

Digital Health

in Qatar

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MARKET OVERVIEW AND TRANSACTIONAL ISSUES

Key market players and innovations

Who are the key players active in your local digital health market and what are the most prominent areas of innovation?

The Ministry of Transport and Communications is working on several innovative healthcare projects and smart solutions, which include ICE tracking and response; smart medication; digital health coaching; remote patient monitoring; virtual consultations; and medication refills delivered to your home.

The Ministry of Public Health announced that the future model of care will be patient-centred, value patient experience and empower patients to share the responsibility for their health. The electronic health record system and Qatar National E-Health & Data Programme made the entire population's health records interoperable. Government funding is being used to improve and prioritise patients' interactions with the care system.

Hamad Medical Corporation has a network of nine specialised and three community hospitals, the National Ambulance Service, home and residential care, and mental health services, and provides diagnosis and treatment to complex cases that cannot be treated in a primary care setting.

Primary Health Care Corporation operates 26 health centres providing a wide range of preventive, diagnostic and treatment services, including dental, antenatal care, immunisation, pharmacy, ophthalmology, audiology, radiology and wellness services, and launched in January 2021 Nar'aakom mobile app. The app provides comprehensive healthcare management on the go; for example, accessing upcoming appointments, applying for a health card online, keeping track of the health card expiry date and online renewal, accessing the assigned health centre, and finding the assigned family physician.

Sidra Medicine, the private hospital for education, science and community development established by the Qatar Foundation for the public benefit, is an ultra-modern, academic medical centre providing specialised healthcare, best practice medical education, innovative biomedical and clinical research and discovery, and patient and family-focused care for women, children and young persons.

Qatar Biomedical Research Institute is a research institute under Hamad Bin Khalifa University that aims to improve and transform healthcare through discoveries in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases affecting the people of Qatar and the region.

The Qatar Computing Research Institute developed AI tools that can translate different languages with around 90 per cent accuracy and mobile apps that can estimate body mass index from facial images and monitor children's lifestyles, food habits and sleeping patterns using wearable sensors.

Other players are private hospitals and medical clinics, private health insurers, healthcare professionals, and developers and suppliers of digital health systems.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Investment climate

How would you describe the investment climate for digital health technologies in your jurisdiction, including any noteworthy challenges?

Healthcare investments and opportunities have increased over the years, making Qatar a leader in healthcare development and technology worldwide. These investments and opportunities are specifically targeting foreign investment and collaboration, especially in the fields of research, new technologies and developing hospital capacity as

additional medical services and research programmes are established in the future. Medical devices, e-health technologies and apps are becoming more interconnected for the collection and monitoring of health conditions, biometric data, results and mental health information.

Growing investment in new healthcare facilities, services and technologies has transformed the Qatari health infrastructure. The National Health Strategy 2018–2022 guides and directs the health sector's next period of growth as one of eight sector strategies that comprise Qatar's National Development Strategy. The amount of 16.5 billion Qatari riyals of Qatar's 2021 annual budget is allocated to healthcare. The venture capital ecosystem role is growing in introducing and supporting new health technology companies.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Recent deals

What are the most notable recent deals in the digital health sector in your jurisdiction?

The following deals come mainly from the public sector.

The TASMU Smart Qatar Programme, created in 2017, seeks to enhance the delivery of public services across five priority sectors (transport, logistics, environment, healthcare and sports) and harnesses advanced technology and innovation to drive sustainable economic diversification and improve the quality of life for citizens, residents and visitors. This platform unites government entities, start-ups, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), local and international technology businesses, and research institutes to build and deliver safe, seamless and convenient solutions for a diversified economy, smart ecosystem and a sustainable future for Qatar.

MEEZA (an IT services centre delivering data centre systems, private and hybrid networks, and around the clock surveillance facilities) recently partnered with Droobi Health to build an end-to-end IT infrastructure to host an online platform and mobile application to make it easier for patients and healthcare professionals to share knowledge and develop a robust Droobi Health hosting solution and to provide infrastructure for web hosting and supplementary support services that account for the essential need for security in healthcare data management.

