

Health promotion and prevention in the digital era

Leveraging potential, reducing risks

In June 2026, the EuroHealthNet Annual Seminar explored the challenges and opportunities of [Health Promotion and Prevention in the Digital Era](#), and made three calls for action at EU and Member State-level:

1. [Create environments that are safe and allow for healthy digital behaviours](#)
2. [Tackle the commercial drivers of digital harms](#)
3. [Protect real-world human connection, capabilities, and wellbeing](#)

The opportunities and the challenges in the digital era

Artificial intelligence, social media, and digital technologies have significant potential to support health promotion and disease prevention - such as in the areas of social connection, tobacco cessation, strengthening immunisation strategies and workplace health promotion. At the same time, excessive screen time and sedentary behaviours are undermining active lifestyles and negatively affecting mental wellbeing. Unhealthy design features on digital platforms place undue pressure on users of all ages through mechanisms that maximise engagement and misleading marketing techniques. Exposure to misinformation and harmful content, cyberbullying and weak protections for privacy and personal data are also creating new risks for health.

The EU has begun to address these issues through several key instruments. The [Digital Services Act](#) provides a framework that requires very large online platforms to address illegal and harmful content and reduce risks to users, particularly children and young people, while the forthcoming Digital Fairness Act, aims to address manipulative and addictive platform design, The [EU AI Act](#) sets rules for artificial intelligence to ensure safety, transparency, and the protection of fundamental rights. The [Audiovisual Media Service Directive](#) sets rules for the EU media sector and video-sharing platforms, which is currently under [review](#) to, among others, ensure adequate protections for viewers,

while the [Action Plan against Cyberbullying](#) seeks to strengthen prevention, protection, and reporting mechanisms for online harm affecting children and young people.

Together, these instruments provide a potentially strong basis for improving user protection and platform accountability. However, their impact will depend on the robust implementation and enforcement of health and wellbeing considerations in digital policymaking and in holding tech companies legally responsible from harms arising from their products and services. In addition, the European Commission's aim to simplify digital legislation as part of the [Digital Omnibus Regulation package](#) shouldn't undermine efforts to strengthen regulation for digital wellbeing.

Against this backdrop and marking the 40th anniversary of the WHO Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, the EuroHealthNet Annual Seminar 2026 on [Health Promotion and Prevention in the Digital Era](#) convened more than 300 participants from public authorities, international organisations, academia, and civil society. The seminar explored how digitalisation and artificial intelligence can be leveraged to support health promotion and disease prevention while addressing potential risks and inequalities. As a follow-up, the EuroHealthNet Partnership made the three key asks presented in this document.

From fragmented to coherent action that embeds health promotion and prevention in the digital and AI transformation

Key asks

1. Create environments that are safe and allow for healthy digital behaviours

- **Adopt a comprehensive approach to digital wellbeing.**

Digital wellbeing needs to be integrated across all environments, recognising that its impacts extend beyond online spaces into the physical and social settings where digital technologies are used, including schools, workplaces, homes, and community settings. Approaches should therefore go beyond singular measures such as bans. Digital wellbeing should be embedded in public health and mental health strategies through monitoring systems that capture both risks and benefits of digital and AI technologies.

- **Strengthen competences in digital spaces - including digital health literacy, critical AI literacy and digital citizenship.**

Population-wide digital health literacy, critical AI literacy and digital citizenship skills should be promoted across all age groups through schools, workplaces and community settings. Particular attention should be given to populations who often face greater exposure to misinformation, manipulative advertising and data-related risks, while having lower levels of digital access and skills.

- **Establish quality standards for digital and AI health applications**

EU-wide quality standards and certification schemes should be developed to improve the safety, effectiveness, accessibility and trustworthiness of digital and AI-driven health applications. This should include robust evidence requirements, transparency regarding algorithms and data use, user-centred design, and alignment with public health, prevention and equity objectives.

2. Tackle the commercial drivers of digital harms

- **Mobilise and enforce existing EU regulatory and policy frameworks to protect health and wellbeing, adopting a 'do no harm' principle**

A 'do no harm' principle to health should guide the implementation and enforcement of key EU policy and legal instruments, including the Digital Services Act, AI Act, the Digital Omnibus simplification processes, and the Audiovisual Media Service Directive. These frameworks should be used to mitigate risks linked to: harmful content; the online marketing and sale of health-harming products such as unhealthy food, alcohol, tobacco, nicotine products, gambling services and illegal vapes; and features of digital environments that contribute to loneliness, anxiety, sedentary behaviour, violence, bullying, sexual harassment, abuse, misinformation and poor mental health.

- **Provide evidence and strengthen accountability of digital platforms and commercial actors**

Provide evidence of the impact on health and wellbeing in a way that legislators can use to hold the platforms to account. Stronger governance and accountability is urgently needed to regulate recommender systems* that expose users, particularly minors, to harmful content; addictive design features that maximise screen time and engagement; and manipulative advertising practices that exploit behavioural vulnerabilities.

* Algorithmic tools used by digital platforms to decide what content, products, or contacts to show users

3. Protect real-world human connection, capabilities, and wellbeing

- **Embed (youth) participation in digital health and AI governance**

Community groups, including children and youth as well as older people and underserved or disadvantaged groups, should be systematically involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of digital health, AI and online safety policies and guidelines. EU and national authorities should support child, youth and family advisory structures, organised community spaces, and participatory mechanisms that enable groups to co-create safer and healthier digital environments.

- **Invest in offline environments that support wellbeing, skills, and resilience**

Digital wellbeing strategies that foster safe and positive online environments should be matched by investment in real-world opportunities for social connection, genuine relationships, skills building, and healthy development. This includes funding for sports and physical activity programmes, outdoor learning, nature-based activities, community initiatives, youth centres, and intergenerational spaces that strengthen social ties.

Exploring key intersections and improving coordinated action at local, national and EU-level are essential to better protect and improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities in the digital era. The WHO Ottawa Charter for health promotion remains a useful reference framework for this shift, helping to connect areas such as AI governance, digital inclusion, health literacy, community participation, and prevention-oriented health systems.

Interested in learning more?

- [‘Beyond Phone Bans’](#); EuroHealthNet’s statement on digitalisation and youth mental health.
- EuroHealthNet’s [consultation response to the EU’s Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#), calling for a public health and health equity perspective, along with updated definitions and regulations to reflect the changing landscape of media.
- A [joint call for an ambitious Digital Fairness Act](#) to better protect people online

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EuroHealthNet Annual Seminar

Health promotion and prevention in the digital era: from challenges to solutions

1 June 2026, Warsaw

View the recording at eurohealthnet.eu/2026-seminar



EuroHealthNet is a partnership of public organisations, institutes, and authorities working on public health, disease prevention, promoting health and wellbeing, and reducing inequalities. We aim to tackle health inequalities within and between European States through action on the social determinants of health. For further information and further references go to www.eurohealthnet.eu.



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