

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A systematic review of clinical health conditions predicted by machine learning diagnostic and prognostic models trained or validated using real-world primary health care data

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Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its [Supporting information](#) files.

Abstract

With the advances in technology and data science, machine learning (ML) is being rapidly adopted by the health care sector. However, there is a lack of literature addressing the health conditions targeted by the ML prediction models within primary health care (PHC) to date. To fill this gap in knowledge, we conducted a systematic review following the PRISMA guidelines to identify health conditions targeted by ML in PHC. We searched the Cochrane Library, Web of Science, PubMed, Elsevier, BioRxiv, Association of Computing Machinery (ACM), and IEEE Xplore databases for studies published from January 1990 to January 2022. We included primary studies addressing ML diagnostic or prognostic predictive models that were supplied completely or partially by real-world PHC data. Studies selection, data extraction, and risk of bias assessment using the prediction model study risk of bias assessment tool were performed by two investigators. Health conditions were categorized according to international classification of diseases (ICD-10). Extracted data were analyzed quantitatively. We identified 106 studies investigating 42 health conditions. These studies included 207 ML prediction models supplied by the PHC data of 24.2 million participants from 19 countries. We found that 92.4% of the studies were retrospective and 77.3% of the studies reported diagnostic predictive ML models. A majority (76.4%) of all the studies were for models' development without conducting external validation. Risk of bias assessment revealed that 90.8% of the studies were of high or unclear risk of bias. The most frequently reported health conditions were diabetes mellitus (19.8%) and Alzheimer's disease (11.3%). Our study provides a summary on the presently available ML prediction models within PHC. We draw the attention of digital health policy makers, ML models developer, and health care professionals for more future interdisciplinary research collaboration in this regard.

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Introduction

Primary health care (PHC) is considered the gatekeeper, where health education and promotion are provided, non-life-threatening health conditions are diagnosed and treated, and chronic diseases are managed [1]. This form of health maintenance, which aims to provide constant access to high-quality care and comprehensive services, is defined and called for by the World Health Organization (WHO) global vision for PHC [2]. Clinicians' skills and experience and the further continuing professional development are fundamental to achieve these PHC aims [3]. Additional health care improvement can be achieved by capitalizing on digital health and AI technologies.

With the high number of patients visiting PHC and the emergence of electronic health records, substantial amounts of data are generated on daily basis. A wide spectrum of data analytics exist to utilize such data; however, meaningful interpretation of large complicated data may not be adequately handled by traditional data analytics [4]. Tools that could more accurately predict diseases incidence and progression and offer advice on adequate treatment could improve the decision-making process. Machine Learning (ML), a subtype of Artificial Intelligence (AI), provides methods to productively mine this large amount of data such as predictive models that potentially forecast and predict diseases occurrence and progression [5]. The variety of ML prediction models' characteristics provide broader opportunities to support the healthcare practice.

Integrating PHC with updated technologies allows for the coordination of numerous disciplines and views. Integrating PHC with such technologies allows for improvements in health care, which may include patient care outcomes and productivity and efficiency within health care facilities [5, 6]. ML models have been developed in health research—most significantly in the last decade—to predict the incidence of diabetes, cancers, and recently COVID-19 pandemic related illness from health records [7]. A systematic overview of 35 studies published in 2021 investigated the existing literature of AI/ML, but exclusively in relation to WHO indicators [8]. Other literature and scoping reviews examined AI/ML in relation to certain health conditions, such as HIV [9], hypertension [10], and diabetes [11]. Other systematic reviews targeted specific health conditions across multiple health sectors, such as pregnancy care [12], melanoma [13], stroke [14], and diabetes [15]. However, reviews investigating PHC specifically have been fewer [16, 17]. It has been reported that research on ML for PHC stands at an early stage of maturity [17]. Similar to ours, a recently published protocol of a systematic review addressing the performance of ML prediction models in multiple different medical fields was published [18]. However, this protocol does not focus specifically on primary care and its search is limited to the years 2018 and 2019. Hence, the current literature is not enough to identify what diseases are targeted by ML prediction models within real-world PHC. Furthermore, literature investigating the validity and the potential impact of such models are not abundant. To direct the focus toward this gap, we conducted this systematic review to encompass the health conditions predicted through using ML models within PHC settings.

Materials and methods

We conducted a systematic review in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) [19] and the CHecklist for critical Appraisal and data extraction for systematic Reviews of prediction Modelling Studies (CHARMS) [20]. The protocol for our review was registered on PROSPERO CRD42021264582 [21].

Search strategy and selection criteria

A comprehensive and systematic search was performed covering multidisciplinary databases: 1. Cochrane Library, 2. Elsevier (including ScienceDirect, Scopus, and Embase), 3. PubMed, 4.

Web of Science (including nine databases), 5. BioRxiv and MedRxiv, 6. Association for Computer Machinery (ACM) Digital Library, and 7. Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Xplore Digital Library.

To find potentially relevant studies, we searched literature with the last updated search on January 4, 2022, back to January 1, 1990. The utilized search terms included "machine learning", "artificial intelligence", "deep learning", and "primary health care". Boolean operators and symbols were adapted to each literature database. Hand searches of citations of relevant reviews and a cross-reference check of the retrieved articles were also performed. Conference abstracts and gray literature searches were conducted using the available features of some databases. The full search strategy for all the electronic databases is presented in [S1 File](#). A reference management software (EndNote X9) was used to import references and to remove duplicates.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: primary research articles (peer-reviewed, preprint, or abstract) without language restriction, studies reporting AI, DL or ML prediction models for any health condition within PHC settings, and using real-world PHC data, either exclusive or linked to other health care data. We directed our focus toward these supervised ML models (random forest, support vector machine (SVM), boosting models, decision tree, naïve bias, least absolute shrinkage and selection operator (LASSO), and k-nearest neighbors) and the neural networks.

Literature screening, data collection and statistical analysis

Title and abstract screening for all records were conducted independently by two researchers through the Rayyan platform [22]. Discrepancies were resolved by discussion. All studies that met the eligibility criteria were included in the systematic review. The process of data extraction was performed by two authors. Items and definitions of extracted data is presented in [Table 1](#).

Health conditions extracted were categorized according to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD)-10 version 2019 [23]. This coding system was selected because it is applied

Table 1. Items and definitions for data extraction.

