Transform Health

STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON DIGITAL HEALTH (PROPOSED BY THE G20)

REPORT FROM MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Executive summary

- In March 2023, more than 80 stakeholders from over 50 organisations were consulted on the Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH) proposed by the G20. The multi-stakeholder consultation was convened by [Transform Health](#) through a virtual workshop and online survey.
- Stakeholders welcomed the proposed GIDH and its potential to help close existing funding gaps and accelerate the equitable digital transformation of health systems, particularly in low and middle-income countries (LMICs), while also sharing recommendations to guide its development and implementation.
- Stakeholders would like to see the Initiative set a **bold, global vision** for the digital transformation of health, and also deliver **tangible outcomes** for LMICs in areas such as:
  - Increasing the capacity of governments and their partners to build stronger and more equitable digitally-enabled health systems;
  - Strengthening global governance and regulatory frameworks for digital technologies and data; and
  - Establishing sustainable investment models to support the development and implementation of digital health strategies.
- The GIDH should **align** with existing initiatives - notably the WHO's digital health strategy - and help to improve coordination and alignment between different initiatives and networks.
- The GIDH should be grounded in existing **principles** for digital development, data governance and donor alignment as well as human rights.
- The Initiative and its governance **structure** should reflect the diverse ecosystem of global, regional and national stakeholders involved in digital health, including end users.
- Funding mobilised through the GIDH should primarily support the development and implementation of **national digital health strategies**. Priority should be given to **LMICs** who are most off-track to achieve UHC and with lowest levels of digital health maturity. Funding streams could also be made available for other organisations to deliver activities that support national digital health strategies and/or cross-border goals.

Background

'Digital health innovations and solutions to aid universal health coverage and improve healthcare service delivery' has been identified as a priority for India's Presidency of the G20. Under this priority area, the Indian Presidency has proposed the creation of a Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH) to harmonise the global digital health landscape.

The Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare invited Transform Health to organise a multi-stakeholder consultation on the proposed GIDH, which included a virtual consultation and online survey. Transform Health is a global coalition of more than 100 organisations that advocates for the equitable digital transformation of health systems to achieve health for all. The coalition recently launched a report, *Closing the digital divide: More and better funding for the digital transformation of health*, which provided further background for the consultation. The report estimates an investment need of approximately US$ 12.5 billion for five years to support priority investment areas in LMICs and sets out recommendations to guide investments and action to support the equitable, inclusive and sustainable digital transformation of health systems.

Coalition partners and other stakeholders shared their feedback on six aspects of the GIDH: the scope of the Initiative; how it should align with other initiatives and principles; how it should be governed; the role of different stakeholders; how funding should be mobilised and distributed; and how the success of the Initiative should be measured.

Over 50 people, representing more than 40 organisations, participated in the virtual consultation on 24th March. The online survey, which was open for over a two-week period, had 29 respondents. Feedback was received from individuals from across the globe and representing a diverse range of sectors including civil society, bilateral donors, multilateral agencies, health implementing organisations, regional digital health networks, youth networks, academic institutions and technical agencies.

Summary of stakeholder recommendations on the Global Initiative on Digital Health

1) Scope of the Initiative

- The Initiative should **set a bold, global vision for the digital transformation of health systems** that will align partners from across the digital health ecosystem and be sustained across G20 presidencies.
- The GIDH should deliver **tangible outcomes**, particularly for primary health care and universal health coverage in LMICs.
- The GIDH should not focus on the development or deployment of individual digital health solutions or public goods since the needs of countries vary considerably and will continue to evolve over time. Instead, the Initiative should focus on the big picture, i.e. setting up the foundations of modern health systems through investing in the **building blocks for the equitable and sustainable digital transformation of health systems**.
- The GIDH could add particular value by:
  - Increasing the **capacity of LMIC** governments and their partners to build more resilient and equitable digitally-enabled health systems;
  - Supporting LMICs to develop, implement and monitor **national digital health strategies** and reducing barriers to equitable digital transformations of health;
  - Establishing **sustainable investment**

models to support the development and implementation of digital health strategies in LMICs;
- Strengthening **global governance** and regulatory frameworks for digital technologies, data and AI. For example:
  - Strengthening global oversight and accountability of public and private actors (including Big Tech) involved in digital health;
  - Strengthening and harmonising regulation and certification of digital health tools including digital public goods;
  - Accelerating the development of global standards on cross-border issues such as health data governance, interoperable health information systems, the use of AI in healthcare, and genomics;
- Improving **interoperability** and the secure/ethical transfer of health data between different systems;
- Establishing global **communities of practice** that bring together national governments, regional networks, and other digital health stakeholders to support peer learning, knowledge sharing and tailored technical support.

2) **Alignment** with existing initiatives and principles

- The GIDH should align with other initiatives that are also seeking to harness digital transformations in support of UHC. In particular, it should support delivery of the **WHO's Global Strategy on Digital Health** and its main objectives on promoting global cooperation; advancing the implementation of digital health strategies; strengthening governance; and supporting people-centred, digitally-enabled health systems.

- The GIDH should help to **reduce fragmentation and duplication** within the digital health ecosystem by improving coordination and alignment between different global/regional initiatives and networks.

- Existing **principles**, such as the **Principles for Digital Development**, **Digital Investment Principles** and **Health Data Governance Principles**, should form the foundation of the GIDH since they reflect the core mission and values that stakeholders are collectively working towards.

- **Human rights** should be incorporated into the foundations of digital health transformation. The GIDH can help to ensure human rights protections are not an afterthought in digital health strategies and approaches.

