Technical briefing on big data
Big opportunities or big noise?

Thursday, 14 September 2017
13:00–14:30, Arcade

Background

1.   Big data and the ever emerging field of data science have been the focus of much attention as a potential new source of information for sustainable development distinct from routine information systems. Big data can potentially be used for official statistics and to inform policy-making.

2.   Despite expectations that big data can be used for evidence-based policy-making for health and well-being, potentially supporting the achievement of Health 2020 policy objectives and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the application of big data is yet to be fully explored. There is currently no clear or unanimously agreed definition of big data use for health, nor is there a vision of how health information systems can harness the innovations and advances resulting from big data and related developments, such as data governance, ethics, technology, interoperability and analytics, among others.

3.   Bearing in mind the vision to integrate and to harmonize health information systems and to provide the flexibility to respond to the needs of policy-makers with relevant information, big data approaches may pose opportunities for health information systems.

4.   For the purposes of this technical briefing, big data for health and well-being is understood to include data sources and approaches that:

- enable better and/or new use of existing data sources either by innovations in methods of analysis or integration/linking (within and across organizations, and between different data sources);

- contribute to the collection of information and enable data sharing for synthesis of data sources in health and to feed into advanced analysis methodologies (such as the Global Burden of Disease); and

- allow identification of new data sources and analysis methods that can provide new information, evidence and contexts to existing knowledge.

5. The WHO European Health Information Initiative (EHII), a multistakeholder network committed to improving the health of people in the European Region by strengthening the information systems and the information that underpin policy, is the coordinating mechanism for advancing the integration, harmonization and innovation of health information systems in the European Region.

6. The EHII is engaged in a concerted effort to integrate health information systems and to harmonize health information. The goal is to make big data a responsive provider of relevant information and analyses that inform policy-makers on population health and on the impact of health policies. With its broad mandate for health information, the EHII is well positioned to facilitate the discussion on the opportunities that big data may generate for health information systems.

Objectives

7. The objectives of this technical briefing are:

- to discuss the strategic role of big data as a data-driven approach to aid health decision-making and support evidence-informed policy development;

- to discuss examples of big data use for health in Member States of the European Region;

- to highlight information-specific barriers to big data use;

- to explore the need for developing a regional strategy on big data for health; and

- to solicit input and guidance from Member States in determining concrete next steps under the EHII to assess the usefulness of big data for health.

Talking points for discussion

- What opportunities and challenges exist for using big data for health in the European Region?

- Are there examples from the country level that demonstrate these opportunities or challenges?

- Is there a need to develop a regional strategy on big data for health?

- Suggestions for concrete next steps that could be taken by the EHII to assess the usefulness of big data for health in the European Region.

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