

SPRING 2021



The Path to Innovating Healthcare: Bringing accessibility to the frontlines

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The Path to Innovating Healthcare: Bringing accessibility to the frontlines

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world in many ways, including the reveal of inadequate healthcare systems. The time for innovation is now. The consumerization of healthcare along with the increasing digitization of our world puts power back into the hands of patients but recognizing the importance of accessibility is vital. That means making data more easily available while simultaneously enhancing in-person care through human-centered design approaches. Innovation is not just technological advancement — it includes improving the processes and systems currently in place so everyone has a better healthcare journey. Whether this is through new digital tools or solutions, equitable access to healthcare is the change the world needs now.

When History Became Reality



When History Became Reality

Over the last year, we've experienced an event only previously read about in history books — a global pandemic.

We have endured unquantifiable loss, economic downfall, and the exposure of glaring [inadequacies and inefficiencies in healthcare](#) not only in North America but around the world.

For some, it was a surprise that access to healthcare and insurance wouldn't fully protect them from the perils of a pandemic. But unreliable or simply inaccessible is how a great number of people experience healthcare every single day — [COVID-19 was just another "pandemic"](#) to try to overcome alongside the ongoing fight for basic healthcare rights across the globe.

As the world changes around us, we need to look at where the gaps are widening and strive to bridge them. And this starts by understanding healthcare trends and the human side of the design experience.



