

# Digital Health Equity: Current Practices & Approaches of AMCs

Jorge Rodriguez, MD, Brigham and Women's

Sarah King, Creighton University

October 17, 2023



Tomorrow's Doctors, Tomorrow's Cures®

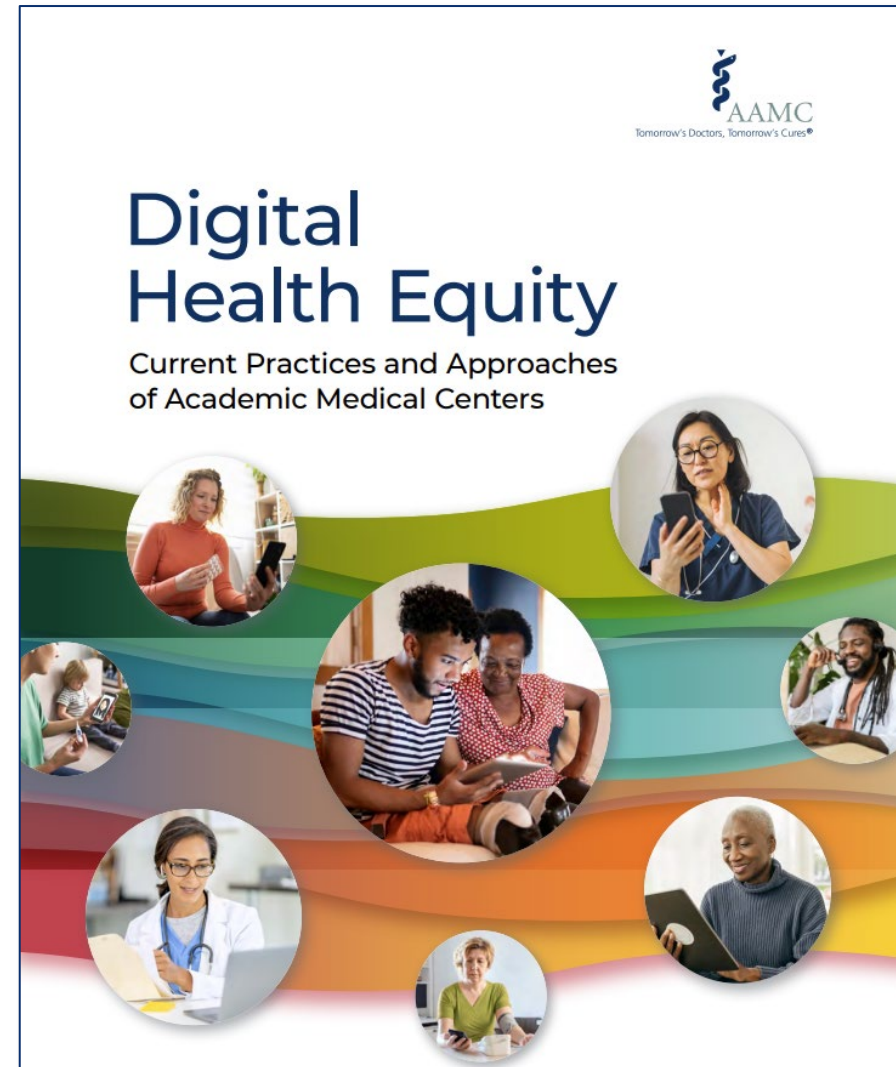
*This work supports "Addressing the Digital Divide to Improve Vaccine Access & Information," a supplemental award (#6NU50CK000506-02-01) funded under a cooperative agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

# Agenda

- What is digital health equity?
- Today's goal
- Overview of digital health equity practices
- Digital health equity in action at UC Davis
- Q&A

# Today's goal

- Highlight current and future strategies and activities that work to improve digital health equity
- Overview of key activities for AMCs to consider:
  - Leadership
  - Strategy
  - Advocacy



