0km Health – A collective pathway to systemic change.

SCOPE IMPACT

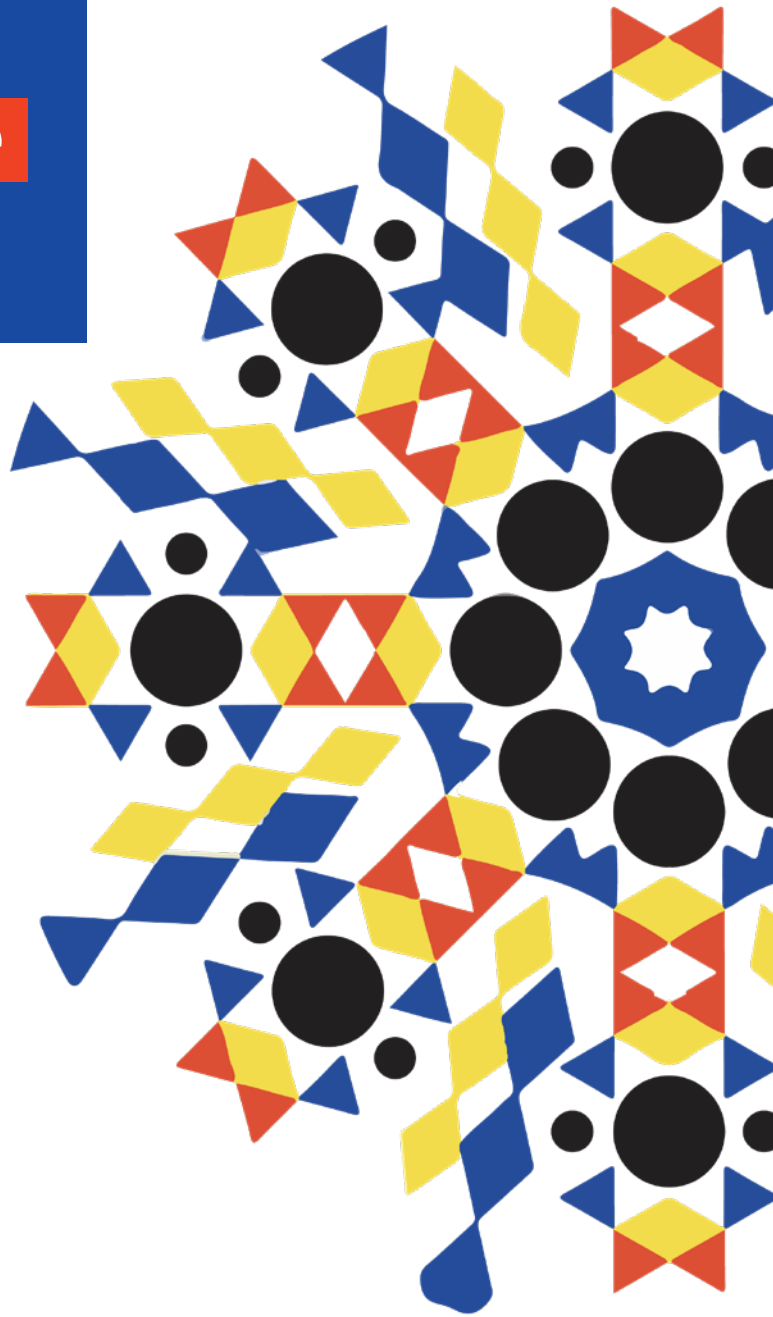
0km Health paves the way for proactive health.

One year on, COVID-19 continues to devastate communities and place unprecedented pressure on health systems. Across the globe, the pandemic has pushed the health sector already grappling with complex challenges to breaking point. Increases in ill health and mortality, disruptions to essential services, delays in elective care, and a wave of mental health problems are some of the heavy burdens the health systems will have to bear going forward. These issues, combined with the physical and mental exhaustion of an already overstretched healthcare workforce and the catastrophic financial challenges faced by the public health sector, paint a bleak picture of the future.

The crisis and exposed system weaknesses have accelerated **a call to 'build back better'**. The pandemic has underscored an urgent demand for services that can be provided with less dependency on facility-based health workers, accessed both locally or virtually, meeting people where they are. The pandemic has highlighted the need to accelerate prevention, early detection, and intervention as well as to better support the self-management of health. The ongoing crisis has also revealed the need for improved ways of addressing social determinants of health and stronger integration of physical wellness, behavioural, and mental health aspects into services. Furthermore, there is a renewed demand for deeper community engagement and genuine participation from groups historically excluded from health sector development efforts.

To deliver on this change, we have to go beyond the idea of building back better. To transform, we must create from the future. By collectively looking across the horizon and imagining new ways of doing, we will be able to prepare for and shape a better tomorrow. Equipped with an alternative vision and by driving forward the change, we believe we can accelerate the attainment of health, dignity, and well-being for everyone.

The '0km' approach to community-centric, proactive health and well-being.



