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Public policies and digital infrastructure in the health sector: a structured narrative review

Políticas públicas e infraestructura digital en el sector salud: una revisión narrativa estructurada

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Abstract

The digital transformation of healthcare systems has become a strategic priority for improving the efficiency, accessibility, and sustainability of health services. In this context, the present study aimed to analyze the available evidence on public policies and digital infrastructure in the health sector through a structured narrative review. The methodology involved the identification, selection, and analysis of 30 academic and technical-scientific publications, primarily published between 2019 and 2025, including research articles, review papers, editorials, and specialized documents addressing digital governance, digital infrastructure, information and communication technologies, interoperability, and digital health. The literature search was conducted in the Scopus, Web of Science, and SciELO databases. The evidence was synthesized through thematic analysis organized into five dimensions: social impact and public policies, digital infrastructure, information and communication technologies, governance and regulation, and implementation challenges. The findings indicate that strengthening digital infrastructure is a key strategic factor for expanding equitable access to healthcare services, improving the interoperability of health information systems, supporting evidence-based decision-making, and enhancing continuity of care. Nevertheless, important challenges remain, including connectivity gaps, insufficient technological investment, cybersecurity concerns, limited workforce training, and the absence of comprehensive regulatory frameworks. It is concluded that advancing digital transformation in healthcare requires robust governance, sustainable investment, and effective interinstitutional coordination to ensure the equitable and successful implementation of digital health strategies.

Keywords: public policy, digital infrastructure, digital health.

Resumen

La transformación digital de los sistemas sanitarios se ha consolidado como una prioridad para fortalecer la eficiencia, accesibilidad y sostenibilidad de los servicios de salud. En este contexto, el presente estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar la evidencia disponible sobre las políticas públicas y la infraestructura digital en el sector salud mediante una revisión narrativa estructurada. La metodología comprendió la búsqueda, selección y análisis de 30 fuentes documentales académicas y técnico-científicas publicadas principalmente entre 2019 y 2025, incluyendo artículos científicos, revisiones, editoriales y documentos especializados relacionados con la gobernanza digital, infraestructura tecnológica, tecnologías de la información y comunicación, interoperabilidad y salud digital en las bases de datos consultadas como Scopus, Web of Science y SciELO. La información fue organizada mediante análisis temático en cinco

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ejes: impacto social y políticas públicas, infraestructura digital, tecnologías de información y comunicación, gobernanza y regulación, y desafíos para la implementación. Los resultados evidencian que el fortalecimiento de la infraestructura digital constituye un elemento estratégico para ampliar el acceso equitativo a los servicios sanitarios, mejorar la interoperabilidad de los sistemas de información, optimizar la toma de decisiones y favorecer la continuidad asistencial. No obstante, persisten limitaciones relacionadas con las brechas de conectividad, la insuficiente inversión tecnológica, la ciberseguridad, la capacitación del talento humano y la ausencia de marcos regulatorios integrales. Se concluye que la consolidación de políticas públicas orientadas a la transformación digital requiere una gobernanza sólida, inversiones sostenibles y mecanismos de coordinación interinstitucional que garanticen una implementación efectiva y equitativa de la salud digital.

Palabras clave: políticas públicas, digitalización en salud, gestión sanitaria.

Introduction

Digital transformation has become one of the central pillars of health system modernization, driving substantial changes in the management of health services, institutional organization, and the delivery of medical care. The incorporation of digital technologies has fostered more efficient, timely, and population-centered services through solutions such as telemedicine, electronic health records, interoperable information systems, and data analytics for decision-making. Within this context, digital infrastructure represents a strategic component for ensuring that these tools function properly, while public policy serves as the mechanism that guides their planning, financing, and implementation within national health systems (Alvarado, 2025; Cruz-Martínez, 2025).

Strengthening digital infrastructure in health depends not only on the availability of technological resources but also on states' capacity to establish regulatory frameworks, governance mechanisms, and coordination strategies among the various institutions involved. Digital transformation therefore calls for public policies that bring together connectivity, interoperability, data protection, workforce training, and technological sustainability, with a view to building digital ecosystems capable of meeting the current demands of health services. From this standpoint, digital governance plays a pivotal role in ensuring that technological innovation genuinely strengthens health systems (Velasco et al., 2025; Luna Solórzano & Fernández Solís, 2025).

Despite the progress observed in recent years, the implementation of digital infrastructure continues to face substantial challenges, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Limitations persist around connectivity, territorial inequalities, insufficient integration among technological platforms, and limited institutional capacity to sustain long-term digital transformation processes. These conditions produce gaps in access to digital health services and constrain the potential of technology to improve the quality, efficiency, and coverage of health care. In Peru's case, although meaningful progress has been made in digital health, challenges remain in consolidating coherent public policies, modernizing technology, and strengthening institutional capacities (Escobar-Agreda & Rojas-Mezarina, 2025; Ponce de León Sierra & Merma Pillaca, 2024).