The Consumerization of Healthcare



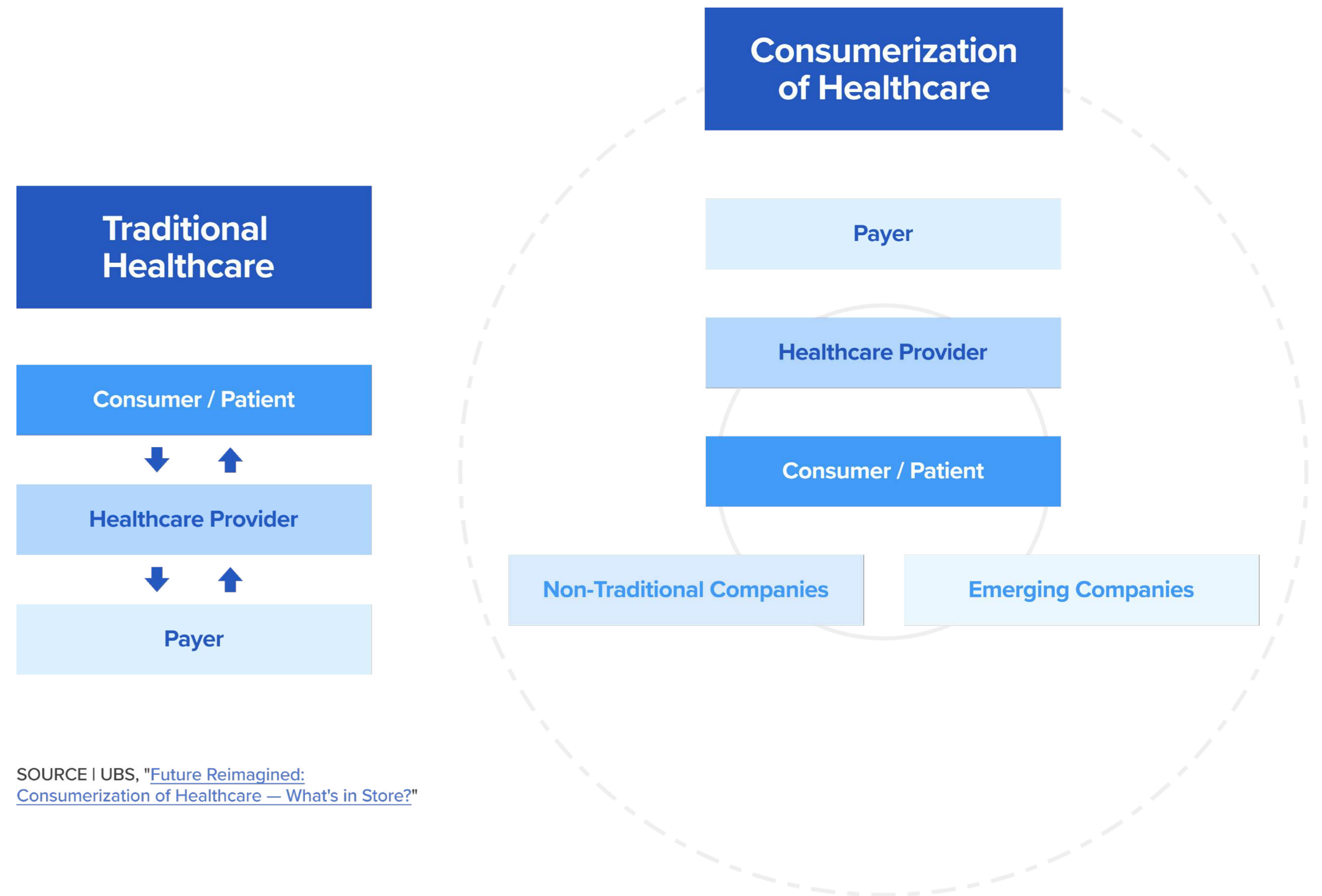
The Consumerization of Healthcare

Healthcare can no longer remain a passive experience that happens to people instead of by people.

As customer expectations evolve, so must the healthcare industry as it shifts toward consumerization and the democratization of access.

The consumerization of healthcare gives patients more control over their health decisions while moving toward digitally-driven healthcare options. This trend was already unfolding pre-pandemic but is now a medical, social, and economic imperative as we transition to a more virtual lifestyle.

Democratizing access plays a vital role in the success of this. Giving people more say in their health requires developing and utilizing tools to encourage engagement — this is achieved by making data and devices more accessible for patients and healthcare providers alike. And because access could mean traditional in-person care or digital channels like smartphones and wearables, it's important to focus on omnichannel experiences instead of simply focusing on tech.



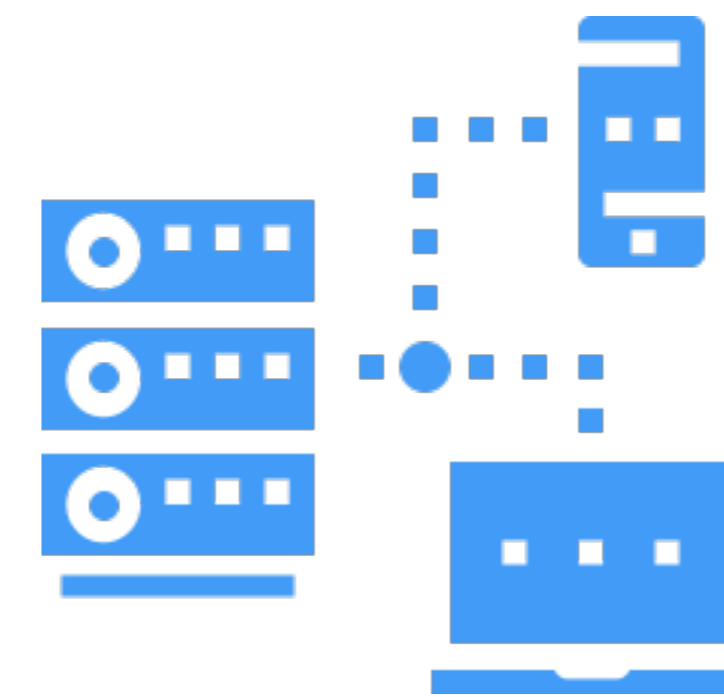
SOURCE | UBS, "Future Reimagined: Consumerization of Healthcare — What's in Store?"

