Midjourney

AI revolutionises South African healthcare, setting a global benchmark

South African healthcare leaders are ahead of the global average in implementing AI for clinical decision support and investing in generative AI, according to a new report.

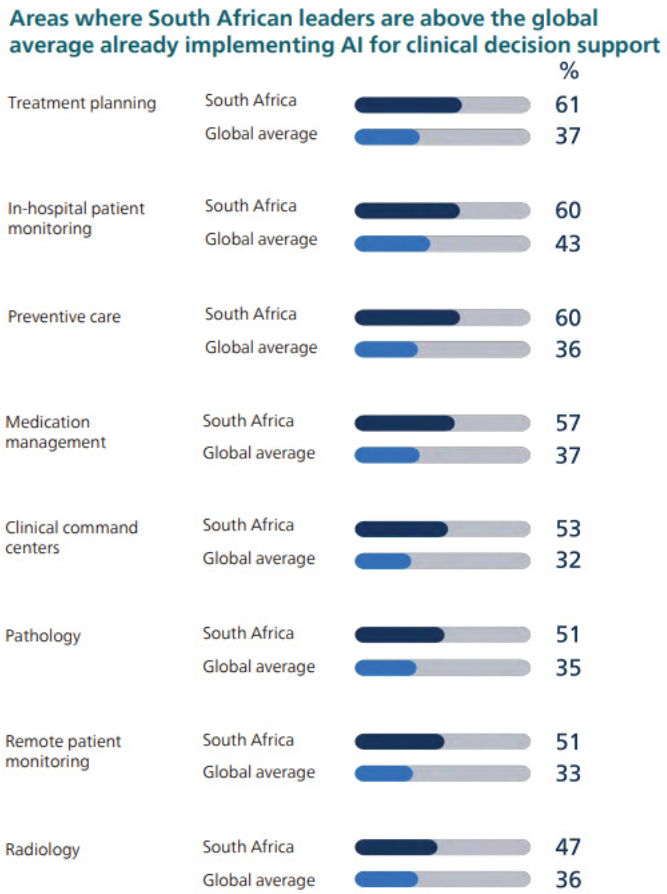
Almost two-thirds of South Africa's healthcare leaders have already implemented remote patient monitoring for mental healthcare (62%), post-operative monitoring (56%), pre-operative care (55%), chronic-disease management (55%), and elderly care (55%).

Royal Philips has released the South African findings of its report, *Future Health Index (FHI) 2024: Better care for more people*.

The ninth edition of the report, which surveyed nearly 3,000 healthcare leaders in 14 countries, shows local healthcare leaders at the forefront in the adoption of AI-enabled innovation to improve patient care impacted by workforce shortages, financial challenges, and growing demand.

The report highlights the rapid transformation of South Africa's healthcare sector. In 2021, just 15% of healthcare leaders cited AI as an area of investment, while today South African healthcare leaders are more likely than the global average to have already implemented AI for clinical decision support, including 60% or more for treatment planning, in-hospital patient monitoring, and preventive care, compared to 37%, 43% and 36% globally, respectively.

Similarly, in 2022, only 27% of healthcare leaders reported investing in remote patient monitoring, while the FHI 2024 reports that almost two-thirds of the country's leaders (62%) have already implemented remote patient monitoring for mental healthcare outcomes.



They are also more likely than the global average to have already introduced remote patient monitoring in post-operative monitoring (56% vs 43% globally), pre-operative care (55% vs 41%), chronic disease management (55% vs 50%), and elderly care (55% vs 42%).

"The local adoption of digital technologies to ease staff shortages and improve outcomes signals a unified commitment to deliver better care," says Romulen Pillay, managing director, Philips Southern Africa. "But the pace and scale of adoption is just the beginning. We need to take equal collective action to ensure these advancements are implemented responsibly to avoid unintended consequences."

The majority (91%) of leaders are concerned about data bias widening disparity in health outcomes, with more than a fifth (23%) describing themselves as extremely concerned, significantly higher than the global average (16%).

