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Summary of the draft global strategy on digital health

In resolution WHA71.7 (2018), the Seventy-first World Health Assembly requested the Director-General to develop, in close consultation with Member States and with inputs from stakeholders, a global strategy on digital health. The WHO Secretariat developed a first draft of the global strategy through internal consultation and in March 2019 presented the outline of scheduled consultations at an information session for Member States. The draft strategy document was made available online for global public consultation from 26 March to 3 May 2019, followed by a Member State consultation at WHO headquarters on 26 July 2019. The WHO Regional Committee for Europe is invited to comment and provide input on the draft global strategy, a summary of which is contained in the present document.

Summary of the draft global strategy on digital health

BACKGROUND

1. In May 2018, the Seventy-first World Health Assembly issued resolution WHA71.7 on digital health. In the resolution, the Health Assembly, *inter alia*, requested the Director-General to develop in close consultation with Member States and with inputs from stakeholders, a global strategy on digital health, identifying priority areas including where WHO should focus its efforts.

2. The WHO Secretariat developed a first draft of the global strategy through internal consultation and on 27 March 2019 presented the outline of scheduled consultations at an information session held for Member States in Geneva. The draft strategy document was made available online for global public consultation from 26 March to 3 May 2019. Following the public consultation, an updated version of the draft strategy is now available for review and comments at the following link: <https://www.who.int/DHStrategy>.

PURPOSE

3. The purpose of the global strategy on digital health is to advance and apply digital technologies towards the vision of health for all. The draft global strategy sets out a vision, strategic objectives and a framework for action to advance digital technologies for health, globally and in countries. It aims to encourage international collaboration and to support countries in their national digital health programmes. It also aims to promote research, improve evidence and share information as well as best practices on digital health to assure its solid foundation.

4. The draft global strategy is expected to lead to concrete actions within the five-year time frame, from 2020 to 2024. As well, the strategic objectives aim to set the overall direction for the development of digital health for a longer period. The draft global strategy is based on several guiding principles. It:

- acknowledges that the institutionalization of digital health in the national health system requires a decision and commitment by countries;
- recognizes that successful digital health initiatives require a unified strategy; and
- promotes the use of appropriate digital technologies for health.

VISION

5. The vision of the draft global digital health strategy is to improve health for everyone, everywhere by accelerating the adoption of appropriate digital technologies for health towards attaining the health-related Sustained Development Goals.

6. The draft strategy identifies four strategic objectives towards the realization of the vision.

SO1 – Promote global collaboration and advance the transfer of knowledge on digital health

SO2 – Advance the implementation of national digital health strategies

SO3 – Strengthen governance for digital health technologies at global and national levels

SO4 – Advocate for people-centred health systems that are enabled by digital health technologies

7. Advancing appropriate digital health solutions has the potential to support equitable and universal access to quality health services; increase health systems sustainability and accessibility and the affordability of care; and strengthen health promotion, disease prevention, diagnosis, management, rehabilitation and palliative care. The strategic objective on strengthening digital health governance focuses on creating sustainable and robust governance structures and capacity for digital health technologies at global and national levels.

FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

8. The framework for action aims to facilitate the implementation of the global strategy by providing an organized collaborating environment. Working collectively towards shared objectives, local and global partners accommodate diversity and consider methodologies, funding and other resources to help advance the global development agenda and support countries in the development, utilization and evaluation of digital technologies as a means of promoting equitable, affordable and universal access to health for all.

9. The framework for action focuses on four major actions:

- **Commit** – encouraging countries, partners and other stakeholders to commit to the global digital health strategy;
- **Catalyse** – creating and sustaining an environment and processes that will facilitate and induce collaboration towards implementing the global digital health strategy;
- **Measure** – creating and adopting processes for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy; and
- **Enhance and iterate** – undertaking a new cycle of action based on what has been experienced, measured and learned.

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

10. The draft global strategy on digital health, as led by WHO, will support and respond to the growing needs of countries to implement appropriate digital technologies to address their health priorities and to advance progress towards universal health coverage and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals. Such support is in line with WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023.

11. WHO will work closely with Member States, other bodies of the United Nations system, international partners and other stakeholders to implement the global strategy. WHO will also engage the various stakeholders to take forward the strategic objectives at national, regional and global levels. The main stakeholder groups are intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations; donors, aid agencies, foundations and development banks; universities and research institutions; health insurance groups and other health care funders; the private sector and technology developers; and the health care community, patients and the public.

ACTION BY THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE

12. The Regional Committee is invited to comment and provide input on the draft global strategy on digital health.

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