

Pak One Health Finalizes its Study on Use of mHealth Public Health Programs, Focusing Infectious Diseases.

Summary of Study

Recent inventions in use of mobile technology in Public Health has revolutionized the management of resistant infectious diseases, especially in developing countries. This frequent availability and use of Information and Telecommunication Technology has opened new avenues for the health management and is termed as eHealth or mHealth.

This new trend of using wireless technology including mobile phones, patient monitoring devices, personal digital assistants (PDAs) etc. in the health sector is commonly referred as mHealth or mobile health. The mHealth platform is particularly useful in collection, transmission and timely analysis of digital data for evidence based health policy and implementation.

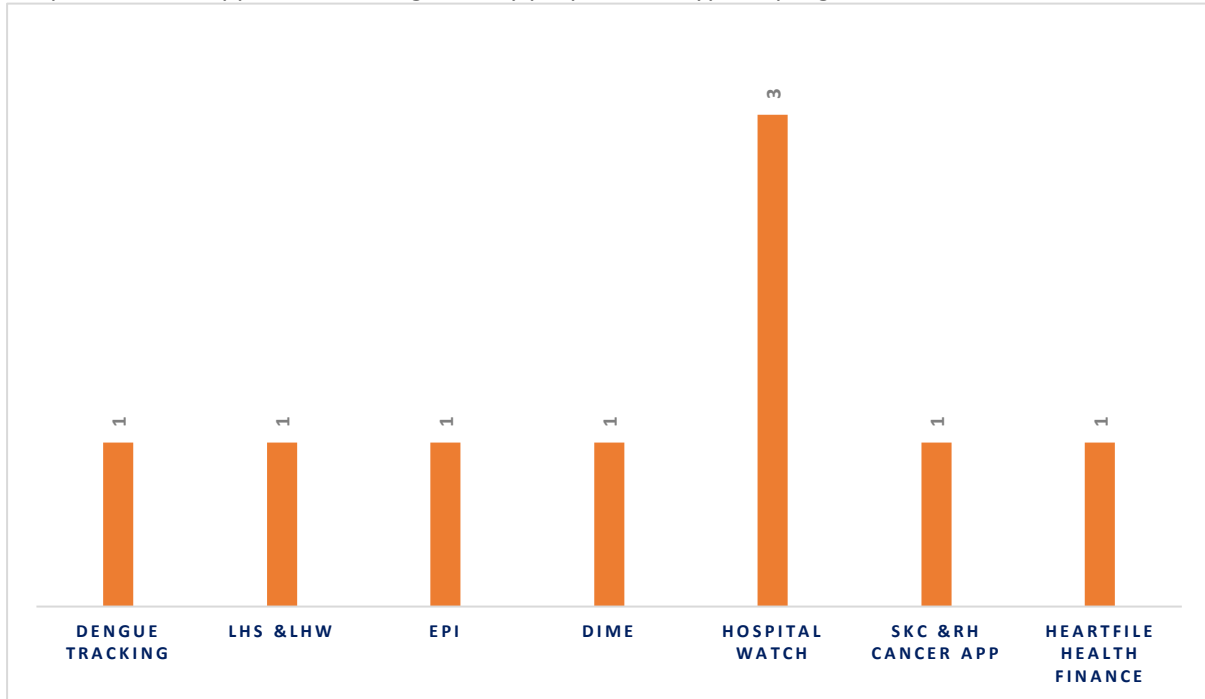
A number of initiatives, especially in government driven programs have also started using mHealth to improve disease management. The worst outbreak of Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever (DHF) in 2011, that led to >300 deaths and affected >20000 patients within few months in Punjab, proved to be a turning point for introducing the use of mHealth to control dengue fever outbreak in future. Based upon the success of mHealth dengue tracking system, subsequently android applications were deployed for management of other infectious diseases (eg EPI, TB), hospital management, monitoring and evaluation of health services and drug quality monitoring in Punjab. Due to strong political support and administrative leadership, Punjab became a role model for other provinces, for use of mobile phones in public health.

Pak One Health Alliance under its Vector Borne Disease Prevention Program organized a baseline study to assess the current status of mHealth projects and identify the measures for optimal mHealth in Punjab by comparing it with International Best Practices. Quantitative cum Qualitative approach was applied by using a structured questionnaire to collect baseline information which was further corroborated by conducting semi-structured interviews of the project managers of the respective projects, users and policy makers.

In the absence of any focal person or organization for mHealth in Punjab, snowball approach was used to get sample of nine prominent mHealth projects including seven from public sector and two from the private sector in Punjab. Almost 90% of the surveyed projects were fully launched and only one project was in pilot phase from private sector initiated by Shaukat Khanum Hospital.

It was observed that the smart phone users' qualification varied from under-graduation to post-graduation in different projects. More than 50% users were trained for less than 1 week and only 10% were trained for 4 weeks for using mHealth apps. Majority of the respondents (30%) were using smart phone app known as Hospital watch while other mHealth projects were represented by only one member each project in the data. Most of the surveyed mHealth projects (77%) are owned and supported by Government of Punjab.

Graph: mHealth Applications being used by purpose and type of program.



Punjab Department aims at expanding the scope of these projects as well as launching some improved versions of the existing mHealth projects.