

Pacific Health Information Network

Strengthening Health Information Systems and Digital Health

INFORMATION DOCUMENT: 7.1 WHO global and regional strategy on digital health

1. BACKGROUND

World Health Organization (WHO) Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO)'s motto is to act today to address the challenges of the future through a back-casting approach, described in the 'For the Future' vision paper approved by all the Member States during the WHO Regional Committee Meeting in 2019. Digitalization will fundamentally transform our society and digital health is an enabler and even a changer to reshape the future of health. This means new trends, topics and future directions in digital health are emerging and need to be captured and considered in a strategic manner.

The COVID-19 pandemic sped up the progress of using digital health tools, technologies, and actions to provide timely and sustainable health services and to enhance health outcomes. For digital health advancement to be sustainable, initiatives must be part of the wider health system and digital health ecosystem, be guided by a robust strategy addressing health priorities, and be led through a strong governance structure.

2. ACTION TAKEN

In 2013, the World Health Assembly adopted resolution WHA66.24 on eHealth standardization and interoperability. The Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025 was endorsed during the Seventy-third World Health Assembly in decision WHA73. The vision of the Global Strategy is:

- to improve health for everyone, everywhere by accelerating the development and adoption of appropriate, accessible, affordable, scalable and sustainable person-centric digital health solutions to prevent, detect and respond to epidemics and pandemics;
- to develop infrastructure and applications that enable countries to use health data to promote health and well-being; and

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- to achieve the health-related Sustainable Development Goals and the triple billion targets of WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023.

The 69th WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific endorsed the Regional Action Agenda on Harnessing E-Health for Improved Health Service Delivery in the Western Pacific (RC69.R2) in 2018. This action agenda highlights that the application of digital health may improve service quality, efficiency and/or equity. The value of any change should be assessed through review of results at different levels – the individual, the service provider, the health-care organization and the overall health system. Monitoring and evaluation should show better quality, improved access and/or lower cost of care. For lasting improvements in service delivery, investment in e-health is required at all service levels, in line with national health plans and priorities.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the considerable progress in deploying digital health solutions, many countries in the region still require institutional support in the development of digital health strategies and the implementation of digital health action plans to achieve systematic digital health governance and enterprise planning. WHO has been actively leading in developing related guidelines and tools, promoting national governance and enterprise planning, and will continue the tailored support to Pacific Island countries and areas to develop and update national digital health strategies and action plans, conduct institutional and health workforce capacity building, and deploy innovative and digital health interventions for better service delivery.