

## **Regional Committee for Europe, 72nd Session**

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### **European Respiratory Society Statement on Digital Health**

The European Respiratory Society supports the draft regional action plan for the WHO European Region 2023-2030. Digital health provides a meaningful opportunity to assist patients and advance research across the European region. WHO's action plan can help countries to swiftly implement the digital transformation within their healthcare systems, while respecting the values of equity, solidarity and human rights. Given the experience with COVID-19, we submit that respiratory diseases both chronic and acute should be an area of focus in the action plan.

For the past two years, we have been facing challenges and disruption to healthcare due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the pandemic has also acted as a catalyst to unleash the untapped potential of digital health. We learnt that digital solutions must not only evolve with patients, but they must also be adapted to different diseases. Health systems need to work with patients to support them during the digitalisation process, building trust while guaranteeing that their rights to privacy are well protected. Furthermore, it is important that decisions on digital health are grounded on evidence of what works and what does not work, and we welcome the strong emphasis on evidence-building and evidence sharing.

It will be required to support national health systems not only with appropriate funding but also by creating and implementing all those infrastructures that are necessary for successful digital transition. Each country will require varying levels of support, depending on their current level of digitalisation, legislative process, capacity to train healthcare professionals and ability to properly inform patients. The issue of equity in access to digital services is a very important consideration and we fully support the statement of Eurohealthnet in this regard. We hope WHO will be sufficiently supported by Member States and donors to make this action plan a reality.

ERS agrees that international cooperation will be critical to implement the regional digital health action plan, as we are already witnessing with the European Commission on the development of the European Health Data Space

Respiratory practice has been and will continue to be transformed faster than anyone thought possible. It is an area that the WHO action plan can showcase and an area where the benefits but also challenges involved in digital transition can be highlighted. There will likely be a blended delivery of care in the aftermath of the pandemic, that includes both digital and non-digital components, to fit every patient's needs. Although we strongly support the digitalisation of the healthcare systems, we also recall that the human factor remains absolutely necessary to properly treat respiratory diseases.