Item Extracted	Definition
Meta-data	First author and year of publication
Study Type	According to CHARMS guidelines [20], the types of a prediction modelling studies are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. model development without external validation, 2. model development with external validation, or 3. external validation of a predeveloped model with or without model update. <p>The included studies are presented in the Results section in three tables categorized according to these three types.</p>
Study design	Design of the included studies.
Models purpose	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Incident diagnostic (occurrence probability of a disorder), 2. Prevalent diagnostic (identifying overlooked cases), or 3. Prognostic (occurrence probability of a future event).
Country	Countries, from which health data were collected to train, test, or validate the models.
Source of data	This represents the source of the health data used to train, test, or validate the model. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. PHC (Data exclusively originated from a PHC settings) 2. Linked data (PHC data linked to other data sources, such as secondary or tertiary health care)
Sample size	Number of the population, whom health data were used to train, test, or validate the models.
Time span of data	Time period, in which the health care data used for modelling were originally available in the health care system.
Health condition	Health condition addressed in the included studies.

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by at least 120 countries across the globe [24]. Considering the countries that apply different coding systems, we used the explicit names of the health condition mentioned in the included studies included to match them to the closest ICD-10 codes.

Descriptive statistics of the extracted data was calculated. The overall number of populations was calculated with considering the potential overlap between the included datasets. This overlap assessment was contemplated based on similarity of source of data, time span of data within each included study, the targeted health condition and the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the participants. The quantitative results were calculated using Microsoft Excel.

Risk of bias and applicability assessment

The 'Prediction model study Risk Of Bias Assessment Tool' (PROBAST) was used to assess the risk of bias and concerns about the applicability of the included studies [25]. The four domains of this tool, which are participants, predictors, outcome, and analysis were addressed. The overall judgement for the risk of bias evaluation and concern of applicability of the prediction models in PROBAST is 'low,' 'high,' or 'unclear.' In cases when all domains were graded 'low' risk of bias, assessment of 'models developed without external validation' was downgraded to 'high' risk of bias even if all the four domains were of low risk of bias, unless the model's development was based on an exceptionally large sample size and included some form of internal validation. External validation was considered if the model was at least validated using a dataset from a later time point in the same data source (temporal external validation) or using a different dataset from inside or outside the source country (geographical or broad external validation, respectively) [20]. Results of risk of bias and concern of applicability assessments were presented in a color-coded graph.

Results

Our search strategy yielded 23,045 publications. After duplicate removal, 19,280 publication abstracts were screened, and 167 publications were eligible for full text screening. A total of 106 publications met our inclusion criteria (Fig 1). A list of the excluded studies with the justification of exclusion is presented (S1 Table). The results of the data extracted in this review are presented in the following subsections: geographical and chronological characteristics of the included studies, studies' type and design, and the ML models addressed, and (frequency of) health conditions investigated.

Geographical and chronological characteristics

The earliest included study was published in 2002 [26], with the most publications occurring over the past four years. Most (77.3%, $n = 82/106$) of the publications were published between 2018–2021 (Fig 2). The United States of America (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) were reported in 57.1% of the included publications. While the 106 included publications reported countries 126 times, the US was reported 41 times and the UK 31 times. Usage of exclusive real-world PHC data for modelling was reported in 77.7% ($n = 115$ of 148 counts of data sources) across the studies. The remaining 22.3% of the PHC data sources were linked to different data sources, such as health insurance claims, cancer registries, secondary or tertiary health care, or administrative data. In the US, data were obtained mainly from PHC centers. In contrast, the most common source of the UK data were the Clinical Practice Research Data-link (CPRD), which is the largest patients' data registry in the UK [27]. The overall time span of health data across the studies ranged from 1982 [28] to 2020 [29]. The individual time span of the included studies varied between 2 months to 28 years. Sample sizes across the included studies ranged from 75 [30] to around 4 million [31] participants. The total number of the

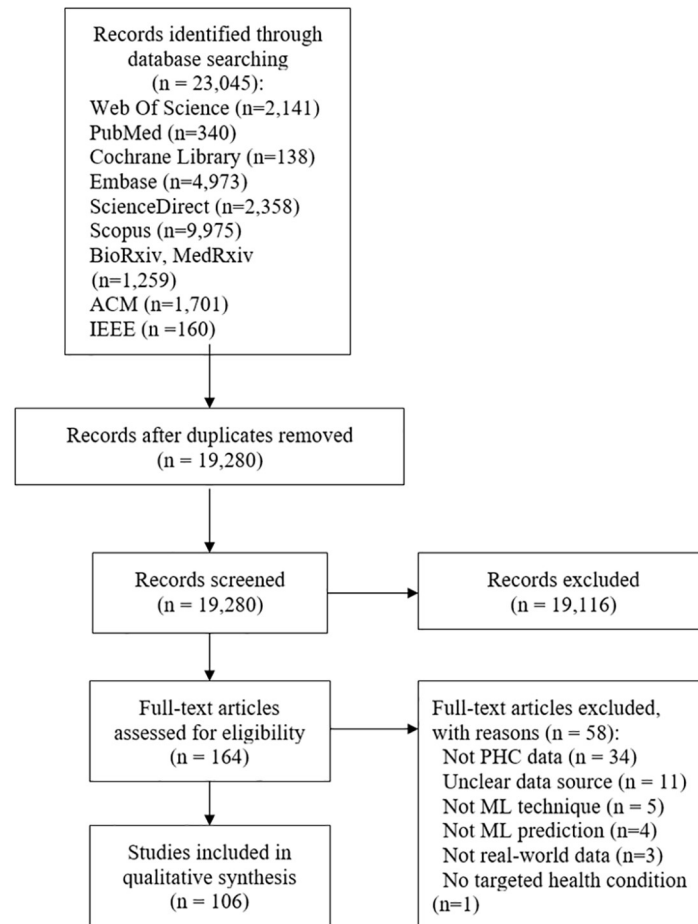


Fig 1. Prisma flow diagram.

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populations within all the included studies was of 23.2 million. After correcting the potential overlaps, the total number of unique populations was reduced to be 22.7 million.

Studies type and design, and ML models

The main type of the included studies was prediction models development without external validations (76.5%, $n = 81$ of 106). Of the remaining 25 studies, 13 studies (12.2%) developed and externally validated the models, and 12 studies (10.3%) externally validated previously existing models. Temporal validation [30, 32–36], geographical validation [37, 38], and using different population sample validations [39–44] were reported but none of these studies reported updating the assessed model.

