



**DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATIONS
FOR HEALTH LAB**

GOVERNING HEALTH FUTURES 2030

SUMMARY REPORT

Building Foundations for Better Health in the Digital Era

*Launch report of the Digital Transformations for Health Lab
at the World Health Summit*

○ October 2023





During the launch of the [Digital Transformations for Health Lab \(DTH-Lab\)](#) at the World Health Summit in October 2023, over 50 representatives of academia, research, public and private sectors, international organizations and youth networks discussed the roadmap to a healthier future for young generations.

Sustainable digital transformation by design

Solidarity is crucial for our future health—the closing sentence of the World Health Summit’s final declaration highlights the role of strong multilateralism in improving global health. The World Health Summit 2023 provided an ideal backdrop for the inauguration of the DTH-Lab, serving as a platform for discussions about the future of healthcare. Under the central theme of [A Defining Year for Global Health Action](#), the event brought together over 370 international speakers from politics, academia, industry and civil society; 3,100 participants from 106 countries on site; and 12,000 viewers online, covering vital topics such as climate change

and health, pandemic prevention, digital healthcare, G7 and G20 health priorities and the 75th anniversary of the WHO. During this year’s World Health Summit, health leaders called for moving from fragmentation to cooperation and integration, addressing disparities within and between countries, and catering to the needs of the most vulnerable.

These principles can also be applied to the ongoing digital transformation—a social shift with a growing impact on our lives, health and well-being. Emerging innovations like mobile technologies, generative artificial intelligence, data engineering, robotics and extended reality, among others, offer vast opportunities to enhance health outcomes and bolster prevention efforts.

However, they also introduce new risks, from unethical data use to digital exclusion. If overseen and neglected, they can negatively influence our health and well-being. Thus, it's time to proactively shape the digital future instead of allowing commercially developed technologies to define it for us. As healthcare ecosystems become interconnected and data transcends the boundaries of separate health systems, governing the digital transformation of health becomes a global imperative.

"We stand at the intersection of healthcare and digitalization, a pivotal juncture where technology redefines our approach to health, well-being and equity. The Digital Transformations for Health Lab (DTH-Lab) emerges as a beacon of hope in this transformative landscape," according to Aferdita Bytyqi, Executive Director of the DTH-Lab.

DTH-Lab to bring together the expertise of a wide range of international experts and partners

The DTH-Lab's event, "*Governing the Digital Transformations for Health: Building an Ecosystem for Public Value*", at the World Health Summit united partners, supporter, and followers with diverse expertise and experience, all sharing a common goal: transforming healthcare by embracing the principles of Health for All and placing young people at the center of digital-first health systems.

Below you can read the highlights of the launch of the DTH-Lab. In our coverage, you'll discover the project's partners and the shared vision for digital transformation, understand why collaboration is a foundational element of the DTH-Lab, and learn how stakeholders from around the world are joining forces for a healthier future.

If you want to learn more about the DTH-Lab's projects and potential collaborations, [download a brief introduction to what we do](#).

The Lab moves into action

Prof. Ilona Kickbusch, Director of the DTH-Lab, opened the discussion with a clear message: As the [Lancet and Financial Times Commission on Governing Health Futures 2030: Growing up in a digital](#) has transferred to the DTH-Lab, our collective focus must continue to shift from digital health to digital transformations *for* health. These transformations should have a clear goal rooted in health-related values.

At the center of the Commission's work is young people's health and well-being. Thus, youth champions from around the world were appointed by the DTH-Lab to ensure the inclusion of the younger generation's voices in shaping the digital transformation of health.

Three priorities have emerged from the Commission's work:

- **Understanding the digital determinants of health**, which includes exploring the interface between digital and commercial determinants and digital and social determinants;
- **Advancing value-driven approaches** to digital transformations, with a particular focus on the concept of "data solidarity" as a governance principle for the digital transformation of health;
- **Aiming to put young people at the center** of digital-first health systems, addressing issues like mental health, sexual and reproductive health, prevention information, and health literacy.

The DTH-Lab will now turn the Commission's recommendations into concrete initiatives by creating a consortium with partners to experiment and test their ideas and solutions.

Key goals will be developing a trust architecture, improving digital literacy, and developing research instruments to monitor young people's health as the digital landscape evolves.

PLUTO: A new platform to assess the risks and harms of digital data is out now

Barbara Prainsack, a Professor at the University of Vienna, and her team presented [PLUTO, the Public Value Assessment Tool](#).

