

BRIDGING THE POLICY GAP

Embedding Healthcare in Nigeria's National AI Strategy

Track: AI Policy, Governance & Ethics in Healthcare.

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Background:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming health systems globally, offering opportunities for improved diagnosis, data use, and service delivery. In 2024, Nigeria launched its National AI Strategy (NAIS), a milestone in shaping AI governance. While the NAIS sets broad pillars for ethics, governance, and sectoral adoption, it does not explicitly address healthcare. Given the sensitivity of health data, risks of bias in clinical algorithms, and the urgent need for equitable access, this omission represents a critical policy gap. This study identified governance gaps, equity concerns, and opportunities for embedding healthcare into AI strategies.

Methods:

A thematic analysis integrated Nigeria's National AI Strategy, policy briefs by Nigeria Health Watch and partners (Leveraging AI to Strengthen Health Systems in Nigeria; Governance of AI for Global Health in Africa), and key insights from two convenings include: the Nigerian AI Healthcare Horizon (March 2024) and the Global Inclusivity and AI Africa Conference (September 2024).

Results:

Findings highlighted three gaps in NAIS for health: (1) absence of health-specific data governance and patient safeguards; (2) limited recognition of equity and inclusion, particularly for women, youth, and underserved groups; and (3) lack of sectoral integration despite healthcare being identified as a priority domain. The Nigerian AI Healthcare Horizon convening contributed to the national discourse by elevating these concerns, yet the strategy still does not explicitly address healthcare, leaving implementation risks unmitigated.

Conclusion:

Nigeria's NAIS represents progress but requires a dedicated health component to ensure ethical and inclusive AI adoption in healthcare. Embedding sector-specific governance would align with WHO guidance on trustworthy AI and the African Union (AU) Continental AI Strategy. Lessons from Nigeria demonstrate how civil society-led convenings can inform national strategies and provide a replicable model for other African countries to close governance gaps and build public trust in AI-driven healthcare.

Keywords: AI governance, ethical AI, healthcare policy, data governance, equity and inclusion, Nigeria, Africa