



Defining the future of health: Lessons from COVID-19

A federal government perspective

September 2020



Lessons from COVID-19

COVID-19 continues to test the resilience of the entire U.S. health ecosystem. The pandemic has exacerbated weaknesses including:

- Inflexibility to adapt to sudden changes in demand
- Access issues
- Supply chain hurdles
- Quality and cost challenges

It has shown that steadfast focus on what's easiest to measure—healthcare costs and efficiency—has resulted in a system that lacks the agility to respond to this kind of crisis.





Signs of change

The pandemic response has also provided real-world proof-of-concepts showing that we can **accelerate change**. We are making the changes we thought were further off in the future, such as using bots for testing, integrating data platforms for scientific collaboration, and changing federal policy to enable record-setting adoption of virtual health.

Above all, COVID-19 has shown why—and how—to accelerate the future of health to improve the wellness of the U.S. population and protect national readiness.

Scaling innovation

COVID-19 has provided a glimpse of what's possible with truly innovative changes in how care is delivered

Robots are helping take patients' vitals and support dietary and sanitation services in field hospitals.¹ **Robotic process automation** is streamlining pre-screening and reporting activities for COVID-19 testing. Moreover, remote visits between patients and healthcare providers exploded during stay-at-home orders.

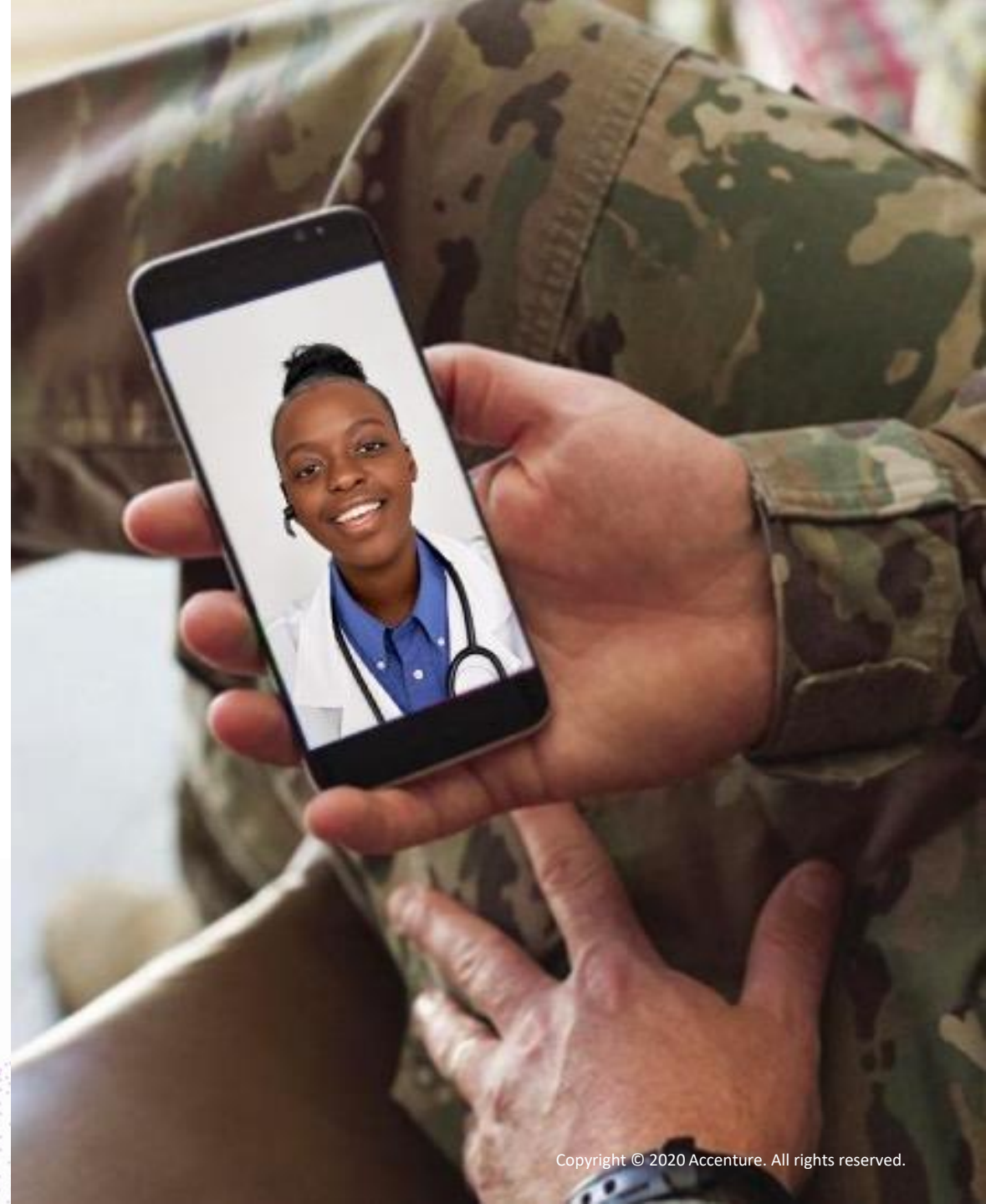
Facing a surge in unemployment claims during the COVID-19 outbreak, state workforce agencies have deployed chatbots to answer questions and guide claimants through the application process. This ability to scale AI to support unemployment claims underscores the potential for chatbots and other forms of conversational AI to support healthcare interactions.²