All of the included studies were observational in design. Apart from 8 prospective studies, 92.4% ($n = 98$ of 106) of the studies were retrospective in design. Of the retrospective studies, 63 were retrospective cohorts. The other reported study designs were case control ($n = 29$), nested case control ($n = 3$), and cross sectional ($n = 3$). The purpose of the models reported was diagnostic in 77.3% ($n = 82$ of 106) of the studies, either incident ($n = 62$ of 82) or prevalent ($n = 20$ of 82). The remaining 23.5% ($n = 25$ of 106), including one study with two purposes of the models [45]) predicted prognosis of health conditions, such as remission, improvement, complications, hospitalization, or mortality. Despite all studies included used

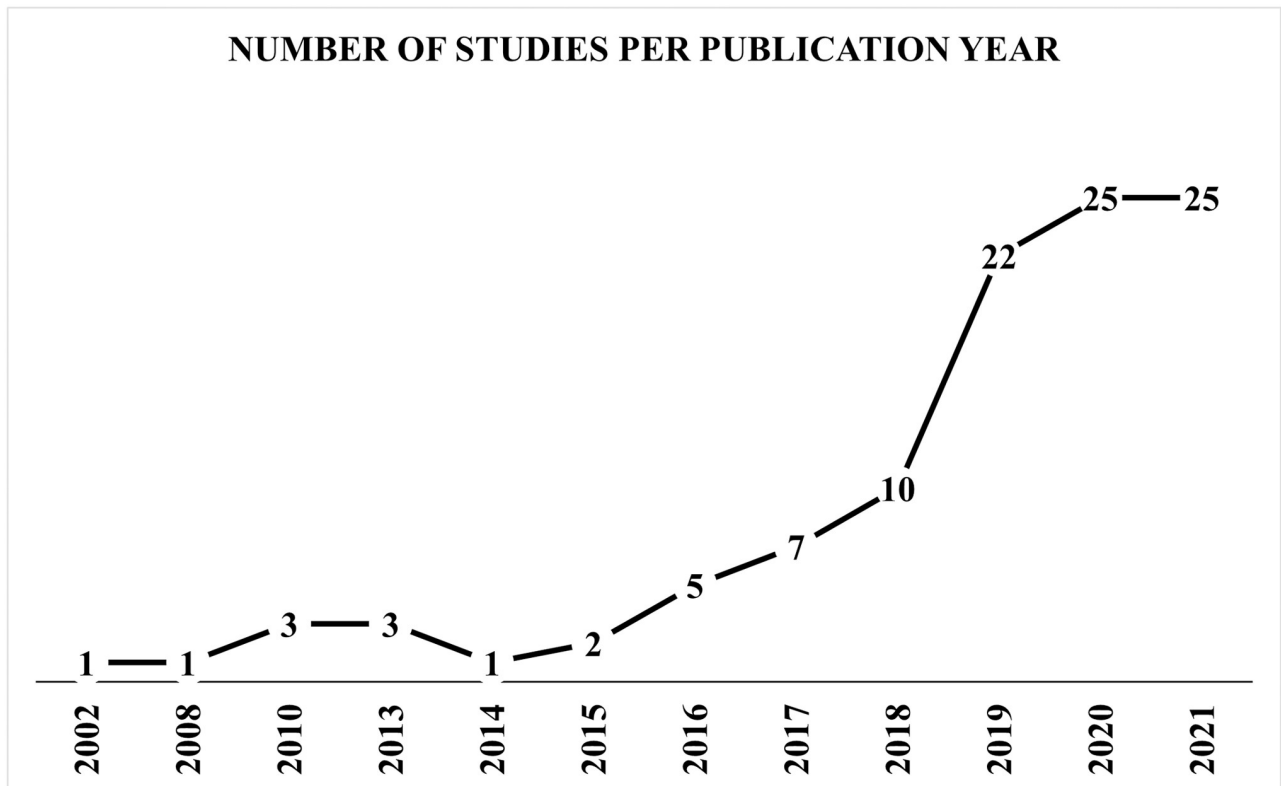


Fig 2. Number of studies for publication years.

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real-world patients' data to develop and/or validate the ML models, four studies reported applying the models developed in real-world primary health care settings [46–48].

Within the 106 included publications, 207 models were developed and/or validated. The most frequently used type of ML was supervised learning 83.1% ($n = 172$ of 207 models across the included studies). These supervised ML models were identified as follows: random forest ($n = 58$), SVM ($n = 30$), boosting models such as extreme, light, and adaptive boosting ($n = 28$), decision tree ($n = 25$), and others such as naïve bias, k-nearest neighbors, and LASSO ($n = 31$). Deep learning techniques, such as neural networks, were reported 35 times (16.9%, of 207 models), either exclusively or in comparison to other supervised ML models. Supplementary table (S2 Table) presents advantages and disadvantages of these models in addition to further descriptive results of our included studies. The most frequently reported evaluation approach of models' performance was the area under the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUROC), which was reported as "good" to "moderate" models performance in 62 studies. One study reported the performance measures using decision analysis curve [49]. Other evaluation approaches were reported across the included studies, such as calculating sensitivity, specificity, predictive values, and accuracy.

The data used to develop the models were called predictors, features, or variables across the included studies. These data were mostly textual. Demographic characteristics and clinical picture of the health conditions were the most frequently found data. Medications, comorbidities, and blood tests performed within primary care unit were reported. Data, such as blood test results and imaging results performed within secondary and tertiary health care were additionally reported in some of the individual studies. Referral documentation and clinical notes

taken by health care personnel were also reported. Five studies used the natural language processing (NLP) technique to handle free text clinical notes [40, 45, 50–52].

Tables 2–4 present an overview of the included studies characteristics based on the type of the study. They are grouped according to the ICD-10 classification and ordered alphabetically within each classification. A quantitative panel summary of all the included studies is also provided (S1 Panel).

Health conditions

Out of the 22 classifications of the ICD-10, 11 classifications were addressed in the included studies. Frequently reported classifications were the endocrine, nutritional, and metabolic diseases classification (ICD-10: Class E00–E90) ($n = 27$ studies of 106, 25.5%), circulatory system diseases (ICD-10: Class I00–I99) ($n = 23$, 21.7%), and the mental and behavioral disorders classification (ICD-10: Class F00–F99) ($n = 21$, 19.9%). Diseases of the respiratory system classifications (ICD-10: Class J00–J99) and neoplasms (ICD-10: Class C00–C97) were addressed in ($n = 10$, 9.4% and $n = 8$, 7.5% respectively). 16% ($n = 17$) of the included studies investigated other health conditions (ICD 10: Classes G00–G99, K00–K93, M00–M99, N00–N99, O00–O99, and X60–X84).

