

# Global Digital Health Forum 2021 Brief

The Global Digital Health Network hosts the Global Digital Health Forum every December. Previously, the meeting was hosted in Washington, DC. The 2021 Global Digital Health Forum that was held virtually focused on digital health transformation in broad areas such as technology, data, processes, and organizational change with 2000+ participants. The Forum featured diverse and engaging sessions attended by government stakeholders, digital health developers, researchers, donors, implementers, and field experts from across the globe. The Forum featured panel presentations, hands-on workshops, poster presentations, lightning talks, expert round-table discussions, digital health workshops, and interactive solution demonstrations. This document provides some of the key highlights of the Forum proceedings.

# PEOPLE-CENTRED APPROACHES

Designing and implementing digital health solutions should focus on patients, families, communities, and health workers who need to be prepared to deploy or use digital health technologies in their work or to access services and information. Leveraging people-centred designs to create public health products and services starts with understanding the needs of the people for more effective and scalable solutions. 'For example, if people are not taking their medication, they need to take their medication. I think we can start here to design with the user. To get solutions to scale, we need to start at a point of What do our patients and citizens need? What is going to make their life better?' said Debbie Rogers, Chief Executive Officer, Praekelt. Thus, the focus should be on what communities need (especially those who have been left behind, such as youth, women, and girls, LGBTQI and people with disabilities), how these solutions will improve their wellbeing, accelerate existing health services, amplify universal health coverage, and increase meaningful participation. To do this requires integrating these changes within existing health systems as an advisor from USAID notes. 'Through the USAID Vision for Digital Health, we understand the environment of the countries we are working in. That means that we are working with digital health strategies. We are trying to build infrastructure. We also try to use technologies we have used before,' Merrick Schaefer, Senior Digital Health Advisor, USAID.

## Key Highlights

- Improve digital health literacy. Deliberate efforts to improve communities' digital health literacy can help inform, motivate, and empower to negotiate and minimize/circumvent the dangers of using digital tools, such as excluding consumers due to language or access to software or hardware. Furthermore, digital technologies such as artificial intelligence could exacerbate or reinforce inequalities and biases in healthcare. The public and private sectors can work together to improve the digital curriculum in schools and provide digital skills training. Health workers, essential to their communities, are equipped and supported to build resilience.
- Digital implementers should strive for forward-looking solutions that meet the needs of health workers and provide adequate supportive supervision, mentorship, and training.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has fast-tracked digital health innovation; however, the more benefits these innovations bring, the greater the urgency to identify models that ensure the most vulnerable are not left further behind. 'The consumer is shifting to be in the middle of decision making. So they need to be empowered to make the best decisions for their health. Our mantra is to meet the end-user where they are. However, not everybody has access to smartphones or the web. So the challenge for digital transformation is to go beyond smartphones. We also make sure that our content is designed for the end-user. For example, Viamo uses pre-recorded solutions to mitigate literacy challenges,' said Mercy Simiyu Country Representative Viamo Kenya and Somalia.

# PEOPLE-CENTRED APPROACHES

- Learn about the user and their context: There is a need to build digital health systems and solutions that involve the end-user from the start of the conversation to be part of the decision-making process—for example, using on-demand content in local languages such as AMPLIO an inclusive digital technology for sharing information with the world's hardest-to-reach communities by CARE and VSO. The initiative uses digital talking books to transform community conversations around adolescent sexual health and wellbeing.

## Related Presentations

- [Remote Digital Stewardship: Engaging Consumers and Health Workforce](#)
- [Leveraging Social Media Influencers to Gather User Feedback at Scale, to Optimize Chatbot Functional](#)
- [Reaching Adolescents in the Hardest-To-Reach Communities: VSO TALK and CARE Act With Her Projects](#)
- [Innovate, Iterate, and Accelerate: Co-Designing Digital Health Solutions with Youth in Latin America](#)
- [Do Client-Facing Digital Health Solutions Help or Harm Health Workers?](#)
- [Amplifying Participant Perspectives for Evidence-Informed Programming](#)
- [Learning More with AI Analytics: Optimizing Current Digital Ecosystems in Sierra Leone and Beyond](#)

