Pandemic highlights e-health issues

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Misinformation and mistrust of Australia's COVIDSafe app underlines the need for standards to scope, develop, assess and roll out e-health services, Flinders University digital health experts say.

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the need for a more robust

framework for analysis of technologies advances and mobile health applications, especially those with clinical security and patient privacy implications, the Flinders Centre for Digital Health Research authors say in a new journal article.

With new digital health responses playing a vital role in the fight against COVID-19 (such as mobile tracking, telehealth, big data/AI etc.), the authors are calling for wider use of a clear map of the ecosystem so these responses can be appraised.

"In a rapidly changing environment with the increasing development of mobile health, issues related to all aspects of user expectations must be well thought out," says Professor Anthony Maeder, Flinders Digital Health Research Centre's co-director.

"We hear so much about the threat of IT—and not only COVID-19 related IT—based on opinion and supposition rather than systematic analysis," he says.

"Instead we need to recognize and respond to the need for guiding a sensible, balanced, broad-based discourse on IT innovation in the public domain, weighing the benefits against the risks."

This is highly relevant in the context of the Australian Government's opt-in contact-tracing app, which continues to rekindle issues of privacy and misuse of personal data in health contexts, adds Flinders Professor of Digital Health Sysems Trish Williams.

"Especially in health applications, there is a tendency for digital (and other technology) solutions to be seen as 'black box magic' and to focus on the potential for scary negative impacts," she says.

"We would like to offer a rational framework which provides a

360-degree perspective to characterize new digital health contributions and facilitates more balance discussion."

A successful framework would link the technology issues (from 'gee whiz' aspects to scalable, sustainable, reliable and trusted properties) with core needs of health goals (the clinical rationale), the systems (providers and service organizations) and of course key stakeholders (from consumers and society to government and other health agencies).

The article, "Contextualising Digital Health Contributions to Fighting the COVID-19 Pandemic," by Anthony Maeder, Niranjan Bidargaddi and Patricia Williams, has been published in the *Journal of the International Society for Telemedicine and EHealth*.

More information: "Contextualising Digital Health Contributions to Fighting the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of the International Society for Telemedicine and EHealth*. DOI: doi.org/10.29086/JISfTeH.8.e3

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