Walking the Balance Beam

Virtual healthcare boomed during the pandemic. The US Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services [reported over an 11,000% increase in virtual visits](#) in early 2020 alone.

And this digitization of care is likely to remain in our “[new normal](#).”

As we straddle the line between in-person and digital, the healthcare industry will need to find a balance. [This could mean:](#)



Diversifying tech tools to accommodate all patients and healthcare providers. Using phone calls, electronic health record-integrated videos, and text messaging while ensuring language accessibility options and features for people with disabilities.



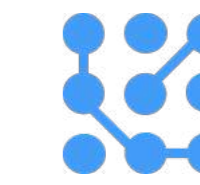
Establishing KPIs to assess the effectiveness of these virtual healthcare models so there can be ongoing improvements.



Developing holistic care pathways that include both virtual and in-person visits.



Understanding the social determinants that often limit access to care and ensuring care is equitable and available.



Providing secure and accessible data.

Ditching Data Silos

The current healthcare experience is creating [data silos](#). Patients are unable to navigate the healthcare system and Health Care Providers (HCPs) can't freely communicate and share information with one another.

Shifting to a patient-focused healthcare model empowers patients to become stewards of their own data and records, moving through their health journey more effectively, and creating more opportunities for access.

But it does more than that. It enables HCPs to deliver better quality care to their patients. With increased system interoperability and movement of [patient data](#), HCPs will be able to serve more patients in a shorter period of time while maintaining first-class care.

However, there's a gap — this model still doesn't equate to equal access for all. As the healthcare paradigm shifts, emphasis should be placed on designing for the human experience.





Human-First Experience Design



Human-First Experience Design

Successful experience design involves taking a [human-centered approach](#), continually researching the mindsets of those you're engaging with, from individual concerns to collective interests.

When considering patient experiences, you need to recognize [social determinants of health](#), like racial inequities and education. Telehealth is valuable, but not everyone will have [broadband access](#) or even the know-how required to be online. This is why it's important to create omnichannel experiences. Go mobile, but also innovate in-person care.

And for HCPs, they are often neglected and underserved.
Mental Health America reported that during the pandemic,

93% of healthcare workers indicated they suffer from severe stress.

Innovation should focus on streamlining processes through automation while simultaneously reducing screen fatigue that adds to their existing burnout.

