Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH or '*Guide*')

Executive Summary

Why

Digital health is a proven accelerator to advance health outcomes and achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the almost two decades since the first Member State driven resolution on eHealth which culminated into the 2020 comprehensive resolution on digital health, over 120 World Health Organization (WHO) Member States have developed a national digital health policy or strategy, although many of these are not costed or propose robust architectural plans.[1,2,3]

The acceleration of digital health transformation is also challenged by fragmentation in resource allocation and alignment to country needs, along with variable definitions and levels of quality of digital solutions. Countries are seeking support to move from product focused digital health initiatives to establishing national digital health infrastructure with the appropriate national competency to maintain and adapt – a recognized need for trusted and quality-assured technical support to address national digital health priorities, with government in the driver's seat.

A lack of visibility and alignment of investments in digital health has for many years frustrated efforts by countries, development partners and technical partners to reduce duplication and optimize impact. For example, a recent report from 2022, highlighted how publicly available information is missing on current funding levels and gaps in domestic and external investment in digital health, particularly for low and lower-middle income countries.[4] The rapid deployment and scale-up of digital technologies propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated countries' appetite for digital health transformation. A global platform which can respond to the complex digital health ecosystem by aligning investments, strengthening the enabling environment and enhancing quality assured technical support while promoting countries' autonomy in their digital health transformation journeys, is therefore needed.

What

The Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH) is proposed to consolidate and amplify recent and past gains in global digital health while strengthening mutual accountability to enhance the impact of future investments. The GIDH will be a WHO Managed Network ("Network of Networks") that will promote equitable access to digital health by addressing challenges such as duplication of efforts and "products-focused" digital health transformation through a focus on four foundational pillars (see Figure 1):

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[1] Fifty-Eighth World Health Assembly. Resolutions and decisions. Resolution WHA58.28 eHealth. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/20378/WHA58_28-en.pdf;jsessionid=EAA0C77876A662601D4EA9421F701BDB?sequence=1

[2] Seventy-First World Health Assembly. Resolution WHA71.7 Digital Health. Agenda item 12.4. 26 May 2018. https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA71/A71_R7-en.pdf

[3] Global strategy on digital health 2020-2025. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO

[4] Transform Health. Closing the digital divide: More and better funding for the digital transformation of health. Basel: Transform Health; 2022. https://transformhealthcoalition.org/investing-in-digital-health/

- **Country Needs Tracker** - ensuring digital health investments are informed by country priorities;
- **Country Resource Portal** – identifying traditional as well as innovative resource opportunities, enhancing transparency and reducing risk of duplication while enabling a standards-based prospective and retrospective analysis of resourcing gaps in digital health.
- **Transformation Toolbox** – quality assured tools and resources that strengthen country capacity and autonomy to manage their national digital health transformation journey;
- **Convening and Knowledge Exchange** - promoting strengthened collaboration and knowledge exchange across global, regional, and national networks in digital health.
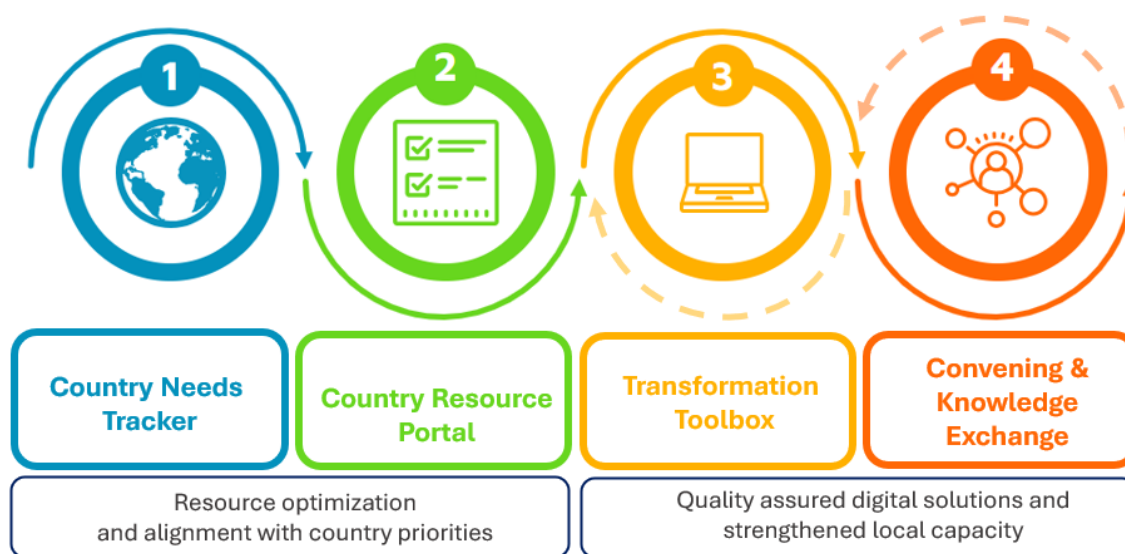