Developed under the umbrella of the DTH-Lab, the tool is anchored in the conclusions of the [white paper, Data Solidarity](#), co-written by Prof. Prainsack in December 2022. It evaluates the public value of data use based on a series of 21 questions organized into four categories: Information about the Data User, Benefits of Data Use, Risks of Data Use, and Institutional Safeguards.

Based on the answers to these questions, PLUTO categorizes instances of data use into four quadrants: facilitate (high-benefit and low-risk data uses), prohibit (low-benefit and high-risk data uses), reduce risk (high-benefit but high-risk data uses), share profits (low-benefit but low-risk data uses).

PLUTO brings a new level of granularity to the assessment of the public value of data use by focusing on the equilibrium between benefits and risks. Its practical applications include supporting organizations in making ethical and responsible decisions regarding data use. The researchers hope that PLUTO will spark dialogues and actions around ethical and responsible data practices, promoting a more transparent, equitable, and responsible digital future.

Understanding the evolution of science and technology under different health agendas

Dr Anurag Agrawal, Dean of BioSciences and Health Research at Trivedi School of Biosciences, Ashoka University, highlighted the University's diverse

environment as a "lab" that centers on young people from various backgrounds, essential for addressing digital divides and fostering innovation. "India's rapid digital transformation is led by young people who are already experimenting with innovative technologies."

The University's liberal arts approach—covering history, computer science, and biology—adds a multidisciplinary dimension. "Science and technology adapt to various influences and health priorities rather than merely solving problems." He underlined the need for a holistic approach to navigating the digital world, concluding that Ashoka is the ideal place for experimentation and critical thinking and therefore a natural partner of the DTH-Lab.

If we don't start doing things on a small scale and in an agile way, it's easy to make mistakes on a large scale.

Nicole Spieker, Chief Executive Officer at PharmAccess Foundation, shared her hope in the establishment of the Lab as it aims to transfer theoretical knowledge on digital health outlined by the Commission report to practical solutions on the ground. [PharmAccess Foundation](#), an international non-profit organization, focuses on the root causes that hamper health care financing and investments towards equitable and quality health care in sub-Saharan Africa. Working as an innovator and catalyst for pragmatic solutions that can be adopted, adapted, and scaled by partners.

Spieker underlined the importance of DTH-Lab for agile, innovative solutions and cited the example of mobile money originating in Africa as a transformative approach. She stressed the necessity of connecting people to healthcare facilities without requiring

physical presence and lauded the power of being part of a consortium like the DTH-Lab. Spieker also discussed the role of public-private partnerships and blended financing—the strategic use of development finance and philanthropic funds to mobilize private capital flows to emerging and frontier markets—in promoting inclusive tech solutions.

The PharmAccess Foundation's CEO advocates for collective data ownership and community involvement while navigating the complexities of data and technology in an increasingly distrustful world, emphasizing the long-term impact of current decisions on future generations.

Data lives forever. Decisions made today also influence the far future

Sebastian Schmidt-Kaehler, Co-Director of Healthcare at Bertelsmann Stiftung, discussed the Foundation's active involvement in the [Trusted Health Ecosystems project](#), aiming to address issues surrounding data architecture and trusted information.

The Trusted Health Ecosystems project aims to inspire collaboration between government, civil society, and the private sector to broker trustworthy health information and services for individuals.

"We have a growing crisis of trust in the digital space, with data misuse, cyberattacks, and disinformation eroding confidence," according to Schmidt-Kaehler. He emphasized the need for digital spaces of trust, where reliable information from trustworthy sources, data sovereignty, data solidarity, and transparency are upheld. He calls for creating platforms governed by public and civil societies to shape digital infrastructures recognizing the importance of youth involvement and supporting the younger generation to play a greater role in the sustainable development of society.

We need to enhance research to understand digital determinants of health

Jessamy Bagenal, Senior Executive Editor at The Lancet, spoke about the significance of the Lancet series and commissions, highlighting their role in harnessing academic creativity and policy resonance to transform healthcare.

The Executive Editor at The Lancet addressed the digital determinants of health—the topic of an upcoming series coordinated by the DTH-Lab—emphasizing the need to balance technological optimism and risks: There is a clear need for accountability, transparency, and a comprehensive definition of digital determinants to foster a supportive research community. "We must continue our efforts to study better how digital determinants intersect with the commercial, political, and social determinants of health, focusing on power dynamics and their impact on population health," she remarks.