Virtual health for veterans

According to the latest data released by the VA, the agency's telehealth visits have increased 1,412 percent from March 1 to August 29, 2020. During the final full week of August 2020, 169,271 video telehealth appointments were conducted for veterans at home or in non-VA locations.³

More than two million VA prescriptions were refilled online in March 2020—a record for a single month. And 5,000+ cellular-enabled tablets were distributed to veterans between March 1 and April 1, 2020. All told, veterans across the country are now using 26,000+ tablets to access care when and where needed. March 2020 brought a 259 percent increase in visits to the VA Mobile App Store.⁴



“The event horizon for telehealth and virtual health has been cut in half, opening more opportunities to deliver high-quality, personalized health.”

– Ron Moody, MD
Chief Medical Officer
Accenture Federal Services

The future of health is innovative

Imagine if these innovations became the rule—not the exception—in care delivery for everyone.

Robots could help address demand surges and safeguard human healthcare workers.

Chatbots could revolutionize **patient engagement** and support by reaching out with health advice and reminders—and helping triage basic clinical needs without involving a human provider.

Virtual health—1:1 video visits, remote monitoring, SMS protocol support, secure AI chat, and health apps—could provide more frequent, more convenient, and more personalized experiences while expanding access to care.

Accelerating cures

The **shared mission** of halting COVID-19 has fueled collaboration across institutional and geographic boundaries as scientists race to develop vaccines and treatments.

For example, the nonprofit TransCelerate BioPharma is a collaboration of 20 of the largest biopharma companies. It helps enable collaboration across the research and development community to identify, prioritize, design, and facilitate the implementation of solutions to drive efficient, effective, and high-quality delivery of new medicines, improving the health of people around the world.



Connected research

During the pandemic, TransCelerate has made some of its resources—including the DataCelerate® platform—available to biopharma and biomedical researchers around the globe.

DataCelerate, built on [the Accenture Insights Platform \(AIP\)](#), allows for multiple de-identified research and development data types to be voluntarily submitted, uploaded, converted, harmonized, and downloaded through an access-controlled, secured environment.

DataCelerate enables users to quickly develop translational insights across the research and development continuum.⁵



National Research Cloud

In June 2020, leading universities and major technology companies announced support for the National Research Cloud intended to give academics and other scientists access to the computing resources now available mainly to a handful of technology powerhouses. The initiative has received bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate and represents a landmark opportunity for scientists, academics, and industry leaders to join forces for more coordinated research and [data sharing](#).⁶





The future of health is collaborative

Imagine if we applied the same level of collaboration and momentum across researchers, providers, payers, and patients.

By fully leveraging discovery and research globally, we could promote prevention and improve outcomes with more **targeted interventions**—from AI support self-care to one-to-one virtual engagement to personalized genomic therapies.

Federal agencies could create incentive models to encourage collaboration and implement technologies that facilitate transparency and real-time information exchange. Automated workflows, data access and sharing, and sophisticated analytics could accelerate cures beyond COVID-19.