Droobi is the world's first suite of bilingual (Arabic and English) digital therapeutic programmes, using various technologies. It strives to integrate technology, healthcare professionals, data analytics and the science of behaviour change to help people manage their chronic illnesses more effectively and reduce the risk of developing other diseases.

EMBER provides solutions that enable healthcare providers to deliver virtual healthcare services (medical consultations, prescriptions, health records and medicine delivery).

At Home Doc offers in-person medical consultation delivery to clients at their site and telemedicine and virtual consultations.

There are several Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP) digital health start-ups, such as HiQ-Nano (point-of-care diagnostics, home testing, colorimetric assays and a new test kit for a healthy lifestyle – iBlue), Wisify (measures body fat of health or sports professionals), Torq Labs and Torq Smart Clothing (connected clothing for full-body injury prevention and performance improvement), Dronur (to assess and enhance fan engagement during games, remotely monitor players' health via remote health monitoring and assess continuous data flow by sports medicine practitioners), NSA (to analyse clients' techniques, skeleton, reaction times, muscle use and much more in sports) and StretchSkin (proprietary stretchable electronic sensors embedded inside soft polymers that can be placed at any part of human joints to measure motion and force).

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Due diligence

What due diligence issues should investors address before acquiring a stake in digital health ventures?

The new investor must:

- understand the specific requirements of foreign ownership of a particular entity under various regulators;
- understand the relevant laws and regulations at the time of acquisition;
- understand if and how the company is compliant with the laws in terms of protection of personal data privacy law and authorisation from the government before processing personal data of a special nature, and the precautions taken for built-in products and systems to protect individuals' data;
- obtain information regarding any regulatory investigations and cybersecurity breaches or legal pursuits regarding the company's activities;
- find out if the company has obtained all the required licences for its operations (software and hardware licensing – right to use third-party services) and for the use of information technology, and implemented all technical and organisational data security measures;
- understand the risk management, including insurance coverage of risks involved and public health conditions; and
- understand the conditions of funding (if any) and repayment and operating restrictions that survive repayment.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Financing and government support

What financing structures are commonly used by digital health ventures in your jurisdiction? Are there any notable government financing or other support initiatives to promote development of the digital health space?

The Qatar Development Bank finances SMEs and entrepreneurs by offering direct lending or SME investments and seed funding, and guarantees financing to get conventional facilities from local banks.

QSTP has created the Product Development Fund (a cost-sharing fund – QSTP provides up to 50 per cent of the cost), with a total funding value of up to 1.2 million Qatari riyals.

The Qatar Foundation Innovation Coupon provides grants for start-ups and SMEs for developing proof of concept (Tier 1), idea design and development (Tier 2) and the path to the market (Tier 3).

Other support for initiatives are the Qatar National Research Fund, Qatar Development Fund, Digital Incubation Centre, Qatar Business Incubation Centre and Qatar Tech Angels investors.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Legislation

What principal legislation governs the digital health sector in your jurisdiction?

The following legislation governs the digital health sector:

- Protection of the Privacy of Personal Data Law No. 13 of 2016 regulating the collection, use and sharing of personal data;
- the Ministry of Health laws on medication and therapeutic goods and devices;
- Consumer Protection Law No. 8 of 2008;
- Cyber Crime Prevention Law No. 14 of 2014;
- the Telecoms Law (Law No. 34 of 2006) and the Telecoms By-Laws (Law No. 1 of 2009); and
- the Qatar Financial Centre Data Protection Regulations No. 6 of 2005 and Data Protection Rules 2005.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Regulatory and enforcement bodies

Which notable regulatory and enforcement bodies have jurisdiction over the digital health sector?

