

Advancing equitable digital health futures for all

Meeting statement

Geneva, 27 March 2024

2024 is set to be a milestone year for digital transformations of health. February saw the formal kick-off of the Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH), a WHO-Managed Network that will support acceleration of the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-2025 and enable digital transformation of health systems through focused global collaborations and country-level coordination across planning, resourcing and implementation. Through the leadership of India's, and now Brazil's G20 presidency, GIDH is high on the political agenda with discussions planned around alignment and tracking of development assistance for digital health transformations and operationalization of country-support.

Several other landmark meetings and policy dialogues on digitalization and AI are taking place in 2024. For example, the United Nations has convened a high-level advisory body on AI, issued guidance on governance of AI and will convene the Summit of the Future to build consensus on a Global Digital Compact and principles for an open, inclusive and secure digital future. The outcomes of these and other processes will have a significant impact on health.

Health and well-being: Our aspiration for digital transformations

Ahead of these upcoming events, we, Geneva-based stakeholders working at the intersection of global health and digital governance, met on 27 March 2024 at the invitation of the GIDH and the Digital Transformations for Health Lab (DTH-Lab).

We discussed the governance-related actions required to harness the potential of digital transformations for universal health coverage (UHC) and to advance health and well-being for all, and shared current and future work being undertaken to support countries in their efforts to build equitable digital first health systems and health promoting digital ecosystems.

We believe that digital transformations present a major opportunity to realize the right to health and strengthen health systems to become more responsive to current and future health priorities. Digital transformation can allow health systems to be reimagined, helping to close health workforce gaps and empowering providers to deliver better, timely care. Through digital tools, individuals can also gain access to a growing range of services, appropriate and trustworthy information and community networks can be fostered to support individual and collective health and well-being.

We recognize that digital transformations in non-health sectors and wider society are shaping how we access health services and also inform our understanding and expectations of health and

well-being. Collectively known as the digital determinants of health, understanding and addressing the immediate and indirect effects of digital transformations and digital governance on people's physical and mental health is a priority area for attention.

Divides in digital infrastructure and combined digital, health and civic literacy—characterized by gender disparities and socioeconomic inequalities—deprive millions of people the opportunities inherent in connectivity, including the benefits of digital health solutions. Approaches to digital transformation that fail to adequately consider health and well-being can contribute to increased health inequities, expose people to a range of harms and undermine human rights. Health agencies, professionals and policymakers often lack the knowledge and resources to anticipate, mitigate and respond to the health-related risks associated with digital transformations.

A call to action

The health benefits of digital transformation will not be realized unless stakeholders from different sectors and geographies work together to close digital divides, scale up effective digital health solutions, address power imbalances and extractive data processes within digital ecosystems, and create safe and health-promoting digital environments. Digital and data governance must be more participatory and inclusive—with the active engagement of young people, women and marginalized or disenfranchised communities—to ensure that innovations in health and other sectors contribute to the greatest possible standard of health and widespread benefits of digital transformation.

As Heads of Governments and other policymakers convene this year at the World Health Assembly, G20, United Nations and other fora, we urge them to ensure that digital transformations intentionally contribute to, and do not undermine, healthy futures for all.

To create conditions for digital transformations to advance health and well-being for all, we identified several priority actions:

- Leverage the GIDH to **improve collaboration and coordination** in support of country-led and evidence-based digital transformation of health systems;
- Recognize the **digital determinants of health** and promote policy solutions to address them;
- **Champion the right to health** within broader policy dialogues on digital, AI and data governance;
- Engage diverse stakeholders including adolescents, youth, women and other under-represented communities in **shaping the design and governance** of digital transformations in health and wider society.

We call upon policymakers, the private sector and other organizations to support these actions and join us in securing a healthy digital future for all.