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WHO issues first global report on AI usage in health

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Growing use of AI for health presents governments, providers, and communities with opportunities and challenges

Artificial Intelligence (AI) holds great promise for improving the delivery of healthcare and medicine worldwide, but only if ethics and human rights are put at the heart of its design, deployment, and use, according to new World Health Organisation (WHO) guidance published recently.

The report, *Ethics and governance of artificial intelligence for health,* is the result of 2 years of consultations held by a panel of international experts appointed by WHO.

“Like all new technology, artificial intelligence holds enormous potential for improving the health of millions of people around the world, but like all technology it can also be misused and cause harm,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “This important new report provides a valuable guide for countries on how to maximize the benefits of AI, while minimizing its risks and avoiding its pitfalls.”

WHO’s new report cautions against overestimating the benefits of AI for health, especially when this occurs at the expense of core investments and strategies required to achieve universal health coverage.

It also points out that opportunities are linked to challenges and risks, including unethical collection and use of health data; biases encoded in algorithms, and risks of AI to patient safety, cybersecurity, and the environment.

For example, while private and public sector investment in the development and deployment of AI is critical, the unregulated use of AI could subordinate the rights and interests of patients and communities to the powerful commercial interests of technology companies or the interests of governments in surveillance and social control.