The Ministry of Public Health's Technology Enforcement Section (the control body for the e-health department and its operations, and is responsible for ensuring the overall continuity of healthcare and for incorporating digital healthcare technologies) is the highest authority for the supervision of medical care and has wide authority to achieve its role and purpose.

The Ministry of Transport and Communications (MOTC) is the regulator responsible for matters of interest to the E-Health Programme and it will be establishing an Artificial Intelligence Committee for implementing the Qatar Artificial Intelligence Strategy, in coordination with the ministries and relevant authorities in the country. The cybersecurity division at the MOTC works, through its two departments, Q-CERT and Critical Information Infrastructure Protection (CIIP), with government agencies, private and public sector organisations, and Qatar's citizens to ensure that online threats are monitored and risks are contained and to protect sensitive information and ensure safety on the internet.

The Qatar Computer Emergency Response Team (Q-CERT), in partnership with Carnegie Mellon University, is an authority that promotes a strengthened cyber environment for the Qatari government and all critical sectors that include healthcare. Q-CERT's objective is to prevent and detect cyberthreats before they cause significant harm.

The National Cyber Security Committee addresses the cyber-agenda at the national level and ensures that all public and private entities are adopting the right cyber-agenda.

The Cyber Security Centre (previously the Information Security Centre) was established (after the government agencies became subject to cyberattacks owing to digitisation between the various state authorities) to be the basic building block for protecting the country's ministries, institutions, bodies and companies from electronic threats and to bridge the gaps and raise their level of electronic awareness, discover the risks and attacks before they occur, and take the necessary measures to avoid risks.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Qatar Financial Centre Authority and the free zones are regulators for the incorporation of commercial companies.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Licensing and authorisation

What licensing and authorisation requirements and procedures apply to the provision of digital health products and services in your jurisdiction?

The Facilities Licensing and Accreditation Department at the Ministry of Public Health issues licences for the medical services within a healthcare facility, the Registration and Drug Pricing Section of the Pharmacy and Drug Control Department issues licences for medical devices for companies, agents of international pharmaceutical companies,

pharmaceutical factories, private hospitals and medical centres, and the Health Facilities Licensing and Accreditation Department approves the publication of a medical service announcement by healthcare investors.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Soft law and guidance

Is there any notable 'soft' law or guidance governing digital health?

The key guidelines of the National E-Health Programme published by the Ministry of Public Health are:

- demonstrating how e-health helps stakeholders to be healthy, to access the healthcare system and access their overall wellness;
- creating positive values in healthcare practitioners and provider organisations, recognising the vital role these professionals play in delivering quality healthcare; providing visible benefits to these stakeholders is an important prerequisite to promoting interest, adoption and change;
- enabling strong collaboration across all members of the health community to promote and accelerate the adoption of standards and solutions;
- developing local knowledge and expertise through research and innovation and playing a significant role in this goal if the right incentives are made available to entrepreneurs and health researchers;
- developing the required e-health skills among healthcare practitioners and attracting qualified professionals;
- focusing on data quality, data management activities and plans and data usage across the full health ecosystem;
- protecting sensitive patient data for multiple purposes including primary, secondary and tertiary care and health analytics, and securing the information from external parties to help build confidence in the e-health system to maximise health system benefits;
- actively managing the terms and the establishment of a terminology authority (or the National Product Centre) to help ensure that terminologies are maintained appropriately;
- attracting and building the necessary data management skills and capabilities in a local workforce; and
- adhering to basic data protection responsibilities (eg, data handlers properly trained and necessary precautions made to 'protect personal data from loss, damage, modification, disclosure or being illegally accessed').

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Liability regimes

What are the key liability regimes applicable to digital health products and services in your jurisdiction? How do these apply to the cross-border provision of digital health products and services?

The domestic and cross-border digital health products and services are subject to all liability regimes: contractual, tort, product liability, consumer protection and criminal liability, and protection of the privacy of personal data and cybercrime prevention laws. Any contract or agreement concluded in violation of the provisions of these laws shall be considered null and void and can lead to fines of up to 5 million Qatari riyals.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

DATA PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT

Definition of 'health data'

What constitutes 'health data'? Is there a definition of 'anonymised' health data?

