Joint Statement by EuroHealthNet and other Non-State Actors

72nd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

Provisional Agenda item 3 "Regional digital health action plan for the WHO European Region (EPW flagship)"

Dear Chair, Mr President, Regional Director, honourable ministers, representatives, and distinguished delegates of the WHO European Region Member States,

EuroHealthNet and co-signatories are delighted to have this opportunity to reflect on the regional digital health action plan, as well as recommend further ways forward. We welcome the plan, its guiding principles and its vision to improve health outcomes for everyone, everywhere, equitably. Indeed, without mindful and balanced implementation, the digital transition will leave people behind and exacerbate health inequalities.

The challenges are clear. While this is an exciting time for digital health, digital advances can be disruptive, particularly for health professionals and authorities who are already overstretched. A lack of capacity, training, and resources to ensure appropriate use of digital tools and technologies will have negative consequences, especially for patients and people in vulnerable situations. Lack of access to such tools and services exacerbates the digital divide, resulting in ever more inequitable health outcomes. If properly deployed, digital health tools can greatly support health systems, improve prevention and care, and increase equity, particularly in dealing with the burden of NCDs and mental health problems and supporting healthy behaviours.

Increasing digital health literacy is paramount to addressing digital health inequalities. People lower along social gradients tend to:

- Have higher disease burdens and health needs
- Experience greater digital exclusion, poorer access to and understanding of health information
- Be less aware of issues of privacy, data use, and data protection
- Be subject to misleading digital marketing and advertising

We welcome Strategic Priority 2's inclusion of digital health literacy, and recommend advancing it as the *foundation* of successful and *equitable* uptake and diffusion of digital health systems and solutions across society.

Furthermore, EuroHealthNet and co-signatories recommend elaborating on the following four elements:

1. A focus on up- and reskilling the European health workforce to support implementation of digital transitions in health ecosystems at all levels. This can be done by ensuring availability of tools and resources, such as those developed by the new, EU-funded "BeWell" initiative.
2. Clear digital health governance mechanisms to safeguard privacy and trust, and which also permit for meaningful and inclusive public and patient involvement in the digital health transformation and for consistent access to data for research across Member States.
3. Providing guidance for engaging with industry and establishing labelling and certification schemes to help identify trustworthy digital health tools and applications, as done by the new "Label2Enable" project.
4. Standardization of digital tools and technologies to foster greater accessibility, transferability, and integration, both across countries as well as sectors. Integration with digital *social* services and social service innovations is particularly critical.

Finally, taking forward Strategic Priority 3, we welcome alignment with the European Union's strategies and actions. In this regard, Non-State Actors have an important role to play building bridges and promoting dialogue. Our research, resources and networks offer rich insights and tools to be leveraged for the plan's implementation.

In summary, the regional digital health action plan is crucial to help steer the digital transformation and to put important safeguards on standards, privacy, inclusion, and equity. We reaffirm our commitment to support the plan's implementation and call upon you and our other partners across Europe and the globe to take advantage of all opportunities to translate it into practice. We hope further exchanges and meetings will be convened, to achieve an *equitable* digital health transition.

Tel Aviv, 12 September 2022

EuroHealthNet

Co-signatories

1. AGE Platform Europe

2. Alzheimer Europe

3. Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER)

4. European Cancer Organisation

5. European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA)

6. European Federation of the Associations of Dieticians (EFAD)

EuroHealthNet

7. European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN)

8. European Forum for Primary Care (EFPC)

9. European Hospital and Healthcare Federation (HOPE)

10. European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention (ENSP)

11. European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)

EuroHealthNet

12. European Public Health Association (EUPHA)

EUPHA
EUROPEAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

13. European Respiratory Society (ERS)

ERS

14. European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO)

ESMO
GOOD SCIENCE
BETTER MEDICINE
BEST PRACTICE

15. Health Action International (HAI)

HAI
HEALTH
ACTION
INTERNATIONAL

16. International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB)

IAPB

17. International Association for Hospice & Palliative Care (IAHPC)

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE

18. International Diabetes Foundation Europe Region (IDF Europe)

International Diabetes Federation Europe

EuroHealthNet

19. International Federation of Medical Students' Associations

IFMSA International Federation of Medical Students' Associations

20. International Federation on Ageing (IFA)

ifa International Federation on Ageing

21. Medicus Mundi International – Network Health for All

medicus mundi – italia

22. Mental Health Europe (MHE-SME)

M·H·E Mental Health Europe

23. Thalassaemia International Federation (TIF)

TIF THALASSAEMIA INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION

EuroHealthNet

24. Wemos Foundation

25. WONCA Europe

26. World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA)

27. World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA)

28. Worldwide Hospice Palliative Care Alliance (WHPCA)