

Pandemic tech left out public health experts. Here's why that needs to change. | MIT Technology Review

By Lindsay Muscato

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Exposure notification apps were developed at the start of the pandemic, as technologists raced to help slow the spread of covid. The most common system was developed jointly by Google and Apple, and dozens of apps around the world were built using it—MIT Technology Review spent much of 2020 tracking them. The apps, which run on ordinary smartphones and rely on Bluetooth signals to operate, have weathered plenty of criticism over privacy worries and tech glitches. Many in the US have struggled with low numbers of downloads, while the UK recently had the opposite problem as people were deluged with alerts.

Now we're looking back at how this technology rolled out, especially because it might offer lessons for the next phase of pandemic tech.

Susan Landau, a Tufts University professor in cybersecurity and computer science, is the author of *People Count*, a book on how and why contact tracing apps were built. She also published an essay in *Science* last week arguing that new technology to support public health should be thoroughly vetted for ways that it might add to unfairness and inequities already embedded in society.

"The pandemic will not be the last humans face," Landau writes, calling for societies to "use and build tools and supporting health care policy" that will protect people's rights, health, and safety and enable greater health-care equity.

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