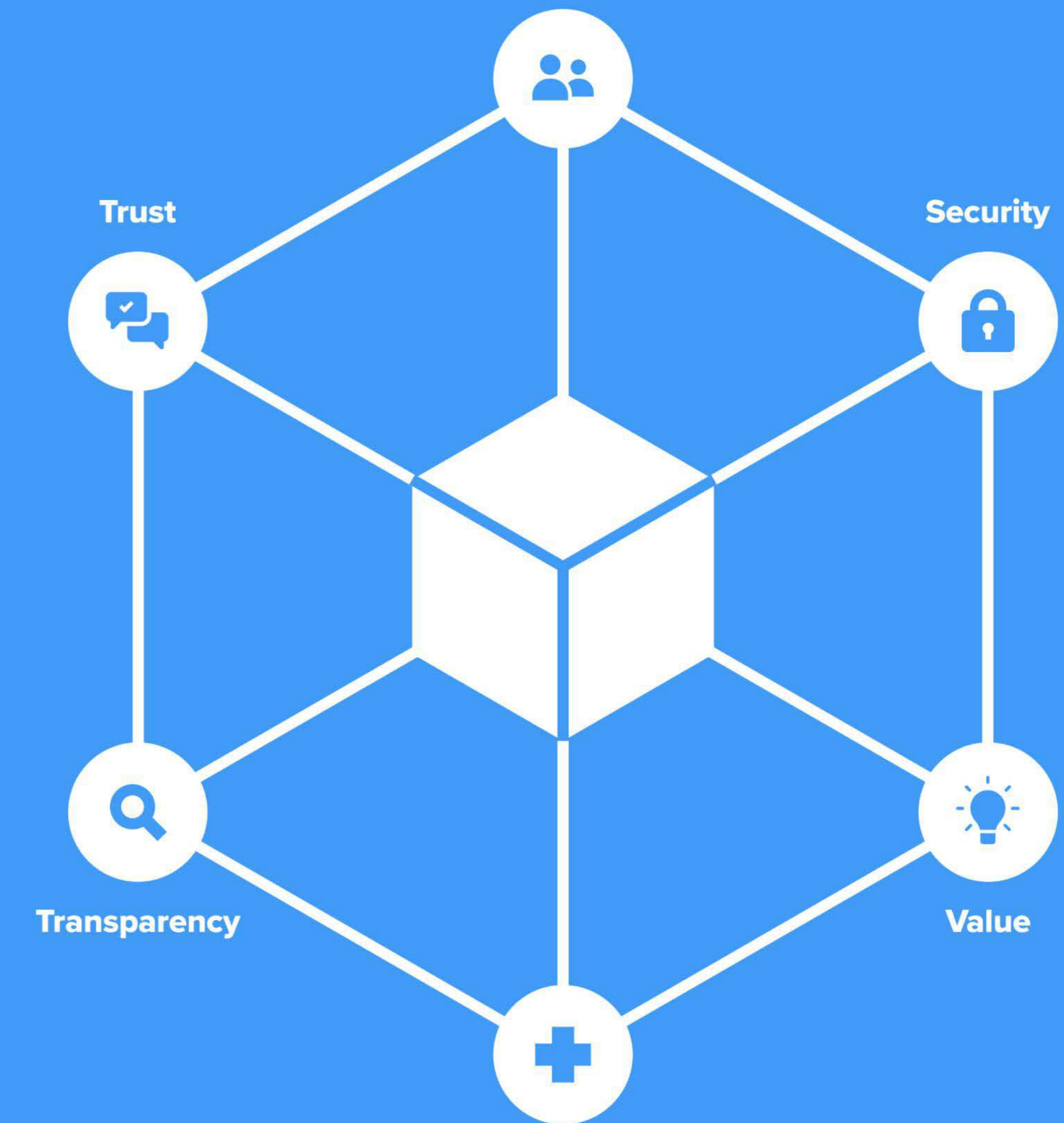


“Liquid expectations” — or customer experiences seeping over from one industry to another — can give healthcare innovation a leg up, taking inspiration from the best of the best. Examine what organizations across industries are succeeding at and apply these insights to reimagining healthcare.

