



dimagi

## **The Dimagi High-Impact Growth Framework**

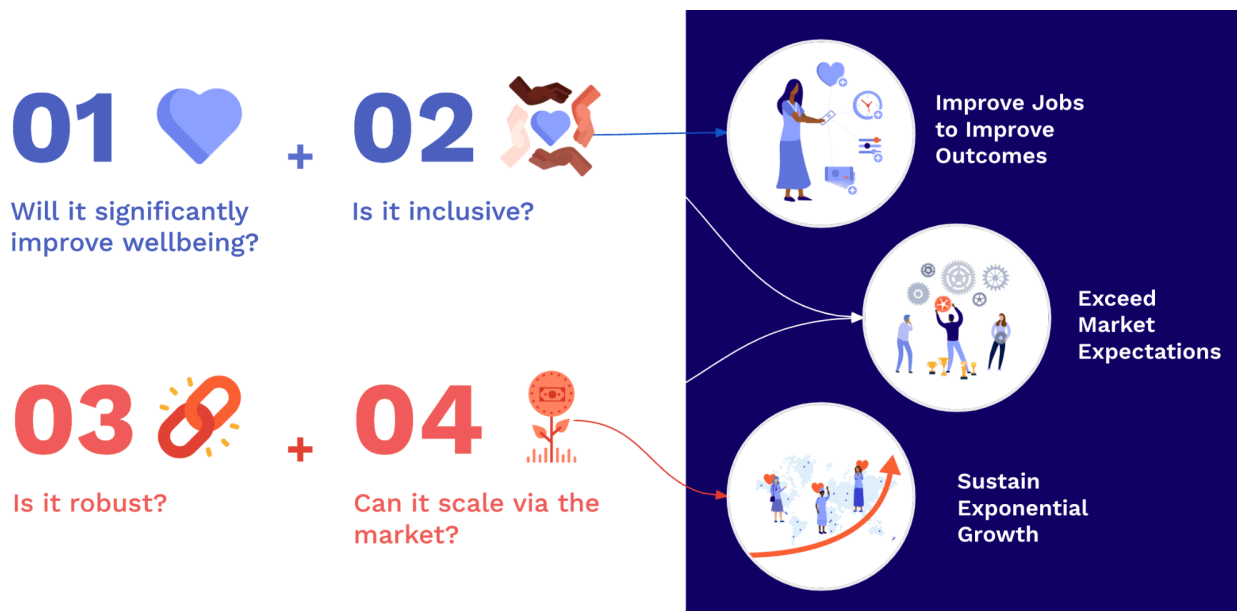
# Overview

Dimagi's vision is a world where all people receive the services they need to thrive. We work towards realizing this vision through our mission: to build and scale sustainable, high-impact digital solutions that amplify the efforts of Frontline Workers and programs. Our most significant contribution to date is the development of our flagship platform, [CommCare](#), one of the most widely adopted digital solutions used by Frontline Workers.

Dimagi's mission is supported by our commitment to both build High-Impact solutions *and* scale and sustain these solutions via paths to Growth. We call this dual focus "High-Impact Growth." While we share many similar views with partner organizations, this dual focus is what differentiates Dimagi.

This public framework codifies our experiences and learnings from two decades of pursuing High-Impact Growth and as one of the few social enterprises developing software [Global Goods](#). In this document, we share four questions that we ask ourselves to evaluate whether a potential solution we're building achieves High-Impact Growth, and thus contributes to our mission to build and scale sustainable, high-impact digital solutions that amplify the efforts of Frontline Workers and programs.

## Dimagi's approach to High-Impact Growth



Thank you for reading about Dimagi's approach to High-Impact Growth! If you have questions about this or want to share some thoughts, feel free to [reach out to us](#).

- Jonathan Jackson (Dimagi Chief Executive Officer) & Dr. Neal Lesh (Dimagi Chief Strategy Officer)

# High-Impact

In developing High-Impact Solutions, we are focused on building technology that amplifies frontline programs' abilities to improve wellbeing for *all*.

## 1. Will it **improve wellbeing**?



**“Harnessing the power of digital technologies is essential for achieving universal health coverage. Ultimately, digital technologies are not ends in themselves; they are vital tools to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable.”**

- *Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General (April 2019)*

We are committed to leveraging technology that has the potential to improve frontline programs' abilities to improve wellbeing and people's ability to thrive. As such, the most basic requirement for determining if our work is impactful is whether it improves the wellbeing of people.

To improve wellbeing, Dimagi evangelizes the need to support frontline service delivery by leveraging technology to improve Frontline Workers and programs. This includes supporting solutions that help Frontline Workers deliver better services or Frontline Programs improve their programs' impact on wellbeing. We are only interested in developing solutions that have the *potential* to create big change. We are not interested in the marginal improvement in wellbeing for a few people, but rather a substantial improvement in wellbeing for a lot of people.