- Core principles that should be considered include: data privacy and security; universality; equity; gender equality; sustainability; country leadership; and transparency.

- The GIDH should provide **practical tools and guidance** for countries and other stakeholders to accelerate UHC and implement agreed principles within their digital health investment strategies and programmatic activities.

- The GIDH should take care to **avoid** inadvertently supporting any digital or data practices that may pose harm or risk to individuals and the planet, violate ethical standards or privacy laws, or perpetuate technological biases and inequality.

3) **Governance** of the Initiative

- The creation of a new hosting organisation or funding instrument should be avoided because of the associated costs and further complexity it would create within the global health architecture. Rather, any such initiative should be hosted within an **existing organisation**, however, with independent governance and oversight.

- Different **governance structures** were proposed for the GIDH - both more and less formal - with inspiration from models used by other global health initiatives.

- Some suggested that any governance structure should be developed around a c**ollective impact model** where different partners contribute to a common goal.

- The GIDH's structures should reflect a **partnership approach** with mechanisms for meaningful multi stakeholder engagement and input.

- Whatever the structure, there should be some kind of **inclusive oversight and decision-making** body to provide overall strategic direction to the Initiative. This structure should support **open and transparent** governance and encourage consensus-based decision-making.

4) Role of different stakeholders in the Initiative

- The GIDH, including its governance structure, should **reflect the diverse ecosystem of global**, regional and national stakeholders involved in digital health, including end users. A special effort should be made to safeguard the representation of **groups that are at greatest risk of being left behind** in the digital transformation of health, or that play a key role in the future of digital health, e.g. people living with disabilities, women, people living in rural areas, and young people.

- Different constituencies should have **equal representation and decision-making powers** and they should be selected through a transparent process to represent their constituency, with clearly defined terms.

- **Private sector** involvement in the GIDH will be critical but mechanisms must be set up to prevent conflicts of interest.

- A group of **technical experts**, representing all regions and stakeholder groups, should be established to assess the quality of funding proposals.

5) Closing the **funding gap** for the digital transformations of health

- The GIDH can support LMICs to close their funding gaps through **mobilising** *additional* **resources** and through **better coordinated funding**.

- By **pooling funds** and allocating them towards areas of greatest need, the Initiative can help to increase the impact of external funding and reduce duplication. Mobilising new funds can also stimulate increased domestic and private investments and more public-private partnerships.

- Funding could be mobilised from a mixture of public and private sources: primarily G20 governments, multilateral agencies, the private sector, and foundations. **All countries** should be encouraged to contribute to the GIDH whether it is through financial resources, technical support and/or human resources.

- Funding allocated through the GIDH should be aligned with **aid effectiveness principles.** Short-term, unpredictable grants should be avoided in favour of more long-term, sustainable funding.

- Stakeholders had different views on what should be funded by the GIDH. Some respondents suggested that the Initiative could help leverage resources for digital solutions to tackle a specific health issue. The majority however wanted to see the Initiative prioritise **foundational investments in digitally-enabled health systems and an enabling environment** for more equitable and effective digital transformations of health that accelerate UHC.

- Funding should be responsive to country demand, however, structures and/or incentives could be put in place to ensure that proposals are aligned to agreed **principles** and aimed at **reducing inequities in coverage/access** to digital health.

- The Initiative should primarily **support LMIC governments** who are most off-track to achieve UHC and with lowest levels of digital health maturity. Complementary funding streams could also be made available for other organisations to deliver activities that support national digital health strategies and/or cross-border goals.

- Other areas that the Initiative could support include:
  - Strengthening WHO's capacity to provide technical and normative guidance to countries;
  - Developing global standards and regulations on priority, cross-border issues such as health data governance;
  - Strengthening global oversight and accountability of public and private actors involved in digital health;
  - Facilitating peer learning, knowledge sharing and tailored technical support;
  - Grants for civil society, researchers and innovators to support national digital transformation and accountability efforts.

- The GIDH can encourage more timely and accurate **tracking and reporting of domestic and donor investments** in digital health. Increased transparency will in turn help countries to better understand the costs of different interventions and improve future budgeting of digital health strategies.

- **Funding for the GIDH** itself should come from contributions from governments and other stakeholders. Every effort should be made to keep the costs of running the Initiative to a minimum. There does not necessarily need to be one centralised fund but there must be strong oversight mechanisms to manage, track and allocate resources.

6) Measuring the impact of the Initiative

- Creating an inclusive governance structure, clearly defined objectives and expectations, and transparent communication and reporting processes will help to ensure **mutual accountability** towards the common goals of the Initiative and build trust between stakeholders.

- The **medium-to-long term success** of the GIDH should ultimately be based on the extent to which it supports stronger and more sustainable health systems and contributes to improved health and wellbeing outcomes for people living in LMICs.

- The **impact of investments** in areas such as health system strengthening, governance and digital health architectures may not be easy to measure in the short term. **Baselines and measurable objectives** for the GIDH will therefore have to be carefully established through an inclusive process.

- **Targets and indicators** should be collectively agreed to assess the impact of the GIDH against core principles such as equity, inclusion, human rights and gender equality.

- **Progress reports** should be submitted to the Initiative's governance structure and G20 leaders at regular intervals.

- Clear policies and mechanisms should be in place to **avoid conflicts of interest**.

- Countries and partners involved in the GIDH should **share their knowledge and learnings** with the Initiative and the wider digital health community.

About Transform Health

Transform Health is a global coalition of 100+ organisations advocating for the equitable, sustainable and inclusive digital transformation of health systems – to achieve health for all.
Learn more at **transformhealthcoalition.org**.

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