

# From Click to Care: Navigating Nigeria's Digital Health Revolution Amid Barriers and Breakthroughs.

## Nigeria's e-pharmacy ecosystem

The e-pharmacy ecosystem in Nigeria has shown substantial growth, driven by increasing digital connectivity, a burgeoning e-commerce landscape, and a rising demand for private and convenient healthcare solutions (Adetumilara et al., 2024). The advent of e-pharmacies has opened opportunities for users to access contraceptives and essential health products online, and for enhanced accessibility, especially among urban and peri-urban populations with high internet access. E-pharmacy in Nigeria, however, faces challenges, some of which are currently being addressed by the e-pharmacy for family planning project. The project is a 4-year investment by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation aimed at improving access to quality family planning (FP) products and services through the optimization of hybrid e-Pharmacy starting with Lagos State, Nigeria and with HealthPlus e-Pharmacy as the test case. The project focuses on generating evidence on the feasibility, acceptability, and business case of optimizing hybrid e/pharmacy models to deliver FP information, products, and services, including addressing regulatory frameworks for digital prescription and dispensing, and bridging gaps in digital literacy and internet access in rural areas, which create disparities in access.

## The studies we conducted

*To further explore the landscape and generate insights, we carried out the following studies:*

E-Pharmacy for Family Planning Situational Analysis and Landscape Study – Initial e-pharmacy landscape assessment

Development and testing of low-tech equity models for underserved populations

Behavioral Audit – Platform assessments to gather insights on user behaviour (UI/UX) and pain points.

Quantitative and Qualitative Studies on underserved and general population to identify and quantify supply and demand side barriers and enablers of e-pharmacy and e-pharmacy for family planning.

## The barriers we encountered or identified as insights from our studies

*The following are some of the barriers we encountered or identified as insights from our studies:*



Awareness gaps- Poor awareness of e-pharmacy and other digital health services.



Regulatory limitations – Lack of policy framework for implementation.



Structural/operational/ logistics barriers- High delivery charges, long delivery times, product unavailability.



Lack of social proof related to platform use



Low trust in the utilization of online services.



Limited digital capacity - Low self-efficacy to use platform, poor self-efficacy for payments.



Platform UI/UX issues - Product search issues, Payment failures, Lack of onboarding support, long chat/engagement waiting times, Inadequate multi-language support



Status quo bias in preference for physical pharmacies.



Poor knowledge of available FP products.



Concerns/scepticisms about online services.



Limited internet connectivity in some locations.

## The enablers we leveraged

*Despite these barriers, we have so far leveraged the following identified enablers:*

E-pharmacy capacity to provide a broad range of FP information products and services

Digital connectivity - The high smartphone ownership in country supports potential demand for e-pharmacy services.

Privacy, convenience, and cost were identified as key factors that can drive trust in e-pharmacy services.

High mobile penetration

High smartphone ownership

Willingness to pay for digital health services.

## The interventions we have implemented so far:

*In line with the enablers and in response to the barriers, the project has carried out the following interventions:*

- Improve awareness of FP access through the e-pharmacy platform - comprehensive online and offline demand generation activities.
- Capacity building – Training of community and e-Pharmacists on balanced counselling and the provision of expanded sets of FP services and training of demand generation interpersonal communication agents.
- Platform enhancements - Implementation of digital enhancements on the platform geared towards the improvement of user interface and user experience
- Logistics Innovations - Products bundling, 3rd party logistics (3PL) integration, Monthly products logistics subscription.
- Digital literacy and access – Testing and implementing low tech equity models that can be used by individuals and communities of various level of digital literacy and little or no internet access.
- Trust and acceptance - Platform enhancements and increased awareness and digital education/responsibility.
- Regulatory and compliance issues - Identification and development of regulation and policy standards/frameworks, some of which are the e-Pharmacy regulation, the e-pharmacy policy and the Nigerian National Prescription and Dispensing Policy (NNPDP) among others.