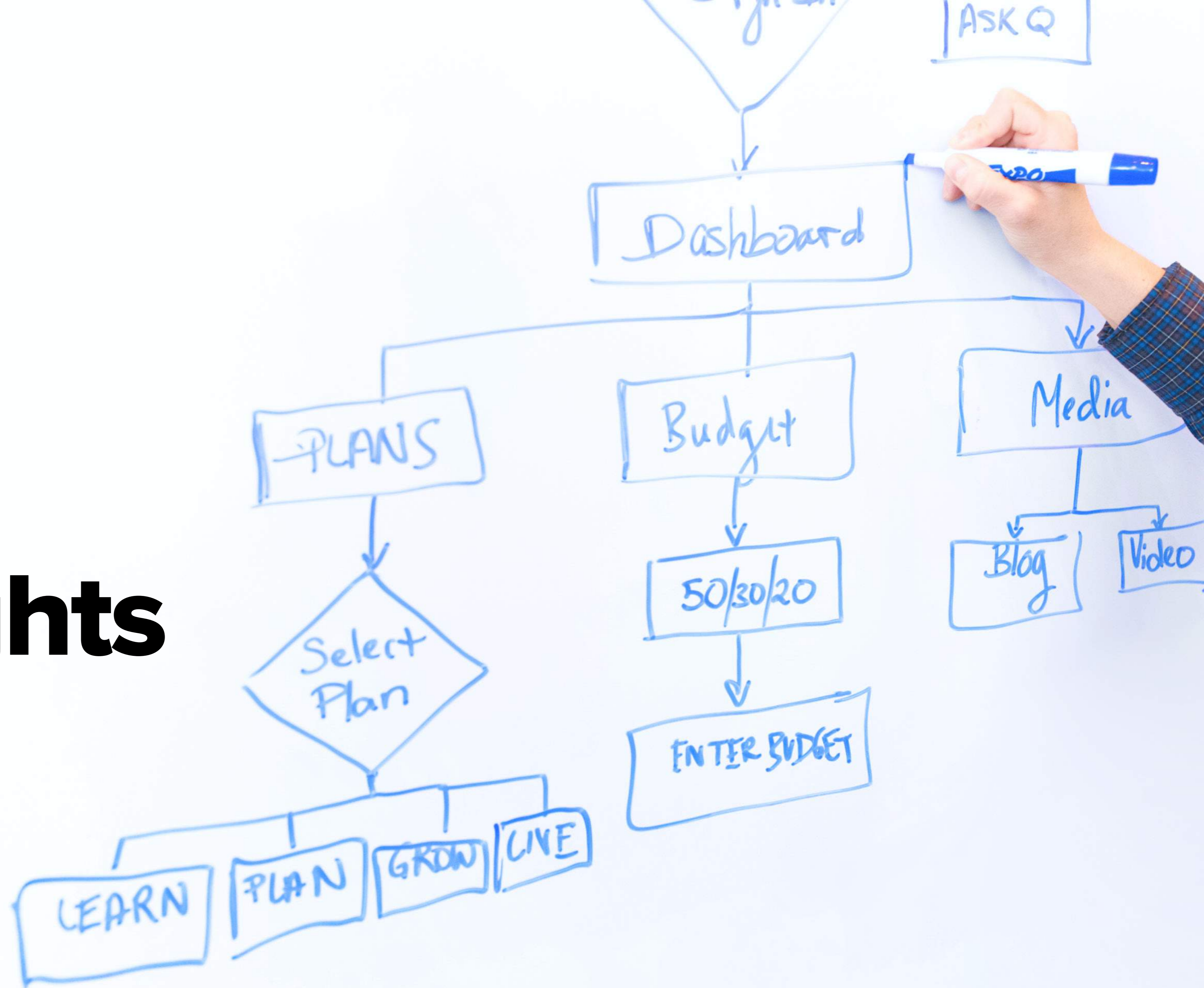
Take Estonia, for example. When working toward securing medical data, their eHealth Authority partnered with Guardtime, a blockchain pioneer. Their healthcare sector now has a decentralized ledger of patient data that enables secure and socialized access to health records for all.

And then there’s Nike. While not a healthcare company, its focus on designing with and not for customers is something any industry can learn from. Nike’s FlyEase line launched in 2015 after collaborating with people with disabilities. Creating an adaptive shoe that’s easy to put on without assistance was possible because of consumers demanding and facilitating change.

Estonia and Nike highlight the importance of understanding customers. Whether it’s fear of data insecurity or issues of inaccessibility, innovation stems from the voices of people.



Applying Insights to Innovation



Applying Insights to Innovation

Access can be understood in more than one way. It can include thinking about every single user and about creating for the up-and-coming generation.

And innovation isn't limited to digital and technological development. It should also involve process and system innovation, leading to empowering experiences that can improve access for everyone within the healthcare landscape.



Q: What might keep you from using chatbots, computers or digital devices for your health questions and care?