Article 16 of Law No. 13/2016 considers personal information related to an ethnic group; children; physical and mental health or state; treatment; health security; cause of death; socioeconomic parameters regarding health and wellness; historical healthcare background such as diseases or any related information; personal information collected to provide health service; opinion; and health services provided as special private data.

Anonymised health data is not defined. However, it can be defined as data from which the patient cannot be identified by the recipient of the information. The name, address and full postcode must be removed together with any other information that, in conjunction with other data held by or disclosed to the recipient, could identify the patient. Unique numbers may be included only if recipients of the data do not have access to trace the identity of the patient.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Data protection law

What legal protection is afforded to health data in your jurisdiction? Is the level of protection greater than that afforded to other personal data?

Qatar was the first Gulf Cooperation Council country to issue in 2017 a comprehensive personal data privacy protection law by issuing Data Protection Law No. 13/2016. This Law is modelled on and incorporates familiar concepts from other international privacy frameworks and mandates that any party that processes personal data adhering to the principles of transparency, fairness and respect for human dignity. The Ministry of Transport and Communications is responsible for implementing and enforcing the Data Protection Law.

The Data Protection Law applies to personal data when this data is processed electronically; obtained, collected or extracted in any other way in preparation for electronic processing; or processed by combining electronic processing and traditional processing. It doesn't apply to personal data processed by individuals privately or within a family context, or to any personal data gathered for official surveys and statistics.

According to this Law, businesses shall be banned from sending direct marketing messages electronically without obtaining an individual's prior consent and organisations must adhere to basic data protection responsibilities (ie, ensuring data handlers are properly trained and that necessary precautions are made to 'protect personal data from loss, damage, modification, disclosure or being illegally accessed'). It also includes articles that require consent from individuals before their personal information can be used by an organisation. The owner or operator of any website related to children must put up a policy about how it manages the information of minors. These website operators must also get the consent of the child's parent when processing his or her information.

Other legal provisions in relation to privacy and personal data may be found in the Telecoms Law (Law No. 34 of 2006), the Telecoms By-Laws (Law No. 1 of 2009), the Qatar Financial Centre Data Protection Regulations No. 6/2005 and the Data Protection Rules 2005.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Anonymised health data

Is anonymised health data subject to specific regulations or guidelines?

With coded clinical data, supported by standardised terminology, it is possible to create advanced data analytics

services for both clinical and operational health data that requires patient consent . It is the individual's right to grant or deny consent for data sharing and use beyond the original purpose for which the data was collected. Under the principle of express, informed consent, individuals must first be educated on the required use of their health data for healthcare services and also be advised if that information may be used for different purposes in the future (eg, in research) in the future. Explicit consent must be obtained or confirmed before personal health information can be collected and processed.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Enforcement

How are the data protection laws in your jurisdiction enforced in relation to health data? Have there been any notable regulatory or private enforcement actions in relation to digital healthcare technologies?

As per the provisions of the Data Protection Law, officers of the Ministry of Transport and Communications have the power to investigate and establish crimes and violations of the Law, in addition to an array of fines for violations of its terms that may go up to a maximum amount of 5 million Qatari riyals. Complaints can also be filed by individuals about alleged violations before the Ministry, which may issue instructions to controllers or processors and seize materials and otherwise document any established violations.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Cybersecurity

What cybersecurity laws and best practices are relevant for digital health offerings?

Qatar showed early interest in preventing cybercrimes and enhancing cybersecurity, particularly after numerous sophisticated, high-profile cyberattacks on its media and government websites, along with the country's energy industry networks, and given that businesses operating in the healthcare sector holding high volumes of sensitive and valuable health data are at a higher risk of being targeted by cybercriminals.