We rely on objective, third-party research by our partners to demonstrate that we are making an impact by improving wellbeing. We are proud that CommCare has a growing [Evidence Base](#) of 100+ [peer-reviewed studies](#), including eight randomized controlled trials (RCTs)—among the strongest such Evidence Base for any digital platform built for Frontline Workers. This Evidence Base shows our digital solutions can improve client wellbeing, including in the most underserved regions of the world. As we invest more in an area, we need to continually see new convincing, objective evidence that we are on a promising path, year after year.

We know that the landscape of technology is going to continue to rapidly change over time. To meet this future, we need to develop solutions that are appropriate for today's

environment and can be adapted no matter what the future brings. We are encouraged by new technologies such as new uses of AI, e.g., to detect pneumonia from audio clips of coughs as well as by digital technology to help provide mental health services without expert therapists. These all have the potential to improve outcomes and in turn, wellbeing. It's worth taking risks on such technologies, even if there are no guarantees they will pan out. We need to place big bets on these technologies, while applying them thoughtfully and realistically to help drive major improvements in closing the service gaps.

**What we keep in mind:** While we need to be ambitious and aim high, we also know we often need to take small steps to achieve a big vision. We should not use this as an excuse to overhype digital technology. Indeed, Dimagi often presents a contrarian view (hopefully a constructively contrarian one) on what we see as over-hyped claims about new technologies, such as blockchain or conversational AI, that rise to the “peak of inflated expectations” noted in the [Gartner Hype Cycle](#). There are no magic bullets or short cuts for the hard work it takes to genuinely improve wellbeing. We often advocate for a “crawl, walk, run” approach to digital technology in general, and data use in particular, in which programs must first establish a foundation of consistent use of technology before applying more advanced technologies.

Additionally, we must be aware that there are some ways of increasing people's wellbeing that actually increase inequalities, such as extending the longevity of populations that already live longer than most of the world. This is still a good use of resources -- better than many other ways to use them. Dimagi still strives to direct our efforts towards improving wellbeing in ways that reduce inequalities. For example, we would prefer a solution that extends the life expectancy of a population from 62 to 65 years to one that extends the life expectancy of another population from 85 to 88 years.

## 2. Is it **inclusive**?



An overarching motivation for our work is to leverage digital technology to correct the unprecedented inequalities across the world today. In 1800, life expectancy was only about 30 years regardless of where on the planet you were born. Over the last 200 years, life expectancy rates have improved substantially everywhere but at [dramatically different rates](#). Today, being born in a high-income country can give an average of 20 more years of life expectancy than being born in low-income countries.

We believe in the Sustainable Development Goals' principle of [leaving no one behind](#) and believe in the power of building inclusive technology that addresses [global inequalities](#). To

create High-Impact, we are ultimately focused on reducing global inequalities by building inclusive technology that can be accessed by and is available to as many people as possible.

The need to reduce global inequality and create more inclusive technology governs our work in countless ways. We believe that inclusive technology is [Open Source](#), is designed for low-literate users, and works in environments with limited internet connectivity. For example, it is critically important that our software platform CommCare works offline. This offline-first feature specifically serves markets that do not command connectivity, enabling Frontline Workers to provide continuity of care to their clients in disconnected environments. Having offline-first software is [extraordinarily complex to maintain](#), so much so that many of the world's biggest technology companies don't maintain it. For us, it's a necessity for Frontline Workers to serve their clients in remote villages, working for weeks without connectivity. Similarly, we maintain CommCare as a "no code" platform, significantly expanding the number of users who can build their own applications.

We are proud that CommCare also supports the advancement of Frontline Workers - many of whom do important, demanding work for rather low pay or no pay at all. Numerous studies have proven that CommCare greatly improves the legitimacy of Frontline Workers, as seen in our [Evidence Base](#). As such, we advocate for allowing non-work uses of the smartphone to further address inequality, in addition to allowing Frontline Workers to use smartphones to support their own [health](#).

As Dimagi broke into the high-income market of the United States, we are especially proud to be going head-to-head and winning with our Open Source, inclusive technology against competitors with proprietary, non-inclusive technology. When Dimagi wins a contract in the United States, this both improves the health and wellbeing there, and also translates to better outcomes in the poorest countries by driving forward our core technology platform and increasing the value we provide to all of our partners globally. We hope that offering inclusive technology will become more and more of a selling point, just as having ethical sourcing for clothing and sustainable agriculture is increasingly expected in high-income markets.