At the same time, several studies argue that digital transformation should be understood as an integrated process linking technological innovation, institutional development, and public policies aimed at ensuring equitable access to health services. Digital infrastructure, in this sense, is an indispensable element for strengthening the resilience of health systems, particularly in the face of crises and public health emergencies. Digitalization should likewise foster more inclusive, efficient, and sustainable models of care, narrowing territorial inequalities and reinforcing the responsiveness of health services through ongoing innovation and collaborative governance (Cruz-Martínez, 2025; Gadelha et al., 2025).

Even so, although the scientific literature on digital transformation, e-government, telehealth, and health governance has grown considerably, the available evidence remains scattered across different conceptual approaches and national contexts. Research centered on specific implementation experiences

predominates, while studies that systematically integrate the relationship between public policy and digital infrastructure as complementary components for strengthening health systems remain scarce. This fragmentation makes it difficult to draw an integrated picture of the main advances, challenges, and trends shaping the formulation of public strategies for digital transformation in the health sector.

The present study sets out to analyze the scientific evidence available on public policies and digital infrastructure in the health sector, with the aim of identifying the main advances, challenges, and contributions reported in the specialized literature that can help strengthen digital transformation processes and consolidate more efficient, resilient, and inclusive health systems.

Methodology

A structured narrative review of the scientific literature was conducted (Ferrari, 2015; Grant & Booth, 2009; Green et al., 2006) to examine the relationship between public policy and digital infrastructure in the health sector. The unit of analysis comprised academic and technical-scientific documents addressing digital transformation, governance, connectivity, interoperability, cybersecurity, and the implementation of digital technologies within health systems. This design made it possible to bring together findings from research conducted across different geographic settings and health systems, offering a broad understanding of the strategies adopted to advance digital transformation in health services, along with the main challenges, advances, and opportunities described in the specialized literature. Unlike systematic reviews, a structured narrative review lends itself to a more critical reading of the evidence through the thematic organization of studies, allowing relationships to be drawn across the different approaches examined and a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study to emerge.

The literature search was carried out between October 2025 and May 2026 across internationally recognized scientific databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, SciELO, Dialnet, Redalyc, and Google Scholar. These sources were chosen for their multidisciplinary coverage and for bringing together research on public policy, digital governance, digital transformation, and technological infrastructure applied to the health sector.

The search strategy was built using Boolean operators and combinations of keywords in Spanish and English related to *public policy, digital infrastructure, digital health, health governance, digital transformation, e-health, telemedicine, health information systems* e *health technology*. The results obtained were then refined by removing duplicate records and screening titles, abstracts, and full texts to confirm their relevance to the study's objective.

Following the search, screening, and relevance assessment process, 30 documentary sources were selected. The corpus was not limited to original research articles but drew on several types of publications deemed relevant to the review's objective, including research articles, narrative and scoping reviews, policy analysis documents, case studies, and one master's thesis. This documentary diversity reflected the interdisciplinary nature of the topic and the need to incorporate empirical evidence, conceptual contributions, regulatory perspectives, and implementation experiences.

Table 1. *Inclusion and exclusion criteria.*

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Topic	Studies focused on public policy, digital governance, digital infrastructure, digital transformation, or the implementation of technologies in the health sector.	Topics unrelated to public policy or digital infrastructure, and studies focused on other sectors (education, banking, business, etc.)

Period	Published between 2019 and November 2025.	Publications falling outside the established time range
Language	Studies in Spanish and English	Publications in other languages
Study type	Original articles, systematic reviews, narrative reviews, case studies, peer-reviewed book chapters	Conference proceedings, opinion pieces, news items, and non-peer-reviewed documents.
Population/context	Policies, institutions, and health systems at the national, regional, or local level; country-specific experiences.	Studies set in contexts unrelated to health, or not applicable to public policy and digital infrastructure; contexts falling outside the geographic scope defined for this review.

Once the search strategy and eligibility criteria had been applied, the final documentary corpus was assembled, comprising thirty scientific articles directly responsive to the study's purpose. For each selected study, information was recorded on the authors, year of publication, country or setting, research objective, methodology used, and key findings related to public policy and digital infrastructure in the health sector.

The information gathered was organized into extraction matrices designed to facilitate comparison across studies, identify points of convergence and divergence among the different approaches examined, and recognize the main contributions reported in the recent scientific literature.

The information was analyzed through a thematic analysis process aimed at identifying recurring patterns, emerging trends, and conceptual relationships among the studies included in the review. An analytical reading of each publication was first carried out to identify its main contributions to the design and implementation of public policies aimed at strengthening digital infrastructure in health systems. Findings were then compared and grouped by thematic affinity, allowing analytical categories to be built that helped organize and interpret the scientific evidence.