Law No. 14/2014 has provisions to fight the most common forms of online crime; provides for strict penalties for each category of reprimanded act; and combats offences committed through the internet, IT networks and computers and other related crimes.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Best practices and practical tips

What best practices and practical tips would you recommend to effectively manage the ownership, use and sharing of users' raw and anonymised data, as well as the output of digital health solutions?

The answer is by properly obtaining the clear consent of concerned individuals before using their data, adhering to basic data protection standards, ensuring that data handlers are properly trained and that necessary precautions are made to 'protect personal data from loss, damage, modification, disclosure or being illegally accessed', and ensuring adequate protection against unauthorised access and cybercrimes.

Protection of the Privacy of Personal Data Law No. 13/2016 has codified the key principles reflecting standard

organisational best practices: the entity that is ultimately in charge of collecting the data (and any service provider it engages) is bound to take necessary measures to protect personal data from loss, damage, alteration and disclosure from any accidental or unlawful access or use; organisations are required to adopt appropriate measures that are consistent with the nature and significance of the personal data to be protected, and sensitive personal health data may not be processed without specific authorisation and controls; and the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) must work closely with the Ministry of Transport and Communications to ensure appropriate safeguards and precautions are used for healthcare data.

The MOPH's National Health, E-Health and Data Management Strategy has enacted a comprehensive vision and plan for future e-health developments to improve healthcare delivery in Qatar encompassing an uncompromising legal and regulatory framework for digitisation and standards for e-health data.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Patentability and inventorship

What are the most noteworthy rules and considerations relating to the patentability and inventorship of digital health-related inventions?

According to Qatari patent Law No. 30/2006, a patent shall be granted to any invention that involves an inventive step and is industrially applicable, whether the invention relates to new industrial products, new industrial processes or a new application of known industrial processes. Accordingly, patentability does not include computer programs (or computer software) that are nonetheless protected by the provisions of copyright and related rights contained in Law No. 7/2002 on the protection of copyright and similar rights.

Patent protection offers an additional layer of protection for digital health solutions compared to copyright. A company may be eligible for patent protection if it has innovated a new approach to identifying data, or to storing data more efficiently, or the data structure itself. Similarly, a digital health application may be patented if its owner focuses on innovation for a computer-specific problem such as keeping data private, keeping data secure and de-identifying data. Such ideas and invention types are patents-eligible. Patentability includes digital health-related hardware, equipment and tools.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Patent prosecution

What is the patent application and registration procedure for digital health technologies in your jurisdiction?

There are no specific provisions for digital health technologies. A patent application is submitted by the inventor to the Patent Office as per the following process:

- the application goes through an initial reviewing process and may be returned to the applicant for required changes;
- registration fees are due once the registration is approved; and
- the applicant will subsequently receive an email with the patent request number and the financial obligations to be undertaken during the specified legal duration, in addition to the due dates of annual fees.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Other IP rights

Are any other IP rights relevant in the context of digital health offerings? How are these rights secured?

Digital health offering ad hoc rules do not exist; general rules apply. Digital health rights are secured by the provisions of copyright and related rights contained in Law No. 7/2002 on the protection of copyright and neighbouring rights.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Licensing

What practical considerations are relevant when licensing IP rights in digital health technologies?

Qatari law accepts requests from third parties for a compulsory licence for exploitation of an invention:

- absent serious or effective exploitation of the patent throughout a period of three years since it was granted;
- unless the patent owner ceased exploiting the protected invention for two consecutive years for no acceptable cause; and
- unless the patent owner declined to licence others for exploiting the invention, thus impeding the establishment or development of industrial and commercial activities in Qatar.

Under certain conditions and requirements of use and exploitation, the competent minister has the authority to cancel a compulsory licence if the beneficiary violates its conditions or the reasons that originally justified the granting of such licence.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Enforcement

What procedures govern the enforcement of IP rights in digital health technologies? Have there been any notable enforcement actions involving digital health technologies in your jurisdiction?