We are mindful that every innovation either increases or decreases inequality. For example, Apple's smart watch may well save lives in High-Income Countries while simultaneously creating greater global inequality, since it is out of reach for the most vulnerable populations. And so we must constantly ask ourselves how each of our products and projects will decrease inequity. One of our core beliefs is that there is a need to specialize digital technology and services in order for them to benefit the hardest to reach populations. Our CTO [reflected](#) on how COVID-19 underscored the extent to which "Big Tech" will not serve LMICs. In building inclusive technology, we are working against this trend by ensuring that our technology can be used anywhere, including LMICs.



**Figure 1:** An illustrative example. While many technology applications can do one thing well or be designed for one group of people, it's much harder to create technology that does many things well for many types of people. CommCare is by no means the only solution, but we are in limited company.

**What We Keep In Mind:** We must remain vigilant in our work, as even our solutions can increase inequality locally. For example, as we leverage Artificial Intelligence (AI), we need to be aware of the potential for AI to entrench existing societal biases. As we explore the potential of direct-to-client extensions of CommCare, we must also realize the potential to increase the digital divide between those who are already benefiting from consumer technology (for example, people who have access to a smartphone) and those who do not.

## Growth

In developing solutions that promote Growth, we are focused on meeting the highest technology standards by building a foundation of scalable and sustainable technology via a market-driven path.

### 3. Is it **robust**?

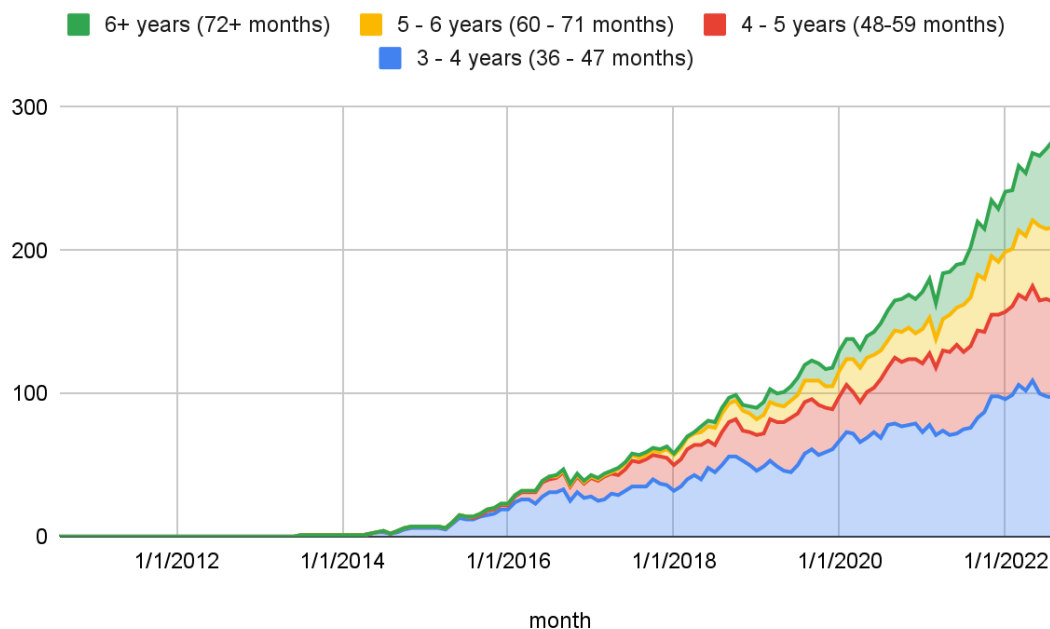


An embarrassing (albeit too common) truth in the public sector is that most digital solutions suffer from a very short lifespan due to organizations [rebuilding tech](#) from scratch. This reality often creates a high burden on frontline programs to maintain their own custom software.

We are skeptical of this approach. Instead, a primary goal of our work is to ensure that we are building a foundation of technology. We work to lead our industries towards greater investment in durable, sustainable, and robust technology that is built to last. This means that we are meeting the highest standards of privacy, support, and performance, enabling us to sustain and scale our technology.

Just our [Evidence Base](#) demonstrates that our solutions can achieve High-Impact by improving client wellbeing and Frontline Worker legitimacy, numerous third-party [evaluations](#) speak to our technological robustness in terms of capabilities, maturity, and scale. We have scaled our technology to more than one million users over time who in turn have registered hundreds of millions of clients. We provide secure world-class global cloud infrastructure. We were gratified to be recognized as the [53rd most valuable repository](#) in an assessment of almost 100 million Open Source code repositories on GitHub - and the only Global Good on [the list](#). Our software is designed to work with both modern elastic clouds and managed services as well as on-premise bare metal hardware and self hosted Open Source Software (OSS) stacks. And as the first SOC-2 certified Digital Global Good, we understand that [security](#) is a process (not a property) that we must continually invest in. The same goes for supporting our systems, including through public [documentation](#), [courses](#), and tiered support services.