# Defining digital health equity

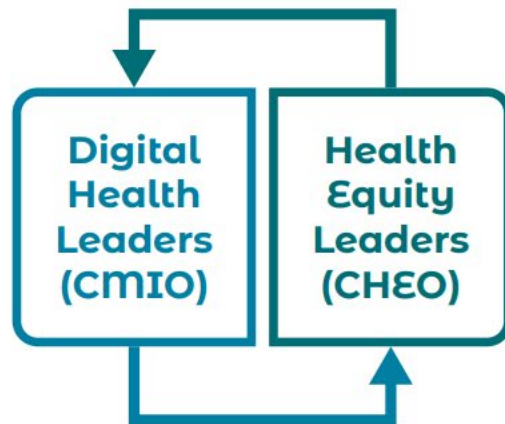
- The ability for all patients to meaningfully engage and benefit from digital tools; consider:
  - Using cost effective digital tools
  - Ensuring access through digital tools for all patients
  - Knowing when to use and when not to use digital tools
  - And more...
- We must understand telehealth's impact on health equity or run the risk of widening disparities in access to care rather than narrowing them

**Example of Defining Digital Health Equity: “[The] ability for people across a wide range of backgrounds and demographics to be able to access services that are enabled by virtual means.”**

— Kevin Chen, MD, MHS (New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation)

# Establishing strong leadership

- **Challenge:** Separate digital teams and equity teams with no clear responsibility for owning digital health equity
- **Opportunity:** Bring siloed teams together to allow for collaboration and ideation
- **Recommendation:**



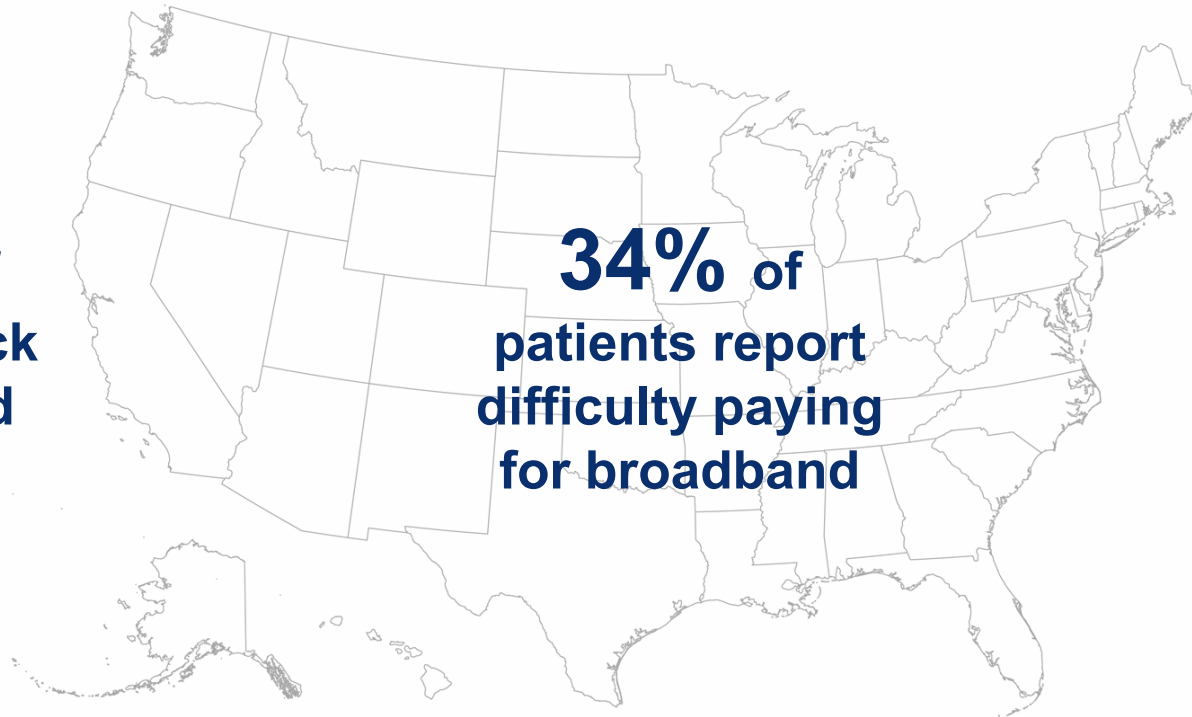
# Assessing and addressing patients' digital needs

**At a minimum, patients need broadband internet access, appropriate devices, and digital literacy skills.**

**23%** of patients lack broadband access

**34%** of patients report difficulty paying for broadband

**15%** of people report not having access to a smartphone



# Understanding digital needs of patients

- AMCs need to determine:
  - ✓ **what** questions to ask?
  - ✓ **when** to ask them?
  - ✓ **who** should ask them?
  - ✓ **how** to report the answers?
  - ✓ **how** to respond to identified needs?
- Opportunity to integrate digital equity needs into screening for social determinants of health or other existing screening measures

“As a clinician, I need to know how to identify low digital literacy because this can impact the health of my patients. And I don’t need to teach the patient how to use the technology, but I need to know that there are staff in the hospital and community organizations who can help and whom I can refer to.”