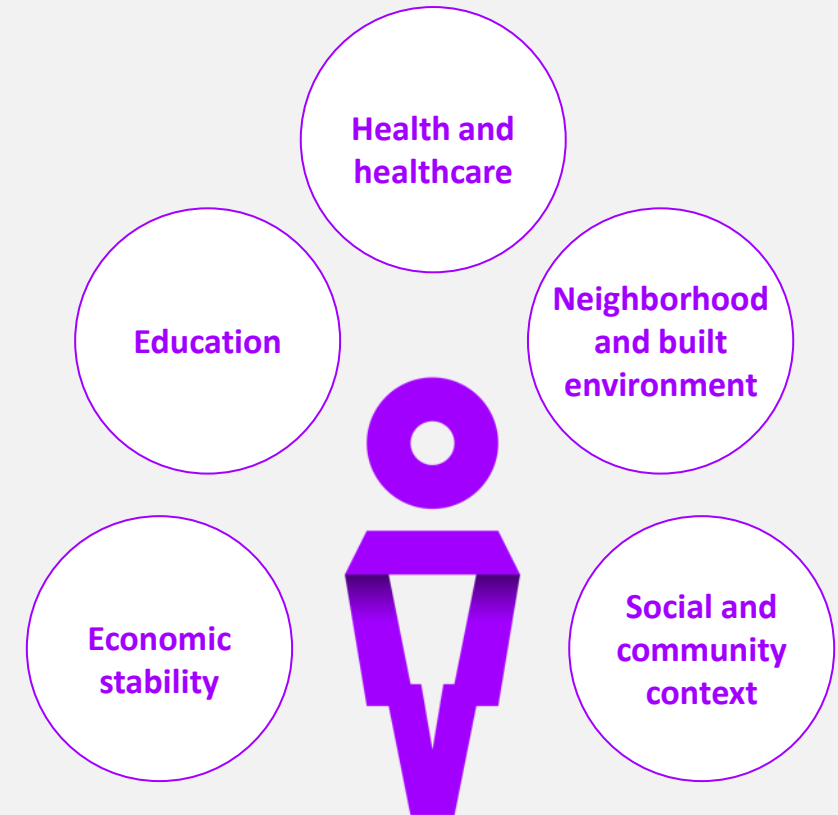
Addressing social factors

Data has shown that people of color are becoming ill and dying from COVID-19 at a disproportionately high rate.⁷ Before the pandemic, these communities were similarly hard hit by other chronic conditions, including cardiac disease, diabetes, and hypertension.⁸

Researchers believe that social determinants of health (SDOH) contribute up to 80 percent of outcomes.⁹ In other words, what happens in clinical settings contributes to health outcomes, but what *really* matters is where and how people live, work, and age.

Understanding SDOH can help identify and deliver what each person—including those in **vulnerable populations**—truly needs to be healthy. That might include addressing non-clinical needs, such as stable housing, access to better nutrition, and a reduction in toxic stress. It can even be as simple as providing a vacuum cleaner to a household in which children have asthma.