The challenge is to move from digitizing data to thinking about digital and data in every aspect of healthcare delivery

Marelize Gorgens, Lead of the Digital Health Flagship Program at The World Bank, underscored three significant points. Firstly, digitalization is a top priority for The World Bank, aligning with its new vision and mission to end poverty and protect the planet. This originates from the World Bank's new evolution roadmap—vision and mission recently developed by the Development Committee of the World Bank.

Secondly, the collaboration with the Lab can help address the critical need for evidence on the effectiveness and suitability of digital interventions in healthcare. Thirdly, designing digital-first, consumer-centric health services,

particularly for young people, is crucial for the future of healthcare systems.

“One common question from governments during our [World Bank] discussions is about the evidence for the effectiveness of digital interventions. They want to understand how to determine the real value and impact of these digital solutions,” according to Gorgens.

We are experiencing a shift from digital experimentation to digitalization. Let's invest in the transformative foundations

Alain Labrique, Director of the Department of Digital Health & Innovation at the WHO, acknowledges the importance of responsible, equitable, and value-based digital health investments. Digital transformation is gaining momentum globally since many countries leapfrog challenges to deliver healthcare innovatively.

Digital health goes beyond data; it's about strengthening primary healthcare, achieving universal health coverage, and promoting equity. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift from digital experiments to digital transformation. This pace must be continued to make health systems fit for the digital age. Labrique advocates for digital decolonization and emphasizes the three foundational elements—people, policy, and planning—vital for digital health investments.

Labrique referred to a new Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH) supported by the G20 Presidency, launched in August 2023. GIDH aims to put countries at the center of digital transformation and support the implementation of the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025.

Many digital solutions are implemented without first measuring their outcomes and impact

David Novillo Ortiz, Head of Data, Analytics, and Digital Health at the WHO, discussed key challenges in digital health implementation in the European region, highlighting the importance of trusted data architecture.

In September 2023, the WHO launched a report, *Digital Health in the WHO European Region: the ongoing journey to commitment and transformation*, which studies the state of digitalization of health systems of the 53 member states in the WHO/Europe region. One key conclusion is that as systems become more advanced and new technologies are introduced, there's a risk of leaving people behind. To prevent this, we must be deliberate and inclusive in involving all population segments when implementing digital interventions.

“About half of the countries lack digital health literacy strategies—education and digital skills should be prioritized alongside technology,” according to Ortiz, who also expressed concerns about data strategies and regulation, particularly in addressing big data and artificial intelligence. Only half of the studied countries have plans regarding AI and data regulation.

The evidence of the benefits of digitalization in healthcare is there: Countries with a higher level of digital readiness and digital implementation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic had better pandemic outcomes. Now, we need to work on eliminating the digital gap so everybody can access what digitalization offers in healthcare.

Health technology assessment is fundamental to ensure the technology that reaches the market is equitable, unbiased and built for positive change

Ricardo Baptista Leite, CEO at HealthAI - The Global Agency for Responsible AI in Health,

remarked on the importance of the DTH-Lab's work for policymakers worldwide, connecting the global North to the South. "Science needs to be translated into people's lives."

Baptista Leite discussed HealthAI's focus on building infrastructure and foundational elements for effective AI regulation, ensuring standards are applied. "We must address AI bias, particularly its impact on young women, children, and minority populations. We must bridge the digital divide to ensure AI innovations reach the most vulnerable populations," acknowledged Baptista Leite.

"Addressing the digital divide is a major concern for us. We are deeply troubled by the fact that, in our experiments, a critical factor is the limited access to digital resources. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, nearly half of the population lacks access to smartphones, and it's one of the regions with the highest costs for data access. Moreover, living further away from a hospital reduces the likelihood of having internet connectivity," according to the CEO of HealthAI.

Digitalization is a means to accelerate the transformation of healthcare systems towards universal health coverage

Christoph Benn, Director for Global Health Diplomacy at the Joep Lange Institute and the President of Transform Health,

highlighted the alignment between Transform Health and the Lab in advancing

digital health transformation for universal health coverage: "Our objective is to promote the digital transformation of healthcare systems as a catalyst, speeding up progress towards universal health coverage and our desired international objectives. I'd like to emphasize that alignment with the focus on young people is key to achieving these goals, and we wholeheartedly embrace it."

Transform Health serves as an advocacy group, working to strengthen the political will, increase financial support, and advocate for global data governance. This diverse coalition includes civil society organizations, foundations, and international institutions. "Involving young people can channel their enthusiasm and connect them to global platforms, effectively advancing their common goals in the field of digital health transformation," concluded the President of Transform Health.