Qatar's general legal IP protection system compensates for the absence of ad hoc law for protecting IP in digital health technologies. In addition to numerous international and regional treaties, the country has several domestic laws governing this issue that afford protection to digital health technologies IP rights, as follows:

- Law No. 25/1995 for the protection of copyright (including computer programs and applications and operating systems);
- Law No. 9/2002 on trademarks, trade indications, trade names, geographical indications and industrial designs and templates;
- Law No. 5/2005 for the protection of trade secrets;
- Law No. 6/2005 for the protection of integrated circuits designs;
- Law No. 30/2006 for the protection of patents;
- Law No. 17/2011 on the border measures for the protection of intellectual property rights; and
- Law No. 7/2014 for trademarks and trade names (Gulf Cooperation Council law).

Law stated - 10 March 2021

ADVERTISING, MARKETING AND E-COMMERCE

Advertising and marketing

What rules and restrictions govern the advertising and marketing of digital health products and services in your jurisdiction?

The Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA) established by Emiri Decree 42/2014 controls the telecommunications and information infrastructure, postal services, digital media access and spectrum industries. CRA promotes an open and competitive sector of information and communications technology, offering advanced, creative and reliable communications services. The Decree provides for enforcing conditions and restrictions on the use of electronic communications in direct marketing (defined as the sending to individuals of any advertisement or marketing material through any means whatsoever). It prohibits direct electronic contact with individuals to send them publicity or marketing materials. Further, it requires the sender to communicate its identity and contact information via which individuals can request that communications be stopped and withdraw their consent to receiving them.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

e-Commerce

What rules governing e-commerce are relevant for digital health offerings in your jurisdictions?

The Electronic Commerce and Transactions Law No. 16/2010 (the E-Commerce Law) governs electronic business. This law acknowledges and validates transactions conducted over electronic communications such as emails, e-contracts and e-signatures. The E-Commerce Law aims to protect consumers online in several ways:

- spam does not count as e-communication;
- consumers have three days to rescind or cancel any e-contract;
- consumers may terminate a contract for a delay of service delivery of over 30 days;
- consumers should not pay to return goods that were delivered in error; and
- service providers may not use, keep or share their customers' personal information for undisclosed or unauthorised purposes unless permitted or required by law or consented to by the customer.

A valid electronic signature should meet the following criteria:

- the signatory must be identified as the sole owner of the signature;
- the signatory must have control of the signature when signing;
- any changes to the signature made after the time of signing must be detectable; and
- where the purpose of the legal requirement for a signature is to assure the integrity of the information of a data message, any alteration made to that information after the time of signing must be detectable.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

PAYMENT AND REIMBURSEMENT

Coverage

Are digital health products and services covered or reimbursed by the national healthcare system and private insurers?

Digital health products and services are not yet covered or reimbursed by the national healthcare system. Currently, two international insurers provide such coverage provided that the insured policy includes such services and products among the risks covered.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

UPDATES AND TRENDS

Recent developments

What have been the most significant recent developments affecting the digital health sector in your jurisdiction, including any notable regulatory actions or legislative changes?

Qatar has implemented the Electronic Health Record System that provides a flux of information by connecting primary, secondary and tertiary hospitals and leads to improved clinical decision-making, patient flow, hospital management and policy planning. Generally, government or government-affiliated hospitals (Sidra Medicine and Hamad Medical Corporation primary healthcare centres) have more advanced digital health technologies than private hospitals. Once the insurance companies compensate for digital health technologies used by the private sector, a surge of this use will most likely be witnessed to generate income.

Because of the rapidly emerging covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) – in partnership with TASMU Smart Qatar, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, Hukoomi and Qatar Post – has launched several remote access channels for healthcare services at Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) and Hamad Medical Corporation, along with prominent digital solution providers. To ensure the safety of everyone, new virtual health services have been introduced by enabling patients to schedule their appointments with healthcare providers by dialling 16000 for virtual consultations, medical advice, sick leave and medicine deliveries.

