Phase2

BORN DIGITAL

Generational Insights for Crafting Future-Ready Digital Health

The Not-So-Big Generational Divide in DIGITAL
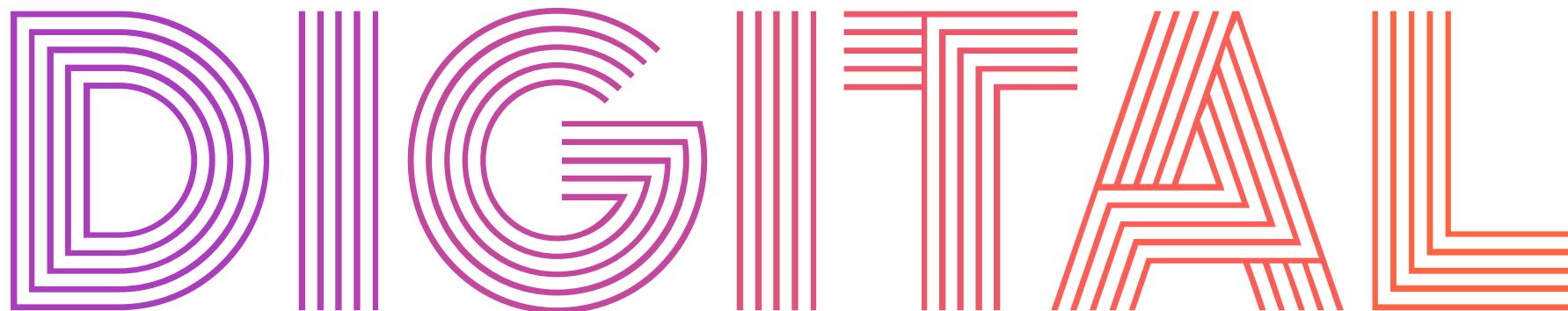
We've all seen the memes — mom can't use the computer and the millennial child, home for the holidays, spends their time fixing all the tech.

And while we all love free tech support from time to time, when it comes to digital experience in health, it is time to dispel that simplistic view. **A quarter of the way through the 21st century, everyone is a digital consumer.**

That doesn't mean we all consume and engage with digital in the same way, nor does it mean that a one-size-fits-all solution will create the best experience. But it does mean that creating personalized, inclusive experiences across the generational divide is a project of nuance, led by research and understanding.

Phase2's roster of highly influential health systems is vast, and after more than 10 years of working in the digital experience space in health, we have amassed an incredible amount of data about user preferences and behaviors across generations. **In this report, we synthesize all we have learned and share our approach to digital experience for any age.**

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Methodology and Sources

Over the past decade, Phase2 has worked with a wide variety of health systems across the country, from academic medical centers to clinical care networks to provider payer organizations. No matter the initiative, we have the opportunity to hear from patients, caretakers, providers, and myriad audiences about several key questions. Our research database includes:

> **Usability studies for digital health products**

> **Audience personas, archetypes, and journey maps**

> **Needs assessments and audience interviews**

We pair this primary research with market research and expert analysis to create an approach and recommendations for our clients that are then tested and implemented.

While each health system has unique challenges, many of the challenges and subsequent generational strategies are consistent. Before we get to solutions, let's look at each generation in more detail.

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Technology at Every Age

At this moment, our oldest citizens saw the first televisions come into our homes and the youngest will grow up in a fully integrated AI world. The march of technology is ever progressing, and even if the specific technology each generation has grown up with is different, the need to learn, adapt, and incorporate emerging technology into our lives persists across generations.

And while the way we learn changes over our lifetime, for the majority of the human lifespan, we are learning and adapting the numerous changes that come our way. Let's look at an example. If we consider something like the rise of large learning model based generative AI in 2024, the entire population of pre-retirement age has a high to moderate learning capacity. The specialization of our learning modes does differ from age to age, but none of them do not allow for new information to be learned and synthesized.

	0-5	6-20	21-30	31-50	51-70	70+
AGE	0-5	6-20	21-30	31-50	51-70	70+
LEARNING CAPACITY	High	Peak	Peak	Stable	Moderate	Lower
SPECIALIZATION	Foundational Skills	Adaptable Learning	Complex Learning Tasks	Applied Learning	Specific Focus	Reliant on Experience
NEUROPLASTICITY			DECLINES OVER TIME			

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GENERALTIONAL INSIGHTS

Phase2's user research has revealed consistent patterns and behaviors across each generation.

While there is plenty that is different, there is also much that is the same.

