

WHO expert panel on digital health meets for first time

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Plan launched on accelerating use of digital technologies to meet global public health needs

WHO is convening global experts to help shape the Organization's roadmap to advance the digital health ecosystem. The WHO Digital Health Technical Advisory Group met for the first time this week to discuss topics ranging from data governance, to ethical and equitable use of digital technologies, to helping communities benefit from proven and cost-effective digital health solutions.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General said, "All governments are facing increasing demands to provide health services to their citizens, and many digital technologies offer solutions to help meet these needs. But countries require confidence in what works. The action plan agreed today focuses our efforts on helping the world benefit from digital health technologies and solutions while safeguarding the misuse of people's data and protecting their health."

The two-day meeting at WHO's headquarters in Geneva led to an agreed action plan to focus the expert group's activities and priorities over the next two years. Meeting focused on better defining WHO's role in supporting global digital transformation. Topics included:

- Developing a global framework for WHO to validate, implement and scale up digital health technology and solutions.
- Recommendations for safe and ethical use of digital technologies to strengthen national health systems by improving quality and coverage of care, increasing access to health information.
- Advice on advocacy and partnership models to accelerate use of digital health capabilities in countries to achieve better health outcomes.
- Advice on emerging digital health technologies with global reach and impact, so no one is left behind.

Steve Davis, Advisory group co-chair & president and chief executive officer of global health non-profit PATH, said the new plan provides direction to help WHO maximize the potential of the digital health landscape and chart future trends, tools and opportunities.

“The WHO continues to demonstrate its strong commitment to harnessing the power of digital technologies and data to address the world’s most pressing health challenges through the launch of this new Digital Health Technical Advisory Group. I am honored to be co-chairing this group that brings together diverse experts from government, civil society, technology innovators, and NGOs. We are committed to working with the WHO to identify sustainable and scalable digital and data tools and approaches that meet global health needs”, he added.

Bernardo Mariano, director of WHO’s Department of Digital health and Innovation, said: “Digital technologies can play a powerful role in improving the health of people worldwide. WHO’s goal is to ensure digital technologies for health are safe and that proven tools reach everyone, everywhere. Digital health can help expand primary health care, allow health workers to fight resurgent or new diseases and ensure people can benefit from the transformation in digital health. What we call ‘digital health’ today will be, in future, known simply as the way we deliver health services in the digital age.”

Technical advisory group members will meet regularly over the coming year to implement their work plan in support of WHO’s digital health agenda.

Representing the public, private and social sectors, the experts will provide insights, guidance, feedback, and new opportunities for WHO as it helps drive digital health transformation in countries and globally. Members come from a wide array of digital health fields, including artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, biomedical innovation, robotic surgery, and wearable technologies; also represented are experts in health and wellness, ethics, governance, security, economics and law.