

# How digital health may shore up pandemic preparedness

November 9 2023, by David Bradley

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Credit: Anton Uniqueton from Pexels

Arguments are still raging about how humanity could have been better prepared for COVID-19. Indeed, politicians who chose different approaches to handling the emerging viral pandemic and especially those

who had abandoned the scientific plans that were in place even before we had named the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 are still being lambasted by their critics, patient advocacy groups and those with a post-pandemic grievance.

So how might we be better prepared for the emergence of the next virulent pathogen? [Research](#) in the *International Journal of Networking and Virtual Organisations* has looked into the realm of digital health and how it might better prepare us ahead of the next plague.

Nilmini Wickramasinghe of Swinburne University of Technology in Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia and Rima Gibbings of the University of North Georgia in Dahlonega, Georgia, U.S., reprise what we know about the devastating and ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. They highlight the key vulnerabilities that lead to so much disease, death and [economic downturn](#). The World Health Organization has, with 20:20 hindsight pointed out how if we had been more prepared we might have coped better with this disease. So much is obvious in retrospect.

In this new work, Wickramasinghe and Gibbings have reviewed the various approaches to the pandemic to home in on those that might be more effective in reducing the impact of a similar future worldwide disease outbreak. The team points out that, clearly, there was never going to be an easy fix once this virus had emerged in China late in 2019 and begun spreading rapidly around the world.

Lockdowns, quarantines, furloughing, shutdowns, masking, [social distancing](#), vaccines, and the various other responses may well have limited the final toll to some degree, but where there ways in which we might have been better prepared and slowed its spread and perhaps even have halted the disease in its tracks?

The team's review has allowed them to build a framework in order to

answer that question in the context of a putative pandemic. Perhaps the key to a future, hopefully, successful response to the emergence of a novel and lethal pathogen is [public education](#), so that the [global community](#) can en masse recognize what needs to be done to stave off a pandemic and individuals can find a shared responsibility that does not rely on political bluff and bluster but is wholly guided by scientifically based guidance.

**More information:** Nilmini Wickramasinghe et al, Using digital health to support superior preparedness to enable better preparedness and readiness to combat pandemics: a scoping review, *International Journal of Networking and Virtual Organisations* (2023). [DOI: 10.1504/IJNVO.2023.134280](#)

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