Through our recent work supporting essential health service innovation, reimagining the role of community health workers, using futures thinking for post-pandemic planning, and co-designing new care models, the concept of 0km Health has emerged. We believe that this proactive and localised health model, outlined briefly herein, can significantly contribute to meeting the needs of communities and health systems going forward.

0km Health is inspired by the Italian Slow Food movement. Their 0km philosophy promotes the prioritisation of healthy, community-centric food production and consumption for the long-term benefits of the local economy, environment, and community. 0km Health is rooted in this thinking. We believe the concept provides the foundation for an **inclusive, localised approach to health with equal, sustained participation from community, service delivery, government, private sector, and impact partners.** The approach is steeped in respect for differences in knowledge, skills, and belief systems while embracing diversity as a strength. It is responsive to context, data, and lived experience. 0km Health is both optimistic and pragmatic – fuelled by a belief in large-scale change while rapidly closing the gap between experimentation, practice, and evidence, making new solutions a reality for people everywhere.

5 key enablers of 0km Health.

In order to transform our vision into practice, we have identified five key enablers of 0km Health. We are confident that focusing on the delivery of these five key areas of change will accelerate the equitable transformation of health globally and place us in a position of strength to tackle challenges to come.

1. Responsive, climate-smart primary healthcare.

Primary healthcare (PHC) is uniquely positioned to meet community health needs locally and act as a strategic entry point for addressing social determinants of health. The pandemic has demonstrated that strong PHC also plays a central role in crisis preparedness, response, and recovery. At Scope, we have identified two areas we believe can further contribute to the ongoing PHC strengthening and that serve as enablers of 0km Health:

Responsiveness to local contexts and community engagement are underlying principles of PHC. **Human-centered design (HCD) has proven to be an effective approach for upholding this ethos, yet it remains underutilised in public health practice.** The HCD approach and mindset are particularly successful in aligning service improvement and innovation with people's lived experiences and changing health needs. The collaborative process at the heart of HCD builds trust, ownership, and local leadership. The rapid testing and refinement cycles lead to efficient solutions, often saving time, effort, and money along the way.

Institutionalising collaborative innovation and creative problem solving is an important element of supporting PHC actors and communities in responding and adapting to ever-changing needs. Embedding HCD and resilience-supporting skills within the community, government, and organisational structures is important given the need for preventing, preparing for, and mitigating current and future future challenges, including the anticipated effects of climate change.

Energy is another critical enabler and a core function of essential local health services. Continuous energy access is vital for deliveries, newborn care, storage of vaccines, provision of emergency services, and supply of clean water. Access to electricity is equally instrumental in attracting and retaining skilled health workers, especially in rural areas. Yet, almost 60% of healthcare facilities in 46 low- and middle-income countries lack reliable sources of energy. **Renewable energy technology, particularly solar photovoltaic (PV) technology, is primed for supporting accelerated facility electrification in rural and resource-constrained locations lacking regular energy sources.** In addition to enabling access to better care, renewable energy also has the potential to reduce or reverse health hazards resulting from carbon and fossil fuel emissions.

However, barriers remain in optimising new climate-smart technologies. In order to scale access to electrified, quality PHC, we need to co-design diagnostic, planning, financing, and capacity building approaches and tools. Designing and showcasing optimised solar-powered facilities and their subsequent, positive impact on health, financial sustainability, and ultimately climate will pave the way for the technology's wider use. Harnessing participatory HCD processes to bridge architecture, technology, and community needs will result in inviting environments combined with safety and support for the provision of quality 0km care.

2. Tech-powered health and wellness.

The pandemic has contributed to the universal demand for new technology solutions, high-quality data, and artificial intelligence (AI) driven interventions. This dynamic shift in demand, alongside technological advances, such as smartphones, 5G networks, and cloud computing provide gateways for technology-enabled diagnostics, triage, remote treatment, and care. Always-on health monitoring and digital therapeutics together with predictive analytics, personalised genomics, and aggregated genetic data sets pave the way for preventative disease detection and precision medicine. Improved decision making, task automation, and better utilisation of scarce human resources are further advantages ushered in by tech development.

However, to realise the potential with equal access and benefit, we need to overcome several hurdles. Digital literacy, affordability, and access gaps are vast and growing. Data privacy and protection remain real concerns. Few clear pathways exist for clustering and adapting contextually relevant solutions for connecting data to public sector digitised records and for creating a patient-centric continuum of care.

Going forward, **designing stepwise, agile pathways for technology-driven models of care for health systems at differing levels of maturity will be the key.** Demonstrating value and providing evidence related to health outcomes, efficiencies, cost-saving, and patient satisfaction will foster wider adoption. Achieving all this requires forming new alliances to accelerate the innovation, testing, and deployment of technology-powered public goods that respond to diverse community and public sector needs.