Endocrine, nutritional, and metabolic diseases (E00–E90). In 27 studies addressing this classification [31, 34, 39, 46, 49, 50, 52, 72–86, 119, 127–130], populations involved were from 12 countries, mainly the US (41.9%). The studies were published since 2008 with the highest number of studies in 2019 (38.7%). 81% of the included studies reported the development and/or training of the proposed models using exclusive primary health care data of a total number of 4.2 million participants. Data were extracted from different sources covering a time span of six months to 23 years. Four health conditions were identified, namely diabetes mellitus (E10, E11) with/without complications ($n = 21$), familial hypercholesterolemia (E78) ($n = 3$), childhood obesity (E66) ($n = 2$), and primary aldosteronism (E26) ($n = 1$). Incident diagnostic prediction was the most commonly reported outcome (42%). Prevalent diagnostic and prognostic prediction were 32% and 26% respectively. Diabetic retinopathy was the most common complication ($n = 5$ of 21 related diabetes mellitus studies) reported. Diabetic foot was investigated in one study [50]. Two studies investigated prognostic predictive modelling of the short- and long-term levels of HbA1c after insulin treatment [49, 83].

Mental and behavioral disorder (F00–F99). In 21 studies addressing six health conditions [28, 30, 35, 92–107, 120, 121, 133], the populations were from eight countries, mainly the US and the UK ($n = 13$). These 21 studies were published since 2013 with the highest number published in 2020 (44.4%). Data were collected from different data sources with time span of data from one year to 28 years. Alzheimer’s disease (F00) was addressed in 12 studies for mostly incident or prevalent diagnosis, apart from three studies. Depression (F32) was tackled in three studies, one of which predicted depression prognosis within two years [92]. Psychosis (F29) [35] and anxiety (F41) in cancer survivors seeking care in PHC [97] were addressed in one study each. Lastly, one study used PHC data to predict any mental disorder using different ML models [104].

Circulatory and respiratory health conditions (I00–I99 and J00–J99). In 33 studies, populations involved were from 11 countries, mainly the US and the UK. The included studies were published since 2010 with the highest number in both groups published in 2020 (30.8%). Data were extracted from the different data sources over time span one month to 23 years. Six circulatory health conditions were identified in 23 studies [29, 36, 37, 40, 45, 53–70]. These conditions were hypertension (I10–I15) ($n = 5$), heart failure (I50) ($n = 5$), atrial fibrillation (I48) ($n = 2$), stroke (I64) ($n = 2$), atherosclerosis (I70) ($n = 1$), myocardial infarction (I21)

Table 2. Overview of the included studies with the type of ML prediction models development without conducting external validation (n = 81).

Study	Study design	Models purpose	Country	Source of data	Sample size	Time span of data	Health condition
Circulatory System Diseases							
Chen <i>et al.</i> 2019 [53]	Retro. nested case control	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	34,502	05/2000-05/2013	Heart failure
Choi <i>et al.</i> 2017 [54]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	32,787	05/2000-05/2013	Heart failure
Du <i>et al.</i> 2020 [55]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	China	Linked data	42,676	2010–2018	Hypertension
Farran <i>et al.</i> 2013 [56]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Kuwait	Linked data	270,172	12 years	Any cardiovascular disease
Hill <i>et al.</i> 2019 [57]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	2,994,837	01/2006-12/2016	Atrial fibrillation
Karapetyan <i>et al.</i> 2021 [29]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	Germany	PHC	46,071	02-2020-09/2020	Any cardiovascular disease
Lafreniere <i>et al.</i> 2017 [58]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Canada	PHC	379,027	Not reported	Hypertension
Li <i>et al.</i> 2020 [59]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	Linked data	3,661,932	01/1998-12/2018	Any cardiovascular disease
Lip <i>et al.</i> 2021 [60]	Retro. cohort	Prevalent diagnostic	Australia	Linked data	926	Not reported	Hypertension
Lorenzoni <i>et al.</i> 2019 [61]	Pros. cohort	Prognostic	Italy	Linked data	380	2011–2015	Heart failure
Ng <i>et al.</i> 2016 [62]	Retro. nested case control	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	152,095	2003–2010	Heart failure
Nikolaou <i>et al.</i> 2021 [63]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	United Kingdom	PHC	6,883	2015–2019	Any cardiovascular disease
Sarrajū <i>et al.</i> 2021 [64]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	32,192	01/2009-12/2018	Any cardiovascular disease
Selskyy <i>et al.</i> 2018 [65]	Retro. case control	Prognostic	Ukraine	PHC	63	2011–2012	Hypertension
Shah <i>et al.</i> 2019 [45]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic/Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	Linked data	2,000	Not reported	Myocardial infarction
Solanki <i>et al.</i> 2020 [66]	Retro. cohort	Prevalent diagnostic	United States	PHC	495	2007–2017	Hypertension
Solares <i>et al.</i> 2019 [67]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	80,964	entry–01/2014	Any cardiovascular disease
Ward <i>et al.</i> 2020 [68]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	262,923	01/2009-12/2018	Atherosclerosis
Weng <i>et al.</i> 2017 [69]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	378,256	01/2005-01/2015	Any cardiovascular disease
Wu <i>et al.</i> 2010 [70]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	44,895	01/2003-12/2006	Heart failure
Zhao <i>et al.</i> 2020 [40]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United States	Linked data	4,914	Not reported	Stroke
Digestive System Diseases							
Sáenz Bajo <i>et al.</i> 2002 [26]	Retro. cohort	Prevalent diagnostic	Spain	PHC	81	01/1999-06/1999	Gastroesophageal reflux
Waljee <i>et al.</i> 2018 [71]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	United States	Linked data	20,368	2002–2009	Inflammatory bowel disorders
Endocrine, Metabolic, and Nutritional Diseases							
Akya <i>et al.</i> 2020 [31]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	4,027,775	01/1999-06/2019	Familial hypercholesterolemia
Á-Guisasola <i>et al.</i> 2010 [72]	Pros. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Spain	PHC	2,662	Not reported	Diabetes mellitus
Crutzen <i>et al.</i> 2021 [73]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	The Netherlands	PHC	138,767	01/2007-01/2014	Diabetes mellitus
Ding <i>et al.</i> 2019 [74]	Retro. case control	Prevalent diagnostic	United States	PHC	97,584	1997–2017	Primary Aldosteronism
Dugan <i>et al.</i> 2015 [75]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	United States	PHC	7,519	Over 9 years	Obesity
Farran <i>et al.</i> 2019 [76]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	Kuwait	PHC	1,837	Over 9 years	Diabetes mellitus