Social determinants of health

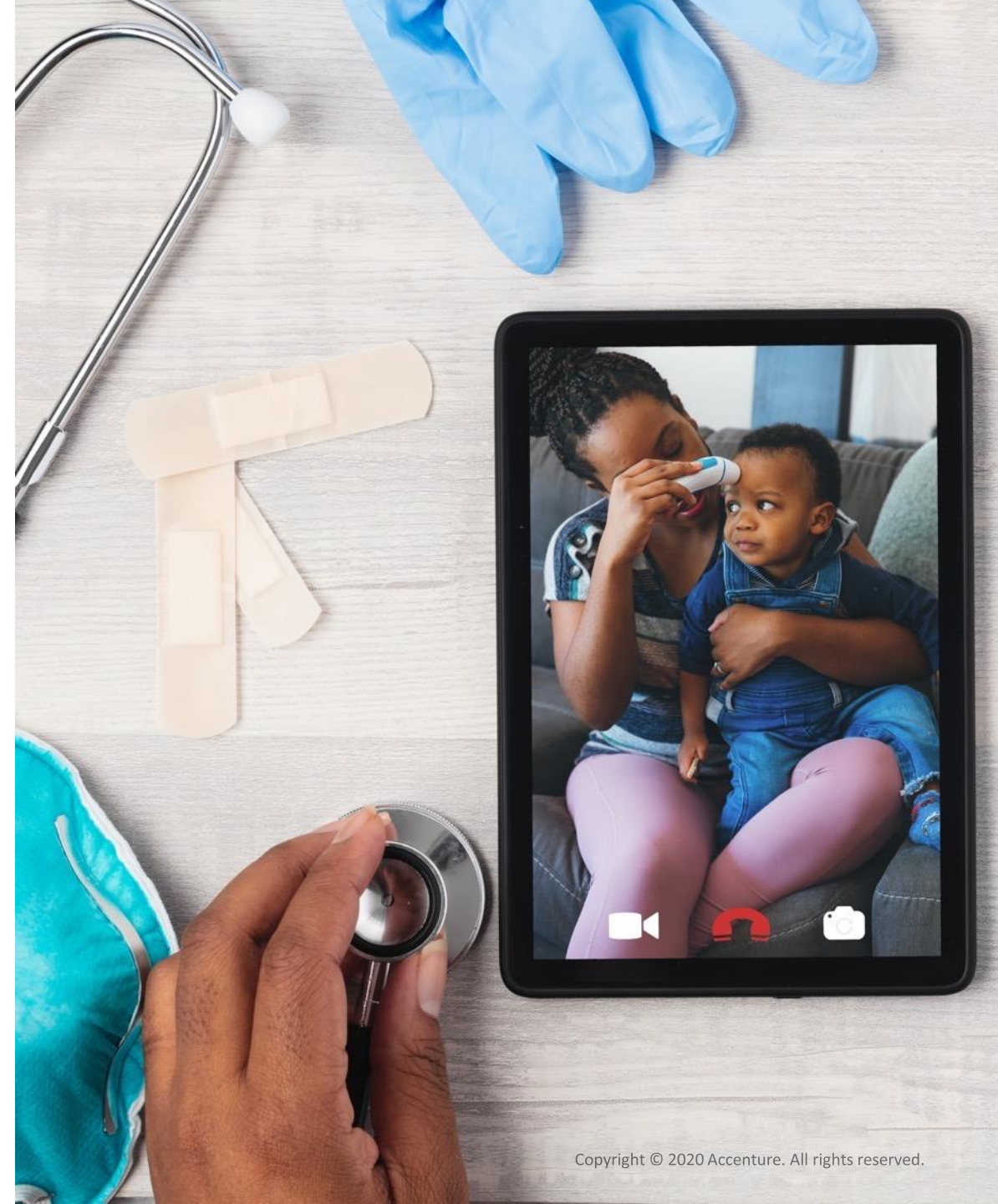


The future of health is inclusive

Imagine if we took a broader view of “health” that accounts for the myriad social factors that shape a person’s well-being. We could begin to understand the root causes of chronic disease for greater prevention and better outcomes.

Healthcare insurers, support agencies, and providers could engage with patients about the non-clinical factors that are affecting their health. Data in electronic medical records and decision support tools could incorporate social factors. Also, population health management could take a more holistic look at what is helping or hurting **outcomes**.

The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) is engaging with providers to understand how SDOH factors may be tracked and acted upon.





How blockchain helps organizations target and personalize services

A national nonprofit is exploring emerging health and human service delivery models to improve care for America's military service members, veterans, and their families. The initiative uses blockchain technology to record service episodes—that is, every unique transaction across a distributed network of health and human service providers. This approach may produce insights that can help **speed the impact** of an intervention and improve client outcomes long after the service encounter has ended.¹⁰

Imagining a new landscape

COVID-19 is shaping a “never normal” across society—and healthcare is no exception. It has changed our view of healthcare and challenged many of the rules that long defined conventional approaches.



**How can we channel the
current sense of urgency
and innovation for a new
future of health?**



The future of health starts now

The innovative technologies, policies, and approaches needed are here and ready to scale. Let's use them to break through longstanding challenges. Let's use them to reshape healthcare delivery for greater resilience and better outcomes, power translational research across traditional boundaries and drive a better understanding of social determinants to improve health and wellness.

Now is the time for more innovation, collaboration, and inclusion in how we deliver healthcare and support outcomes.

It is time for an **ecosystem that is nimbler**—and better able to respond not just to a future crisis, but also to the complex, dynamic needs of the people it serves.

Let's get started together.

