



Sponsored

The fight for techquity: Why business leaders need to address the barriers to healthtech

VB Staff

July 26, 2022 6:10 AM

[f](#) [t](#) [in](#)

Image Credit: Artur Debat, Getty Images

Presented by [Optum](#)

In 2021, healthcare company funding surged by 30%, breaking the \$80 billion mark in the U.S. and Europe. IPOs tripled, M&A doubled, and 42 healthtech unicorns emerged — representing 157% more healthtech investment dollars than just a year previous. From telehealth to virtual care, patient portals, AI and machine learning, advanced analytics, and the huge and growing market for wearables, just to start, [technology has become an inextricable part of the healthcare story](#). Healthcare technology is improving patient outcomes, upgrading patient safety and opening up new areas for innovation.

But it has also turned the access gap into a gulf, especially over the course of the pandemic. While many were able to seamlessly transition to a world of remote working and virtual care, the vulnerable, underserved and marginalized communities were left on the other side of the [digital divide](#), where access is limited or sometimes impossible.

And so tech integration and innovation, meant to be the bridge between the community and the healthcare system, have the potential to actually diminish or harm health prospects for these populations. It's urgent to prioritize healthtech equity, or [techquity](#), using technology innovations to actually close the digital divide, or else risk further widening the gap.

“The opportunity to minimize those barriers with healthcare technology is truly profound,” says [Tushar Mehrotra](#), senior vice president of analytics at Optum. “Techquity is using advancements in technology, from design, development and deployment, in an intentional and inclusive way to drive health equity and close the gaps in access.”

But gaining techquity is not an individual or consumer level problem — techquity needs to be addressed at the systemic level, which requires collaboration, transparency, inclusivity and a commitment to ensure organizational transformation.

The four core elements of techquity

There are four essential elements to techquity: digital access, digital literacy, healthcare literacy and consumer trust.

Digital access is just that: It's about ensuring that everyone, regardless of income bracket, has access to technology, whether it's as basic as a smartphone or Chromebook, plus a way to access the internet. But in the U.S., there are major gaps in access: [15–24% of Americans lack any sort of broadband connection](#). It's not just a rural issue. In NYC, where broadband internet coverage is at nearly 100%, [one-third of the population isn't connected](#), mostly low-income, marginalized racial and ethnic groups, those over the age of 65, and ESL groups.

Another big factor of accessibility is basic affordability. That includes not only the cost of devices but the cost of accessing healthtech platforms, subscriptions, apps and devices.

But once access is gained, the next challenge is increasing **digital literacy**, or ensuring that the tools and technology are actually useful to the community they're serving. Healthtech has a reputation for being challenging to access and difficult to use, lagging behind in user friendliness, personalization, interoperability, accommodations for disabilities, inclusion in terms of language, and representative examples that draw from diverse experiences and identities and privacy protections.

That ties into **health literacy** as well. A consumer might have been sent home with a diabetes monitoring tool, but have they been given the knowledge they need to understand the feedback they're getting from that tool, or what symptoms to watch out for? They also need to understand what their rights are, what kind of care they should have access to, and how to advocate for their own needs.

The fourth bucket is **consumer trust**, which is essentially the foundation of the first three tenets. Unfortunately, in the U.S., mistrust and fear of the healthcare system is built on centuries of systemic and structural racism, social injustice and discrimination.

“You can put all of the tools and technology and access out there, but if an individual doesn't have [trust in their health system](#), or doesn't believe that his or her data or information is private or used correctly, or isn't comfortable accessing health information through their mobile device, they're not going to use it,” Mehrotra says. “It's about understanding communities, where their concerns are and how you solve those.”

What techquity means for organizations

Healthcare organizations have the power to shift the tide toward techquity, Mehrotra says, and ensure that every consumer stays on the digital landscape. They need to turn their attention toward being a trusted entity in the community, to focus on understanding all the populations that exist in the communities they serve.

For organizations, techquity is about fundamentally changing the approach for building technology, ensuring you're doing the right research and market testing, and that you're incorporating that equitable approach to designing, building and launching your products. Unfortunately, not every organization is there.

“If this is not a top-team agenda item, a C-suite agenda, then it isn't going to be funneling down to your technology or your product or your design teams,” Mehrotra says. “You'll run into challenges in terms of making sure it disseminates and is incorporated into your organizational approach.”

“There has to be a willingness, a persistence, a focus and a commitment of resources in an organization,” Mehrotra adds. “There has to be proactive outreach to those communities to drive education and drive understanding, or you're not going to get the change in behavior. Vulnerable members of our communities will say themselves even more at risk if we're not careful with this.”

Looking for more? Visit [Optum C-suite Insights](#) for actionable insights for healthcare leaders, including peer-to-peer insights, dialogue, perspectives, analysis and more.

Sponsored articles are content produced by a company that is either paying for the post or has a business relationship with VentureBeat, and they're always clearly marked. Content produced by our editorial team is never influenced by advertisers or sponsors in any way. For more information, contact sales@venturebeat.com.

Transform 2022's AI & Edge Week

Register now for your free virtual pass to Transform's AI & Edge Week, July 26-28. Hear from AI and data executives from Visa, Lowe's eBay, Credit Karma, Kaiser, Honeywell, Google, Nissan, Toyota, John Deere, and more.

[Register Here](#)