# COVID-19 AND POST PANDEMIC

Covid-19 tested our capacity for emergency preparedness in healthcare service delivery. With this, there emerged numerous digital health solutions from around the globe. Some digital health solutions are successful, while others are less successful. The pandemic shows that we need horizontal digital health solutions grounded in universal health care systems that can manage day-to-day healthcare needs and unprecedented challenges like pandemics. This section provides some of the best practices for using digital technologies to manage COVID-19 to enable us to be pandemic resilient and prepared.

## Key Highlights

- Digital solutions are not equal. The focus should be on tools that foster efficiency. For example, remote tools offer freedom of movement to reach more people with minimal resources.
- Allow for linkages to systems for aggregate data reporting and access across different health systems to inform timely healthcare decisions and coordinated care. 'We coordinated closely with the various Ministries of Health to align the messaging and communication strategies to the national COVID-19 vaccine uptake plans. Our efforts contributed to increased attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions towards COVID-19 vaccines,' said Stephen Maina, Social Media Optimization Manager Population Services International.
- Maximize investments by creating solutions that can be adopted across implementers.
- COVID-19 has accelerated the development of digital health solutions. There is a need to build robust and self-organizing platforms that facilitate learning to 'bounce forward' investments rather than bounce back. That includes using a routine information system to understand how the situation is changing through continuous monitoring of the service delivery and utilization through connecting health systems. 'The connectivity we have today gives us ammunition to fight this pandemic in ways we never previously thought possible,' said Alain Labrique, the Johns Hopkins University Global-mHealth Initiative director.

# COVID-19 AND POST PANDEMIC

- Vaccine demand and acceptance challenges are adaptive and technical and thus require holistic approaches. Misinformation and disinformation have been the main barrier to vaccine demand and acceptance during the COVID-19 pandemic. 'The cornerstone for fighting misinformation is a strong public health information response system,' said Estelle Willie, Director, Health Policy and Communications, Communications, Policy and Advocacy, The Rockefeller Foundation.
- Maintaining strong partnerships with all players, including civil society, government, and the private sector, to increase the reach and impact of digital solutions. For example, to curb the COVID-19 misinformation on social media, the World Health Organisation partnered with tech and social media companies to increase and ease accessibility of accurate information. 'Today's social media age provides the ideal kindling for misinformation and mistrust to be spread in every single corner of the world. We are more connected now than we have ever been. In the midst of this, partnerships have been key in addressing misinformation and distrust,' said Andrew Pattison, Team Leader, Digital Channels and Leader of the Tech Task Force, World Health Organisation.

## Related Presentations

- [Insights on the Importance of Trust in Harnessing Social Media for Vaccine Confidence](#)
- [Digital Engagement for Risk Communication and Community Engagement Response to COVID-19](#)
- [Individual Presentations 4: Stopping Infectious Disease & Preparing for Epidemics](#)
- [Using Facebook To Build Trust in COVID-19 Vaccines Uptake](#)
- [Individual Presentations 17: Stopping Infectious Disease & Preparing for Epidemics](#)
- [Individual Presentations 29: Stopping Infectious Disease & Preparing for Epidemics](#)
- [Digital Engagement for Risk Communication and Community Engagement Response to COVID-19](#)
- [Individual Presentations 3: Stopping Infectious Disease & Preparing for Epidemics](#)
- [Individual Presentations 4: Stopping Infectious Disease & Preparing for Epidemics](#)
- [Say Hello to Bablibot \(Babybot\): An Artificially Intelligent Vaccines Chatbot](#)

# GOVERNANCE

Governance for digital health aims to strengthen the capabilities and skills needed for countries to promote, innovate, and bring digital health technologies to scale. Actions to enhance governance should include defining principles and reaching cross-sectoral and international agreements for data sharing, quality and accuracy of health data and prioritization of investment plans and policy.