Figure 1. Four foundational pillars of the Global Initiative on Digital Health

The key components of the GIDH will leverage existing evidence, tools and learnings and will be co-created through a transparent and inclusive process. Through this evidence-based and comprehensive co-creation process, GIDH will ultimately aim to:

ALIGN efforts to support of the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025;
SUPPORT quality-assured technical assistance to develop and strengthen standards-based and interoperable systems aligned to global best practices, norms and standards;
FACILITATE the deliberate use of quality assured digital transformation tools that enable governments to manage their digital health transformation journey.

Expected Outputs (5 years)
The GIDH will advance national digital health transformation by ensuring:

1. **Country needs for technical support are systematically captured and made accessible to development partners** through a standardized Country Needs Portal.
2. **A platform to announce and identify resources and gaps** in financial and in-kind commitments in digital health is available to countries, development partners and technical partners.

3. **Countries have timely access to routinely updated tools** to measure maturity of the enabling environment for digital health, track digital health initiatives, guide the development and updating of digital health related strategies and policies, and identifying quality-assured digital solutions.

4. **Continuous cross-network knowledge exchange** between existing global, regional, and national communities of practice, coalitions and more **is institutionalized within the WHO**.

Expected Outcomes

Ultimately, GIDH will contribute to accelerating the achievement of UHC and health-related SDGs through:

1. **Increased transparency and alignment on availability and reporting of digital health resources and unfunded priorities**.

2. **Improved alignment, collaboration, and knowledge exchange** on standards based and deliberate technical assistance between countries, development and technical partners supporting national digital health transformation.

3. **Strengthened enabling environment for sustained whole-of-government approaches** to national Digital Health Governance.

4. **Increased technical and financial support for the accelerated achievement of the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020 – 2025** and its next phase.

5. **Strengthened country ownership of quality assured investments in digital health implementation** needed to sustainably accelerate national health priorities.[5]

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[5] Digital implementation investment guide: integrating digital interventions into health programmes. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020. Licence: _CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO_.

Addressing FAQs

The Role of G20
The GIDH seeks the political, financial, technical support of the G20 member-countries, and will continue to seek continuity in that support under future G20 presidencies. No privileged oversight is afforded to these member-countries beyond participation in established WHO processes, through the World Health Assembly. Member-countries will be encouraged to use the Country Resource Portal to document their commitments (financial and in-kind) to digital health transformation.

Data protection
Using established WHO processes, GIDH will only collect voluntarily provided data needed to evaluate and help guide investments and technical support in digital health. Through its collaborative efforts and convening of global and regional stakeholders, GIDH will promote open health data standards, incorporate best practices and lessons learned from countries. GIDH will not be collecting individual data in any of its activities. It will not interfere with individual countries' sovereign laws, regulations & initiatives to protect health data, ensuring the privacy & security of individuals' personal health information which have been set up to enable appropriate data exchange for healthcare purposes such as GDPR by EU, HIPAA by USA, PIPEDA by Canada etc.

