
WHO and HL7 Collaborate to Support Adoption of Open Interoperability Standards



Recognizing the importance of interoperability standards in digital health transformation, WHO and standards-development organization, Health Level Seven International (HL7®), signed a [Project Collaboration Agreement](#) to support the adoption of open interoperability standards, globally. Adoption of interoperability standards are critical for consistent representation of data and information in health. This consistency allows for various digital health solutions to seamlessly communicate and exchange information, enabling and supporting continuity of care at all levels of the health system, regardless of the software used. For example, interoperable digital solutions can ensure that information from a primary care provider can be easily shared with a specialist health care provider, which is needed as part of the referral process.

Outlined in the [Global strategy on digital health 2020-2025](#), there is a call for WHO to provide global guidance on interoperability standards adoption and guidance on how WHO clinical, public health and data guidance can be translated into digital health systems. To support implementation of the Global Strategy on Digital Health, WHO has established [the SMART Guidelines](#) approach. SMART Guidelines encode packages of WHO evidence-based recommendations and clinical and public health protocols into decision support logic, data dictionaries and computable care plans using interoperability standards. One of the principal interoperability standards used for person-centered digital solutions is HL7 Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR®), which is an API-based open data exchange standard.

HL7 International is a non-profit standards development organization whose vision is to create a world in which everyone can securely access and use the right health data when and where they need it. Widely implemented by vendors and healthcare systems, HL7 standards, including FHIR, empower global health data interoperability.

The objectives of the collaboration between WHO and HL7 International are to:

1. Strengthen implementation of the WHO Global strategy on digital health 2020-2025 at country level and build capacity to support the adoption and appropriate use of interoperability standards in Member States in an equitable manner.
2. Increase access to WHO's guidance and recommendations through developing interoperability specifications that are applicable globally and suited for local adaptation.
3. Support the use of [WHO Family of international classifications and terminologies \(WHO-FIC\)](#) in the HL7 FHIR community.
4. Make available the technical infrastructure (e.g. sandbox testing environment) and documentation to support interoperability.

This collaboration between WHO and HL7 International builds on the leadership of WHO's Science Division support to Member States on their journey of digital health system transformation. It will further enable the equitable development of and access to, health interoperability standards, evidence-based guidance, and foundational architectural building blocks for digital health, to accelerate progress towards Universal Health Coverage.

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