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

Study	Study design	Models purpose	Country	Source of data	Sample size	Time span of data	Health condition
Hammond et al. 2019 [77]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	United States	PHC	3,449	01/2008-08/2016	Obesity
Kopitar et al. 2020 [78]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	Slovenia	PHC	27,050	12/2014-09/2017	Diabetes mellitus
Lethebe et al. 2019 [79]	Retro. cohort	Prevalent diagnostic	Canada	PHC	1,309	2008–2016	Diabetes mellitus
Looker et al. 2015 [80]	Retro. case control	Prognostic	United Kingdom	PHC	309	12/1998-05/2009	Diabetic nephropathy
Metsker et al. 2020 [81]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Russia	NR	54,252	07/2009-08/2017	Diabetic polyneuropathy
Metzker et al. 2020 [82]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Russia	NR	58,462	Not reported	Diabetic polyneuropathy
Nagaraj et al. 2019 [83]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	The Netherlands	PHC	11,887	01/2007-12/2013	Diabetes mellitus
Pakhomov et al. 2008 [50]	Retro. cohort	Prevalent diagnostic	United States	PHC	145	07/2004-09/2004	Diabetic foot
Rumora et al. 2021 [84]	Cross sectional	Incident diagnostic	Denmark	PHC	97	10/2015-06/2016	Diabetic polyneuropathy
Tseng et al. 2021 [52]	Cross sectional	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	NR	07/2016-12/2018	Diabetes mellitus
Wang et al. 2021 [85]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	China	PHC	1,139	2017–2019	Gestational diabetes
Williamson et al. 2020 [86]	Pros. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United States	Linked data	866	Not reported	Familial hypercholesterolemia
External Cause of Mortality							
DelPozo-Banos et al. 2018 [87]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	Linked data	54,684	2001–2015	Suicidality
Penfold et al. 2021 [88]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United States	Linked data	256,823	Not reported	Suicidality
van Mens et al. 2020 [89]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	The Netherlands	PHC	207,882	2017	Suicidality
Genitourinary System Diseases							
Shih et al. 2020 [90]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Taiwan	Linked data	19,270	01/2015-12/2019	Chronic kidney disease
Zhao et al. 2019 [91]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	61,740	2009–2017	Chronic kidney disease
Mental and Behavioral Diseases							
Dinga et al. 2018 [92]	Pros. cohort	Prognostic	The Netherlands	Linked data	804	Not reported	Depression
Ford et al. 2019 [93]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	93,120	2000–2012	Alzheimer's disease
Ford et al. 2020 [94]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	95,202	2000–2012	Alzheimer's disease
Ford et al. 2021 [95]	Retro. case control	Prevalent diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	93,426	2000–2012	Alzheimer's disease
Fouladvand et al. 2019 [96]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	United States	PHC	3,265	Not reported	Alzheimer's disease
Haun et al. 2021 [97]	Cross sectional	Incident diagnostic	Germany	PHC	496	Not reported	Anxiety
Jammeh et al. 2018 [98]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	3,063	06/2010-06/2012	Alzheimer's disease
Jin et al. 2019 [99]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	923	2010–2013	Depression
Kaczmarek et al. 2019 [100]	Retro. case control	Prevalent diagnostic	Canada	PHC	890	Not reported	Post-traumatic stress disorder
Ljubic et al. 2020 [101]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	2,324	Not reported	Alzheimer's disease
Mallo et al. 2020 [102]	Retro. case control	Prognostic	Spain	PHC	128	2008	Alzheimer's disease
Mar et al. 2020 [103]	Retro. case control	Prevalent diagnostic	Spain	Linked data	4,003	Not reported	Alzheimer's disease

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

Study	Study design	Models purpose	Country	Source of data	Sample size	Time span of data	Health condition
Póichlopek et al. 2020 [104]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	The Netherlands	PHC	92,621	2007-12/2016	Any mental disorder
Shen et al. 2020 [105]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	China	PHC	2,299	2008–2018	Alzheimer's disease
Suárez-Araujo et al. 2021 [106]	Retro. case control	Prevalent diagnostic	United States	PHC	330	Not reported	Alzheimer's disease
Tsang et al. 2021 [28]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	United Kingdom	PHC	59,298	1982–2015	Alzheimer's disease
Zafari et al. 2021 [107]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Canada	PHC	154,118	01/1995-12/2017	Post-traumatic stress disorder
Musculoskeletal and Connective Tissue Diseases							
Emir et al. 2014 [108]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	587,961	2011–2012	Fibromyalgia
Jarvik et al. 2018 [109]	Pros. cohort	Prognostic	United States	PHC	3,971	03/2011-03/2013	Back pain
Kennedy et al. 2021 [110]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	Linked data	23,528	Over 6 years	Ankylosing spondylitis
Neoplasms							
Kop et al. 2016 [111]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	The Netherlands	PHC	260,000	Not reported	Colorectal cancer
Malhotra et al. 2021 [112]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	5,695	01/2005-06/2009	Pancreatic cancer
Ristanoski et al. 2021 [113]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	Australia	PHC	683	2016–2017	Lung cancer
Nervous System Diseases							
Cox et al. 2016 [114]	Retro. case control	Prevalent diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	3,960	01/2007-12/2011	Post stroke spasticity
Hrabok et al. 2021 [115]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	United Kingdom	PHC	10,499	01/2000-05/2012	Epilepsy
Kwasny et al. 2021 [116]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	Germany	PHC	3,274	01/2010-12/2017	Progressive supranuclear palsy
Respiratory System Diseases							
Afzal et al. 2013 [117]	Retro. cohort	Prevalent diagnostic	The Netherlands	PHC	5,032	01/2000-01/2012	Asthma
Doyle et al. 2020 [118]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	112,784	09/2003-09/2017	Non-tuberculous mycobacterial lung
Kaplan et al. 2020 [32]	Retro. cohort	Prevalent diagnostic	United States	Linked data	411,563	Not reported	Asthma/obstructive pulmonary disease
Lisspers et al. 2021 [41]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	Sweden	Linked data	29,396	01/2000-12/2013	Asthma
Marin-Gomez et al. 2021 [42]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Spain	PHC	7,314	03/04/2020	COVID-19
Ställberg et al. 2021 [33]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	Sweden	Linked data	7,823	01/2000-12/2013	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
Stephens et al. 2020 [51]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	7,278	2009–2019	Influenza
Trtica-Majnaric et al. 2010 [43]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	Croatia	PHC	90	2003–2004	Influenza
Zafari et al. 2022 [44]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Canada	PHC	4,134	Not reported	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

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Table 3. Overview of the included studies with the type of ML prediction models development with conduction of external validation (n = 13).