To mitigate the risks associated with bias, healthcare leaders say it is important to create policies for the ethical use of data and AI (46%) and ensure staff diversity in data and AI (43%).

Barriers remain

South Africa's healthcare leaders see a wide range of opportunities to improve patient care by bringing data together in a meaningful way. For example, almost half (45%) believe the biggest opportunities lie in optimising treatment plans and care pathways. They also see scope to forecast and manage patient demand (43%), identify evidence-based best practices (39%), and predict and reduce adverse patient events (38%).

However, healthcare leaders face barriers to getting the most out of healthcare data. The vast majority (97%) report data-integration challenges within their organisations, affecting their ability to provide timely, high-quality care. The impact is clear: healthcare professionals lose precious time accessing or integrating data, leaving less time for patient care.

This is further aggravated by persistent workforce pressure, with leaders recognising the impact of staff shortages on patients, leading to delays in care, less time with clinicians, and reduced availability of treatment options.

"South Africa's healthcare leaders are facing multiple challenges as a result of staff shortages, an issue that shows few signs of easing," says Pillay. "In fact, more than half of healthcare leaders express concern over staff leaving their current roles, geographies, or the healthcare sector altogether – due to staff shortages – contributing to even greater pressure."

Sixty per cent of healthcare leaders say that staff have less time to spend with patients, while more than half (52%) report a lack of time to upskill staff and embed new technologies, which could help address these problems.

In addition, a vast majority of healthcare leaders in the report recognise that reducing the environmental impact of healthcare should be a top priority. But almost all grapple with financial challenges (97%) at the same time. This shows the urgent need for technological solutions that are both green and help reduce the cost of care.

The next frontier

Viewing generative AI as the next frontier of innovation that will help unlock new efficiencies and insights from patient data, almost half of healthcare leaders (47%) are already investing in it – considerably more than the global average (29%). A further 37% plan to invest in generative AI in the next 12 months.

"In the FHI 2024 report, younger healthcare professionals (59%) cited being at the forefront of AI in healthcare as an important factor when choosing a future workplace," says Pillay. "The adoption of AI-enabled innovation is an encouraging trend, primed to attract and retain healthcare professionals for the future."

In addition, all healthcare leaders in South Africa see the potential for data-driven insights to help reduce health disparities. They are most likely to see this happening through insights facilitating targeted outreach and tailored interventions for specific populations (48%), allocating treatments fairly among population groups (47%), and supporting evidence-based policy decisions to address health disparities (46%).

However, the data that is needed to generate these insights is frequently in short supply: nearly three-quarters of leaders (74%) say there is a lack of data available in their organisations' regions on the social determinants of health.

To realise the future of health in South Africa, enabling timely, high-quality care for everyone, healthcare leaders look to collaborations with industry trade organisations (50%), healthcare technology companies (49%), government (42%) and educational institutions (41%) to help build sustainable foundations to meet the present and future requirements of patients.

Healthcare leaders see the strongest need for partnership in using data analytics for informed decision-making (43%). Other important factors cited include implementing value-based care models (39%), and the enhancing of technology integration and interoperability (39%).

"The report serves as a call to action for policymakers, healthcare providers, and industry stakeholders to collaborate and leverage these insights to create a sustainable and efficient healthcare system," says Pillay.

Article republished from Bizcommunity. Original article here.

Bahoši ba tša maphelo Afrika Borwa ba maatla go feta karolelano ya lefase ka bophara ka go šomiša AI go thuša mo diphethong tša kalafo, go ya ka pego ye mpsha. Batho ba ka gaufi le seripa sa maemo a godimo ba šetše ba tsentše mogato wa go lekola balwetši kgole bakeng sa tlhokomelo ya monagano (62%), tlhokomelo ya morago ga tsenyo ya kalafo (56%), tlhokomelo ya pele ga kalafo (55%), taolo ya malwetši a sa felego (55%), le tlhokomelo ya bagolo (55%).

Translated to Sepedi by Dr Walter Matli