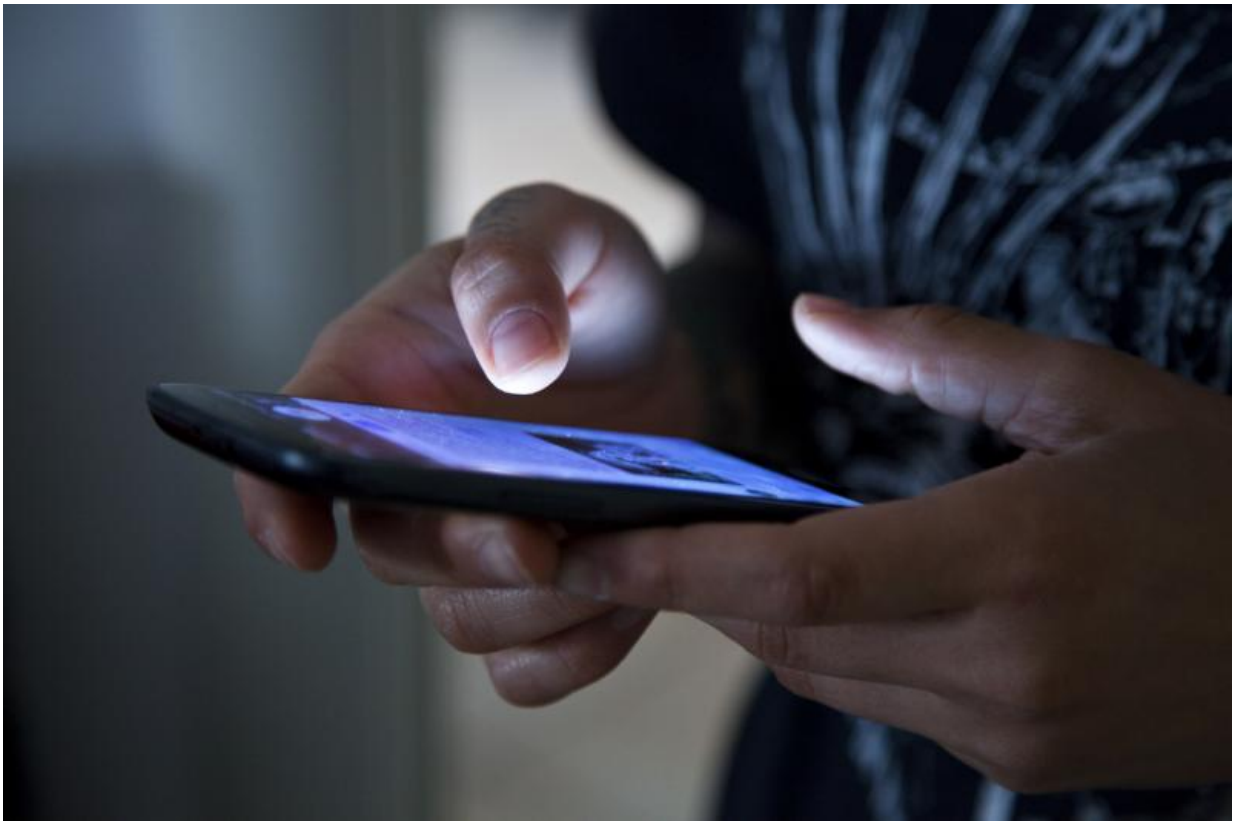


Telehealth: Using cell phones to fight chronic disease in Latin America

September 17 2015, by Nardy Baeza Bickel



Latin America has rapidly rising rates of chronic diseases, but mobile phones might be a key part of the solution, according to a new University of Michigan study.

For more than eight years, U-M professor John Piette has studied "telehealth" in the region and has developed programs in Honduras, Colombia and Mexico that help patients manage their chronic conditions. Most recently, his research expanded to Bolivia.

Piette is especially interested in migrants, indigenous minorities and those with low literacy in Bolivia. Although these people are often poor, most of them own cell phones, which can be used to share information about their health.

"Health care providers and [family members](#) struggle to ensure that people living with diabetes and other [chronic health problems](#) get the help they need," said Piette, professor of public health and internal medicine. "We are focusing on widely accessible technology to provide access to care between doctor's appointments."

Piette is the main author of the new study that included participants with [chronic diseases](#), such as diabetes, [high blood pressure](#) and depression. They received weekly calls to their cell phones, asking about their blood-sugar levels and other signs of decreased health. One group's results were shared with caregivers or family members.

Those who had a caregiver or family member involved in the process were twice as likely to complete the health call and to report excellent health, suggesting involving someone else—even from a long distance—could work for this population.

"Many people from indigenous communities have migrated to urban areas looking for a job and don't have family nearby to care for them. Getting a call reminding them to take care of themselves is really important," said Amparo Aruquipa, a co-author of the study and a student at Universidad Católica Bolivariana in La Paz.

Provided by University of Michigan

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