BABY BOOMERS

GEN X

MILLENNIALS

GEN Z

SPECIAL SECTION: GEN ALPHA

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GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

BORN

1946
–
1964

Baby Boomers

BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS

Baby Boomers are embracing digital health tools at an accelerating pace, due to more time passing in a consumer technology rich world, the necessity brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to manage chronic conditions at this age. Despite this progress, barriers such as limited digital literacy and concerns about privacy remain significant hurdles, though these barriers reflect practical challenges rather than resistance.

> *It's time to break down the stereotype that older generations are resistant to digital healthcare services. The truth is, those turning 65 today were 35 years young in 1994 when Internet technologies were becoming commonplace in work environments.*

Jeff Walpole | CEO, PHASE2

PREFERENCES

✓ Favor structured, hierarchical navigation over search-driven interfaces

✓ Place high value on trust signals, such as detailed doctor profiles, robust privacy assurances, and reliable functionality

✓ Seek unified platforms that streamline tasks like prescription management, appointment scheduling, and access to medical records

Current age
(as of 2025)

60-78
years old

64%
of Baby Boomers completed at least one digital health task last year

78%
report high satisfaction with digital tools for accessing test results and scheduling appointments
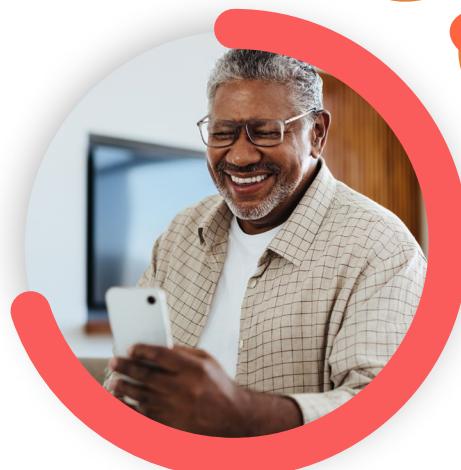
65%
express interest in unified platforms for healthcare management.
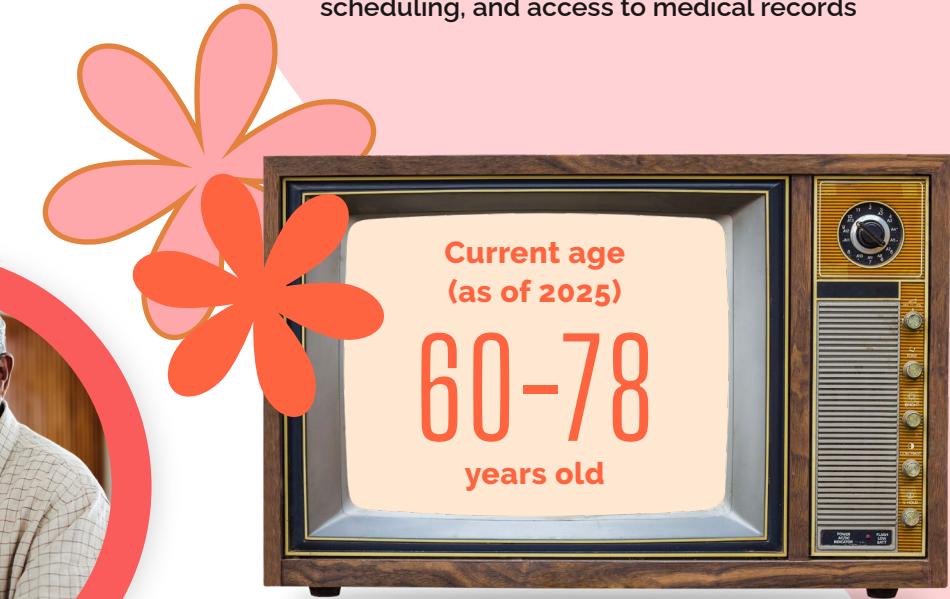
INSIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

Baby Boomers' preference for simplified, linear navigation reflects their comfort with familiar, consistent digital interactions. However, gaps in eHealth literacy necessitate more intuitive interfaces and educational support to maximize their engagement.

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GEN X

PREFERENCES

- ✓ Favor tools that support multitasking and offer centralized access to family health data

- ✓ Appreciate streamlined interfaces that prioritize efficiency and clarity

- ✓ Expect easy-to-navigate appointment scheduling, provider communication, and proxy access features for caregiving responsibilities

INSIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

Gen X values pragmatic, time-saving tools but often encounters friction with poorly integrated platforms. Their shared caregiving role underscores the need for solutions that simplify multi-user management.

BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS

Often referred to as the "sandwich generation," Gen X juggles caregiving for both aging parents and for children, in addition to managing their own health needs. This multifaceted responsibility makes them critical users of integrated digital health solutions.

Survey feedback highlights the importance of robust search functionality and clear navigation paths.

77%

of Gen X caregivers use health apps for family health management

Current age (as of 2025)

44-59

years old

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GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

BORN
1981 – 1996

BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS

As digital natives, Millennials have high expectations for convenience, transparency, and personalization in digital health tools. Their interactions are often benchmarked against consumer facing user-friendly apps in banking, retail, and entertainment sectors.

"Wherever you can allow people to be more empowered about their health is the way to go."

Patient User from a Leading Health System

PREFERENCES

- ✓ Desire on-demand care options, including telehealth and mobile-first experiences
- ✓ Require transparency in pricing, care options, and wait times
- ✓ Expect seamless interoperability across digital health platforms

millennials

80%
of Millennials engaged in at least one digital healthcare task last year

67%
switch providers if digital tools fail to meet their expectations

Current age
(as of 2025)
28-43
years old

iMac

INSIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

Millennials' willingness to switch providers underscores the importance of competitive, well-designed digital experiences. Personalization and convenience are non-negotiable for this cohort.

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GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

BORN

1997 — 2012

GEN Z

BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS

Gen Z is defined by its digital-first approach, preferring interactive, mobile-friendly platforms. They actively seek health information online and through social media, often relying on video-based and interactive content.

PREFERENCES

- ✓ Demand highly personalized, visually engaging, and mobile-first digital experiences.

- ✓ Utilize interactive tools like symptom checkers and health trackers.

- ✓ Express concerns about misinformation and data privacy, emphasizing the need for credible sources verified by their peers.

INSIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

While highly engaged with digital tools, Gen Z's trust in non-traditional sources and their concerns about privacy present challenges for traditional healthcare providers. Solutions must balance transparency, reliability, and user-centric design. Younger generations are less tolerant of lapses in communication or delays in scheduling.

79% of Gen Z participated in digital health activities

43% trust peer recommendations more than provider-led communications

Current age (as of 2025)

12 — 27 years old

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GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

BORN
2010
–
2024

gen alpha

Current age (as of 2025) **0-14** **years old**
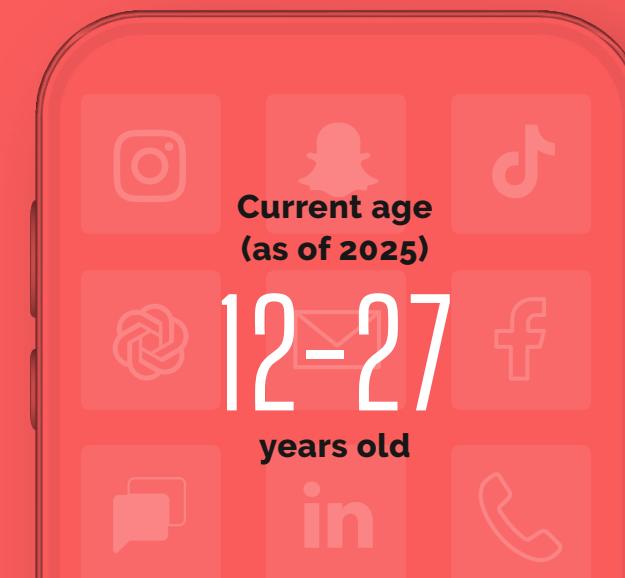
The first generation born entirely in the 21st century, much is yet to be seen about Gen Alpha. And yet based on our analysis, we have good hypotheses about their future digital health preferences:

Big Population Impact: Globally, Gen Alpha is poised be the biggest generation of all time, which means, they will wield enormous influence in how digital experience is shaped as they come into adulthood.

Digital Primaries: If Gen Z are digital natives, Gen Alpha are digital primaries. Everything about their lives is digital-first. This is especially influenced by COVID lockdowns, which had them engaging in early school in a fully digital space.

Trust is Everything: And, a little unpredictable. As our world of information bubbles and the fluid perception of facts evolves, earning Gen Alpha's trust will be paramount.

Sentient Personalization: Well maybe not truly sentient, but Gen Alpha will grow up in a world where personalization becomes so anticipatory, so ubiquitous, and so effective that a digital companion that feels alive will become the norm.

Harmonic Health: Raised by the most mental health-aware generations in history, Gen Alpha will move well beyond holistic health that considers every facet of health to harmonic health — where there is no question between the links and required cooperation of all health and wellness factors.

