World Health Organization

Executive Board
156th session

Provisional agenda item 24.3 EB156/35

23 December 2024

Global strategies or action plans that are scheduled to expire within one year

Global strategy on digital health 2020–2025

Report by the Director-General

1. In 2005, the Health Assembly, through resolution WHA58.28, requested the Director-General to, inter alia, provide technical support to Member States in relation to eHealth products and services. Subsequently, the Health Assembly requested the Director-General, through resolution WHA66.24 (2013), to, inter alia, provide support to Member States, as appropriate, in order to integrate the application of eHealth and health data standards and interoperability in their national eHealth strategies and, through resolution WHA71.7 (2018), to, inter alia, develop a global strategy on digital health. Following a two-year development process, the global strategy on digital health 2020–2025 was endorsed by the Seventy-third World Health Assembly in decision WHA73(28) (2020).

2. The global strategy on digital health 2020–2025 will expire in the coming year. The present report responds to the request in decision WHA73(15) (2020) to allow Member States to consider whether global strategies or action plans that are so scheduled to expire have fulfilled their mandates, should be extended and/or need to be adjusted.

Progress on implementation of the global strategy on digital health

3. Since 2020, Member States, the Secretariat and development partners have undertaken numerous initiatives and support activities to implement the four strategic objectives of the global strategy on digital health, through coordinated engagement and partnerships with various stakeholders. The WHO Digital Health Technical Advisory Group was set up to initiate implementation activities, and in 2024, to further the agenda of the global strategy on digital health, the Secretariat contributed to the development of the Pact for the Future, the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations at the United Nations Summit of the Future.

Objective 1: Promoting global collaboration and advancing the transfer of knowledge on digital health

4. Several intergovernmental bodies have leveraged the global strategy on digital health to inform the priorities and implementation plans of their respective Member States. For example, digital health has been included in the agenda of five successive G20 presidencies, with the launch of the Global Initiative on Digital Health supported by the presidency of India in 2023 and operationalized through digital public infrastructure during the presidency of Brazil in 2024. The Global Initiative on Digital Health, launched in 2023, is a WHO-managed network of organizations, institutions, development partners and government agencies to support digital health transformation in countries worldwide.

5. Government-to-government collaboration on digital health has been established in four WHO regions, while 40 Member States have joined the Global Digital Health Partnership.

6. In Africa, Member States, working with the Secretariat and ITU, the African Union and the Smart Africa initiative, have developed a regional blueprint for digital health, while the African Union led the development of regional health information exchange guidelines and standards. In south-eastern Asia, Member States have worked on digital health assessment and maturity and on digital health gap analysis and response.

7. Brazil, Estonia, India, Ireland and Malawi have played leading roles in multistakeholder global sessions convened by the Secretariat to support the national scale-up of digital health and innovation. Australia, India, Japan and the United States of America sponsored a side-event on digital transformation at the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly in 2024, driving attention and focus on digital public infrastructure.

8. National, scalable digital health programmes have been launched in a number of countries, including the My Health Record in Australia; the National Telehealth Program in Brazil; the Canada Health Infoway; the e-Health Record system established on the X-Road platform in Estonia; the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission and eSanjeevani telemedicine platform in India; the M-TIBA national health wallet in Kenya; the Integrated Health Management Information System in Rwanda; the SEHA Virtual Hospital in Saudi Arabia; the National Electronic Health Record in Singapore; and the MomConnect programme in South Africa.

9. Between 2020 and 2024, the Secretariat developed more than 60 digital health knowledge resources, including guidelines, toolkits and reports.

10. The Secretariat, working with development partners and entities of the United Nations system, has trained more than 1600 government officials from over 100 countries in digital health and artificial intelligence. More than 300 participants from 59 countries have attended in-person technical workshops on telemedicine and artificial intelligence for health. Over 25 000 health workers, policy-makers and students from 175 countries have taken the OpenWHO online course on ethics and governance of artificial intelligence for health.

11. The Secretariat established the WHO Innovation Hub at WHO headquarters and launched the WHO Country Demand Catalyst programme.

12. Development partners have hosted global, regional and national gatherings and knowledge exchange platforms on digital health. For example, the Global Digital Health Forum meets annually, with more than 2500 attendees each year.

13. Many multilateral organizations have supported the policy agenda of the Global Initiative on Digital Health; networks of digital health professionals in four WHO regions have been active in fostering regional collaboration, training and capacity-building on digital health; and the World Bank has established the Joint Learning Network to facilitate knowledge sharing on the successful integration of digital technology and data into healthcare systems.

Objective 2: Advancing the implementation of national digital health strategies

14. Eighty-five (44%) Member States had developed national digital health strategies by 2015 and 120 (68%) by 2020. To date, 129 Member States have national digital health strategies. Of the 67 Member States that reported to the Global Digital Health Monitor in 2023, 75% had active or recently updated strategies and 27% had fully costed strategies.

15. Several Member States have legislation that provides the necessary policy framework to support digital transformation, such as the Kenyan Digital Health Act of 2023. The Secretariat has developed a central database of national digital health policies and strategies available for use by Member States to foster collaboration and enhance the visibility of best practices.

16. Regional action frameworks on digital health have been or are being developed for all WHO regions. PAHO, for example, has developed a road map for the digital transformation of the health sector in the Region, a policy on the application of data science in public health using artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies, and a strategy for universal access to health and universal health coverage.

17. Multiple partners are engaged in supporting Member States to advance implementation of digital health strategies. For example, the Inter-American Development Bank collaborated with PAHO to develop the Pan-American Highway for Digital Health and has developed a national digital health repository with associated maturity levels.

