



# Digital transformation for Universal Health Coverage

## A goal within reach

In September 2015, world leaders committed to universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although much progress has been made, approximately half of the world's population still lacks access to primary health care and at least 400 million people have no access to essential health services such as family planning, child immunization, and access to clean water and sanitation.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, each year about 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty due to unforeseen health expenditures.<sup>2</sup> If these trends continue, only half of the global population will have achieved UHC by 2030, falling far short of our goal.<sup>3</sup> COVID-19 has reminded us that strong and resilient healthcare systems are essential for global prosperity and that SDG 3 (health) is intrinsically linked to all of the other SDGs.

Digital technology, if effectively deployed, has the potential to expand the coverage of primary healthcare, strengthen health systems, reduce costs, improve quality of care and accelerate UHC, ensuring the world meets its 2030 target. This opportunity is greater now than ever, with the increasing penetration of mobile and digital technology offering opportunities to expand healthcare services in remote settings and to include those who were previously excluded.

### **The challenge**

Currently, digital technology is not being effectively harnessed to improve health outcomes, particularly in some of the least developed countries and for marginalized communities. Lack

of resources, weak capacity, and lack of training and development for health professionals is leading to low adoption and sustainability of digital technology.<sup>4</sup> Digital technology also has the potential to put people at the center of the healthcare system, giving them more control over their own health outcomes, and allowing the world to move from a disease-based approach to health to a people-centered approach. To achieve this will require the greater engagement of civil society in the elaboration of national health plans. Currently, inadequate consultation and engagement of local communities and marginalized groups in the planning and implementation of digital health programs are undermining local relevance and buy-in.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2015/uhc-report/en/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259817/9789241513555-eng.pdf;jsessionid=4087B521F765E2980BBACE400DD7B896?sequence=1>

<sup>3</sup> <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/260522/WHO-HIS-HGF-17.2-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/gS4dhdaa2a9f352b0445bafbc79ca799dce4d.pdf>

The adoption of human-centered design principles and approaches to ensure tailored solutions for different sets of beneficiaries could address this. The piecemeal approach from many donor-funded programs is compounding this issue, and increasing the transaction burden on local staff who are drawn into the implementation of donor-funded initiatives yet are unable to sustain the program once funding ends.

Many decision-makers in low-and-middle-income countries (LMICs) have yet to see the full benefit of digital technology, applied at scale, and covering the needs of an entire population. Therefore, many are not demonstrating the necessary leadership and support to enable domestic funding, coordination, and accountability to enable their health systems to adopt digital technology in a systematic manner. Similarly, a more comprehensive system-wide and country-led approach is required by donors rather than fragmented support for initiatives.

In order to meet the SDG commitments by 2030, governments around the world need to work together, along with the private sector and other key stakeholders, to support the least developed countries in accelerating the adoption of digital technologies to increase access to primary health care and ensure everyone benefits from UHC.

### The solutions

UHC is a goal shared by most governments around the world. To achieve UHC for all, we need greater collaboration across the public and private sectors to maximize the transformative opportunities of digital technology and data, and to mitigate any risks. All communities, including women, youth, and the most marginalized groups must be fully engaged in an inclusive and participatory manner to ensure the digital age supports health for all.

Governments need to create an enabling environment for the digital transformation of health systems to expand primary health care and achieve UHC by demonstrating political leadership and support, providing the right levels of funding, developing the right policies, regulations, and integrated health strategies that will enable all stakeholders to work together. Only then will we be able to achieve UHC by 2030.

## DCCC and Transform Health are calling for:

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1. Greater political commitment from governments in LMICs to fund and support inclusively developed national strategies for the equitable digital transformation of their health systems to accelerate UHC.
  2. Greater commitment from national authorities to work multi-sectorally by strengthening public-private-partnerships, and to include civil society and representatives from marginalized and traditionally excluded communities in the design, implementation, and governance of digital transformation processes.
  3. Increased donor funding to support LMIC governments to develop and implement innovative digital tools and data-driven decision making for overall health system strengthening.
  4. The consolidation and effective coordination of the multiple donor financing streams and mechanisms using technology to build transparency; increasing efficiency and reducing costs for all, in particular patients and healthcare providers, in low-income countries.
  5. Greater support for national and local governments to develop and implement policies, regulations, and health strategies to integrate digital technologies and accelerate the digital transformation of the system, which can further facilitate the expansion of digitally-enabled primary health care coverage to achieve UHC.
  6. Different stakeholders, such as private companies and NGOs, team up and develop ecosystem partnerships.

## How we are working together

Transform Health and the Digital Connected Care Coalition (DCCC) are part of a growing ecosystem of organizations and initiatives calling for greater support for the digital transformation of health systems in LMICs to ensure that we reach our 2030 commitment of UHC for all.

We are collaborating based on the shared belief that in a digital world, the transformation of health systems is necessary to provide quality care at scale to achieve and maintain UHC. We also believe that digital technology allows people to take more control over their own health and well-being.

Our respective coalitions are contributing to the digital transformation of health systems and the effective use of data to achieve UHC in different ways. The focus of **Transform Health** is on analysis, advocacy, and campaigning, with an emphasis on amplifying the voices of women, youth, and marginalized communities, who are traditionally left out of decision-making processes.

By building a movement of committed organizations, Transform Health aims to build public understanding and support for the equitable digital transformation of health systems and the responsible use of data to strengthen primary health care and achieve UHC.

**DCCC** is a growing global collaborative platform – already including private companies, investors, and non-governmental organizations – that work in the health space. The DCCC aims to accelerate the digital transformation of healthcare towards UHC in LMICs. It focuses on promoting synergistic actions across sectors, learning, and connecting for scale.

## Get involved!

Join us! DCCC and Transform Health welcome new members. We recognize that different organizations and institutions have different approaches to bring about change and achieve social good. Please feel free to contact either or both of us to find out how you can support the digital transformation of health systems to achieve UHC.

See more information in the attached DCCC leaflet and the link to TransformHealth website: [www.transformhealthcoalition.org](http://www.transformhealthcoalition.org)  
DCCC email address: [info@digitalconnectedcarecoalition.org](mailto:info@digitalconnectedcarecoalition.org)

