Digital health

Draft resolution proposed by Algeria, Australia, Brazil, Estonia, Ethiopia, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Mauritius, Morocco, Panama, Philippines and South Africa

The Seventy-first World Health Assembly,

(PP1) Having considered the report on mHealth;[1]

(PP2) Recalling resolutions WHA58.28 (2005) on eHealth and WHA66.24 (2013) on eHealth standardization and interoperability;

(PP3) Recognizing the potential of digital technologies to advance the Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular to support health systems in all countries in health promotion and disease prevention, and by improving the accessibility, quality and affordability of health services;

(PP4) Recognizing that while technology and innovations can enhance health service capabilities, human interaction remains a key element to patients' well-being;

(PP5) Underscoring the need to ensure that digital health solutions complement and enhance existing health service delivery models, strengthen integrated, people-centred health services and contribute to improved population health, and health equity, including gender equality, and addressing the lack of evidence on the impact of digital health in these respects;

(PP6) Acknowledging that the transfer of technology and knowledge on mutually agreed terms, as well as technical cooperation, aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 17, are important in promoting digital health;

(PP7) Highlighting recent progress in the development and implementation of digital health strategies, policies, legislation and programmes by Member States,[2] WHO and partner organizations;

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[1] Document A71/20.

[2] And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

(PP8) Acknowledging previous experience[1] of countries and organizations, the interconnectedness of digital technologies, the collection, management and evaluation of health data, the robustness of the enabling environment, in line with established good practices, while considering the sustainability of innovations, and their feasibility, scale-up and inclusivity,

OP1. URGES Member States:[2]

(1) to assess their use of digital technologies for health, including in health information systems at the national and subnational levels, in order to identify areas of improvement, and to prioritize, as appropriate, the development, evaluation, implementation, scale-up and greater utilization of digital technologies, as a means of promoting equitable, affordable and universal access to health for all, including the special needs of groups that are vulnerable in the context of digital health;

(2) to consider, as appropriate, how digital technologies could be integrated into existing health systems infrastructures and regulation, to reinforce national and global health priorities by optimizing existing platforms and services, for the promotion of people-centered health and disease prevention and in order to reduce the burden on health systems;

(3) to optimize, in health systems development and reforms, the use of resources by developing health services alongside the application and use of digital technologies;

(4) to identify priority areas where normative guidance and technical assistance and advice on digital health would be beneficial, including, but not limited to, gaps in research, evidence-based standards, support to implementation and scale-up, financing and business models, content, evaluation, cost–effectiveness and sustainability, data security, ethical and legal issues, re-use and adaptation of existing digital health and other relevant tools;

(5) to work towards and support interoperability of digital technologies for health by, inter alia, promoting the use of international and open standards as an affordable, effective and easily adaptable solution;

(6) to disseminate, as appropriate, best practices and successful examples of digital health architecture, programmes, and services, in particular effective policy design and practical implementation, with the international community, including through WHO, bilateral, regional, cross-regional and global networks, digital platforms and hubs;

(7) to strengthen public health resilience and promote opportunities, as appropriate, through the use of digital technologies, including to improve access to, and monitoring, sharing and use of, quality data, direct citizen, health worker and government engagement, and to build capacity for rapid response to disease incidents and public health emergencies, leveraging the potential of digital information and communication technology to enable multidirectional communications, feedback loops and data-driven "adaptive management";

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[1] Programmes specified in comments from Missions included the Global Observatory for eHealth, WHO-ITU initiative on mHealth for noncommunicable diseases, the Innovation Working Group, Every Woman Every Child initiative and the WHO-ITU National eHealth Strategy Toolkit. Principles for Digital Development (WHO endorsed).

[2] And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

(8)   to build, especially through digital means, capacity for human resources for digital health, as appropriate, across both health and technology sectors, and to communicate areas of specific need to WHO in order to receive appropriate technical assistance;

(9)   to improve the digital skills of all citizens, including through working with civil society to build public trust and support for digital health solutions, and to promote the application of digital health technology in the provision of, and access to, everyday health services;

(10)   to develop, as appropriate, legislation and/or data protection policies around issues such as data access, sharing, consent, security, privacy, interoperability and inclusivity consistent with international human rights obligations and to communicate these on a voluntary basis to the WHO;

(11)   to develop, as appropriate, and in coordination with existing and emerging regional hubs and support mechanisms, effective partnerships with stakeholders from across all sectors in the use of digital health;

OP2. REQUESTS the Director-General:

(1)   to develop, within existing resources, and in close consultation with Member States[1] and with inputs from relevant stakeholders as appropriate, a global strategy on digital health identifying priority areas including where WHO should focus its efforts;

(2)   to elevate the strategic capacity of WHO in digital technologies and to mainstream these in WHO's work, operations and relevant programmes, including when working with Member States;

(3)   to provide technical assistance and normative guidance to Member States, on request, for scaling up the implementation of digital health – including through the development and implementation of Member States' digital health strategies, and in line with the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023, with the appropriate structure, resources, assets and capabilities, within existing resources;

(4)   to ensure that WHO builds on its strengths, by developing guidance for digital health, including, but not limited to, health data protection and usage, on the basis of its existing guidelines and successful examples from global, regional and national programmes, including through the identification and promotion of best practices, such as evidence-based digital health interventions and standards;

(5)   to develop a repository on regulations, evidence related to improvements and unintended effects regarding health promotion, disease prevention and access to, and quality and cost–effectiveness of, health services, and best practices relating to digital health technologies, provided by, inter alia, Member States on a voluntary basis;

(6)   to monitor developments and trends of digital technologies in health systems, public health and data science, and analyse their implications for the achievement of the health-related Sustainable Development Goals;

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[1] And, as applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

(7)   to promote WHO's collaboration with other organizations of the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen digital health implementation, by leveraging their capabilities;

(8)   to submit a report to the Seventy-third World Health Assembly in 2020 on the progress made in implementing this resolution.

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