18. In 2021, *The Lancet* and *Financial Times* reviewed national strategies on digital health and published a knowledge product discussing the interplay between digital health, determinants of health and young people. In 2021, the Transform Health coalition analysed costing elements of national digital health strategies and launched a call for action report.

Objective 3: Strengthening governance for digital health at global, regional and national levels

19. In 2024, 15 Member States in the African Region convened to share best practices in digital health governance, supported by the Secretariat, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the Regenstrief Institute.

20. In total, 130 Member States have performed digital health maturity assessments using the Global Digital Health Monitor. Data show that most countries are at maturity level 3 of 5 across the seven components of the digital health enabling environment defined by WHO and ITU. The component for which Member States are lagging the furthest behind relates to health workforce skills.

21. In 2023, although over 71% of the 67 Member States surveyed were leveraging existing policies and regulatory frameworks for digital health, 56% had no functional digital health governance. Member States are addressing the elements essential to the successful implementation of digital health strategies. For example, of the 52 Member States in the European Region taking part in a regional survey in 2022, 42 reported having processes for monitoring and evaluating digital health interventions, programmes or services.

22. In 2021, the Secretariat hosted the Health Data Governance Summit over two half days and issued guidance on the ethics and governance of artificial intelligence for health the same year, with subsequent workshops for Member States.

23. The Regional Office for the Americas and the Regional Office for Europe published documentation on health information system governance. In 2023, the Regional Office for Europe initiated a project with the European Commission to align regional health data governance and standards. In addition, the Inter-American Development Bank produced guidance on digital health governance in 2020.

24. In 2023, the Commonwealth Secretariat established a memorandum of understanding with WHO, focusing on areas such as digital health maturity. In line with the memorandum of understanding, digital health maturity assessments have been conducted in Seychelles and Zambia.

25. Several partners have advanced the cause of data governance in health. For example, in 2024, the Transform Health coalition convened consultations with around 500 stakeholders in 65 countries to develop a minimum set of components for health data governance regulations. PATH has provided support to Member States to establish robust health data governance frameworks.

Objective 4: Advocating people-centred health systems that are enabled by digital health

26. Several Member States have made significant progress in ensuring that digital health literacy and digitally enabled health systems are part of national digital health strategies and in developing person-centric digital health interventions. Examples include LACPASS, a personal health record initiative in the Americas; the European Health Data Space in the European Union; the Kanta Services in Finland; the 21st Century Cures Act in the United States of America; and the DiGA digital health platform in Germany.

27. Working with development partners, the Secretariat has focused on gender dimensions to foster uptake of its digital health literacy programmes. Of the 477 learners enrolled in one course cohort, 64% were men and 36% were women.

28. The Secretariat launched the Global Digital Health Certification Network, a standards-based digital platform to support participating jurisdictions in recognizing and trusting each other’s health documents. Current and future uses of the network include digital coronavirus disease (COVID-19) certificates, hajj health records, the digital international certificate of vaccination and prophylaxis, digital personal immunization records and an international patient summary. More than 1.8 billion people in the 80 countries that have joined the network will be able to retrieve their health documents in a secure, verifiable manner.

29. To facilitate the consistent incorporation of recommended clinical, public health and data practices into digital information systems, the Secretariat has developed SMART – standards-based, machine-readable, adaptive, requirements-based and testable – guidelines on antenatal care, HIV, family planning, tuberculosis, child health, immunizations and digital COVID-19 certificates. These technical specifications include minimum data, service delivery and reporting protocols and architecture and functionality requirements to facilitate the development of interoperable, person-centred digital systems and are being used in over 80 Member States across all regions. WHO has also developed a living catalogue for clinical, public health and health policy guideline recommendations and provides digital publishing and dissemination of all WHO normative and standard-setting guidance.

30. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat made trusted health information and evidence-based guidance available to more than 1 billion people and provided 300 million users a day with life-saving information using digital channels.

31. A series of global webinars was conducted in 2022 on the interplay of digital health and patient-centred healthcare. Furthermore, several development partners have incorporated a people-centred approach into their digital health priorities and strategies; the World Bank produced a report on the value proposition of digital health in unlocking value for all; and the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development produced a policy document on virtual health and care to foster uptake of digital modalities in care.

32. Partners have played a vital role in supporting person-centred software platforms and cross-border patient-centric interoperability and access. For example, the Global Digital Health Certification Network is based on the European Union digital COVID-19 certificate system; Google developed the Open Health Stack resources to facilitate the local development of person-centred applications in line with the fast healthcare interoperability resources standards and SMART guidelines; and an agreement between WHO and Health Level Seven supports the adoption of open interoperability standards globally.

Recommendation for the way forward

33. There is a need to extend the global strategy on digital health 2020–2025 to 2027 to allow Member States and stakeholders time to assimilate the Global Digital Compact and to align digital health efforts with the 2030 outcomes for the Compact and the Sustainable Development Goals, leveraging rapidly accelerating transformative technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing.

Action by the Executive Board

34. The Board is invited to note the report and consider the following draft decision:

> The Executive Board, having considered the report by the Director-General,[1]
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> Decided to recommend to the Seventy-eighth World Health Assembly the adoption of the following draft decision:
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> The Seventy-eighth World Health Assembly,

[1] Document EB156/35.

Having considered the report by the Director-General,

Decided:

(1) to extend the global strategy on digital health 2020–2025 to 2027;

(2) to request the Director-General to develop, guided by the global strategy on digital health 2020–2025 and in consultation with Member States and stakeholders, a draft global strategy on digital health for the period 2028–2033 and to submit the draft global strategy for consideration by the Eightieth World Health Assembly in 2027, through the Executive Board at its 160th session.
