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(CSTD)**

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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on
their efforts in 2018 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 22nd 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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World Summit on the Information Society: eHealth action line (C7)

The World Health Organization (WHO) Report for 2018. 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

Progress around the world regarding the use of information and communication technologies for health (eHealth) has continued throughout 2018, as Member States reaffirmed their commitment to investing in developing or updating their national eHealth strategies and moving forward with their implementation to support their national health priorities and improving their health systems.

The 142nd session of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization, in January 2018, discussed the broader implications of ICT for the health sector and a potential resolution under the umbrella of digital health. The term digital health aims to encompass traditional eHealth and mHealth services and systems, as well as including emerging areas, such as the use of advanced data and computer sciences (in the fields of “big data”, genomics and artificial intelligence, for example).

Two important endorsements from WHO Member States in 2018 have further emphasized the important role of digital technologies to support national health agendas and the delivery of universal health coverage.

The 171st session of the World Health Assembly in May 2018, discussed and adopted the new resolution on digital health. This resolution recognizes the continuous advancements of digital technologies and their contribution to personal and public health. It highlights recent progress in the development and implementation of digital health strategies, policies, legislation and progress in countries. It urges Member States to take action in several areas, such as that of optimizing the use of digital technologies in health systems development and reforms and building capacity for human resources for digital health across both health and technology sectors, among others.¹

Through this resolution, WHO has been tasked with developing a global strategy on digital health, in close collaboration with Member States and with inputs from relevant stakeholders.

In November 2018, in the Astana Declaration on Primary Health Care, Member States expressed their support for broadening and extending access to a range of digital technologies to enable individual and communities to play a more active role in their health needs, as well as maintaining their own health and well-being.²

While there has been steady progress on the use of digital technologies for health, ensuring effective multisectoral collaboration, available resources (human and financial), and an enabling environment for scalable and interoperable digital health solutions still remain significant challenges, especially for low- and middle-income countries. Policies for ensuring quality, safety and ethical standards with respect to the confidentiality of health data are still lagging in many countries. New ethical challenges need to be addressed in the use of digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence in public health.

¹ WHA document A71.7, digital health resolution (2018).

² <https://www.who.int/primary-health/conference-phc/declaration> (accessed 12Dec 2018)

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 engagement and cross-sectoral collaboration at the global, regional and country levels.

A new global partnership in digital health has been established to bring countries together to share best practices and address the shared challenges. The Global Digital Health Partnership (GDHP) is an international collaboration of governments, government agencies and multinational organizations dedicated to improving the health and well-being of citizens through the best use of evidence-based digital technologies.³

The collaborative work between the WHO Regional Office for Africa and ITU's Digital Health Initiative⁴ continues to support countries in the 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.

The Health Data Collaborative⁵ continues to enhance country capacity to monitor and review progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through better availability, analysis and use of data through digital technologies.

Digital technologies are also shaping the future of primary health care.⁶ Digital health applications from technologies that allow people to manage their health more effectively to better ways of diagnosing diseases, to monitoring the impact of policies on population health, are all having a profound effect on how health services are delivered and how health systems are run.

Challenges

There still remain social, economic and other barriers that affect a country's ability to take advantage of digital health and ensure equity in the use of its application. Building a strong foundation, including the necessary infrastructure, standards, legislation and workforce, especially in low- and middle-income countries, persist as barriers to implementation. Legal, privacy and ethical issues related to the use and access to personal health data still presents challenges in many countries.

The substantial increase in the number and range of digital health solutions, particularly donor-driven projects, continue to pose challenges in governance, as well as for producing scalable and interoperable national solutions for better access to health care. Harnessing digital technologies for health requires cross-sectoral collaboration, commitment and strategic

³ <https://www.gdhp.org/our-vision> (accessed 12Dec2018)

⁴ <http://www.afro.who.int/news/who-and-itu-use-digital-technology-strengthen-public-health-services-africa> (accessed 12Dec2018)

⁵ www.who.int/features/2016/health-data-collaborative/en (accessed 12Dec2018)

⁶ https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/primary-health-care-conference/digital-technologies.pdf?sfvrsn=3efc47e0_2 (accessed 12Dec2018)

planning. There should always be careful consideration of the country context when introducing innovative approaches, ensuring the necessary oversight and regulation in order to realize the benefits and avoid potential harms.

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