

Digital Transformations of Health Lab (DTH-Lab)

Meaningfully engaging young people

Understanding youth dynamics

“Youth” is a fluid, dynamic category that must be necessarily viewed with an intersectional lens. As such, when youth are referred to throughout the work of the Lab, we adopt a broad perspective that [defines youth](#) as a group that includes individuals before a period of transition to the independence of adulthood as well as the “period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence ... [ultimately] more fluid than other fixed age-groups”.

So far the role of youth in digital health has highlighted the unique concerns that youth face. [For example](#), as one of the most active demographic groups engaging with digital technologies, this can both present opportunities for increased health care access but also concerns for increased exposure to digital harms.

To mediate this, many actors have begun exploring ‘youth engagement’ in digital health interventions. In recognition of the rising need to engage and include youth in digital health governance, organisations such as the [WHO](#), [AMREF](#) and the [UN](#) (through the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth) have recently published guidelines on youth engagement and are increasingly engaging and including youth in their activities. For example, the WHO’s recent strategy on [Youth-Centred Digital Health Interventions](#) highlights creating youth boards and creating ‘fun’ and ‘safe’ spaces for youth engagement. A partner institute of the Commission is the the Youth and Media (YaM) team at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University who have also shared key insights around ways that different stakeholders such as international organisations, companies, researchers, and educators can build [participation models](#) which enable meaningful youth engagement in our increasingly digital world.

Whilst the DTH-Lab will partner with youth, the intended impact of the Lab’s work is to improve health and wellbeing for all young people including children and adolescents. In working with this population, the DTH-Lab will continue to reflect upon the changing dynamics of youth in the digital health space.

Building on the youth-led work of the GHFutures2030 Commission

The GHFutures2030 Commission’s main objective was to deliver a clear set of recommendations on the governance of digital health, AI and UHC, but one of its noted achievements was its success in including young people creatively and inclusively within its work and research agenda, for example:

- The creation of a dedicated youth team within the Commission’s Secretariat;
- For the first time, *The Lancet* published a partnering document to the Commission report, [Youth Statement and Call for Action](#), that was completely youth authored;
- The Commission’s report was informed by inputs from over 23,000 young people from 176 countries aged 14-35 gathered through a [UNICEF UReport survey](#);

- The Commission conducted [an exploratory study](#) on approaches to digital transformation of health systems in different parts of the world, particularly in ten African countries where young people under 25 make up a substantial proportion of the population;
- The creation of [six digital childhood profiles](#) to illustrate the diversity of young people's lived experiences of growing up in a digital world;
- [Imagining Health Futures](#), a collaboration with UNICEF that brought together young people from 20 different countries to leverage foresight, storytelling and youth imagination in a collection of fictional short stories that reveal young people's collective hopes, fears, and imagined solutions for health futures in a digital world;
- The development of a methods guide for youth and well-being focus groups with Harvard Berkman and Klein Center for Internet and Society that help shed light on how youth think about and experience well-being;
- A [youth edition of the report](#) that summarises the main messages of the Commission report for older children and youth;
- The establishment of the [GHFutures2030 Youth Network](#). Since its launch in April 2022, the current [#MyHealthFutures Youth network](#) of more than 800 young people and has been effective at:
 - Advocating for greater involvement of young people in the design and implementation of digital health policies and programmes;
 - Disseminating the Commission's findings to new audiences;
 - Holding decision makers accountable for their commitments to health and the equitable and responsible use of technology and data;
 - Collaborating with other networks engaged in policy change to promote and govern health futures.

The DTH-Lab's work builds on the Commission's track record of fully and meaningfully working with young people and expands the scope of this work further to include more youth voices and perspectives from diverse social, geographical and disciplinary backgrounds.

Institutionalising youth engagement in the DTH-Lab's work

Meaningful engagement

In alignment with the [Global Consensus Statement on Meaningful Adolescent and Youth Engagement](#), we will continue to seek out and be respectful of young people's diverse views, backgrounds and identities. We recognise that young people and their experiences of growing up in a digital world are not homogeneous. We will therefore actively seek to engage and include a variety of young people in DTH-Lab activities and explore different ways to engage young people that are empathetic to their different identities, cultural backgrounds and levels of digital access.