— Pablo Buitron de la Vega, MD (Boston Medical Center)

# Key considerations to assess digital needs

Patient-level questions should focus on:

1. Broadband internet access and affordability
2. Device access and affordability
3. Digital literacy
4. Patient preference

Questions	Considerations
What questions help assess digital needs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PhenX Toolkit.<sup>13</sup></li><li>• Digital literacy assessment.<sup>14</sup></li><li>• Center for Care Innovations Telemedicine for Health Equity Toolkit.<sup>4</sup></li></ul>
When can digital needs questions be asked?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Patient level:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Screening for social determinants of health.</li><li>◦ Registration.</li><li>◦ Admission or discharge from the inpatient setting.</li><li>◦ Digital health navigation programs.</li><li>◦ Appointment scheduling.</li></ul></li><li>• Community level:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Needs assessment surveys.</li></ul></li><li>• Planning and implementation stages of community collaboration efforts (e.g., surveys, health screenings).</li></ul>
What can be done to address identified digital needs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop organization-funded digital equity programs (e.g., tablet-lending programs).</li><li>• Referral to local, regional, or federal digital equity programs (e.g., Affordable Connectivity Program).</li><li>• Referral to community groups focused on digital equity (e.g., libraries with digital literacy classes).</li></ul>



# Addressing the needs

- FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program
- Device loaning programs
- Embedding technology access points in the community (e.g., school-based telehealth, health kiosks in libraries, etc.)
- Digital health navigators
- Digital inclusion coaching
- Training centers for patients (e.g., The O Bar)
- Training providers and staff in digital literacy (e.g., AAMC telehealth competencies)

# A closer look: digital health navigators

- Opportunity to have a team member (e.g., digital health navigator, community health worker, medical student) dedicated to providing digital equity support

Skill	Strategies
Outreach and building rapport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assess digital literacy.</li><li>• Build rapport with patients in a way that is supportive and inclusive and that asks them to consider stepping outside their comfort zones.</li><li>• Identify and connect with patients who have digital needs.</li><li>• Screen for digital needs and refer to resources.</li></ul>
Technology knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have a general understanding of common technology platforms (e.g., iOS, Android, Windows).</li></ul>
Digital health knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be trained in digital health programs (e.g., telehealth, remote monitoring, health apps).</li><li>• Support other related digital tasks (e.g., email sign-up).</li><li>• Understand the enrollment processes for digital health programs (e.g., patient portal).</li><li>• Understand the uses of current digital health tools (e.g., functions of the patient portal).</li></ul>
Clinical knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be able to describe how digital tools can improve a patient's health.</li></ul>
Organizational awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand the clinical workflows and how digital tools are integrated into day-to-day care.</li></ul>

# Leveraging data to identify patients' needs

## Opportunities:

- Developing a telehealth equity data dashboard to review EHR data across populations and identify access gaps
- Creating digital equity maps to pinpoint neighborhoods where health technology has low uptake (patient portal use, video visits, etc.)
- Integrating an EHR tool to screen patients in need of extra support

**AMCs can use a data-driven approach to optimize their digital health strategy, support advocacy efforts, and deepen community engagement/collaboration efforts.**

# Design and integration

- Digital health platforms and programs were designed not inclusively.
- Opportunity to co-design and integrate digital tools with patients, community, providers, and other key stakeholders using human-centered design.



# A patient-centered approach

Developing an approach that considers **leadership**, strategies for **identifying and addressing patients' needs**, and **advocacy** can support AMCs to develop a patient-centered approach to digital health.

**Ensure that digital health is helping us achieve our ultimate goal, health equity.**

# Questions?