2023, we published the results of our study examining the use of a COVID-19 open-source online course series with over 2,000 enrollees from around the world. We examined global enrollment patterns and interviewed learners from Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Rwanda, Thailand, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States.

We found that the online course content helped fill a critical gap in trustworthy COVID-19 information for pandemic responses and was widely shared through health workers’ professional and personal networks.

Because you’re a doctor you’re expected to understand something. You can’t tell your patients ‘I don’t know what it is. It’s a new disease.’ That’s not right. So at least I had to be able to get some information on how people can protect themselves.”

– Doctor in Kenya during an in-depth interview

While learners emphasized the usefulness of the content, they also expressed a need for adaptable content. To effectively reach health professionals in all communities, there is a growing need for content that is easier to contextualize and share.

Preparing for Disease X, the next as-yet-unknown pathogen to cause a pandemic

We are currently working with the WHO Health Emergencies Program to investigate how to better develop and disseminate online training for care providers during critical health events.

The WHO Health Emergencies Program manages OpenWHO, a web-based platform that offers online courses to people working in pandemics and other health emergencies. The ultimate goal of our work together is to help low-resource settings better prepare for Disease X, the next as-yet-unknown pathogen to cause a pandemic. We will publish ongoing updates and findings as they become available.

Open online courses are an incredible platform through which health professionals can quickly reach a broad range of learners with critical health information. When disease outbreaks occur, such a platform is invaluable. We are thrilled to work with the WHO Health Emergencies Program to understand how to make open online courses more accessible, equitable, and impactful.”

– Dr. Victoria Ward
Medical Director at Digital Medic
INVESTIGATING HOW TO REACH UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES EFFECTIVELY AND EQUITABLY

Spotlight Overcoming barriers to vaccination in the highlands of Guatemala

Indigenous Maya peoples make up over 40% of Guatemala’s overall population. They have faced substantial barriers to COVID-19 vaccine access and acceptance, and consequently, vaccination rates among Indigenous Guatemalans remained low in the months following the vaccine’s rollout.

We have been working with Wuqu’ Kawoq | Maya Health Alliance and the University of California San Francisco since 2021 to understand the factors contributing to vaccine hesitancy and to explore a community-centered approach to vaccine outreach.

In 2023, we published the results of our participatory qualitative study in which we interviewed Indigenous community members and health workers to understand the main drivers of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy.

We found three main barriers to vaccination:
1. A lack of available easily understandable, linguistically appropriate, and culturally sensitive COVID-19 vaccine information.
2. Vaccine access and supply issues that prevented people from being vaccinated efficiently and quickly.
3. Widespread misinformation and disinformation that prey on people’s fears of the unknown and mistrust of the medical establishment and government.

As part of our multi-phase study, we created culturally tailored videos addressing these barriers and shared them with community members via social media, then evaluated their impact on vaccine perceptions and uptake. See what we learned along with all videos and publications.

We are continuing our work with Wuqu’ Kawoq and UCSF in Guatemala to discover and address barriers to HPV vaccination and routine immunization.
Community health workers play a crucial role in ensuring that vaccines are distributed and accepted worldwide. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine hesitancy has become a growing issue, leading to a decline in routine immunizations for children and adults globally.

CHWs face significant obstacles in promoting vaccine uptake, including misinformation, outdated information, and limited training in effective communication. We are working with the Lwala Community Alliance in Kenya and Dimagi to provide CHWs with the tools to overcome these challenges.

Together, we are working to:
1. Identify sources of vaccine hesitancy around childhood immunizations, including the newly implemented malaria vaccine.
2. Equip CHWs with vaccine education training that addresses these sources of hesitancy.
3. Provide CHWs with a patient-facing chatbot, enabling them to dispel myths and provide reliable educational information directly to communities.

Through these activities, we will investigate how digital education and social media can support CHWs in meeting patients where they are on the spectrum of vaccine acceptance to increase vaccine uptake.

“My child also experienced swelling and I directed my wife never to take the child for vaccination again. I was afraid of taking him for vaccination because of the previous bad experience. I think when you visit us we are able to understand some of the side effects because I know you are knowledgeable. By teaching us we become less afraid of vaccination.”

– Community Member
Inspiration is Infectious: Engaging at Global Events

Being part of the global social impact community involves connection and idea-sharing across borders, languages, and cultures. Collaboration is a cornerstone of our work, and we are thrilled to partner with nonprofit organizations, government bodies, and supporters to collectively make an impact.

In 2023, we were thrilled to connect with old and new colleagues, share our work, and learn at events throughout the year, including the International Maternal Newborn Health Conference, the International Conference on Public Health in Africa, the Skoll World Forum, and the Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH) Annual Conference. We look forward to spending time with more collaborators and changemakers in 2024.

At the CUGH conference, we received one of two honorable mentions in the CUGH-Pulitzer Center Global Health Video Competition. Our featured video explains the importance of expanding access to health education to improve health worldwide.
Thank you to our collaborators and supporters

We thank you for your continued support in our work to improve global health outcomes through high-quality health education. With deep and heartfelt appreciation to our original founding supporters who believed in our future: Burke Family Foundation, ELMA Foundation, Emerson Collective, and Robert and Ashlea Paddock.

AFREhealth
Community Health Impact Coalition
Coursera
Dimagi
Digital Square
Educast
edX
ELMA Foundation
Eswatini Antivenom Foundation
Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance
Grow Great
La Leche League South Africa
Last Mile Health
Lwala Community Alliance
Medic
Nama Wellness Community Centre
National Department of Health, South Africa
Next Door Solutions to Domestic Violence
Noora Health
One to One Africa
OpenWHO
Partners in Health
PATH
Perinatal Mental Health Project
Philani Maternal, Child Health and Nutrition Trust
Resolve to Save Lives
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South and Southeast Asian Community-based Trials Network
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World Health Organization Health Emergencies Programme
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Our team

We are learning designers, clinicians, and global health researchers based in Stanford, California and Cape Town, South Africa.

Learn more.