Quality Assured Digital Solutions
The GIDH will promote equitable access to quality assured digital solutions leveraging WHO norms, standards, and guidance to strengthen global alignment in the vision and implementation of digital services and applications, moving away from a product-focused digital health transformation. As part of the GIDH Transformation Toolbox, the existing WHO Digital Health Clearinghouse will be promoted and leveraged as a repository of curated digital solutions which countries and their partners can leverage to guide and inform quality assured digital health transformation which addresses national needs. The GIDH will not promote individual digital health tools and technologies.

Democratization of digital health technologies
GIDH will accelerate democratization of digital health technologies by enabling global use of quality assured solutions curated through the WHO Digital Health Clearinghouse. This is envisioned to enhance access and contextualizing of digital tools by local developers and ultimately empower countries to enhance local capacity to develop, maintain and adapt digital health technologies to continuously changing needs.

Country Needs Tracker & Country Resource Portal
A platform will be co-created with digital health stakeholders to strengthen visibility on resources mobilized for digital health transformation and their alignment with existing country priorities. Countries will be invited to publish their priorities. If resources can be mapped to these country priorities, the respective development partners will be encouraged to engage in bilateral dialogue – without GIDH's engagement unless requested for. GIDH will promote development partners to support unfunded priorities identified through the platform. Governments and development partners will be expected to engage their ministries and divisions that are leading digital health transformation to ensure alignment with efforts of the GIDH.

Financing

An annual operating budget of an estimated USD 14 million will be needed to support the implementation of the four pillars, managed by the WHO Secretariat at global and regional level. The implementation of investments published in the Country Resource Portal will be managed by partnerships created between the development partner and respective countries and their technical partners. (see Table 1)

Table 1. GIDH Annual operating budget

Global Initiative on Digital Health Workstream	Annual budget (USD)
Secretariat, Country Needs Tracker & Country Resource Portal (Development, maintenance, and reporting)	5 million
Transformation Toolbox (Digital Health Atlas, Digital Health Clearinghouse, Digital Health Competency Framework, Digital Health Strategy & Policy Repository, Digital Health Maturity Model)	4 million
Communities of Practice and Network Convergence	1.5 million
Regional Capacity development	3.5 million
Grand total	**14 million**

The funding required for the operation of the GIDH secretariat – including staff and operations – will be derived from funding allocated to support the Department of Digital Health and Innovations at WHO – partially through assessed contributions (if available), philanthropic support and voluntary contributions.

The Network

The GIDH will be set up as a WHO Managed Network of Networks, following an existing structure and mechanism with a lean management mechanism approved by WHO Member States (e.g. the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network). GIDH will not be a separate legal entity and will derive its legal status from WHO. Thus, it shall be administered and housed in WHO. The operations of GIDH shall in all respects be administered in accordance with the WHO Constitution and General Programme of Work, WHO's Financial and Staff Regulations and Rules, WHO's manual provisions, and applicable WHO rules, policies, procedures, and practices. Participation in GIDH will be open to any network and non-state actor that has an interest in furthering the aims of the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025. Individuals will not be eligible for membership.

Administration

A lean GIDH Secretariat will be hosted in the WHO Department of Digital Health and Innovation, Science Division in WHO Headquarters with technical focal points placed in the six WHO regional offices to strengthen alignment with country needs and priorities. In the coming months, WHO will finalize the formal mechanism to further guide the set-up of the Secretariat, the Steering Committee, membership terms and activities under the four foundational pillars mentioned above. This process will be guided by and leverage global expertise and lessons learned in alignment of

digital health investments, included but not limited to the Principles for Digital Development.[6] To ensure widespread ownership, an inclusive and transparent co-creation process will be used to develop these mechanisms.

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[6] Principles for Digital Development. https://digitalprinciples.org/