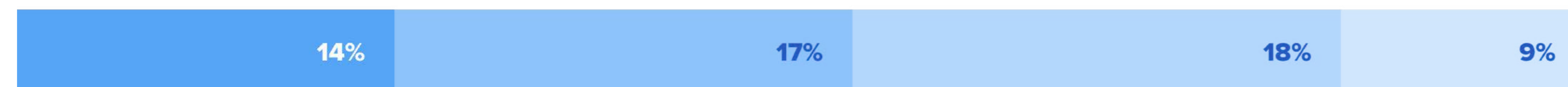
Concerns about my privacy or data security



Don't trust the effectiveness of the service



Prefer my current providers



Have not heard of any



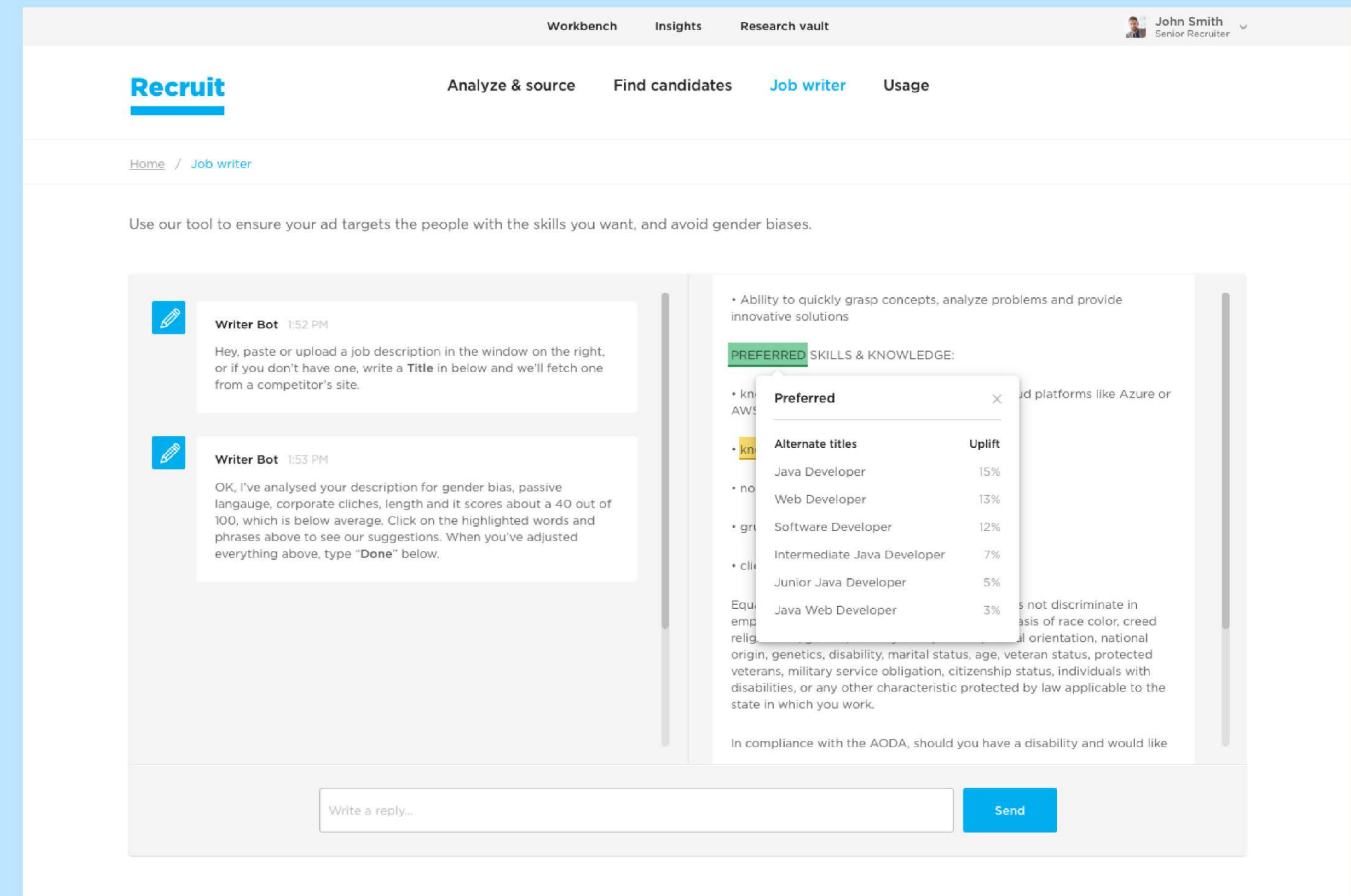
SOURCE | Accenture, "[How Can Leaders Make Recent Digital Health Gains Last?](#)"

Disseminating Data

Having more data than ever before brings hurdles. From concerns over security to serving several customer groups, datasets will be used in different ways.

