

Prevention, digital access, and patient-centred care

 By [Aimée Wesso-Roberts](#)

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As we begin to venture into 2024, the landscape of healthcare in South Africa is marked by a blend of innovative technologies and burgeoning challenges.



Source: Supplied. Aimée Wesso-Roberts, AfroCentric Group

From the ever-growing impact of chronic diseases to the constant struggle with healthcare accessibility, the focus on preventative healthcare is set to shape the upcoming trends in the years to come.

One of the dominant themes that will echo through the healthcare sector in 2024 is the necessity for more proactive healthcare approaches. Emphasising health screenings, predictive analytics, and the cultivation of improved lifestyle habits are set to form the foundation of scalable and impactful healthcare solutions in the year ahead.

- **Virtual healthcare to streamline access:** Digital health continues to expand, with virtual healthcare emerging as a significant trend. Given that over 90% of South Africans own smartphones, the potential of virtual healthcare solutions to

bridge gaps in underserved populations and address prevalent health-delivery challenges cannot be overstated.

Moving beyond consultations with your healthcare provider, advancements in virtual screening and diagnostics are poised to empower patients, enabling them to take a more proactive role in their health while equipping healthcare professionals with crucial data for informed treatment decisions.

- **Wellness and self-care as preventative measures:** The increasing awareness that a considerable percentage of diseases can be averted through lifestyle changes is propelling the prioritisation of preventative healthcare. With the ballooning costs associated with non-communicable diseases, both patients and healthcare systems are recognising the significance of the adage "prevention is better than cure".

This shift is driving a surge in initiatives focused on mental wellbeing, diet, and exercise, spurring a quest for solutions that foster holistic preventative care. As the Internet of Things (IoT) gains more traction, there's a growing understanding of the interconnectedness between mental and physical health, thereby influencing the design of comprehensive preventative care strategies.

- **Mental health: challenging stigma and access:** The spotlight on mental health continues to intensify, breaking down the stigma around seeking mental-health care. Increased conversations on social-media platforms coupled with the proliferation of mental health and wellbeing apps are making people more open to engaging with mental-health resources.

Nevertheless, the challenge remains in ensuring access to mental healthcare. Innovative approaches are necessary to facilitate easier access to these vital services, even though mental-health support apps aren't intended to replace therapy but rather to supplement and support the work conducted outside of therapy sessions.

- **GenAI in healthcare: Revolutionising health solutions:** The advent of Generative AI (GenAI) has invigorated innovation in the healthcare industry. These technologies hold promise in addressing long-standing challenges in resource constraints and health-risk management. The integration of AI into healthcare solutions is crucial, as it has the potential to significantly impact decision-making support and enrich predictive analytics for both preventative and curative healthcare.

- **Value-based care: Redefining healthcare delivery:** As healthcare costs rise and population-health declines, new healthcare delivery models are gaining traction. Value-Based Care (VBC) seeks to remunerate services based on the quality of care provided. This approach aims to hold healthcare professionals accountable for health outcomes, paving the way for more effective, patient-centred services.

However, the implementation of VBC underscores the necessity of considering social and environmental determinants of health, as well as the need for a supportive system to enable healthcare professionals to achieve desired health outcomes. Consequently, the industry is prioritising data integration, defining health objectives, and designing new reimbursement models to steer towards value-based healthcare.

I have no doubt that 2024 is poised to be a year where South Africa's healthcare landscape witnesses a pivotal shift

towards a more proactive, technology-driven, and patient-centric approach. With a focus on prevention, accessibility, and quality, the healthcare industry is striving to address challenges while embracing the potential of innovative solutions for a healthier future.

ABOUT AIMÉE WESSO-ROBERTS

Aimée Wesso-Roberts works for the JSE-listed AfroCentric Group.
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