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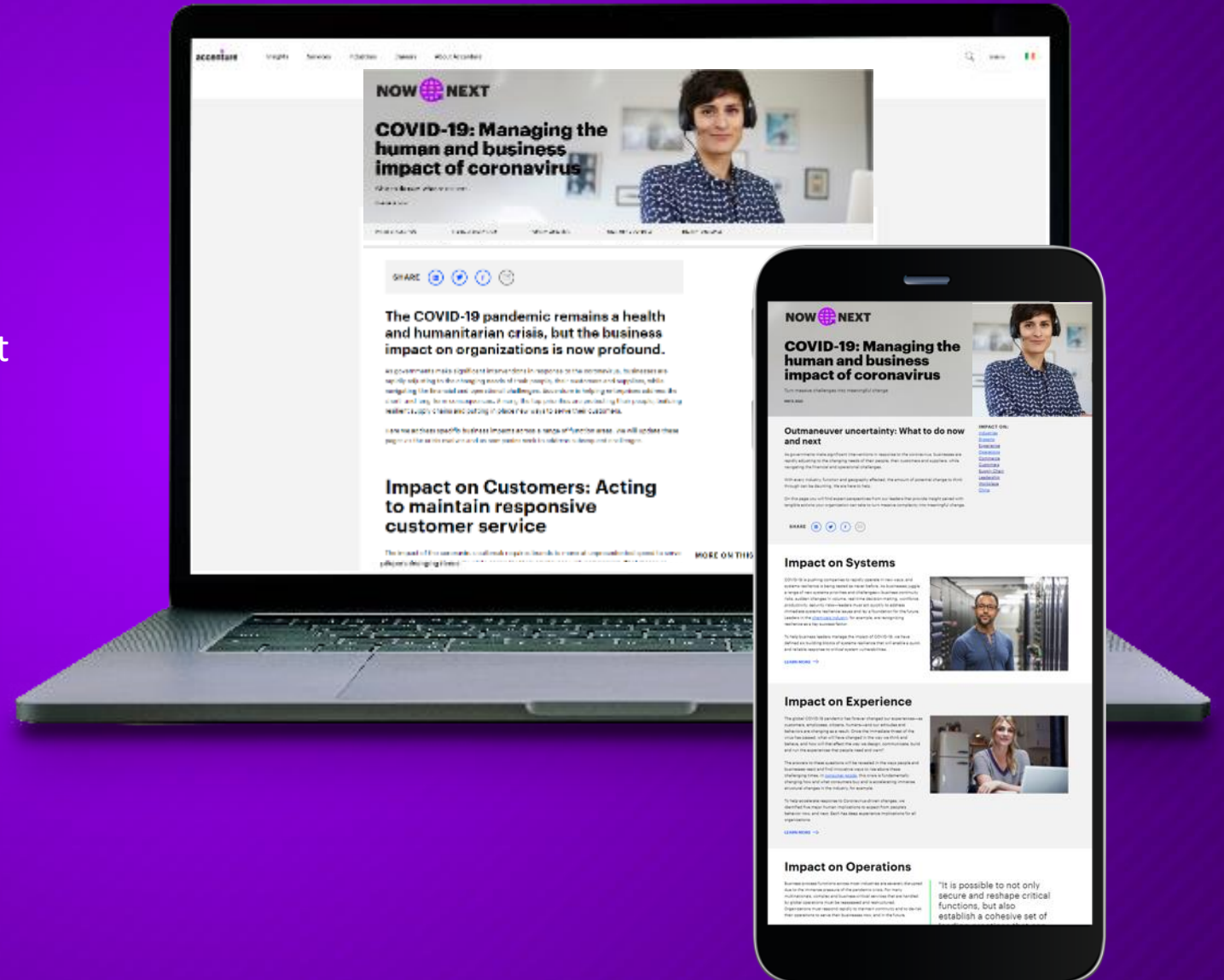
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To help our clients navigate both the human and business impact of COVID-19, we've created a hub of all of our latest thinking on a variety of topics.

Each topic highlights specific actions which can be taken now, and what to consider next as industries move towards a new normal.

From leadership essentials to ensuring productivity for your employees and customer service groups to building supply chain resilience and much more, our hub will be constantly updated. Check back regularly for more insights.

[VISIT OUR HUB HERE](#)



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