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## **App empowers communities to take control of their health**

A venting session in a cardiovascular research lab on the state of healthcare in South Africa and the challenges it poses for patients, especially those in marginalised communities, was exactly what a group of final-year medical students and a PhD candidate at the University of Cape Town (UCT) needed to jump into action and exercise their civic duty.

After two years of hard work, a global pandemic and many other stops and starts along the way, the result is a mobile application that contains succinct, accessible information on various health challenges. [Mandla Health](#) is a one-stop chronic health shop and has been designed to assist patients on their journey to good health.

“We are so excited to introduce Mandla Health to the market. As medical students working in healthcare facilities in the country, we see the plight of our people and we understand their challenges. It was our civic duty to do something about it,” said Mark Verryn, co-founder of Mandla Health.

Verryn developed Mandla Health in collaboration with his fellow student partners, Gilad Shorer, Siyavuya Fikamva and Nkanyiso Hadebe.

Mandla Health primarily targets patients who access overburdened public healthcare facilities in the country.

The application serves three core functions:

- It allows users to access material on various health topics via a digital library and includes links to other useful health-related resources produced by government and non-profit organisations. Videos and relevant telephone numbers have also been included.
- It enables users to set and monitor certain health and lifestyle goals. This includes weight and BMI monitoring. The application also helps users keep an eye on their blood pressure levels, tracks glucose levels, and monitors CD4 counts and viral loads. Mandla Health also tracks an individual’s alcohol consumption and cigarette intake.
- It empowers users to keep track of their medication and includes a novel built-in system like a pill description tool that helps users identify their medication by size, shape and colour.

Mandla Health was officially launched at the beginning of 2022 for both Android and Apple devices and is free to use.

Through meaningful engagement with the platform, users are empowered to take control of their health and well-being. And by doing so, Verryn said the team hopes that it will decrease the load on the already overburdened public healthcare system.

“While the Mandla Health application is suited to all South Africans’ needs, we feel that those in under-resourced communities will benefit most from the recourse, especially those accessing care in overburdened facilities where healthcare professionals have short consultation times and where language barriers are a big factor,” he said.

The application’s noteworthy multilingual feature means users can access all its resources in three of South Africa’s 11 official languages – English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa, and is what sets it apart from its counterparts.

Mandla Health was selected as a finalist in [UCT’s Investment Society’s 2021 Leopards Lair Social Innovation competition](#), the [Africa Oxford Health Innovation Platform](#) and the [Wits Healthcare Innovation Drive](#), achievements Verryn said the team are most proud of.

The team has big plans to lead their brainchild successfully into the future. But for now, they are focused on understanding how well users engage with the application and will use this feedback to shape any improvements along the way. In the long-term, further developing the application and providing additional services in line with users’ needs to directly support the public healthcare system is also on the cards.

“We have many big ideas on how to improve the application. Ultimately, we hope that Mandla will be in the hands of all South Africans and that it will act as a useful tool to assist users on their journey to good health and hopefully help alleviate the burden on public sector hospitals,” he said.

*Story by Niémah Davids, UCT News.*



The Mandla Health team

Photo: Supplied

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