That was Apply Digital's experience while working with a recruitment services company. When we were approached to create a cohesive customer experience, we realized through our research that this project would need not one, but three distinct offerings suiting the diverse needs of their team and customer groups.

In this case, recruiters, enterprise clients, and government agencies would use our client's singular dataset in different ways. So, we designed with them in mind. Understanding who will need access to data in what way means creating solutions catered to your user groups.



Optimizing a recruiter's job writing experience



This approach can be applied to any industry. How a patient needs and accesses data and information will differ from HCPs. When you put a patient's data in their own hands, they'll have more control over their health allowing for freedom of choice. And when you create processes that enable healthcare workers to share and retrieve data, treating their patients becomes simplified.

Integrating data with wearables, for instance, can help healthcare organizations [make educated predictions](#) about what their patients' next steps should be. Wearables like [Fitbit can collect a patient's personal health and exercise data](#) and send these valuable insights directly to an HCP.

And digitizing processes will help them move quickly and efficiently.

Roping in AR

New technologies, like [augmented reality](#), present unique opportunities to bring experiences to life — while enhancing processes and systems.

Apply Digital's work with a global agricultural company included developing an AR-focused mobile app where users could live a day in the life of a farmer, harvesting and sorting grains. It was an experience that not many had the opportunity to previously try while concurrently demonstrating how our clients' products aid the farming industry.

Just as AR benefits our clients, so too can it benefit the healthcare industry.

Through AR, HCPs can see through the eyes of their patients — to see their perspective. Whether that means improving telehealth diagnostic processes, [virtually-guided physiotherapy](#), or [practitioner training environments](#), AR has its many advantages.



