

Moscow DIGITAL4NCD Conference Statement

WHO European Conference on Tackling Noncommunicable Diseases through Digital Solutions

European Response to Noncommunicable Diseases 4.0: 10 years following the Moscow Declaration Viewed through the Lens of the European Programme of Work

Moscow, Russian Federation

14–15 December 2021

We, ministers of health and representatives of the Member States of the World Health Organization in the European Region, experts and non-state actors have gathered in Moscow, Russian Federation, and online on 14 and 15 December 2021 to accelerate our efforts to address noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) through digital solutions.

In so doing, we reaffirm our commitment made at the World Health Assembly and in United Nations General Assembly resolutions on NCDs, digital health and universal health coverage. This brings together commitments made 10 years ago in the Moscow Declaration, issued at the First Global Ministerial Conference on Healthy Lifestyles and Noncommunicable Disease Control (Moscow 28–29 April 2011), along with priorities outlined in the WHO European Programme of Work 2020–2025 – "United Action for Better Health in Europe", especially its Digital Health flagship initiative. We recognize the value of digital technologies in their contribution to the advancing of universal health coverage and other health aims of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We shall continue to assess our use of digital technologies for tackling NCDs and to prioritize, as appropriate, the development, evaluation, implementation, scale-up and greater use of digital health technologies. We continue to rely on WHO for the provision of normative guidance in this area, including through the promotion of evidence-informed digital health interventions.

Digital health solutions support the further implementation of the Moscow Declaration, the Ashgabat Declaration on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases, United Nations high-level meetings and other existing resolutions at all levels related to NCDs. We are resolved to strengthen our contribution to the United Nations SDG target of universal health coverage by 2030, leaving no one behind.

Notwithstanding the damage that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused, we recognize the opportunity and are resolute in utilizing the potential of digital health solutions in equitable bridging of health system shortcomings, especially in access to care and lack of health workers, in order to take meaningful action for NCDs at individual and societal levels across the WHO European Region. Such action is in line with the WHO European Programme of Work and promotes delivery of its three core priorities: moving towards universal health coverage, protecting against health emergencies and promoting health and well-being.

1. We recognize that NCDs are the leading cause of death and disability worldwide and pose major challenges to health and well-being in the WHO European Region as well as to the attainment of the SDGs.
2. We see that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed our citizens, especially those suffering from NCDs, to considerable challenges in access to health-care services and health information, including increased risk of exacerbation of previous conditions and the failure to diagnose onset of new ones. People living with NCDs are also at much higher risk of adverse outcomes when infected with SARS-CoV-2, and subsequent COVID-19 is exacerbated in those with NCDs. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been exacerbated by failures to tackle NCD risk factors and prevent NCDs in the past.
3. Some of the most successful methods to tackle challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic include innovative digital tools and technologies. The WHO European Region has been hit hard by the pandemic but it has also been the WHO region where digital health has been most frequently used as a mitigation strategy and as a solution for many arising wicked problems. In many countries, responses included accelerating progress through the use of digital technologies in many areas, including health-care service provision and data gathering. However, this might also have increased inequalities within and between Member States in the implementation and use of digital health.
4. We acknowledge that the current crisis presents a unique opportunity to address long-standing systemic problems and deficiencies in health services for people living with NCDs. Grasping this opportunity will require increased investment in health workers and their continued education. The current context also presents a possibility to accelerate the implementation of innovative interventions at individual and societal levels, including appropriate use of digital technologies and interventions targeted to reach those who are most vulnerable. We commit to working together to reduce inequalities between and within countries, including inequalities in access and use of digital solutions.
5. We recognize that Member States across the WHO European Region have adopted strategies reflecting the strategic objectives of the WHO Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025 by using the WHO and International Telecommunication Union National eHealth Strategy Toolkit in order to strengthen governance for digital health at global, regional and national levels and to advocate people-centred health systems that are enabled by digital health.
6. We see that advances in digital technologies have revealed new opportunities for monitoring health, preventing and controlling NCDs and advancing universal health coverage. The European Programme of Work 2020–2025 outlines health-related priorities and empowerment through Digital Health is one of its four flagship initiatives. This provides technical and policy guidance and expertise on successful implementation of digital health solutions for our key health challenges.
7. We recognize that digital environments are ubiquitous and have become an important determinant of NCDs and health in general. We commit to working together to make digital environments healthier and safer for all.
8. We appreciate the ongoing efforts of the WHO Regional Office for Europe to raise the profile of digital health under the European Programme of Work even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Going forward, we commit to working with the WHO Regional Director for Europe and the WHO Secretariat in these initiatives to ensure that digital health gains the prominence and attention it requires in the WHO European Region.

The Conference has reached the following objectives.

1. Disruption of health services and reduced demand for them brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other shortcomings of health systems, have been addressed by some Member States through targeted communication with people living with NCDs as well as use of patient-to-provider telemedicine to increase access to health services. We commit to improving access and quality of care through such measures. Many

Member States have a shortage of qualified health workers and poor adherence to guidelines among some workers; they have overcome this to a certain degree through provision of online training and educational content as well as through digital solutions such as provider-to-provider telemedicine, decision-support systems and digital tracking. Insufficient supply of commodities caused by the global breakdown of supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic have been addressed through digital systems for stock notification and commodity management.

2. In order to promote global collaboration, advance the transfer of knowledge on digital health and advance the implementation of national digital health strategies, many representatives of Member States have shared their good practices and innovations in the drafting of national strategies and implementing digital health solutions for surveillance, prevention and control of NCDs. They have also expressed their willingness to share their knowledge and experience with other Member States where the introduction of digital solutions is just beginning.

3. WHO can support countries in successfully implementing digital health solutions for NCDs and building back better in the face of the pandemic through proactive education of decision-makers on the solutions and expertise available and provision of best practice examples, as well as by facilitating twinning projects between Member States.

The Conference has produced two main outputs: a collection of innovative digital health solutions for surveillance, prevention and control of NCDs and this Conference statement. In addition, an implementation guide highlighting practical steps to increase the uptake of digital solutions for NCD surveillance, prevention and control will be developed to complete Conference commitments.

The Conference statement can serve as a roadmap and pave the way for innovation and scaling up of digital technologies and tools for surveillance, prevention and control of NCDs.