

mHealth: Mobile technology for healthier communities

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Foundation for Research in Health Systems

Ghana AIDS Commission

Indonesian Partnership Fund for HIV/AIDS

Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs

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Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand

Service Workers IN Group (SWING)

Tanzania Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

Text to Change

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The term “mHealth” commonly refers to the use of mobile technology, such as phones and tablets, in health care provision, research and education. With the increasing global accessibility of cellular phones, wireless services and other technology, mHealth has the potential to change health care systems as we know them. FHI 360 uses mHealth to deliver text messages containing health information, reach at-risk or remote populations, transmit training materials for health workers, and make data collection and reporting easier.

FHI 360's work in mHealth

For FHI 360, mHealth is proving to be an effective way of working with community-based organizations and ministries of health to share information on family planning, reproductive health, HIV and sexually transmitted infections. FHI 360 employs mobile technology in its work with hard-to-reach populations, such as female sex workers and men who have sex with men, encouraging them to access health services and providing them with health information, including facts about HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. FHI 360 also uses mobile technology to monitor health services and provide job aids to community health workers.

Together with the Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs (JHU/CCP), FHI 360 co-chaired between 2009 and 2013 the mHealth Working Group, an international body with more than 1450 members that shares and synthesizes knowledge on mHealth, seeking to frame mobile technology within a larger global health strategy.

The following are highlights of mHealth projects that FHI 360 currently has under way in Africa and Southeast Asia.

FHI 360/mHealth for family planning

In India, FHI 360's Urban Health Initiative, in partnership with the Foundation for Research in Health Systems, has initiated the use of mobile phones to monitor service sites, supply outlets and family planning use in urban slums of Uttar Pradesh. In addition, the Urban Health Initiative plans to pilot the use of mobile phones for demand generation, in collaboration with JHU/CCP. This work is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

In Kenya and Tanzania, FHI 360's award-winning Mobile for Reproductive Health (m4RH) project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), has used mobile phones since 2009 to disseminate family planning information to the general public, as well as information on the nearest clinic that offers these services. m4RH is one of the few text-messaging services globally that provides family planning information as a means of education and behavior change communication.



To see an example of mobile technology at work, view an interactive demonstration of FHI 360's m4RH text-messaging system at www.fhi360.org/m4RH.



FHI 360 HEADQUARTERS
2224 E NC Hwy 54
Durham, NC 27713 USA
T 1.919.544.7040
F 1.919.544.7261

WASHINGTON DC OFFICE
1825 Connecticut Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20009 USA
T 1.202.884.8000
F 1.202.884.8400

ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL OFFICE
19th Floor, Tower 3
Sindhorn Building
130-132 Wireless Road
Kwaeng Lumpini, Khet Phatumwan
Bangkok 10330 Thailand
T 66.2.263.2300
F 66.2.263.2114

EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA
REGIONAL OFFICE
1115 Burnett Street
Hatfield Square, Building 3, 4th Floor
Hatfield, Pretoria 0083 South Africa
T 27.12.762.4000
F 27.12.762.4001

www.FHI360.org

In Rwanda, the m4RH program is being expanded to focus on health content for young people, including information about pregnancy, puberty, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Another FHI 360 project in Tanzania involves the adaptation of an evidence-based family planning counseling and screening job aid for use on mobile phones by community health workers as part of an existing HIV home-based care program. The intervention also focuses on the use of mobile phones to expedite routine data collection and reporting among levels of the health system.

In partnership with UNICEF in Zambia, FHI 360 is supporting the use of mobile technology to improve and maintain high-quality services for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. To address the challenges in ensuring a continuum of care for pregnant women, new mothers and their children, the partners are piloting projects using two innovations developed by UNICEF. The first innovation is called Results 160, which works by sending dried-blood-spot results via text messages from the laboratory to the mobile phones of specific health care workers to ensure speedy delivery of infant HIV test results. The other innovation is called RemindMi (**Remind Mothers and Infants**), which operates by sending text-message reminders of next clinic appointments to care givers, thereby improving follow-up.

Globally, FHI 360 collaborated with the Mobile Alliance for Maternal Action (MAMA) on a new set of culturally sensitive, postpartum family planning messages that women can receive on their mobile phones. These messages are designed to educate mothers on the benefits of birth spacing and reproductive health and help them make informed decisions with valuable information that can save lives. MAMA's postpartum family planning messages are free of charge and accessible through www.mobilemamaalliance.org.

FHI 360/mHealth for most-at-risk populations

In Ghana, the SHARPER project's Text Me! Flash Me! helpline enables men who have sex with men to receive key health messages and referrals through text messaging. They can also request a call back from a helpline staffed by certified counselors trained by the national AIDS program. The initiative, which expanded to include female sex workers, has increased the use of HIV counseling and testing and treatment services for sexually transmitted infections by both groups.

Through the Aksi Stop AIDS Project in Indonesia, text messages sent to men who have sex with men include reminder messages; personal invitations to clinics, events and group discussions; and fast answers when men have immediate questions or concerns.

In Thailand, the Sex Alert communications campaign uses text messaging as part of a six-pronged communications strategy that aims to raise awareness, promote safer sexual behavior and encourage men who have sex with men to use health services for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections.

About FHI 360: FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions. Our staff includes experts in health, education, nutrition, environment, economic development, civil society, gender equality, youth, research, technology, communication and social marketing — creating a unique mix of capabilities to address today's interrelated development challenges. FHI 360 serves more than 60 countries and all U.S. states and territories.