The DTH-Lab is a unique space where the future of health is co-created by the young generation

Alexander Schulze, Chief Programme Officer for Fondation Botnar,

expressed enthusiasm for the transition from the Commission to the DTH-Lab, highlighting its distributive governance model. Fondation Botnar values the involvement of diverse global partners to shape a relevant research and policy agenda for the Lab.

The focus on youth engagement is essential, and Schulze emphasized the need to explore various methods of meaningful engagement, leveraging youth-led organizations and advisory groups, finding ways to include voices from remote areas and digitally underserved populations.

"It is fascinating to witness numerous organizations from various continents participating in the DTH-Lab initiative.

Our partners unite to shape a bright digital future for all

Digital transformation is global, so it needs a collective approach

Not only the setting of the DTH-Lab kick-off, but also the timing is of paramount significance. After years of digital health driven mainly by technology itself, the time has come to minimize risks and seize opportunities for innovation from a public perspective.

In 2005 and 2013, the World Health Assembly passed resolutions urging Member States to develop long-term strategic plans for eHealth services. In 2020, the [WHO's global strategy on digital health for 2020-2025](#) was adopted, building on these resolutions and incorporating inputs from various stakeholders and United Nations initiatives to guide digital health implementation worldwide.

Recently, WHO/Europe initiated a flagship initiative, [Empowerment through Digital Health](#), that aims to evaluate the effectiveness of digital health solutions deployed during the COVID-19 crisis, establish a European roadmap for digital health systems, and create a health data governance framework to protect individuals' data rights while enabling better decision-making and public health functions.

In September 2023, WHO/Europe launched the report [The Ongoing Journey to Commitment and Transformation: Digital Health in the European Region 2023](#), which summarizes the state of digitalization in healthcare in 53 Member States of WHO in the Region. One of the five considerations is establishing effective

digital health governance, which involves establishing and expanding national bodies and agencies dedicated to this pursuit.

Also, a report by the World Bank, [Digital-In-Health: Unlocking the Value for Everyone](#), published in August 2023, advocates for a shift in focus from digitizing health data to a more holistic approach, emphasizing the fusion of digital and health for better outcomes. In order to provide advanced and improved healthcare services in the world going through digital transformation, it is essential to have strong leadership, collaboration, and effective data governance. This includes the reinforcement of ethical standards and regulatory systems to ensure fairness and trustworthiness in digital healthcare solutions.

United Nations (UN) expert Tlaleng Mofokeng called in April 2023 for a [human rights-based approach to the governance of digital health](#) at both national and global levels, emphasizing the importance of meaningful participation from civil society, communities, and young people.

There is an explicit consensus that we must strengthen governance to shape further digital health expansion so it will serve people and the public interests. Especially since we know that [harnessing the power of digital technologies is essential for achieving universal health coverage](#), as stated by the WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

DTH-Lab joins this international coalescence with vitality and optimism, bringing young people's voices to the front.



Conclusion

DTH-Lab's partners unanimously agreed on the significance of the goals set by the DTH-Lab, particularly in light of the current challenges driven by socio-technological transformation. This enthusiasm and leadership to co-create a better digital future for the next generation gives the Lab a solid mandate to run projects for – and together with – those who will potentially benefit from emerging technologies or need to be protected from potential threats.

A most-often raised issue was the critical role of young people in driving digital transformation, the importance of evidence-based digital interventions, the urgent need to build trust and transparency in the digital space, and ethical approaches to developing artificial intelligence and data processing. Participants called for addressing the digital divide to ensure that the benefits of digitization are accessible to all and for strengthening the governance of the implementation of new technologies in healthcare.

For technological progress to become a powerhouse that benefits everyone, it must

be smartly shaped through co-creation and far reaching, long-term policies. It must be grounded in shared values and bold visions.

Experts representing various fields across the globe who joined the DTH-Lab event emphasized the importance of understanding the transformation driven by technologies in the broader context of their impact on health. In the fascination with breakthrough innovations, we cannot let their generational effects be a matter of chance or the sum of individual interests of big tech companies. Healthcare needs cutting-edge and evidence-based digital solutions but also solid foundations on which they can grow.

The DTH-Lab possesses the necessary expertise to address this challenge, drawing from the experience of partners from diverse fields and rooted in the scientific foundation developed through several years of work by the *Lancet and Financial Times Commission*. The expressed willingness to cooperate closely for the sustainable development of digital health, with the goal of achieving universal health coverage and a more equitable and sustainable future, will drive DTH-Lab for years to come.

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