Study	Study design	Models purpose	Country	Source of data	Sample size	Time span of data	Health condition
Endocrine, Metabolic, and Nutritional Diseases							
Hertroijs <i>et al.</i> 2018 [49] ^a	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	The Netherlands	PHC	10,528	01/2006-12/2014	Diabetes mellitus
			The Netherlands	PHC	3,337	01/2009-12/2013	
Myers <i>et al.</i> 2019 [39] ^a	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	33,086	09/2013-08/2016	Familial hypercholesterolemia
			United States	Linked data	7,805		
			United States	Linked data	35,090		
			United States	Linked data	8,094		
Perveen <i>et al.</i> 2019 [34] ^a	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	Canada	PHC	911	08/2003-06/2015	Diabetes mellitus
			Canada	PHC	1,970		
Weisman <i>et al.</i> 2020 [119] ^a	Retro. cohort	Prevalent diagnostic	Canada	PHC	5,402	2010–2017	Diabetes mellitus
			Canada	Linked data	29,371		
Mental and Behavioral Diseases							
Amit <i>et al.</i> 2021 [120] ^a	Retro. cohort	Prevalent diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	24,612	2000–2010	Post-partum depression
			United Kingdom	PHC	9,193	2010–2017	
			United Kingdom	PHC	34,525	2000–2017	
Levy <i>et al.</i> 2018 [30] ^a	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	49	Over 9 months	Alzheimer's disease
			United States	Linked data	26	Not reported	
Perlis 2013 [121] ^a	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	United States	PHC	2,094	1999–2006	Depression
			United States	PHC	461		
Raket <i>et al.</i> 2020 [35] ^a	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United States	PHC	145,720	1990–2018	Psychosis
			United States	PHC	4,770		
Musculoskeletal and Connective Tissue Diseases							
Fernandez-Gutierrez <i>et al.</i> 2021 [122] ^a	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	Linked data	19,314	2002–2012	Rheumatoid arthritis & Ankylosing spondylitis
			United Kingdom	Linked data	1,868		
Jorge <i>et al.</i> 2019 [123] ^a	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United States	Linked data	400	Not reported	Systematic lupus erythematosus
			United States	Linked data	173	Not reported	
Zhou <i>et al.</i> 2017 [124] ^a	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	Linked data	Not reported	10/2013-07/2014	Rheumatoid arthritis
			United Kingdom	Linked data	475,580	03/2009-10/2012	
Neoplasms							
Kinar <i>et al.</i> 2016 [125] ^a	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Israel	PHC	606,403	01/2003-07/2011	Colorectal cancer
			United Kingdom	PHC	30,674	01/2003-05/2012	
Pregnancy, Childbirth, Puerperium							
Sufriyana <i>et al.</i> 2020 [126] ^a	Retro. nested case control	Incident diagnostic	Indonesia	Linked data	20,975	2015–2016	Preeclampsia
			Indonesia	Linked data	1,322	Not reported	
			Indonesia	Linked data	904	Not reported	

^aEach row per study represents a different dataset that was used to develop and/or validate the prediction models.

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Table 4. Overview of the included studies with the type of reporting external validation of previously developed ML prediction models (n = 12).

Study	Study design	Models purpose	Country	Source of data	Sample size	Time span of data	Health condition
Circulatory System Diseases							
Kostev <i>et al.</i> 2021 [37]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Germany	PHC	11,466	01/2010-12/2018	Stroke
Sekelj <i>et al.</i> 2020 [36]	Retro. cohort	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	604,135	01/2001-12/2016	Atrial fibrillation
Endocrine, Metabolic, and Nutritional Diseases							
Abramoff <i>et al.</i> 2019 [127]	Pros. cohort	Prevalent diagnostic	United States	PHC	819	01/2017-07/2017	Diabetic retinopathy
Bhaskaranand <i>et al.</i> 2019 [128]	Retro. cohort	Prevalent diagnostic	United States	PHC	1,017,001	01/2014-09/2015	Diabetic retinopathy
González-Gonzalo <i>et al.</i> 2019 [129] ^a	Retro. case control	Prevalent diagnostic	Spain	PHC	288	08/2011-10/2016	Diabetic retinopathy
			Sweden	PHC			
			Denmark	PHC			
			United States	Linked data	4,613	Over 2014	
			United Kingdom	Linked data			
Kanagasingam <i>et al.</i> 2018 [130]	Pros. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Australia	PHC	193	12.2016-05/2017	Diabetic retinopathy
Verbraak <i>et al.</i> 2019 [46]	Retro. cohort	Prevalent diagnostic	The Netherlands	PHC	1,425	2015	Diabetic retinopathy
Neoplasms							
Birks <i>et al.</i> 2017 [38]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United Kingdom	PHC	2,550,119	01/2000-04/2015	Colorectal cancer
Hoogendoorn <i>et al.</i> 2016 [131]	Retro. case control	Prevalent diagnostic	The Netherlands	PHC	90,000	07/2006-12/2011	Colorectal cancer
Hornbrook <i>et al.</i> 2017 [47]	Retro. case control	Incident diagnostic	United States	Linked data	17,095	1998–2013	Colorectal cancer
Kinar <i>et al.</i> 2017 [48]	Pros. cohort	Incident diagnostic	Israel	Linked data	112,584	07/2007-12/2007	Colorectal cancer
Respiratory System Diseases							
Morales <i>et al.</i> 2018 [132]	Retro. cohort	Prognostic	United Kingdom	PHC	2,044,733	01/2000-04/2014	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

^aEach row per study represents a different dataset that was used to develop and/or validate the prediction models.

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(n = 1), and any cardiovascular event or disease (n = 7). Five respiratory health conditions were investigated in 10 studies [32, 33, 41–44, 51, 117, 118, 132, 134, 135]. Four studies predicted mortality and hospitalization risks on top of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) (J40). Two studies investigated prevalent diagnosis of Asthma (J45) and its exacerbation risk. Influenza was predicted in two studies [117, 124] for incident cases and prognosis. COVID-19 (U07) incident cases were predicted within routine PHC visits in one study [42].

