

STARTUP PROFILE

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NGUVU HEALTH

What does the company offer?

The company offers on-demand teletherapy from trained and certified clinical therapists, primarily serving the Nigerian population. The app offers personal therapy, couples therapy, and free mental health screenings.

Who started it and when?

Nguvu Health was founded in March 2020 by Joshua Koya, Tolulope Ogunjuyibe, and Juliet Odumosu.

What are examples of Nguvu's recent traction?

The app, currently available on iOS and Android, boasts 26 registered therapists and over 2,200 signups.

How will the company fund itself?

Nguvu Health has been self-funded since its foundation, but founder Joshua Koya revealed growth plans for the startup. They are currently in search of funding of about \$200,000 to \$400,000 to expand their operations.



Nguvu Health is an organization dedicated to addressing the inadequate mental health resources for the people of Nigeria. With enormous challenges in the mental health space around the world, Nguvu Health is providing solutions leveraging tech, not only in Nigeria but to the continent of Africa as a whole. There is a drought of mental health support in Africa, particularly in the mental support systems in Nigeria.

The mental health legislation of Nigeria—otherwise known as the Lunacy Act of 1958—was first enacted in 1916, and has not been amended since 1958.¹ It is, therefore, no surprise that a nation with such outdated laws would be the hotbed of what can be called a ‘mental health pandemic’. The institutional challenges brought about by the dearth of mental health support have put Nigerians in a very difficult situation. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a quarter of the Nigerian population—around 50 million citizens—are afflicted by some sort of mental illness.² Currently said to have the highest caseload of depression in Africa, Nigeria ranks 15th in the world on suicide frequency.³ This is not helped by the obvious brain drain in the medical sector presently.

Nigeria is suffering from a shortage of mental health professionals. According to Aljazeera, there are less than 150 psychiatrists in this country of 200 million, and WHO estimates that fewer than 10 percent of mentally ill Nigerians have access to the care they need.⁴ A look into the 8 regional psychiatric hospitals and the departments of psychiatry in 12 medical schools across Nigeria⁵—which comprise the major part of mental health services in the country—gives a little glimpse into the inadequacies and challenges faced by the medical practitioners and patients. This is the reason why the sudden surge of social media usage has drastically helped broaden conversations about mental health in Nigeria.

The discourse induced by social media interactions and realizations has led to the emergence of startups focused on addressing this problem namely, Bridgingspace, Truthshare, Mytherapist, and

¹ Westbrook, Andrew Hudson. "Mental health legislation and involuntary commitment in Nigeria: A call for reform." *Wash. U. Global Stud. L. Rev.* 10 (2011): 403.

² Socrates Mbamalu, "Nigeria has a mental health problem," Aljazeera. Accessed December 19, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2019/10/2/nigeria-has-a-mental-health-problem>

³ Mbamalu, "Nigeria has a mental health problem"

⁴ Mbamalu, "Nigeria has a mental health problem"

⁵ Ayonrinde, Oyedeji, Oye Gureje, and Rahmaan Lawal. "Psychiatric research in Nigeria: bridging tradition and modernisation." *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 184, no. 6 (2004): 536.



Nguvu Health. Founded in March 2020⁶ by Joshua Koya, Tolulope Ogunjuyibe, and Juliet Odumosu⁷, Nguvu Health stands out among the bunch in its mission to provide mental health services to the fingertips of Africans. According to Koya, since Swahili is the most widely spoken language in Africa, he chose the word ‘nguvu’ which means ‘strength’ in Swahili because he wants “people to be strong, mentally”⁸. He said he choose this name to reiterate his commitment to building a solution for Africa as a whole and not just Nigeria because for him, Nguvu Health advocates for a better mental health space through preventive and corrective tech. ⁹‘Teletherapy’ is the word used to describe Koya’s innovation—therapy that can be done virtually.¹⁰ This makes sense given that Nguvu Health offers services that include text chat therapy and video sessions at different prices. Considering the perception of mental health in Nigeria, one would wonder about the steps Nguvu Health takes to ensure that information entrusted to them is safe and treated with the utmost confidentiality. This is an important part of the conversation because patients’ information is sensitive and should be regarded with the highest standards of security.

The onboarding process requires you to take an assessment that ensures that they fully understand your needs before you can go on to pick a therapist for sessions which could be via text or video call. Nguvu Health also has a social feature called ‘Rant Room’, a safe space where users can share experiences and challenges in their journey to finding help. This feature is free to all users irrespective of their selected plans. Since Nguvu Health is committed to ensuring that not only do their users get the help they need but also to keep their information safe, Nguvu Health’s app has disabled screenshots. In the era of the ‘screenshot rave’, this is a great way to ensure that the users’ information remains secure. Meanwhile, Nguvu Health has been self-funded since its foundation, but founder Joshua Koya revealed growth plans for the startup. They are currently in search of funding of about \$200,000 to \$400,000 to expand their operations. The app, currently available on iOS and Android, boasts 26 registered therapists and over 2,200 signups and is well on its way to changing the face of mental health in Nigeria.

⁶ Tom Jackson, "How Nigeria's Nguvu Health provides on-demand therapy sessions to Africans," Disrupt Africa. Accessed December 19, 2021. <https://disrupt-africa.com/2021/08/13/how-nigerias-nguvu-health-provides-on-demand-therapy-sessions-to-africans/>

⁷ Praise Ojekudo, "We want to change the face of therapy in Africa—JFK, CEO Nguvu Health," Medium. Accessed December 19, 2021. <https://medium.com/@praiseojekudo/we-want-to-change-the-face-of-therapy-in-africa-jfk-ceo-nguvu-health-80a48e1c032a>

⁸ Ojekudo, "We want to change the face of therapy in Africa—JFK, CEO Nguvu Health."

⁹ Ojekudo, "We want to change the face of therapy in Africa—JFK, CEO Nguvu Health."

¹⁰ Ojekudo, "We want to change the face of therapy in Africa—JFK, CEO Nguvu Health."



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