VULA MOBILE

SOUTH AFRICA

PRESENCE: South Africa, Lesotho

Vula Mobile uses its mobile technology and apps' ecosystem to solve the problem of communication between health workers and specialists. The company has designed the Vula Mobile eReferral and Chat App, which improves services in public health care, particularly in rural areas in South Africa, by ensuring that patients connect with medical practitioners and seek advice.

Vula Mobile is looking for:
• Investments (USD 10 million in equity).
• Partnerships with governments, INGOs, and multinational corporation in Africa to support expansion.

CHALLENGE

Healthcare workers in rural, remote and underserved areas in developing countries are heavily challenged with communication issues. In South Africa, healthcare workers have traditionally made referrals using phone calls, emails and WhatsApp, which meant patient personal and protected health information was being processed across multiple platforms, thus not guaranteeing the security or the integrity of the transfer of the information, as records could be lost or deleted. Concurrently, regular load shedding in South Africa leads to low internet connectivity which hinders communication in rural areas and large provincial hospitals.

SOLUTION

Vula Chat and Referral is an Android and iOS application that facilitates referrals between primary health workers and medical specialists, to manage patients’ case remotely. A health worker from a rural clinic can contact a specialist at a major provincial hospital, share a form designed per speciality including text, visuals and results from bespoke clinical tools (eg. the Vula vision test). Increased access to specialist medical care benefits patients in rural areas where medical facilities are limited to basic clinics. Compared to competitors, Vula is unique as it follows a multidisciplinary approach, connecting doctors and healthcare workers on several specialties, thus going beyond primary care. The service is based on a monthly subscription fee per health worker, and its cost is covered by the public or private health authority.

“Very interesting venture. With the use of a simple digital tool, they improve patient referrals and reduce frictions and inefficiencies in the public healthcare system.”

– Max Cuvelier, Head of Mobile for Development, GSMA

Vula therefore improves rural health care, reduces the number of unnecessary referrals and increases the number of appropriate referrals in remote, low-skilled centres. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when the public healthcare system was under strain due to the rising number of COVID-19 positive patients, Vula allowed patients to be treated remotely, further reducing the risk of referring patients to busy hospitals and avoiding their exposure to COVID-19.

IMPACT

Up to 1,000 referrals are made per day through the Vula application, indicating 1,500 interactions between health workers. At the same time, this prevents unnecessary referrals to maximise time. In 2020, over 120,000 patients benefited from Vula’s services. There are 17,000 health workers registered on Vula Mobile, of which 7,000 were active on the system in 2020. Further, over 1,500 health science students are also registered on Vula, which is being used for remote teaching at three Universities. Vula also believes in equal opportunity for the employment of women in all roles across its organisation, including technical positions, and currently have 50% of women representation in its C-Suite.
Since inception, the company’s impact involves:

- **450,000** referrals.
- **USD 2.3 million** income saved by not missing work.
- **USD 1.8 million** in transport costs saved to patients and workers.
- **USD + 80,000** cost of training saved to 7000 healthcare workers.
- **USD 2.8 million** transaction costs saved in finding the right doctor.
- **USD 3.2 million** in time costs saved to doctors and specialists.

### SCALABILITY

In South Africa alone there are 200,000+ health professionals, and 17,000 are already registered on Vula Mobile. Vula’s network is growing at +/-10 health workers per day. Currently, Vula works with governments, NGOs, academic institutions and private health companies, to illustrate Vula’s value in the referral process. In the future, it plans to expand to countries with large populations, public and private health providers, and academic medical hospitals. To scale up, the company is also exploring partnerships with technology companies that already work with governments and the public sector, as for example Microsoft.

### FINANCIALS

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<tr>
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<th>Annual Revenue ($)</th>
<th>EBITDA ($)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>373,000</td>
<td>228,000</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>300,000</td>
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### INVESTMENTS

Approximately **USD 1.5 million** have been invested in Vula’s seed round and in the first round of Series A funding by E4E Africa, Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation, Enza Capital, Harambe Entrepreneur Alliance, Havaic Fund and other angel investors.

### PARTNERSHIPS

Vula has strategic partnerships with the **Government of South Africa**, private sector multinationals such as Sanofi, Enel, Usizo Advisory, Essity, and the **Independent Pharmacy Association of South Africa**. It also has academic partnerships with the **University of Cape Town**, the **University of Pretoria** and the **University of Stellenbosch**, and NGOs such as Clinton Access Initiative and the **Johnson and Johnson Foundation**.

### AWARDS

![Clearly: VISION PRIZE](image1)

### DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

The Vula Mobile App is the first solution of its kind in South Africa connecting frontline healthcare workers in public and rural health care facilities directly with medical specialists. The E-Referral App and Online System is used by Health professionals to connect and chat securely, and patients get specialist guided healthcare at their local facility. In this way, previously unrecordable communication data is aggregated and valuable. In addition, the innovation offers an online dashboard for monitoring and evaluation purposes, which is password protected and free to use by health administrators.

The Vula App is also being used to provide a training and assessment solution to medical and nursing students, who work with facilitators to learn from real cases observed in South African healthcare. The Vula App also helps doctors whilst doing their community service in rural areas, enabling them to improve their own assessment and diagnosis capabilities during community service period.

### FOUNDER

Dr William Mapham is the CEO of Vula and an ophthalmologist. He has served as the Vice Chair of the Rural Doctors Association of South Africa and previously spent time in New York and Washington designing mobile phone applications for healthcare. He studied Medicine and Surgery and holds a degree from the University of Cape Town.

### MORE INFORMATION

Website: [www.vulamobile.com](http://www.vulamobile.com) | Facebook: @VulaMobile | Instagram: @VulaMobile | Twitter: @VulaMobile | Linkedin: Vula