This process yielded five main research categories relating to the social impact of public policy on digital health, digital infrastructure and hospital modernization, information and communication technologies applied to the health system, the management and digital transformation of health services, and governance and regulation in digital health. This classification allowed the findings to be systematically structured and enabled a comparative analysis of the different perspectives present in the scientific literature.

Table 2. *Categories of analysis for public policy and digital infrastructure implementation in the health sector.*

No.	Categories	Number of Articles
1	Social Impact and Evaluation of Public Policy in Digital Health	11
2	Digital Infrastructure and Hospital Modernization	9
3	Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the Health System	8
4	Management and Digital Transformation of Health Services	1

To synthesize the available evidence, a comparative matrix of the main findings identified in each study was also developed, highlighting their contributions to the design, strengthening, and implementation of public policy and digital infrastructure within health systems. This synthesis made it possible to identify convergent elements across the studies, as well as the main recommendations put forward by the authors for advancing sustainable and inclusive digital transformation processes.

Results

To synthesize the available evidence, a comparative matrix of the main findings identified in each study was also developed, highlighting their contributions to the design, strengthening, and implementation of public policy and digital infrastructure within health systems. This synthesis made it possible to identify convergent elements across the studies, as well as the main recommendations put forward by the authors for advancing sustainable and inclusive digital transformation processes.

The results corresponding to the 30 studies analyzed are presented in detail in Table 3, which synthesizes the main characteristics and contributions of the scientific evidence included in this review. Taken together, the studies agree that the digitalization of health services goes beyond the mere adoption of technology, requiring robust regulatory frameworks, sustained investment, governance strategies, interoperable information systems, and ongoing workforce training. The studies also highlight that implementing digital infrastructure improves operational efficiency, broadens access to health services, and strengthens institutional capacity to respond to population needs.

Table 3. *Main findings related to public policy and digital infrastructure implementation in the health sector*

No.	Author	Relevant contributions to digital infrastructure implementation in health
1	Álvarez (2025)	Prioritize digital infrastructure and cybersecurity in rural areas to reduce inequalities.
2	D'Agostino et al. (2021)	Integrate technological sustainability, governance, and training into digital health policy.
3	Mesa del Olmo (2019)	Drive digital inclusion and equitable access through ICT infrastructure.
4	D'Agostino et al. (2022)	Design inclusive information systems supported by sustainable digital infrastructure.
5	Suclly (2024)	Ensure interoperable infrastructure, connectivity, and telemedicine to expand access.
6	Mantri et al. (2024)	Establish a national framework for interoperability, security, and digital governance.
7	Alunyu et al. (2024)	Develop interoperable, scalable systems adapted to resource-constrained settings.
8	Yew et al. (2025)	Strengthen hospital connectivity through secure and reliable networks.
9	Li et al. (2024)	Implement data governance and training for the effective use of artificial intelligence.
10	Rees & Peralta (2024)	Establish telemedicine as a permanent policy to expand universal access.
11	Curioso (2019)	Define a national digital health agenda with clear targets and indicators.
12	Roy et al. (2025)	Promote participatory governance to develop population-centered solutions.

13	Labrique (2025)	Prioritize infrastructure and connectivity to narrow access gaps.
14	Thakur et al. (2025)	Strengthen coordination among health workers alongside data protection.
15	Salazar-Villegas (2024)	Encourage community participation to secure acceptance and sustainability.
16	Zang et al. (2025)	Expand broadband infrastructure to improve access and health outcomes.
17	Zermeño-Flores et al. (2021)	Strengthen interinstitutional coordination to promote medical tourism.
18	Grande et al. (2020)	Promote innovation and infrastructure to enhance the competitiveness of medical tourism.
19	Al Knawy et al. (2022)	Implement interoperability and data governance to optimize health management.
20	Jia (2024)	Reduce inequities through technologies that eliminate access barriers.
21	Jeilani & Hussein (2025)	Strengthen leadership and policy to consolidate digital infrastructure.
22	Ahmed et al. (2025)	Expand connectivity and digital platforms in rural and vulnerable areas.
23	Awosiku et al. (2025)	Drive digital financial technologies to support universal coverage.
24	Marwaha et al. (2022)	Incorporate interoperability and sustainability criteria into technology adoption.
25	Al Meslamani (2023)	Improve connectivity, equipment, and training to accelerate digital transformation.
26	Husain et al. (2025)	Establish standards and sustainable financing for digital solutions.
27	Cervera & Goussens (2024)	Strengthen ongoing training to improve the health system's digital resilience.
28	Baque et al. (2024)	Implement cybersecurity policies to protect infrastructure and clinical data.
29	Roveri (2022)	Develop inclusive policies that ensure equity, privacy, and digital access.
30	Huaiquián et al. (2022)	Strengthen infrastructure and connectivity to broaden access to digital health services.