## Key Highlights

- Breaking down silos by closing the digital divide will be essential in increasing access to digital health services, building trust in these tools, and scaling digital health solutions.
- Find visionary leaders and put the government in a leading and coordinating position: Identify and build trust with visionary leaders with the government's ultimate goal of having a sense of ownership of these digital health solutions. For instance, The President's Malaria Initiative and Digital Square's Digital Community Health Initiative Ideal State Framework and Living Goods' Digital Health Tools: Maturity Model and Toolkit. This innovative framework harnesses three components: people, the training and technical support needed for actors involved in digitizing community health or the policies, strategies for digitizing community health and systems, the data flow, and interoperability between these tools. Key lessons learned for digitizing community health include including the user in digitizing community health, identifying the key investment areas for operationalization of this vision, and establishing a vision and objectivity for digitizing community health considering people, governance, and systems.
- Put the right digital infrastructure in places such as access to energy for digital inclusion and reliable and affordable power.
- For tech to be trustworthy, partnerships involving researchers, civil society organizations, and governments need to be involved in technical innovation to maximize impact and deliver effective service.

# GOVERNANCE

## Related Presentations

- [Top 5 Challenges in Digital Health Today](#)
- [Digitizing Healthcare Delivery Through Public-Private Partnerships to Achieve UHC in Uganda](#)
- [USAID Keynote](#)
- [What is the Ideal State? Leveraging People, Governance, Systems to Digitize Community Health Systems](#)
- [AeHIN Regional Enterprise Architecture Council for Health-Sharing Experts Across Asia](#)
- [Individual Presentations 13: Making Healthcare Fairer and More Equitable](#)
- [Managing Multiple Health Financing Schemes Using openMIS - Experiences from Cameroon](#)
- [Individual Presentations 34: Strengthening Digital Health Ecosystems](#)
- [What is the Ideal State? Leveraging People, Governance, Systems to Digitize Community Health Systems](#)
- [Improving Health Information Systems Using the 'Stages of Continuous Improvement' Tool](#)
- [Individual Presentations 13: Making Healthcare Fairer and More Equitable](#)
- [The Big Picture of Human Resources for Health Data: Global Transformation of HRH Information Systems](#)
- [Cultivating Successful Transition of Digital Systems to Government for Long-term Sustainability](#)
- [Individual Presentations 33: Strengthening Digital Health Ecosystems](#)
- [Individual Presentations 5: Strengthening Digital Health Ecosystems](#)

# CYBERSECURITY AND BIG DATA

Cybersecurity is critical to healthcare service delivery safety but has often been underestimated. This requires cybersecurity to become an integral part of patient safety through changes in human behaviour, technology, and processes as part of a holistic solution. To achieve this, the future of big data, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity in healthcare should be comprehensive, evidence-based, personalized, and combine the best available scientific knowledge and professional experience to benefit individual patients. Cybersecurity presents the opportunity to provide more accurate diagnoses through optimized decision-making to bring about better medical treatments to patients while protecting patients' data from cyber threats. 'We need to look at cybersecurity as a thread that runs through digital solutions to ensure resilience and digital sustainability. Adaptation of cybersecurity threats will require partnerships and collaboration,' said Rebecca Saxton-Fox, Lead, Development Informatics Team, USAID.

## Key Highlights

- To increase the uptake of digital solutions within communities and sustain trust in digital health, policymakers and innovators must protect privacy and security.
- A rights-based framework will be critical to ensure that laws and policies protect data privacy.
- The data sets need to be broader and more robust to make sense of the available health data to inform healthcare decisions. Data barriers such as incomplete or low quality and siloed processes limit data interoperability and portability.
- Healthcare organizations must evolve their approach and implement more robust security systems that encompass broader ecosystems, including partner organizations. New models and policies must ensure that the partner organizations joining the digital health ecosystem adhere to the same security standard.
- Increasing security awareness and promotion of solid security behaviours augments technical cybersecurity controls. At the same time, implementing multiple layers of security controls prevents internal and external attacks.

## Related Presentation

[Healthcare Re-coded](#)