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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international
organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2019 to
implement the outcomes 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 23rd 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.

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

The World Health Organization (WHO) Report for 2019. 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 draft global strategy on digital health has been prepared by WHO in consultation with Member States and with inputs from stakeholders in response to the WHO resolution on digital health (WHA 71.7). It aims to address existing gaps and help countries to achieve the health related SDGs. The draft global strategy will be presented and discussed by the WHO Executive Board in February 2020 and is expected to be considered for adoption by WHO Member States in 73rd session of the World Health Assembly in May 2020.

The vision of the global strategy is to improve health for everyone, everywhere by accelerating the development and adoption of appropriate digital health solutions. It has prioritized four strategic objectives towards the achievement of the vision: 1) Promote global collaboration and advance the transfer of knowledge on digital health; 2) Advance the implementation of national digital health strategies; 3) Strengthen governance of digital health at global and national levels; 4) Advocate for people-centred health systems that are enabled by digital health. A series of action plans have been recommended to be taken by WHO, countries and other partners to implement the global strategy.

To help countries with selection of appropriate digital health interventions, WHO released a set of recommendations in the first guideline on digital health intervention contributing to health system improvement.

Progress has been made to discuss ethical challenges in the use of digital technologies such as artificial intelligence in public health and provide appropriate guidance for countries in their ethical design and use.

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. The workforce capacity building on digital health, more specifically around governance and leadership has been among high priority areas specifically in many low- and middle-income countries.

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 digital technologies to support their health priorities and achieving SDGs through stakeholder engagement and cross-sectoral collaboration at the global, regional and country levels.

WHO released the first guideline on digital health interventions. The key aim of this guideline is to present recommendations based on evaluation of the evidence on relevant digital health interventions that are contributing to health system improvements. Selected countries and group of stakeholders are currently working on implementing these recommendations within their health systems.

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.¹

The collaborative work between the WHO Regional Office for Africa and ITU's Digital Health Initiative² 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 Collaborative³ 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.⁴ 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 strong governance, 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 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.

¹ <https://www.gdhp.org/our-vision> (accessed 12Dec2018)

² <http://www.afro.who.int/news/who-and-itu-use-digital-technology-strengthen-public-health-services-africa> (accessed 12Dec2018)

³ www.who.int/features/2016/health-data-collaborative/en(accessed 12Dec2018)

⁴ https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/primary-health-care-conference/digital-technologies.pdf?sfvrsn=3efc47e0_2(accessed 12Dec2018)