

Written statement by the International Federation on Ageing

72nd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

Provisional Agenda Item 3: Regional digital health action plan for the WHO European Region 2023-2030

As an international non-governmental organization whose membership base comprises government, civil society, industry, academia and individuals, the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) appreciates the opportunity to provide a written statement at the 72nd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe regarding the *regional digital health action plan*.

The IFA's goal is to be the global point of connection and networks of experts and expertise to influence and shape age-related policy. Working towards this goal for the past 49 years, the IFA has consistently campaigned for the rights and choices of older people, ensuring they are both protected and respected to achieve a world of healthy older people by driving the agenda of ageing populations.

Population ageing is a demographic upheaval alongside urbanization and migration that is driving change in health and social systems policies. Digital health technologies, such as the vital role of telehealth in facilitating care delivery to older people in remote areas, present a promising future for healthcare systems. However, there are significant barriers to accessibility, such as the caveat of digital literacy for end-users – exacerbating the digital divide and health disparities, leaving older people and vulnerable populations at heightened risk.

Digital health technologies, when appropriately used with proper training and guiding resources, can help strengthen health emergency preparedness. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic propelled the advancement of technology within healthcare systems. Digital technology investments must be aligned with population and system needs and emerging capabilities and be supported by robust data collection and evaluation to provide better care for all including older people.

Just as crucial for the standardized adoption of digital health is interdisciplinary collaboration and communication on a regional, national, and global scale. Inclusive mechanisms that engage a broad range civil society including patient associations, policy makers, advocacy organizations, and community groups across sectors and disciplines help inform digital health action plans which are essential for long-term success.

In the context of older people, digital health including artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, health information systems, and telemedicine enables older adults to maintain their autonomy and dignity. Ensuring integrated care through technology for older persons reflects a continuum of care to help reorient health and social services toward a more person-centered and coordinated model that supports optimizing the intrinsic capacity and functional ability of older people.

In summary, the potential benefits of the digital health action plan to improve the health and well-being of the public is crucial and needs to be balanced with the values of equity, solidarity, and human rights. The International Federation on Ageing calls upon the WHO and other agencies across Europe and globally to equitably and effectively incorporate digital health and emerging innovations to strengthen national health systems to sustainably improve people's health and well-being, including older adults, through an equity lens.