Digitalisation of health information

Timely and accurate health data and information can allow those making decisions to achieve a safe, effective, responsive, and patient-centred care, that is also cost-effective and accessible. New digital health services and applications are possible thanks to a wider use of health data and information that is easier to understand and valid for a range of uses and users. These new digital health services, ranging from telehealth to artificial intelligence, may lead to better access to healthcare and increase patient satisfaction, especially amongst those patients that face the most barriers to traditional in-person care services such as those living in remote areas in LAC (OECD, 2021[2]).

This digital transformation could be useful to improve healthcare access and quality in Latin America and the Caribbean. Countries in LAC could also facilitate the establishment and integration of regional health bodies through the digitalisation of health, thanks to the real time communication and resource dissemination that have been highlighted by the COVID-19 crisis (Di Paolantonio, 2020[3]).

LAC3 countries had on average 65% of primary care practices using EMRs, compared to 93% in OECD24 countries. Only Costa Rica, reporting that all public primary care facilities are using EMRs, had a higher coverage rate than the OECD on average. Mexico had the lowest coverage amongst LAC3 countries with less than a third of primary care practices reporting using EMRs (Figure 5.1).

Two main aspects of people-centred health systems are consulting individuals on their healthcare as well as giving them access to their health data and information. Partly due to the COVID-19 crisis, patients and providers are more and more interested in using digital tools to improve individual health and facilitate patient engagement with health systems. In five LAC countries, 41.6% of individuals aged 16-74 used the internet to seek health information in the three months preceding the survey, compared to 58.6% on average in OECD38 countries (Figure 5.2).

However, important demographic and socio-economic differences in seeking health information online are in place (Oliveira Hashiguchi, 2020[4]). Older adults, individuals with lower levels of educational attainment, as well as those from households with lower incomes were less likely to search for health information online. Both health and digital health literacy are key to guarantee that the digital transformation leaves no one behind.

Definition and comparability

An electronical medical record (EMR) is a computerised medical record created in an organisation that delivers care, such as a hospital or physician's office, for patients of that organisation. Ideally, EMRs should be shared between providers and settings to provide a detailed history of contact with the healthcare system for individual patients from multiple organisations. The figures presented on EMR implementation come from a 2021 survey of OECD countries to which 24 OECD member countries responded, including three members from LAC. The survey was carried out in 2012, 2016, and 2021.

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Access and Usage by Households and Individuals database provides a selection of 92 indicators, based on the second revision of the OECD Model Survey on ICT Access and Usage by Households and Individuals. The indicators originate from both an OECD data collection on OECD and accession countries or key partners (such as Brazil), and Eurostat statistics on households and individuals for the OECD countries that are part of the European statistical system (which are presented here as part of the OECD38 average).

References

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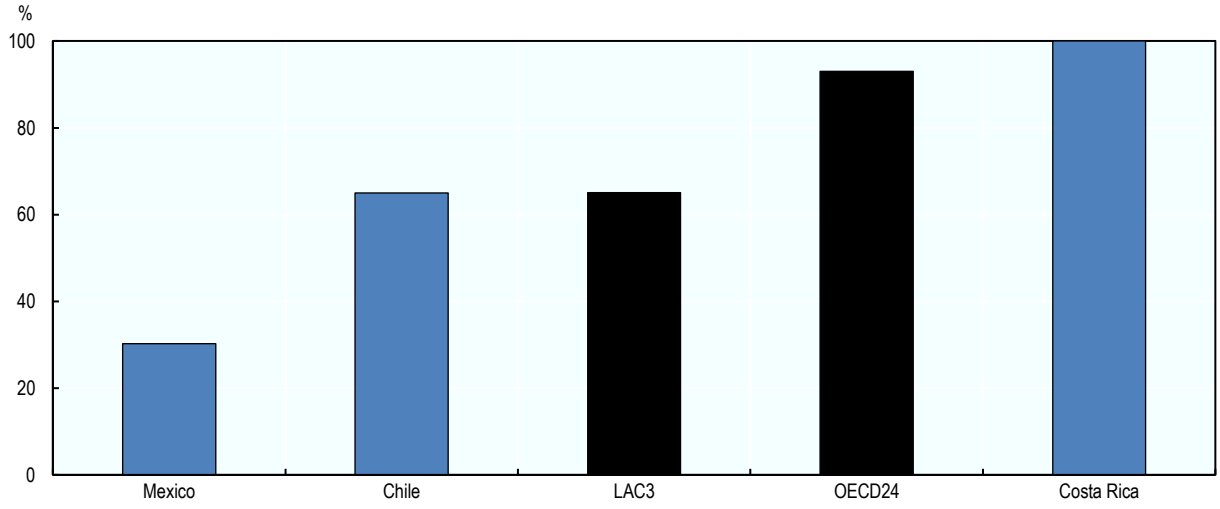
Oliveira Hashiguchi, T. (2020), "Bringing health care to the patient: An overview of the use of telemedicine in OECD countries", *OECD Health Working Papers*, No. 116, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/8e56ede7-en. [3]

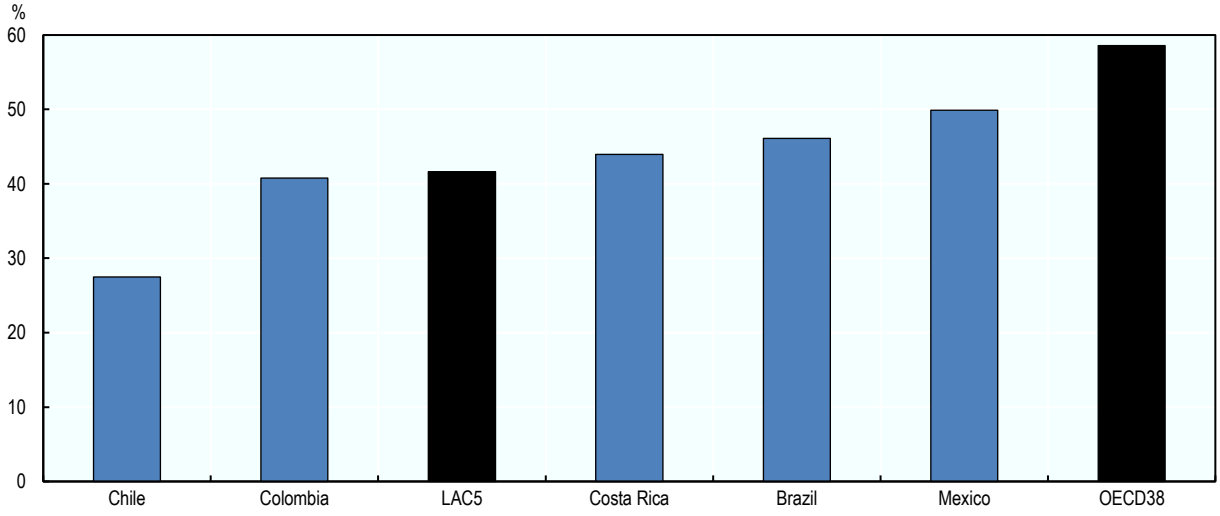
Figure 5.1. Proportion of primary care physician offices using electronic medical records, 2021



Source: OECD survey of electronic health record system development and use, 2021.

StatLink https://stat.link/8l0sh2

Figure 5.2. Percentage of adults searching for health information online, 2021 or latest available year



Source: OECD ICT Access and Usage by Individuals 2022.

StatLink https://stat.link/ajurst