Infinite Insights: As our ability to track, connect, and assess health data gets even better, Gen Alpha will operate in a world of boundless access to actionable insights derived from expansive data. The blending of disparate data sources into a coherent knowledge system will be the norm.

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FEATURE FOCUS

From navigation to personalization to security, each generation has different preferences and expectations.

And while these differences can be significant, smart digital strategy can speak to all needs and ensure an excellent digital experience at any age.

NAVIGATION

PERSONALIZATION

CARE COORDINATION

DIGITAL LITERACY SUPPORT

TRUST AND SECURITY

Navigation

Baby Boomers

> Prefer hierarchical menus and clearly labeled navigation pathways

> Respond better to consistent layouts and larger fonts for accessibility

Gen X

> Value intuitive navigation that supports multitasking

> Seek clear labeling and multiple access paths (e.g., search, breadcrumbs)

Millenials

> Demand seamless, intuitive navigation with modern, visually appealing designs

> Expect robust search functionalities

Gen Z

> Prefer mobile-first, interactive navigation with high responsiveness

> Gravitate toward engaging and visually rich designs

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Personalization

Baby Boomers

› Appreciate simplified experiences with tailored health records and reminders

› Benefit from features like direct appointment links and prescription management

Gen X

› Need tools that integrate health data for multi-user management (e.g., family health dashboards)

› Expect reminders and actionable notifications for caregiving roles

Millenials

› Expect highly personalized experiences, including cost transparency and tailored care recommendations

› Demand seamless integration across all digital touchpoints

Gen Z

› Seek real-time, personalized health data and interactive features

› Value customization options for content delivery formats (e.g., video, chat)

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Care Coordination

Baby Boomers

> Require straightforward access to care coordination features, including proxy options

> Prefer visual indicators for upcoming appointments or required actions

Gen X

> Depend on synchronized tools for managing multiple schedules (e.g., for children and parents)

> Appreciate shared access for caregivers

Millenials

> Expect interoperability between systems for holistic care management

> Prefer seamless connections between providers, pharmacies, and labs

Gen Z

> Look for instant communication with providers through chat or video

> Value transparency in care planning and data sharing

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FEATURE PREFERENCES

Digital Literacy Support

Baby Boomers

> Need tooltips, tutorials, and helplines embedded into the interface

> Benefit from guided user journeys and consistent terminology

Gen X

> Appreciate help features that simplify complex processes without interrupting workflows

Millenials

> Require minimal guidance but value proactive support for advanced features

Gen Z

> Expect self-explanatory interfaces but will use FAQs or videos for quick resolutions

