

# Heading towards a strong digital health ecosystem

Healthcare is one of India's most dynamic yet challenging sectors. The country's National Health Policy aims to achieve universal health coverage, including universal access to qualitative healthcare, medicines and vaccines. But while indicators have shown a marked improvement in the healthcare ecosystem over time, challenges remain around the non-uniform lack of affordability, accessibility to both preventive and curative health services, and poor infrastructure across the country.

## Leveraging digital technologies

To address these challenges, transformative programs that leverage digital technologies have been successfully set up under the 'Digital India Program'. Moreover, healthcare is one of the major focus areas in India's 'National Strategy on Artificial Intelligence'.

3d rendered illustration of generic human cells.  
Source: Shutterstock.





The “Ayushman Bharat” program has brought healthcare within reach for hundreds of millions Indians, significantly increasing the number of people with government-funded health insurance. The program sets to drive electronic patient records and digital health delivery by triggering significant technological innovations, including the development of a sophisticated IT system.

With the National Digital Health Blueprint, India has set the architectural framework for an efficient and secure implementation of digital health. It provides a strong infrastructure for data integration by leveraging Big Data Analytics, Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence.

The recent launch of the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) has brought comprehensive e-health a step nearer. Every Indian citizen will have a unique health ID linked to identifiers that will facilitate access to medical services; because under the NDHM continuity of care, international standardized data, interoperability and an open API- approach are all taken into account. Although

implementation of the NDHM has its challenges, such as inclusiveness and data quality, it shows how India clearly understands the value of health data and AI, and is willing to actively invest in enabling conditions.

**Scope for collaborations**

India and the Netherlands share a long-term bilateral agenda, with healthcare as one of the core themes and AI a crosscutting, key-enabling technology. And India itself sees and welcomes opportunities for collaboration in addressing the challenges around optimal use of health data and AI.

There are already several existing Indo-Dutch partnerships focused on health and AI. Maastricht University, for example, has two such projects running: TRAIN focuses on privacy-preserving AI that unlocks health data without centralizing it. The second project is a collaboration between the university, Apollo Hospitals and Microsoft to use AI to predict cardiac disease.

**Potential for further collaborations**

India has the potential to become the world’s IT hub, with its young, tech-savvy population. And with the two countries’ complementary talents, knowledge and resources, India and the Netherlands are optimally positioned to create further crosscutting public-private-partnerships, boost business and foster innovation-driven growth, as our collaborations in the Health sector and AI illustrate.

NIN India, is currently working on an AI opportunity report for Indian and Dutch stakeholders to explore areas for further collaborations.

*Netherlands Innovation and Health Attache Network India  
Sandra Kalidien, Freek-Jan Frerichs and Marcel Floor  
[nde-ia@minbuza.nl](mailto:nde-ia@minbuza.nl)*

**The aim is give hundreds of millions more Indians access to healthcare**