

SAMA Health Summit

On behalf of the South African Medical Association (SAMA), the Scientific Committee of the SAMA Health Summit is pleased to present this abstract issue, showcasing the posters and oral presentations delivered at the summit, which was held from 22 - 24 May 2026.

The overarching theme of the summit, 'Innovate to elevate: Transforming healthcare together', expresses our recognition of the urgent need for collaborative, forward-thinking approaches to healthcare delivery in South Africa (SA) and across the African continent. By convening leading experts in the field, SAMA's Durban Summit attracted a diverse range of high-quality submissions.

Our SA healthcare system continues to face profound challenges in its pursuit of universal health coverage. Ever-rising healthcare costs, constrained finances and dilapidated infrastructure, human resource limitations, and widening inequalities place increasing pressure on both the public and private sectors. Our country faces the quadruple health burden pinpointed by Prof. Mayosi over a decade ago: communicable and non-communicable diseases, trauma, and maternal and child health problems, compounded by a silent mental health pandemic, and the detrimental impacts of unemployment, poverty and social inequity. The lived realities of our people demand innovative, scalable and sustainable solutions that improve both access to and quality of care.

As we determine the way to the future of healthcare, innovation has become not merely desirable, but essential. Digital transformation, data-driven healthcare systems and the responsible integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into clinical practice, administration, education and public health will likely play a pivotal role in addressing the healthcare challenges of the coming decades. However, unequal access to technology and digital literacy presents a major barrier to equitable AI adoption. Bridging this divide is critical to ensuring broad-based benefits. In addition, enduring socioeconomic disparities, rooted in historical injustices, may hinder AI uptake. Addressing these requires inclusive implementation that supports equitable access to AI technologies and their benefits.

To fully realise the potential of AI, careful consideration of its ethical, social and economic implications is required, to ensure that benefits are widely shared and risks effectively managed. AI systems must be transparent, accountable and designed to promote fairness while mitigating bias. A human-centred approach is essential, ensuring that AI augments rather than replaces human decision-making. Aligning AI development with societal and ethical values requires safeguarding professional responsibility and embedding human values within these systems.

There is growing demand for AI-driven solutions in critical sectors such as healthcare, where AI offers opportunities to address complex social challenges, improve service delivery and enhance quality of life. However, these benefits must be balanced with sustained human control. Maintaining human oversight – particularly in critical decision-making – is essential to ensure responsible use. This underscores the importance of human-in-the-loop systems, in which human judgement remains central. Accordingly, AI implementation and decision-making must prioritise human oversight, accountability and ethical governance.

Recognising that AI is transforming multiple sectors globally, with particularly significant implications for healthcare, the SAMA Health Summit brought together key stakeholders – including healthcare professionals, AI experts, policy-makers, private and public service providers, professional groups, academics, healthcare funders and administrators, and innovative role players – to examine the opportunities, challenges and ethical considerations associated with implementing AI in the SA healthcare system.

The standard of submissions for the oral and poster presentations was uniformly high, and the judging panel identified the submissions presented in this abstract issue as most representative of the aims and aspirations of the conference.

The submitted abstracts were grouped into the four categories: Digital Health Innovations; Innovations Driving Equity in Healthcare; General Clinical Innovations; and General Health Research. The work presented in this abstract collection demonstrates the remarkable creativity, scientific rigour and commitment of healthcare professionals, researchers and students who are actively contributing to this transformation.

We are proud to present the prize winners below:

Poster presentations

1st prize: Digital Health Innovations

Economic pressures on doctor-led primary care and the role of point-of-care decision support in South Africa – Dr Hilary Mukudu

1st prize: Innovations Driving Equity in Healthcare

The case for personalised medicine in epilepsy in South Africa: Bridging the treatment gap with genetic testing and digital health – Dr Tshimogo Sathekge

1st prize: General Clinical Innovations

Opportunities to expand delivery of prehospital tranexamic acid to bleeding trauma patients – findings from a prospective, multi-centre trauma study – Dr Daisy Inglis

Oral presentations

1st prize: Innovations Driving Health Equity in Healthcare

Mapping social innovation in South Africa's health ecosystem: Enablers, barriers and pathways to scale – Ms Alexandra Lugagne

Honorary mention

Where healthcare supply and demand meet: Actuarial insights into evolving dynamics in South Africa – Anesu Williams

1st prize: General Clinical Innovations

Optimising clinical governance and risk management in a resource-limited hospital – Prof. Mergan Naidoo

1st prize: General Health Research

Predictors of perceived stress among early-career medical doctors in KwaZulu-Natal: A cross-sectional study – Mrs Sithabile Mncwango

We trust that the research and innovations showcased within these pages will inspire further collaboration, inquiry and practical solutions aimed at strengthening healthcare systems and improving health outcomes in SA and throughout the continent.

Dr Zane Farina and Prof. Dirk Hagmeister

Editors, SAMA Health Summit Abstract Issue