Other health conditions. Eight studies colorectal cancer (CRC) (C18) (n = 6), lung cancer (C34) (n = 1), and pancreatic cancer (C25) (n = 1). Four studies addressed the same incidence prediction model known as ColonFlag (previously MeScore) to identify CRC cases [38, 47, 48, 125]. Each study predicted incident cases within different time windows before diagnosis; from three months to two years. Three health conditions affecting the nervous system were addressed [114–116], which were post stroke spasticity, epilepsy specifically mortality four years before and after its diagnosis (G40) [115], and a rare neurodegenerative disease progressive supra-nuclear palsy (G23) [116]. A few studies investigated musculoskeletal and

connective tissue disorders as well as gastrointestinal and kidney diseases [122–124, 108–110]. The musculoskeletal and connective tissue condition were back pain (M54) prognosis within PHC settings [109], ankylosing spondylitis (M45) [110]. The gastrointestinal and kidney diseases were examined in four studies, namely inflammatory bowel diseases (K50-K52), including Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis [26, 71], peptic ulcers (K27)/gastroesophageal reflux (K21), and chronic kidney disease (N18) [90, 133]. Three studies tackled suicidality (X60-X84) [87–89]. Lastly, one study addressed preeclampsia (O14) [126].

Quality assessment

Quality was assessed using the PROBAST tool and 90.5% (n = 96 of 106) of the included studies were of high and unclear risk of bias (Fig 3). Analysis domain was the main source of bias, because of underreporting. It was found that only a few studies (n = 11) were reported in accordance with transparent reporting of a multivariable prediction model for individual prognosis or diagnosis (TRIPOD) guidelines [136]. Nevertheless, studies of low risk of bias were downgraded to be of high risk of bias due to the lack of external validation of the proposed models (n = 20). The second concern assessed using this tool was the concern of applicability, which was estimated as low to moderate concern (66%). The dependence of the predictive models on not-routine PHC data as a concern of models' applicability within PHC settings was raised in 34% of the studies.

Most of the included studies (n = 98 of 106, 92.5%) were published as peer-reviewed articles in biomedical (e.g., PLOS ONE, n = 8) and technical journals (e.g., IEEE, n = 3). Eight studies were preprint and abstracts. National research institutes and universities were the most frequently reported funding support. Most of the studies reported that the funders were not involved in the published work.

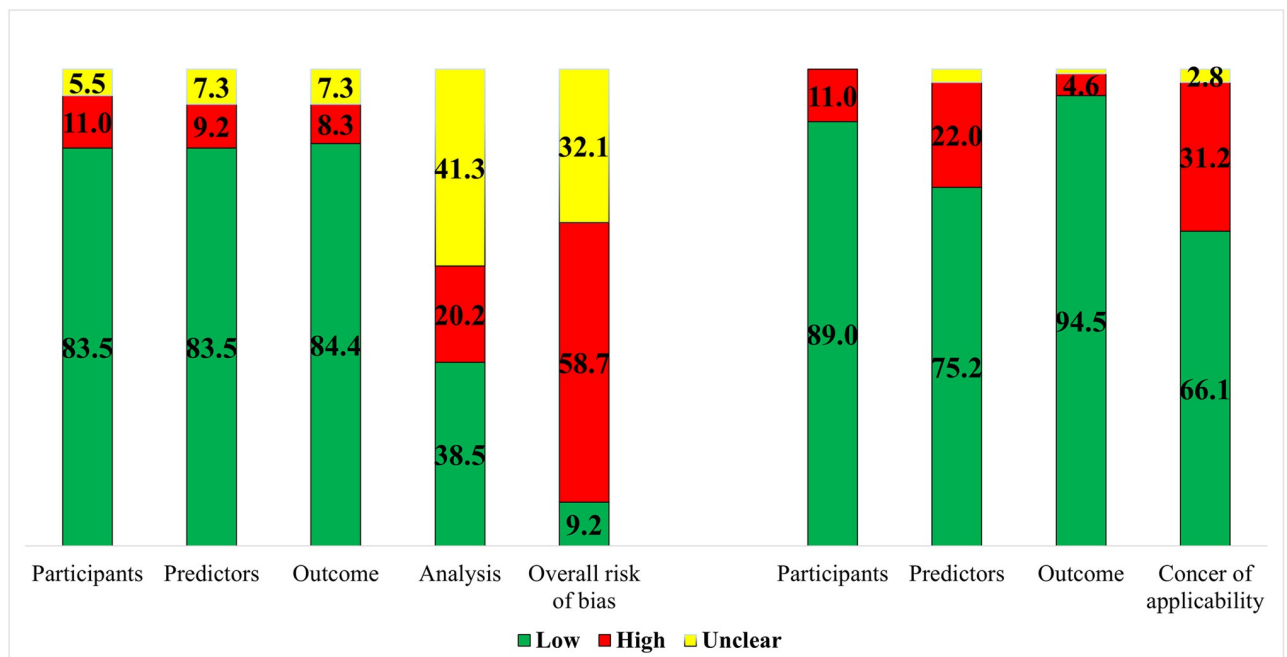


Fig 3. Percentage presentation of the results of (PROBAST) tool. The tool has two components. Component 1. Risk of bias (4 domains: Participants, predictors, outcome, and analysis). Component 2. Concern of applicability (3 domains: Participants, predictors, and outcome).

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Discussion

ML prediction models could have an immense potential to augment health practice and clinical decision making in various health sectors. Our systematic review provides an outline of the health conditions investigated with ML prediction models using PHC data.

Summary of findings

In 106 observational studies, we identified 42 health conditions targeted by 207 ML prediction models, of which 42.5% were random forest and SVM. The included models used PHC data documented over the past 40 years for a total of 22.7 million patients. Half of the studies were conducted in the US and the UK. While the majority of the included studies (77.3%) focused on diagnosis prediction, a significant portion also addressed predictive aspects related to complications, hospitalization, and mortality. The most frequently targeted health conditions included Alzheimer's disease, diabetes mellitus, heart failure, colorectal cancer, and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, while other conditions such as asthma, childhood obesity, and dyspepsia received comparatively less attention. A considerable portion of the models (76.4% of the included studies) were trained and internally validated without evaluating their generalizability.

Results in perspective

Detection and management of health conditions, particularly those that are preventable and controllable like diabetes mellitus, stand for the fundamental role of PHC [3]. Advances in such technologies might enhance health care and quality of life. Noticeably, they have gained more attention in many countries [11]. Our findings of common and rare health conditions targeted by ML prediction models in PHC indicates increase of research interest. However, clinical implication of such models is still limited to the theoretical good performance. Furthermore, the unequal distribution of publications across countries could be related to the low publication rate or lack of proper health data documentation systems in lower income countries, which impose further limitation to validate and implement such models.

