

# Making digital transformations work for health: introducing a new consortium to take forward recommendations from the *Lancet* and *Financial Times* Commission



The *Lancet* and *Financial Times* Commission report, that we published 2 years ago, on governing health futures 2030: growing up in a digital world, drew attention to the many different ways in which our health futures are being shaped by digital transformations.<sup>1</sup> We proposed that a new understanding of health is required and that universal health coverage must accommodate the changing priorities and expectations of current and future digitally connected populations. We argued that although digital transformations offer extraordinary potential to improve health and wellbeing for all, their boundaries are being pushed forward without adequate concern for their public purpose or the effects on health equity and human rights.

In our analysis, we were particularly interested in the effect of digitalisation on young people’s health and wellbeing. Unlike previous generations, young people are growing up in a digital world in which experiences with digital technologies and environments form an important part of the foundation for long-term health and wellbeing.<sup>2</sup> To enable young people’s health and wellbeing to thrive in an age of digital transformation, and to accelerate public health and universal health coverage for all, the Commission identified three urgent action areas for policy makers and other stakeholders.

Firstly, we recommended that young people’s health and priorities be put at the centre of digital health development and governance. Although the importance of involving youth in digital health is being recognised,<sup>3</sup> few initiatives allow young people, particularly those from poorer and marginalised communities, to meaningfully shape their health futures and co-design digital first health systems that respond to their health priorities. More young people need to be enfranchised to participate in digital transformations for health as part of wider efforts to increase public participation and digital health citizenship.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, we called for action to reorient the application of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and data away from profit and towards public value and health equity.<sup>5</sup> New, participatory

governance approaches are needed to build public trust in digital health ecosystems, address the unequal distribution of power and resources within and between countries, and close digital divides. Recognising the speed at which new technologies are being introduced—and the comparatively slow pace at which policy makers can respond—the Commission specifically called for precautionary approaches to digital and data governance that are grounded in Health for All values including democracy, equity, solidarity, inclusion, and human rights. The need for such future-ready governance mechanisms has been clearly shown as the world grapples with how to manage the sudden introduction and rapid uptake of ChatGPT and other generative artificial intelligence tools.<sup>6</sup>

Our third major recommendation to policy makers and other actors was to recognise the digital ecosystem as a new setting for health. While digital environments and data-driven tools can undoubtedly play a role in strengthening health-care and health systems, as well as contributing to prevention, there is also increasing recognition that their use can come at a cost to physical, mental, and planetary health.<sup>7-9</sup> The growing adoption of artificial intelligence and other digital

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transformations therefore continues to cause both excitement and trepidation among those looking to improve health and wellbeing.<sup>10,11</sup> With huge evidence gaps on the direct and indirect health effects of digital transformations on different groups, particularly in low-income and middle-income countries, we have called for more research into, and action to address, the digital determinants of health.<sup>12</sup>

The Commission's findings and recommendations have been well received by actors from multiple sectors. Key concepts in the report such as data solidarity and digital determinants of health have particularly captured interest and are being incorporated into policy guidance and research agendas.<sup>13,14</sup> There is, however, still much work to do to make the Commission's recommendations more tangible and actionable for decision makers to catalyse a whole-of-society effort towards their realisation.

To continue the work that we began, and to help accelerate implementation of the Commission's recommendations, we have established the Digital Transformations for Health Lab. As a global consortium comprising many former commissioners and partners, the Digital Transformations for Health Lab's mission is to help decision makers, technology companies, and other national and global stakeholders translate the Commission's proposals into policies and governance instruments. Our priority will be to work with governments and partners in countries with the largest populations of young people such as India and Nigeria. We will develop and pilot localised policy solutions and governance approaches that incorporate the Commission's recommendations and respond to young people's needs.

The evolution of the Commission to a policy laboratory reflects our belief that addressing the opportunities and challenges of digital transformation requires continuous experimentation, innovation, and adaptation. A laboratory with multiple nodes across the globe is essential to co-design and test solutions that are based on local environments and priorities. We aim to become a dynamic space for collaborative thinking

and co-creating solutions with young people—the next generation of health professionals, policy makers, and innovators—playing a crucial role in all aspects of our work. Partnerships and collaboration across sectors will be vital for everyone to thrive in this age of digital transformations. We invite all who share our hope for more equitable and sustainable health futures to work with us to make this a reality.

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