3. Holistic self- and group-care practice.

Self-care is not a new practice. Yet recent developments across devices, products, and drugs provide new opportunities for self-care and the realisation of 0km Health. Personalised, preventative self-care plans, individual and household tailored 'digital medicine cabinets', home testing linked to diagnosing, monitoring, and digitally assisted counselling are just some feasible 0km Health solutions that currently remain out of reach for most.

Though inroads have been made in promoting self-care interventions for a wider population and linking these interventions into the healthcare system, a series of barriers remain. These barriers include poorly designed or incorrect information, low health literacy levels, sub-standard products and services, and most importantly, the lack of connection from self-care tools to health service follow up. Innovation is also required to meet people's rapidly changing expectations of how they wish to interact with and access care, including from within the home, in the community, alongside peers, through traditional practice, or in connection to pharmacies and alternative service outlets.

The fragmented, disconnected self-care service journey needs to be rethought with a life-course perspective and multi-service point approach where extended service tentacles create a holistic self-care practice. **New solutions have to be designed with and for communities that have the most to gain from improved self-care and group-care models**; people facing geographical service barriers, economically disadvantaged families, mobile, migrant and refugee populations, the increasing numbers of people living in informal urban settlements as well as groups facing systemic discrimination and stigmatisation. Moreover, the opportunity to support the health, dignity, and well-being of the **one billion people living with disabilities** has largely been overlooked. Advancing proactive and self-managed 0km care options hold life-changing potential in supporting agency and realisation of the right to health for many communities sidelined by medical self-care advances to date.

4. Community health worker 2.0.

Community health workers (CHWs) are a vital component of localised, primary health. In carrying out their role, CHWs play an important bridge function between the health system and the community, serving a triple role of service extender, cultural broker, and social change agent. In practice, however, the health system has limited its focus to the service extender aspect of the role, missing out on the opportunity for the wider benefit of culturally sensitive health communication, contextualisation of practice, leveraging community influencers as well as weaving together rituals and traditional practices with biomedically recommended health advice.

Supporting CHWs in optimising their role is a key element in advancing particularly underserved communities in attaining better health. This will include, amongst others, strengthening CHW networks with beneficiaries, peers, and community influencers as well as equipping them with adaptive health communication skills. Tech enablement and delegation will help resolve task management, prioritisation, mobilisation as well as reminder issues, enabling CHWs to focus on in-person activities.

Leveraging universal ritualisation mechanics for CHW-led behaviour change is also an effective yet untapped approach that can support the integration of the community's received wisdom and biomedical information to better align with community motivations and meanings. Rituals are practised by all communities to avoid risk and promote health, create cohesion, coordinate collective action as well as reinforce desired behaviours. They are highly intertwined with health, hygiene, and diet. Ritualising recommended health behaviours will play an important part in enabling CHWs to become persuasive social change agents that can play a critical role in advancing community health and well-being.

5. Creative community change-making.

Communities hold within them an abundance of human capital, entrepreneurship, and innovation potential. Across the globe, everyday people develop ideas, build new skills, and pioneer solutions for improved health. Communities generate new resources, press for service improvements and organise to tackle underlying causes of ill health. **Community-led mobilisation is a proven, effective transformation approach and by its very nature strengthens the ability of people to work together for any goal that they deem important.**

Social circumstances may, however, obstruct and hamper community ability and confidence to effectively mobilise to drive change. People may struggle to unlock existing knowledge, free resources, or gain access to new skills, information, and channels needed to take solutions into wider, systemic use. The framing of issues and limited availability of diverse means of participation may also prevent meaningful engagement or contribution by people with differing levels of experience, skills, and abilities.

Supporting and encouraging community-led social innovation and mobilisation can take many forms. Building community capacity in weaving together local know-how, collaboration, and social learning as well as supporting communities in gaining externally acquired new knowledge and resources is an important support mechanism. Bringing together diverse people and perspectives through creativity and arts can provide both a channel and a resource that the community can use to make sense of the world, connect with collective memory, and reimagine the future. Leveraging the arts, popular culture, and community influencers to ignite and encourage self-expression and engagement can help shift agency away from institutions and gives ordinary people the ability to create meaningful change in unprecedented ways. Supporting particularly women to lead in shaping change agendas, organising collective action and driving innovation is critical.

An inclusive, people-centric approach to exploring how healthcare should evolve in the years to come can also be done through futures thinking and scenario building. Futures thinking allows us to reimagine society and a system in which everyone has a stake. It serves as a method to engage diverse views for consensus building and framing public discourse on health systems of the future.

What's Next?

Shifting prevailing mindsets and changing systems is not easy. Unleashing the full potential of these and other community-centric enablers will require radical collaboration, collective learning, and open innovation.

0km Health is a call for sustainable value creation with communities, organisations, governments, and impact actors alike. By taking the leap together, we can usher in new models for better, more equal health and well-being that is co-created, tech-enabled, and planet positive from the outset. Laying the foundations of tomorrow's health, well-being, and dignity starts today.

Scope Impact is a social impact company. We are looking forward to collaborating to accelerate health and social change at scale.

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