In addition, the evidence points to persistent challenges related to connectivity gaps, territorial inequalities, data protection, financial sustainability, and the limited alignment between public policy and technological innovation. Despite these limitations, the studies reviewed converge on recommendations aimed at building resilient digital ecosystems through collaborative governance, institutional strengthening, digital inclusion, and the progressive rollout of health technologies. Table 3 synthesizes the main contributions identified across the selected studies.

Discussion

This structured narrative review made it possible to bring together the published evidence, showing that digital infrastructure in the health sector is a multidimensional process shaped by public policy, governance, institutional capacity, and technological innovation. Taken as a whole, the studies agree that digital transformation goes well beyond adopting technological tools and calls for sustainable national strategies that integrate connectivity, interoperability, regulation, workforce training, and ongoing evaluation. The evidence likewise converges on the need to develop user-centered digital health systems geared toward narrowing access gaps and strengthening the resilience of health systems.

With respect to public policy, the findings show that government strategies yield better results when

they incorporate criteria of equity, inclusion, citizen participation, and institutional strengthening. The literature holds that digital transformation should be conceived as a comprehensive public policy, grounded in capacity building, digital literacy, and ongoing evaluation to ensure its sustainability (Curioso, 2019; D'Agostino et al., 2021; Grande et al., 2020; Husain et al., 2025; Mantri et al., 2024; Zermeño-Flores et al., 2021). In this context, public governance oriented toward innovation fosters a more efficient and transparent implementation of digital health programs.

Regarding digital infrastructure, the evidence identifies connectivity, interoperability, and the availability of technological platforms as the main enablers of digital transformation. Even so, limitations persist around financing, physical infrastructure, and territorial inequalities, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. The studies highlight that strengthening digital networks, electronic health records, secure data centers, and interoperable platforms improves continuity of care and broadens access to health services (Alunyu Egwar et al., 2024; Jia, 2024; Labrique, 2025; Rees & Peralta, 2024; Roy et al., 2025; Salazar-Villegas, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). These findings support the case for treating digital infrastructure as a strategic investment for narrowing access gaps and strengthening the operational capacity of health systems.

As for information and communication technologies, the literature shows that their implementation improves clinical management, streamlines institutional communication, and strengthens data-driven decision-making. Their effectiveness, however, hinges on developing digital competencies, providing ongoing training for health personnel, and fostering organizational environments conducive to innovation. System interoperability and the integration of technology with care processes emerge as decisive factors for the success of digital transformation (Cervera García & Goussens, 2024; D'Agostino et al., 2022; Jeilani & Hussein, 2025; Marwaha et al., 2022; Ahmed et al., 2025; Salazar-Villegas, 2024; Suclly Amanqui, 2024).

Finally, the evidence shows that building sustainable digital ecosystems depends on solid regulatory frameworks and effective governance mechanisms. Elements such as data protection, cybersecurity, interoperability, the regulation of artificial intelligence, and the definition of national standards are indispensable conditions for ensuring public trust and the continuity of public policy in digital health (Al Knawy et al., 2022; Al Meslamani, 2023; Baque Pinargote et al., 2024; Cruz-Martínez, 2025; Li et al., 2024; Roveri, 2022; Velasco Villafaña et al., 2025). Taken together, the studies show that strengthening digital infrastructure requires collaborative governance among governments, health institutions, academia, and the private sector, capable of sustaining innovation processes aimed at continuously improving health care.

Conclusions

Implementing digital infrastructure in the health sector is a strategic process that is redefining governance, health management, and service delivery across countries. This progress has improved operational efficiency, strengthened diagnostic capacity, and broadened access to essential services such as telemedicine and health information systems. Critical challenges remain, however, including unequal connectivity, a lack of interoperability, insufficient digital literacy among health personnel, and the need for more comprehensive and sustainable public policies. In this regard, the studies analyzed agree that a planned, participatory, and context-sensitive adoption of digital technologies not only improves the quality and continuity of care but also becomes a fundamental driver of health equity and the development of more resilient, inclusive, and efficient health systems.

Declaration on the use of artificial intelligence

The authors declare that they used generative artificial intelligence tools (Perplexity AI) solely to support grammatical review, improve wording, and refine academic style. AI was not used to generate results, analyze evidence, interpret findings, or formulate conclusions. The authors fully carried out and supervised the literature search, methodological design, analysis of the literature, and preparation of the

manuscript, and assume full responsibility for its content. This statement is provided in accordance with the principles of transparency and integrity promoted by the *Committee on Publication Ethics* (COPE).

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