


DIGITAL TOOLS—DONE RIGHT

Improve program efficiency and patient outcomes

- Digital tools can improve care and save lives—but only if they are done right.
- Digital tools can serve as both a light electronic health record (EHR) and can improve monitoring and management.
- When designed with the user in mind, digital tools can solve problems created by paper-based record-keeping (or inefficient digital tools) and facilitate rapid process improvements.


Benefits of a well-designed digital tool include:

- ✓ Increasing program efficiency;
- ✓ Saving health care workers time;
- ✓ Managing large patient populations;
- ✓ Retaining a higher proportion of patients in care;
- ✓ Reducing health care worker training time; and
- ✓ Improving program quality.



Clear, actionable guidance from the creators of the Simple app

[Read the playbook >](#)



LESSONS FROM Simple

The principles outlined in the playbook are drawn from years of experience developing [Simple](#), an open-source tool that has been used in more than 5,000 facilities to manage more than 4 million patients with hypertension and diabetes in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Ethiopia.

User-centered design sets a digital tool up for success

Effective digital tools put the needs of the key user — the frontline health care worker — at the center. A user-centered design approach can mean the difference between a tool that many users adopt and one they reject or use incorrectly — and, therefore, the difference between a program that fails and one that succeeds.

Four principles for user-centered design:

- 1 Design for the user, not the stakeholder;
- 2 Observe real-world clinical care;
- 3 Talk to users; and
- 4 User-test your software.



Key features of an effective digital tool

Capture the right data points

A good data collection application is one that's actually used during clinical care at the time of the patient visit.

Capturing only the data that needs to be tracked — the bare minimum to drive key indicators — keeps data entry quick and easy, making health care workers more likely to use the tool consistently.

Make it very fast and easy to use

For busy health care workers, data entry must be extremely efficient. Only a fast, user-friendly tool will be used consistently.

Offline functionality, quick patient search, and features that make tracking and contacting overdue patients a lighter lift are some of the most important features for health care workers.

Focus on patient management

Unlike paper-based systems, which are fixed at a facility, a digital tool allows patients to move between facilities while maintaining a single and complete longitudinal record.

Automating administrative tasks that are slow and labor-intensive using paper-based systems — such as sending SMS reminders and compiling reports of overdue patients — makes patient management easier for health care workers and can improve patient retention.

Build simple dashboards that show the right indicators

A simple, effective dashboard can help decision makers quickly identify problems and monitor the effects of their interventions. Dashboards should prioritize the indicators that demonstrate progress towards health outcomes.