Yet, further, the DTH-Lab's strategy to engage with young people also adopts the perspective that to fully create structures for meaningful youth engagement and improved digital health outcomes it is important to [not bifurcate the categories of youth](#) and institutions of power. This means recognising that youth and the institutions determining digital health futures are in a constant dialectic whereby the degree to which youth perspectives are included is continuously in flux.

Therefore, the DTH-Lab operates within a frame that aims to bring together youth and institutions of power. To do this, it is important to engage both sides. By understanding the relative perspectives of each side, it becomes possible to build bridges which provide the space to more fully embed youth and youth organisations within institutions of power in meaningful ways. Ultimately, by building these bridges it opens the space for youth health issues to be defined by youth. It is through this analytical frame that the strategy proposes the following aims in order to support the work of the DTH-Lab.

The DTH-Lab strives to include young people within its governance structure. RYC provide ongoing guidance about the meaningful engagement of diverse young people in each stage of the DTH-Lab's work. As a Steering Committee member of the DTH-Lab, the Chair of the Regional Youth Champions will participate fully in the decision making process of the DTH-Lab. In addition to the governance structure within the DTH-Lab, the Lab include young professionals as research fellows, experts and innovators that actively contribute to the outputs of the Lab.

Partnerships

The Commission was able to establish meaningful youth engagement structures and partnerships that the DTH-Lab will leverage as it expands and further institutionalises its way of working with and for young people to ultimately accelerate progress towards UHC and equitable benefits to young people's health and wellbeing.

The Lab has well established partnerships with the future health workforce (IFMSA, IPSF and the WHO Global Health Workforce Hub), next-gen leaders (AI Future Lab, WEF global shapers) and young leaders (YET4H, WHO Youth Council, Youth Health Organisation). Such trusted partnerships also ensure the local/national experience, knowledge and perspectives are included from the conception of the Lab. Through partnerships with youth-led organisations the Lab will leverage existing youth networks, federations and collectives to ensure divergent and diverse youth experts are present.

The DTH-Lab is exploring new partnerships with the greatest potential to drive value-driven and youth-centred approaches to digital transformations of health, improve young people's health and wellbeing, and maximise health equity especially in most vulnerable communities and resource scarce settings.

Structures and mechanisms for meaningful youth engagement in the DTH-Lab's work

Moving beyond the identification of young people solely as [beneficiaries](#) of good health governance and towards engaging them as equal and valuable partners in all projects, research and initiatives that are co-led and centred around young people, the DTH-Lab will strive to effectively and meaningfully work with the young people. By means of both the DTH-Lab's structure and mechanisms for engagement, the Lab is inclusive from conception as youth are considered equal partners in decision making with other stakeholders and are consulted and meaningfully engaged in the execution of initiatives led by the DTH-Lab.

Below are some illustrative examples of how youth's roles will be institutionalised in the Lab's structures and in each step of its pathway to impact.

DTH-Lab governance - Regional Youth Champions will appoint a representative to sit on the steering committee of the DTH-Lab on a rotational basis. The terms of reference for this role will be developed with the RYCs.

Secretariat - A full-time Youth Lead will provide strategic guidance and oversee all youth-focused aspects of the Lab's work, including supporting the youth network and RYCs.

#MyHealthFutures youth network - Will continue to contribute expertise and ideas into the work of the DTH-Lab and help to promote its findings to different audiences.

Regional Youth Champions - Will collate the views and experiences of different youth communities to shape the DTH-Lab's work and represent the DTH-Lab on different platforms.

Fellowship programme - Students and early career professionals, the majority coming from LMICs, will have opportunities to support a specific area of the Lab's research or analysis, present their work at events and build their professional networks.

Issue identification - Regular engagements with youth through the GHFutures2030 Youth Network, partnerships and convenings will be a critical source of information for the DTH-Lab on emerging issues that require governance solutions.

Knowledge generation - Through the DTH-Lab fellowship programme and other partnerships with academic institutions, young people will bring local and national-level experience, knowledge and perspectives into the development of new governance solutions.

Design solutions - Young people representing different communities will be part of all initiatives to develop governance solutions and more responsive digital first health systems.

Test new approaches - Young people will be invited to work alongside governments and other partners in testing governance solutions.

Develop proof of concepts - Young people will play a key role in assessing the feasibility of solutions for scale and impact in different contexts.

Promote innovation - Young people's voices will be critical to shift political and public opinions in support of more responsive digital first health systems and proven governance solutions.