Our approach allows partners to focus their efforts on their programs and impact rather than on software. This has demonstrated substantial value, which is why certain programs have estimated cost-savings from [\\$830,000](#) to [\\$5 million](#) a year using CommCare. As seen in the graph below, we are proud to serve teams who measure the impact of their tools in years, and even some who are now measuring in decades - including the Integrated eDiagnostic Approach (IeDA) [program](#) in Burkina Faso (2010). Enabling partners like these is critical in fulfilling our core belief that impact is not generated by reaching scale, but by sustaining and evolving at scale.

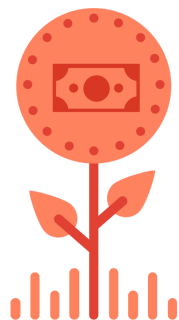


**Figure 2:** CommCare projects that have been active for three or more years (as of 2022)

**What we keep in mind:** We are committed to providing scalable, open technology that is built to last. To honor this, we can't become dependent on technology solutions that don't follow this mantra. For example, while we strive to support innovation, we won't introduce core features that make our partners depend on unproven, closed technologies. We don't pursue sweetheart deals with corporate solutions to gain private access to technology on

their terms, no matter how valuable their offer may appear or how widespread their reach. We do not amass proprietary intellectual property or form long-term exclusive relationships. We view the sustainability of our partner's programs to be too vital to be subject to the whims of Silicon Valley's news cycle.

#### 4. Does it have a **market-driven** path to scale?



The second implication of our devotion to Growth can be seen in that we are only interested in solutions that have a market-driven pathway to scale.

Like most actors supporting public benefit, we face an underlying challenge where our most impactful work may have the least viable path to being funded. This is inherent to the task of serving the most underserved populations. It's also inherent to the fact that frontline users benefit the most from our technology, while governments, NGOs, foundations, or other groups pay for it - creating an incentives dissonance.

As such, we seek approaches that have both 'market' and 'merit' - knowing that better functioning markets for digital technologies will support faster advancement across High-Impact Growth. As a social enterprise ourselves, we support the first digital [Global Good](#) that isn't backed by a non-profit organization and has a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) model to drive growth. Our SaaS-oriented revenue stream gives us feedback loops that both drive and sustain scale - including the ability to invest in [customer success](#) and follow product-market-fit in order to continually increase the value we provide to our users. We see little value in developing low-impact features. Instead, it's critical that every Global Good and long-running at-scale digital service (not just Dimagi's) can create the impact, prove the impact, and make sure there is a viable path to paying for that impact through a positive feedback loop.

While we take pride in putting our efforts into initiatives that reward sustainability, we ensure that it's done collaboratively. This commitment to collaboration also means being willing to risk market share for the benefit of the wider good. We often share internal tools we develop with the world, such as our [total cost of ownership](#) model, templated [applications](#), and even our [business development](#) approach. As part of our COVID-19 response efforts in 2020, we partnered with two of our biggest Global Goods "[competitors](#)" to align our solutions and data structures.

**What we keep in mind:** Certain funding (e.g. grant funding or award funding) that drives innovation, research, and development is critical to building products that won't necessarily generate strong financial returns. While this type of funding wouldn't be a viable investment for traditional capital, it is necessary in the social impact market to fund new exploratory



areas. That said this type of funding should not be considered a viable long-term market approach. Instead, we believe that to ensure sustainability, all products and services need to find viable value-based customers with willingness and ability to pay.

## Closing Thoughts

It goes without saying that there are many inherent tensions among the different questions we ask ourselves to achieve High-Impact Growth. For example, we won't achieve High-Impact Growth if we build apps that lead to radical improvement but cannot scale or be sustained. And as we scale, we must continue to put in the groundwork to ensure we are continuing to improve wellbeing. It's this plethora of complexities that makes opportunities to achieve both High-Impact *and* Growth far, far, far fewer than opportunities to reach just one. We embrace this complexity.

In order to capture as much High-Impact Growth as possible, we approach challenges curiously and creatively. We operate a dynamic business that provides both technology and professional services, working in nearly all countries and numerous [sectors](#). Our flagship software platform is CommCare, but we also invest in many other products. We embrace uncertainty, and to remain open to opportunities, we adapt to changing circumstances as well as the evolving needs of the market(s) and our users. While the path may be challenging, when we do find opportunities to achieve High-Impact *and* Growth, we are unafraid of taking the more complex, harder route if it leads to the outcome that most closely achieves High-Impact Growth.

While no framework is perfect, by articulating and investing in these efforts, we hope to develop a virtuous feedback mechanism across these four questions. Together, they help us stay true to our mission and guide us towards our vision: a world where all people receive the services they need to thrive.