MyHealth enables access by patients to their key health records anywhere via the internet. The portal gives access to key medical information, including test results, upcoming appointments and medication. It shows one single record of information, regardless of whether you were seen at Hamad Medical Corporation or PHCC.

PHCC launched its new website in October 2020, which provides easy access to all primary care information online and access by patients to e-services by allowing them to conduct 'day-to-day' administrative business online. It also launched Nar'aakom in January 2021, a bilingual mobile application that provides comprehensive healthcare management on the go for its 27 health centres. PHCC offers the Hayyak service, which enables patients to obtain the necessary information about their medical appointments and the answers they need regarding PHCC's healthcare services through the helpline '107' available around the clock in five languages.

Awnak (Your Help) emergency service provided by the Technical Affairs Department at the National Command Centre (NCC) is an around-the-clock humanitarian service enabling individuals to ask for help in cases of medical and security emergencies using an easy-to-use device with high technical features. It targets elderly citizens above 60, persons with disabilities and patients with chronic diseases who are subject to sudden falls to ensure immediate response to their emergency calls in cases that require quick action, as they will only need to press the button of the service device. A database for the elderly is registered at the emergency room of the NCC. It includes the health number, date of disease and type of disability (if any) to accelerate response to any report from this segment of people.

Law stated - 10 March 2021

Coronavirus

What emergency legislation, relief programmes and other initiatives specific to your practice area has your state implemented to address the pandemic? Have any existing government programs, laws or regulations been amended to address these concerns? What best practices are advisable for clients?

The government injected 75 billion Qatari riyals in incentives to the private sector and directed state funds to increase private investment in the local bourse by 10 billion Qatari riyals. Entrepreneur tenants were exempted from rental fees.

The National Response Guarantee Programme was created to grant to the private sector interest-free loans from the private banks guaranteed by Qatar Development Bank. Loan payments and private sector obligations were postponed for six months.

The MOPH has adopted the EHTERAZ application, which is mandatory for all residents and visitors to Qatar to identify their covid-19 status by providing coloured codes (green: no positive result; yellow: quarantined; grey: suspected; red: confirmed; and gold: vaccinated) in addition to updates regarding covid-19 cases statistics. The app has proven to be successful, owing to adequate and strict enforcement by the government entities.

The MOPH has created a website to provide a trusted source of information concerning covid-19.

A new covid-19 department was established to investigate any criminal cases pertaining to breach of mandatory measures and requirements imposed to combat covid-19.

Infectious Disease Law No. 9/2020 amended some provisions of Law No. 17/1990 to widen its coverage and impose procedure on the defence against such diseases.

A strict lockdown policy and preventive safety measures were and remain implemented.

The MOPH issued several circulars regarding health and safety procedures to be taken in different sectors (eg, strict health and safety procedures for food and bottled water factories, covid-19 prevention measures in food establishments and covid-19 prevention measures in hypermarkets).

The government implemented several relief measures for foreign visitors in Qatar unable to return home by allowing them to remain in the country without extending their visas or paying any fees.

Access to testing for covid-19 for free and in a way that was readily available to the public in four health centres and three dedicated drive-through facilities was ensured.

New digital health technologies were implemented by government hospitals or government-affiliated hospitals, which are far more advanced when compared to private medical centres.

A community awareness campaign in different languages was delivered, featuring a dedicated national website, TV and radio interviews with medical experts, regular social media messaging and newspaper coverage.

Most of the official government entities, including courts, are now relying upon the electronic platforms to register applications and requests, file documents, etc. Some courts are conducting virtual hearings (eg, QICDRC has used e-court since 2018 and has used innovative technologies for electronic case management and online hearing system particularly during covid-19). In various sectors, tele-consultations and virtual platforms are the new normal for businesses in various industries and sectors.

Law stated - 10 March 2021