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## On the Brink of a Digital Health Revolution: The Risk of Leaving Millions Behind



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Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, was pleased to announce the generous hosts of Second WHO Symposium on the Future of Digital Health Systems in the European Region have signed a letter of intent with the Portuguese Government to open a new WHO Country Office in Porto, Portugal. The new office will be focusing on a special project related to health technology and entrepreneurship in a significant step in addressing healthcare challenges and promoting innovation in the region.

Dr. Kluge has raised crucial questions and considerations regarding the digital health revolution: "Will its advantages be accessible to all?"; "Will the security of our data be guaranteed?"; "What impact will it have on the healthcare workforce?"

As the future becomes digital, we must ensure equitable access to the benefits of digital health and the need for efforts to ensure that everyone can enjoy these advancements.

The release of the WHO/Europe report on the state of digital health in the region is a significant step toward comprehending the current landscape and addressing the challenges that lie ahead. They must be addressed to unleash the potential of digital tools and interventions to improve overall health and well-being.

The European Region has a strong foundation for leading in digital health. Many countries in the European Region already have a digital health strategy, use some form of electronic health records, and have legislation safeguarding the privacy of personal data.

However, only half the EU countries have policies to improve digital health literacy. Closing the gap in digital health literacy policies is a significant step toward leaving no one behind in the digital health revolution.

It's an unfortunate paradox that individuals with limited or no digital skills are the ones could gain the most from digital health tools. This particularly applies to vulnerable groups, including the elderly, disabled individuals, and those residing in rural areas. Addressing this disparity is crucial for the successful digital transformation of the healthcare sector.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital health tools. However, this adoption was often driven by short-term needs rather than long-term strategic planning. A recurring challenge was the limited financial resources available for the monitoring and evaluation of digital health interventions required to ultimately improve patient care.

Artificial intelligence is reshaping healthcare, but its rise and adoption need to be carefully regulated. Several key actions are necessary including: regulation and governance, collaboration and consensus, and inclusivity.

To fully realise the full potential of digital health we need to invest in the necessary infrastructure to ensure that reliable, low-cost broadband internet can reach every household and every community across our Region. Governments and health authorities must shift their perspective and consider digital health as a strategic long-term investment. We can only successfully implement digital health tools if we build and maintain trust in the digital health ecosystem. Finally, there needs to be extensive international collaboration and knowledge-sharing. For digital health tools to have a meaningful impact, they must be able to communicate across national and international boundaries.

Source: [WHO](#)

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