

## **Report reveals gender disparity in Australia's digital health sector**

More than 90 per cent of women respondents believe there is still progress to be made to reach gender equity in the digital health sector, according to a new report released by Telstra Health, the Australasian Institute of Digital Health (AIDH), the Digital Health CRC (DHCRC) and CSIRO's Australian e-Health Research Centre. .

The *Understanding Gender Diversity in Australia's Digital Health Sector* special report provides qualitative and quantitative research findings on the current state of gender diversity, career progression and equity in the sector based on the findings from a first of its kind survey.

The survey which informed the report was completed anonymously by close to 300 people who work in the digital health sector. While more than 90 per cent of women respondents said they believe there is still progress to be made in reaching gender equity, one in five men respondents disagreed.

The *Understanding Gender Diversity in Australia's Digital Health Sector* report also shows that fewer women respondents than men respondents intend to continue to work in digital health (77 per cent and 90.8 per cent respectively) yet over nine in 10 respondents advised they would still recommend a career in digital health to others (93.4 per cent).

The report shows different views between the genders regarding senior leadership, with more men than women believing there is a sufficient proportion of women in senior leadership positions (67.8 per cent of men compared to 51.5 per cent of women). Yet, more survey respondents noted reporting to a man (52.6 per cent) than a woman (41.1 per cent).

Career progression is a key theme addressed throughout the report, with more women (66.3%) than men (35.6%) agreeing there are not clear pathways for career progression in digital health. Furthermore, survey respondents identified several opportunities for creating clearer career pathways within the sector, such as qualifications and defined processes and practices for career development.

Commenting on the report, Professor Mary Foley AM, Managing Director of Telstra Health, said, "The digital health sector has enormous potential to lead the technology sector in the representation of women in leadership positions. The health and aged care sectors are already well represented by strong senior women leaders, especially compared to the ICT and technology sectors. As these sectors digitise and the technology and health sectors continue to converge, we need to embrace the strengths and experience of women as well as the benefits of diversity if we are to take advantage of the improvements digital health can enable. The much higher proportion of women respondents who came from the health sector into digital health is indicative that women in the health sector are seeing the importance of digital health to the future effectiveness of health and aged care services."

Annette Schmiede, CEO of Digital Health CRC, said, "The Digital Health CRC team were thrilled to be involved in the development and deployment of this survey, which we see as an integral and overdue benchmark for our industry. The findings set the scene for the ongoing improvement of gender diversity in digital health, which we can achieve through ongoing advocacy and collaboration with our participant organisations and key stakeholders. As one of the leading bodies for research and development in the



digital health sector, we look forward to playing a key role in building accessible career pathways for individuals regardless of gender, supported through our strong workforce capacity and education program.”

The report also identifies a potential retention issue in an industry currently experiencing skills shortages. Twenty-two per cent of women respondents acknowledged they are unsure about continuing their careers in digital health, compared to 8 per cent of men.

When asked “what is the most important consideration when considering a new job?”, job security was of greater importance for women than men (10.7 per cent and 6.9 per cent respectively), whereas compensation was significantly more valuable to men than women (13.8 per cent and 7.1 per cent respectively). Interestingly, ability to have impact was of equal importance across men and women.

David Hansen, CEO of Australian e-Health Research Centre, CSIRO Health and Biosecurity, said, “For Australia to truly have high quality health services that meet the needs of all Australians, we need to embrace diversity at every level. Digital health is not immune and we need to take steps towards eradicating gender bias in our workforce so we can expand women’s contributions, including through their lived experience. This report shows we’ve started on the diversity path. But, it’s clear we still have work to do at structural and cultural levels to ensure gender equity in the digital health space. Let’s keep moving forward.”

Professor Wendy Chapman, Associate Dean, Digital Health & Informatics at University of Melbourne, said, “Co-design with stakeholders is key to designing successful digital health interventions, and it will be just as important in creating inclusive workplaces in digital health. This report gives us a glimpse into the perceptions and experiences of the workforce and provides a first step towards scaling the enablers and breaking down the barriers.”

Dr Louise Schaper, CEO Australian Institute of Digital Health, said, “The landmark gender diversity survey provides insight into workforce diversity across the digital health sector. For leaders and decision makers, this presents a valuable opportunity to address the challenges that are impeding a truly diverse and representative, digitally enabled health workforce. We were delighted to be a part of bringing the survey together and we look forward to working collectively, in realising its goals. The time to act is now.”

Conducted in partnership by Telstra Health, the Australasian Institute of Digital Health (AIDH), the Digital Health Cooperative Research Centre (DHCRC) and CSIRO’s Australian e-Health Research Centre, the survey was launched in 2021 and aimed to create a baseline understanding of gender diversity within the Australian digital health sector to help to identify the challenges and opportunities for improvement within the sector. The findings of the report are based on the views expressed by survey respondents and do not reflect the views of the organisations involved.