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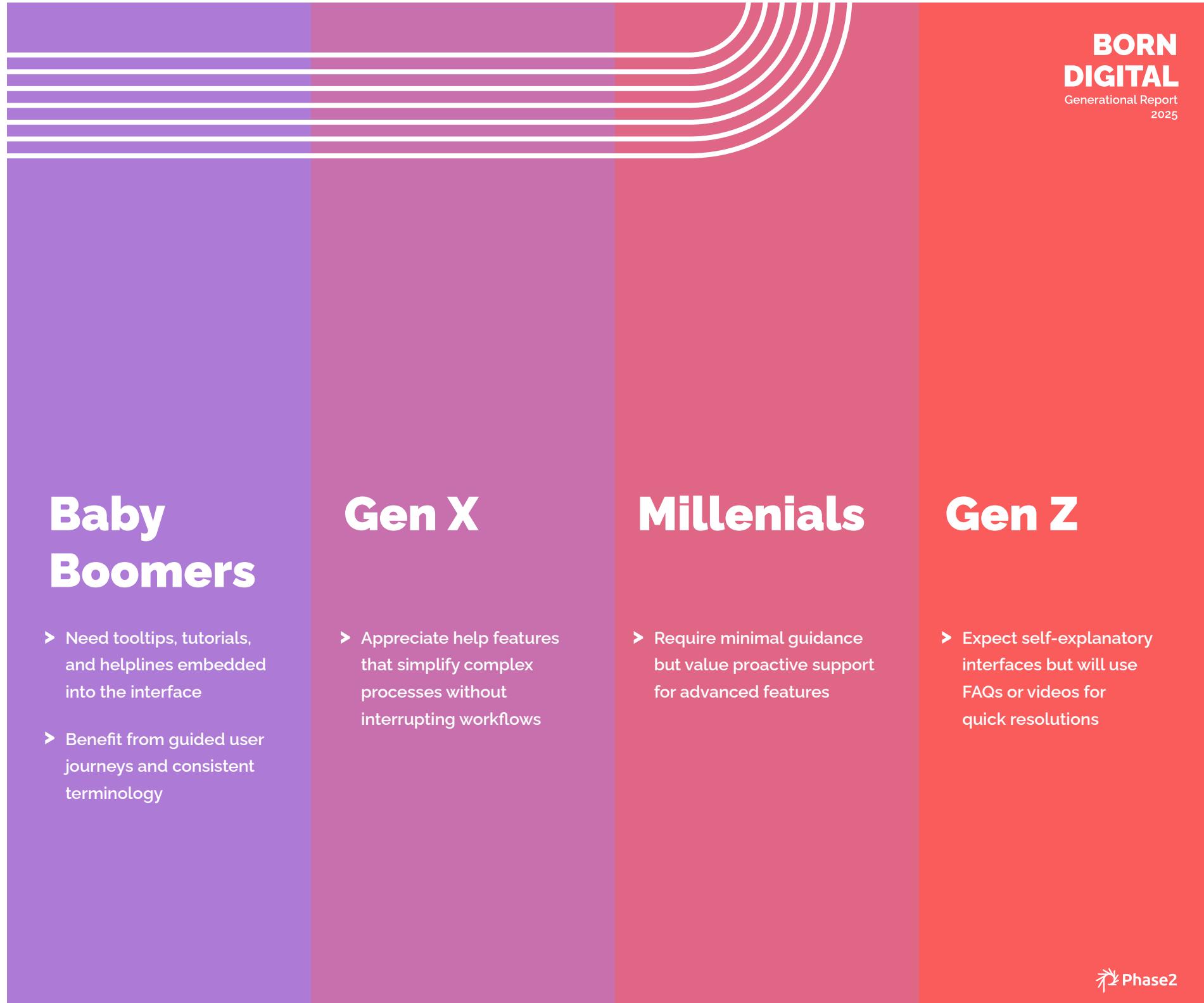
Trust and Security

Baby Boomers

> Highly value clear trust signals such as secure login, data privacy assurances, and provider credibility

Gen X

> Require secure platforms but also value user reviews and community feedback

Millenials

> Expect visible privacy controls and the ability to customize data-sharing preferences

Gen Z

> Demand transparency about data use and prioritize platforms with high-security reputations

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What Health Systems Should Do

While preferences and behavior across generations have some differences, we found more in common for health systems than what many expect. And after conducting generational user testing on a variety of health system sites — the conclusions are consistent among them.

For our starter DXP framework, we bring this perspective and abundant user research to every new health system evolution we undertake. And while every health system has specific challenges, most can benefit from the following advice:

01

Invest in Personalization

Tailor digital experiences using data-driven insights to address individual preferences across generations where it really matters. For example, a unified health dashboard would allow health systems to highlight generational needs most prominently — appointment reminders and test results for Baby Boomers, multi-user profile toggles for GenX, symptom checkers and health trackers for Gen Z.

02

Build Trust Through Design

Incorporate trust signals, such as transparent pricing, detailed provider profiles, and robust security features. Ensure that all communication aligns with user expectations for clarity and honesty.

03

Provide Multiple Pathways to Information

Search functionality, simple menus, and breadcrumb trails — to accommodate varying levels of digital comfort and generational preferences. Make sure these pathways are complimentary, not conflicting or overly complex.

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What Health Systems Should Do

04

Enable Caregiver Support

Develop tools that support multi-user access, allowing caregivers to manage household health efficiently. Features like proxy access and appointment synchronization are essential for Gen X users.

05

Enhance Accessibility and Inclusivity

Ensure platforms are inclusive, featuring options like larger text, voice command capabilities, multilingual support, and simplified workflows to accommodate all users.

06

Educate and Support Users

Offer resources to enhance digital literacy, particularly for Baby Boomers and Seniors. Tutorials, helplines, and in-platform guidance can reduce friction and improve adoption.

07

Plan for Today and Tomorrow

As generations age, their need for health system services increases, so catering to generational preferences while audiences are young is an investment in their future loyalty.

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Digital Experience for All Ages

Generational differences in digital health engagement present both challenges and opportunities for health systems. By leveraging nuanced insights, health systems can create inclusive, personalized experiences that resonate with all age groups. These tailored strategies will ensure better engagement, satisfaction, and outcomes for every generation.

And while regional differences and the specific needs of individual communities and health systems drive some derivation, **these insights hold largely true across the US health system landscape, allowing quick integration of these ideas into building incredible digital experience.**

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