The coding system used in health records does not universally follow the same criteria for all diseases, posing challenges for the consistency of models' performance [137]. Moreover, the lack of globally standardized definitions and terminology of diseases and the wide variability of the services provided across different health systems further limit the effectiveness of the models [137]. For example, uncoded free-text clinical notes as well as using 'race' and 'ethnicity' or 'suicide' and 'suicide attempts' to be documented as a single input can affect the predictive power of the models [138]. Other drawbacks reported include underrepresentation of healthy persons, retrospective temporal dimension of predictors, and the absence of confirmatory diagnostic services in PHC pose significant limitations [139, 140].

Technical biases can significantly influence the clinical utility of technologies. Models trained on historical data without adaptation to policy changes may reinforce outdated practices, leading to erroneous results [141]. Additionally, validating models using different populations data can create a mismatch between the data or environment on which the models was trained; this mismatch may impact the accuracy of the models' prediction [141]. Therefore, documenting characteristics of the health systems may highlight the discrepancies between the data used to train and validate the models. This may improve the validation and implementation processes of the models. Models that are known for their high prediction accuracy, such as random forest and SVM might support better health outcomes when developed using high quality health data [139]. Additionally, the variety of the ML prediction models characteristics provide opportunities to improve healthcare practice. Using large data documented as

electronic health records, random forest models and ensemble models such as boosting models have the ability to handle large datasets with numerous predictors variables [140]. Artificial neural network can also perform complex images processing that can boost the primary health care services [140]. Furthermore, SVM and decision tree models can provide nonlinear solutions, thus will support our understanding of complex and dynamic diseases for earlier health conditions prediction [142].

Nature of diseases append further challenges. The most challenging diseases for ML prediction are multifaceted long-term health conditions, such as DM, that are influenced by combination of genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors. The complex health conditions further tangle the models, making it harder to identify accurate predictive patterns. Furthermore, the subjective nature of symptoms, especially symptoms related to mental health disorders, pose additive challenges toward ML models accuracy. Rare diseases, if documented, often suffer from limited data availability, leading to difficulty to train ML models effectively [143].

Health care professionals are fundamental to the process of implementing and integrating ML prediction models in their healthcare practice. Despite that, our review did not report outcomes related to healthcare professionals. Significant variability of opinions on the utilization of ML in PHC among primary health care providers hinder its acceptance. Furthermore, the black-box nature of ML prediction models precludes the clinical interpretability of models' outcomes. Additional workload and training are needed to implement such technology in the routine practice. Trust, data protection, and ethical and clinical responsibility legislation are further intractable issues that represent major obstacles toward ML prediction models implementation [5].

A considerable lack of usage of studies reporting guidelines across the included studies lead to deficient description of the populations' demographics and underreporting of the models' related statistical analysis, which lead to high risk of bias of majority of studies. These shortcomings negatively affect the reproducibility of the models [144]. Navarro and colleagues investigated this underreporting, and they claimed that the available reporting guidelines of modelling studies might be less apposite for ML models studies [145].

Implication of results and recommendation for future contributions

This review provided a comprehensive outline of ML prediction models in PHC and raises important considerations for future research and implementation of this technology in PHC settings. Interdisciplinary collaboration among health care workers, developers of ML models, and creators of digital documentation systems is required. This is especially important given the increasing popularity of digitally connected health systems [5]. It is recommended to augment the participation of health professionals through the development process of the PHC predictive models to critically evaluate, assess, adopt, and challenge the validation of the models within practices. This collaboration may assist ML engineers to recognize unintended negative implications of their algorithms, such as accidentally fitting of confounders, and unintended discriminatory bias, among others, for better health outcomes [146]. Health care systems need to provide comprehensive population health data repositories as an enabler for medical analyses [137]. Well-designed and -documented repositories which provide representative health data for the healthy and diseased populations are needed [137, 139]. These high-quality data repositories might provide future modelling studies with data that match the studies' clinical research questions for more accurate prediction. Further ML prediction studies are needed to target more health conditions using PHC data. Despite the additional burden, it is beneficial also to continuously assess the potential significance of models, such as improved

health outcomes, reduced medical errors, increased professional effectiveness and productivity, and enhanced patients' quality of life [147]. It is recommended to follow reporting guidelines for producing valid and reproducible ML modelling studies. Developing robust frameworks to enable the adoption and integration of ML models in the routine practice is also essential for effective transition from conventional health care systems to digital health [148, 149]. Sophisticated technical infrastructure and strong academic and governmental support are essential for promoting and supporting long-term and broad-reaching PHC ML-based services [138, 150]. However, balanced arguments [151, 152] regarding the potential benefits and limitations of ML models support better health care without overestimating or hampering the use of such technology. It is also suggested to integrate the basic understanding of ML concepts and techniques in education programs for health science and medical students.

Strengths and limitations of the review

Our review was conducted following a predesigned comprehensive protocol [21]. We identified the health conditions targeted within PHC settings and identified the gaps that need to be addressed. The main limitation of our review is the low quality of evidence of the primary evidence. It is also possible due to the wide array of descriptors that exist to describe ML, our search strategy could have missed some studies if they exclusively used terms outside of our search string [153]. Limiting the scope of our review to clinical health conditions might have excluded other conditions, such as domestic violence and drug abuse [3]. Guiding our work using ICD-10 might have led to the exclusion of some health conditions, such as frailty studies [154]. Lastly, we did not present the statistical analysis of the models' attributes or conduct a meta-analysis, because of the broad heterogeneity across studies. In the future, we plan to update our review—considering the noticeable rise of ML studies within PHC, while also modifying our methodology to reduce the identified limitations. It is also planned to use the specific ML guidelines TRIPOD-AI and PROBAST-AI when published to strengthen quality and reporting of our findings [155].

In conclusion, ML prediction models within PHC are gaining traction. Further studies examining the use of ML in real PHC settings are needed, especially those with prospective designs and more representative samples. Collaborating amongst multidisciplinary teams to tackle ML in PHC will increase the confidence in models and their implementations in clinical practice.

Supporting information

S1 Table. List of excluded studies with reasons (n = 58).

(PDF)

S2 Table. Characteristics of the included ML predictive models.

(PDF)

S1 File. Search strategy.

(PDF)

S2 File. Prisma checklist.

(DOC)

S1 Panel. Quantitative summary of the included studies' characteristics (n = 106).

(PDF)

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