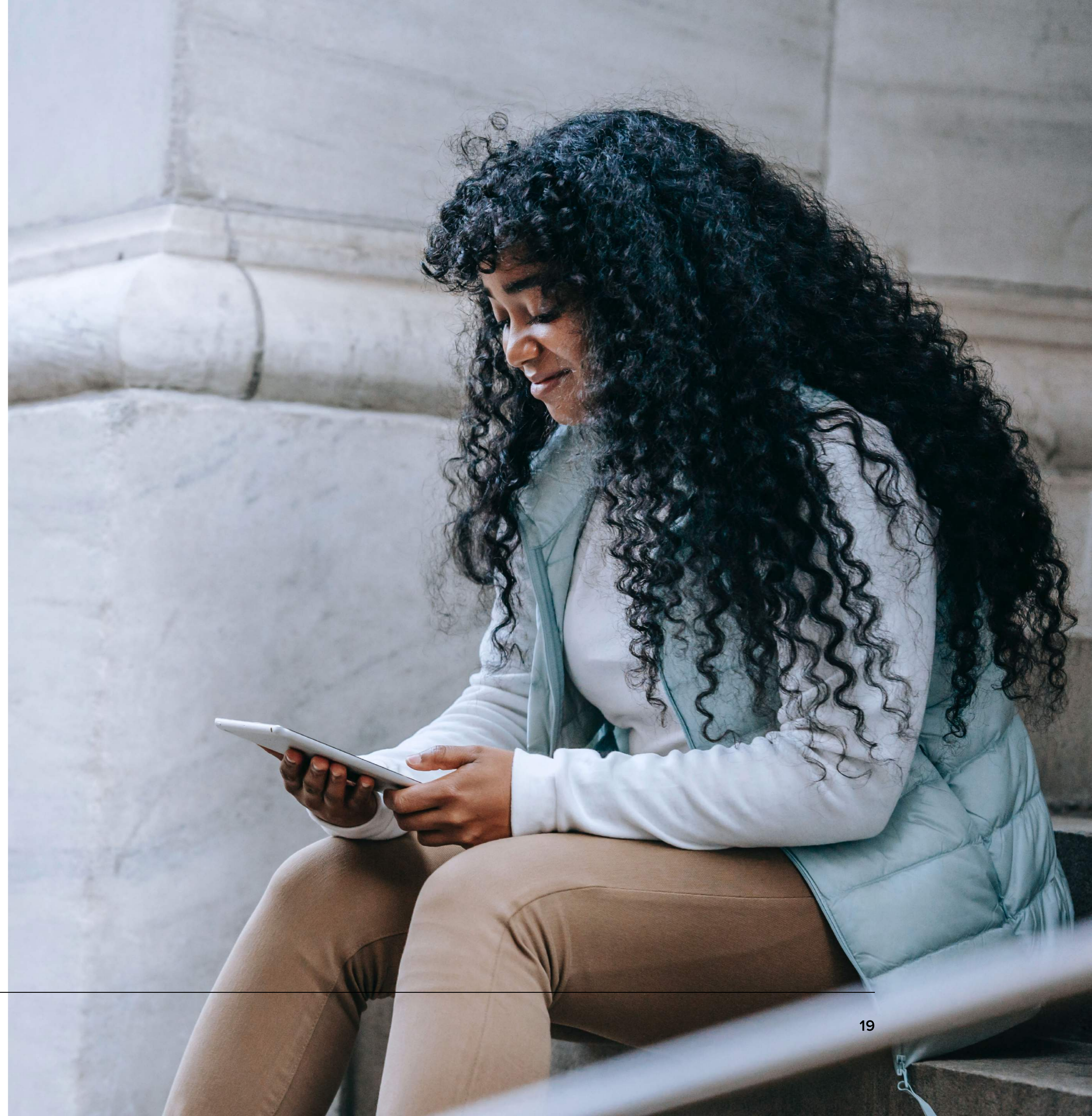
Fill the Binz: The AGI AR Experience

Innovating Access

Creating accessible solutions comes in many shapes and forms. This focus on tech is something digital natives are well-prepared for, but healthcare is for everyone and not everyone has readily available access to digital technology.

So, how do you take trendy technological innovation and apply it to underserved or low digital literacy communities?

Part of it comes down to bridging the tech divide by [providing skills development](#) — educating patients on how to use smartphones and digital health tools. Another part relates to omnichannel experiences which enable you to digitize while also enhancing in-person care for non-technical people. As HCPs' workdays [change with the addition of virtual visits](#), it's vital to optimize their processes and create designated virtual clinics. The less time spent on paperwork and switching between digital and in-person channels means more time spent with the patients themselves.





Our work with a biomedical client includes both of these aspects.

Creating a strategy based on patient-centered care while also considering the needs of HCPs enables our client to take a multi-pronged approach to their digital strategy. Education and empowerment for patients and reduction of labor-intensive efforts for HCPs require an intelligent experience ecosystem for every stakeholder.

Change is on the Horizon

There may always exist limitations to what we can achieve in the world of healthcare, but consumerization and the democratization of access are shifting the balance of power.

People are driving real, meaningful change for one another — a transition to innovative healthcare for the people, by the people. And it will empower everyone equitable access to healthcare.

About Apply Digital

Apply Digital is an innovation, products, and experiences company.

Digital to our core, we are purpose-built to transform possibilities for people.

We solve complex problems with well-executed solutions tailor-made for continuous growth — we're ambitious and our clients are too. We work with well-funded start-ups, global brands, and Fortune 1000 companies spanning industries and audiences, including EA, Moderna, League Health, and Realtor.com.

For more insights on how we can help you succeed,

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