

**COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT  
(CSTD)**

**Twenty-first session  
Geneva, 14 to 18 May 2018**

**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on  
their efforts in 2017 to implement the outcome of the WSIS**

**Submission by**

World Health Organization

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

<p>DISCLAIMER: The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.</p>
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11 December 2017

Dear Ms Sirimanne,

I acknowledge receipt of the letter dated 2 November 2017, in which Dr Kituyi invited the World Health Organization (WHO), to contribute to the Secretary-General's report on the "Progress made in 2017 in the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels".

I am pleased to attach herewith WHO's input to the report.

Yours sincerely,

  
Dr Bernhard Schwartländer  
Chef de Cabinet

ENCL: as stated

## ***World Summit on the Information Society: eHealth action line (C7)***

*World Health Organization (WHO) Report for 2017. Priority areas in the action line include improving health information systems, facilitating access to knowledge and information, strengthening continuous training and public health research, promoting international standards for the exchange of health data, and strengthening systems for disaster response and communicable diseases monitoring and alert.*

### **Summary**

The worldwide progress on the use of information and communication technologies for health (eHealth) continued in 2017. Today over 120 countries have national eHealth strategies in place to systematically benefit from ICT support for national health priorities and improving the efficiency of health systems. One of the main areas of progress has been on the innovative use of mobile and wireless technologies for public health (mHealth) especially in facilitating access to clinical care, health promotion, health research and emergency management.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognized the need to significantly increase access to information and communication technologies. Such technologies have the potential to play a major role in catalysing and measuring progress towards a number of the health-related Sustainable Development Goals.

WHO Member States are embracing the use of these technologies, looking into generation and use of data for decision making and considering new solutions in support of strengthening their health systems in line with their commitment to Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

The 139<sup>th</sup> session of the WHO Executive Board in May 2016 recognized the value of mHealth in supporting national health priorities and UHC<sup>1</sup>. The Executive Board agreed to discuss, in its future sessions, the broader implication of ICT for the health sector and a potential resolution under the umbrella of digital health. This would encompass traditional eHealth, and mHealth services and systems as well as address emerging areas such as the use of advanced computer sciences (in the fields of “big data”, genomics and artificial intelligence, for example). The request from WHO Member States to discuss the new potentials, address important gaps and further align actions around digital health comes at a key time, as they move forward with national eHealth strategy implementations.

WHO is committed to develop, in full consultation with its Member States, a global strategy on digital health to align future action by WHO, its international partners and Member States in support of this request.

Assuring effective multisectoral collaboration, available resources, and enabling environments for scalable and interoperable eHealth solutions still remain as a big challenge especially for low- and middle-income countries. Policies for ensuring quality, safety and ethical standards in eHealth and respect for the principles of confidentiality of health data, especially related to international sharing of electronic health record data for patient care is going through steady but slow adoption.

### **Uptake and trends**

WHO continues to support its Member States through policy guidance, evidence building, provision of norms and technical assistance for the adoption of ICT to support health priorities through stakeholder engagements and cross-sectoral collaboration at the global,

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<sup>1</sup> EB139/8 - [http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/EB139/B139\\_8-en.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB139/B139_8-en.pdf?ua=1)

regional and country levels. The national planning approach promoted by WHO and ITU through their joint guidance to countries aims to engage stakeholders at all levels to strengthen, accelerate and align eHealth efforts towards achieving their health objectives.

Countries continue to move at different speed with their eHealth strategy action plans and implementations depending on their capacity and availability of resources. Where the need has been identified, new partnerships have been established to help countries to move forward with their eHealth implementation plans.

One example of such partnership is the recent WHO Regional Office for Africa and ITU Digital Health Initiative<sup>2</sup> aiming to support countries in the WHO African Region with their eHealth strategy implementation. To overcome some of the existing foundational challenges it aims to strengthen public-private partnerships, seek resources and build the capacity needed to scale up eHealth.

At the international level, systems for surveillance and monitoring of diseases and epidemics, and initiatives to share knowledge and data for health research and health development are progressing. WHO continues to track the adoption of eHealth and UHC goals and measuring the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Two particular work areas continue to advance eHealth agenda in this respect: the Health Data Collaborative and the implementation of the WHO Framework for Integrated People-Centred Services.

The Health Data Collaborative<sup>3</sup> is a partnership with WHO and other development agencies, countries, donors and academia launched in 2016 to strengthen health information systems as part of monitoring the SDGs. Its objective is to strengthen country capacity for collecting and using health data, including through the use of ICT. The collaborative has been attracting more demands from countries and is being recognized as a global platform around health data policy and information sharing.

The 69<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly in 2016 adopted the Framework on integrated, people-centred health services, recognizing that: “Making progress towards the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), including target 3.8 on universal health coverage, requires countries to move towards ensuring that all people and communities have access to health services that are high quality, safe and acceptable.” The five inter-dependent strategies include the information systems that are fundamental to implementing this approach.

Governments are using ICT to assure continuity and quality of care, facilitate patient’s empowerment and reach geographically isolated communities towards the provision of integrated, people-centred care in line with the WHO Framework on Integrated People-Centred Services<sup>4</sup>. Proper setup and use of integrated eHealth services have been shown to be effective in support of the improving the quality of the health systems, training of the health workforce and timely use of data for decision support. WHO is working on development of a capability maturity model to help countries measuring their progress.

## **Challenges**

In some countries there is still a need to build a strong eHealth foundation including necessary infrastructure, standards, legislation and workforce. Legal, privacy and ethical issues related to use and access to personal health data still causes foreseeable challenges in many countries.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.afro.who.int/news/who-and-itu-use-digital-technology-strengthen-public-health-services-africa> (accessed 04Dec2017)

<sup>3</sup> [www.who.int/features/2016/health-data-collaborative/en](http://www.who.int/features/2016/health-data-collaborative/en) (accessed 04Dec2017)

<sup>4</sup> WHA document A69/39, *Framework on integrated, people-centred health services* (2016).

The substantial increase in the number and range of eHealth solutions particularly pertinent to mHealth and donor-driven projects continue to pose challenges in governance as well as for producing scalable and interoperable national solutions for access to care.

WHO is working with its partners to provide guidance and assessment frameworks on mHealth and eHealth innovations to help countries to select, adopt, manage and evaluate their solutions in order to aid good governance and ensure good investment decisions.