DOWNEAST DIGITAL

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Synopsis for Events

# The role of faith-based and other community organizations

## Speakers

- **Pamela Price** — The Balm in Gilead
- **Sinsi Hernandez-Cancio** — Health Justice
- **Donald Jonas** — Social Impact
- **Lisa Fitzpatrick** — Grapevine Health
- **Lisa Fitzpatrick** — Grapevine Health
- **Grace Cordovano** — Unblock Health
- **Dexter Shurney** — Blue Zones

## Summary

This session at the Downeast Digital 2025 Health Equity Innovation Forum focused on the critical role of faith-based and community organizations in advancing health equity, particularly through digital health innovations. Participants emphasized the importance of understanding the unique challenges faced by underserved communities, such as limited access to technology, digital literacy, and cultural mistrust. The session highlighted the necessity of building trust through consistent engagement with these communities, leveraging the established trust that faith-based organizations already possess. Strategic partnerships between healthcare providers and community groups were explored, showcasing successful models where healthcare initiatives were integrated with community needs. The session concluded with a call to action for healthcare providers to engage meaningfully with these communities, ensuring that health initiatives are both beneficial and sustainable.

## Key Insights

- Faith-based organizations, particularly churches, play a pivotal role in advancing health equity by acting as trusted community hubs. These organizations can bridge the gap between healthcare providers and underserved populations by leveraging their established trust and relationships. This trust is crucial in communities where there is skepticism towards external entities and digital health technologies. By integrating spiritual, emotional, and physical support into health programs, faith-based organizations can make health initiatives more holistic and culturally sensitive.
- Challenges in technology adoption within underserved communities are multifaceted, including limited access to broadband and digital literacy issues. Cultural mistrust towards technology and concerns about data privacy further complicate adoption. Engaging with trusted community organizations, such as faith-based groups, can help address these barriers by fostering trust and facilitating technology adoption. These organizations provide valuable insights into the specific needs and concerns of the community, allowing for more tailored digital health solutions.
- Economic models for faith-based engagement highlight the potential for these organizations to bridge the gap between healthcare innovations and underserved communities. By leveraging their trust and networks, faith-based organizations can influence health behaviors and improve outcomes. Genuine partnerships with healthcare providers can create sustainable economic models that benefit both the community and the organizations involved, ensuring a mutual return on investment.
- Rural health partnerships are emerging as a critical strategy in addressing healthcare access and equity challenges. Faith-based organizations and local community groups play a vital role in bridging the gap between healthcare providers and rural populations. These partnerships leverage the trust and networks of local churches to facilitate healthcare delivery, overcoming cultural and societal barriers to technology adoption. Successful case studies demonstrate the tangible benefits of these collaborations, such as the establishment of local health clinics and remote patient monitoring.

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## Best Practices

- Co-creation with community groups, particularly faith-based organizations, is essential for enhancing digital health initiatives. Engaging with these groups requires understanding their unique cultural contexts and needs. Trust is earned through consistent engagement and collaboration. By partnering with trusted religious institutions, businesses can bridge gaps in public healthcare and overcome cultural barriers to technology adoption. Successful partnerships have shown significant improvements in health outcomes, such as remote patient monitoring and chronic disease management services.
- Leveraging philanthropy for partnerships involves building trust and collaboration with faith-based and community organizations. These partnerships can bridge gaps in healthcare access and technology adoption, particularly in underserved communities. Philanthropy supports the development of two-way relationships that venture capital often overlooks. Successful collaborations require understanding the unique needs and financial standings of each community, ensuring initiatives are co-created with local stakeholders. This approach fosters trust and ensures culturally relevant and sustainable solutions.
- Addressing digital infrastructure gaps requires understanding and integrating the unique needs of underserved communities. Many rural and low-income communities lack reliable broadband, essential for digital health technologies. Partnerships with local organizations, including faith-based institutions, can facilitate the adoption of digital tools by addressing cultural barriers. Leveraging existing community structures, such as churches, to provide digital literacy education and access to technology can address barriers, enhance trust, and increase engagement. Innovative funding mechanisms, like utilizing Medicare Advantage benefits to subsidize broadband access, can alleviate affordability and access issues.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this breakout session highlighted the indispensable role of faith-based and community organizations in promoting health equity through digital health innovations. By addressing barriers such as digital literacy, infrastructure, and trust, these groups can facilitate greater access to healthcare technologies and improve health outcomes in underserved communities. The session emphasized the importance of building genuine partnerships with these organizations, ensuring that health initiatives are both impactful and sustainable. By leveraging the unique position of faith-based groups as trusted community entities, healthcare providers can effectively bridge gaps in access and foster a more inclusive approach to health equity that addresses both the physical and emotional needs of patients.

## Top Topics

- Faith-based organizations
- Community engagement
- Digital health access
- Cultural sensitivity
- Trust-building strategies
- Healthcare partnerships
- Technology adoption barriers
- Rural health initiatives
- Financial challenges
- Co-creation in healthcare

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