EU HEALTH COALITION

DIGITALLY-ENABLED HEALTHCARE: IS OUR ECOSYSTEM ON TRACK?

EVENT REPORT

BACKGROUND

The digital revolution is no longer science fiction. New technologies and data from novel sources are already generating insights and optimising healthcare systems. Change can take time, requiring fresh thinking from across the system to deliver the full potential of digitally enabled healthcare.

Not only should stakeholders collaborate to accelerate progress, the policy and regulatory environment must respond in a way that improves patients' outcomes and experiences while supporting innovation.

At EU level, this has been an area of significant activity, despite the challenges inherent in transforming large and complex systems. In 2020, European Commission President, Ursula Von der Leyen, set out a vision for 'grasping the opportunities of the digital age within safe and ethical boundaries.'

Since then, EU institutions have adopted a number of horizontal proposals and advanced the European Health Data Space (EHDS).

For its part, the 49 member organisations of the EU Health Coalition have called for clarity on the interplay between innovative digital technologies and legislation on how data is stored, shared and used. Members have driven several initiatives with the potential to catalyse the digital transition.

Notwithstanding the challenges that must be overcome, the Coalition has expressed a shared goal of embracing digital transformation to increase patient satisfaction and drive clinical decisions, while keeping patient safety at the core of the conversation.

INTRODUCTION

Nathalie Moll, Director General of the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA), and **Lynne van Pomfret Poelgeest**, President of the World Federation for Incontinence and Pelvic Problems (WFIPP) set the scene by noting that EU legislation on data and artificial intelligence (AI), as well as the EHDS, recognise that data is at the core of efficient and patient-focused healthcare systems.

As co-Chairs of the EU Health Coalition, they emphasised the value of hearing voices from across the health ecosystem.

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> DIRECTOR GENERAL - EFPIA

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> **LYNNE VAN POMFRET POELGEEST**
> PRESIDENT - WFIPP

'Stakeholders overwhelmingly agree on the need for an EU policy environment that unlocks the value of the data economy,' Nathalie Moll said. 'Healthcare systems need to use digital technology for innovative solutions to improve healthcare delivery and to achieve improvements in patient experiences.'

This was echoed by Lynne van Pomfret Poelgeest who said the Coalition can play a role in shaping the future of digital healthcare. 'We have so many different stakeholders with a huge richness of expertise that we need to share,' she said. 'From the patient perspective, it's absolutely key that we get this right by working together.'

BEST PRACTICES FOR A DIGITALLY-ENABLED HEALTH ECOSYSTEM

The EU Health Coalition is committed to playing an active and constructive role in addressing the key enablers of data-driven healthcare. These include *trust, skills, interoperability*, and *capacity building.*

TRUST

Public confidence in the responsible use of healthcare data is a prerequisite for digitally enabled healthcare. By empowering citizens to access and manage their data, and ensuring transparency in how health systems manage information, trust can be developed.

Milana Trucl, European Patient Federation (EPF), outlined how the Data Saves Lives initiative is improving understanding of health data.

Patients want to know that data is being used in an ethical way to improve care outcomes. 'Patients should be equal partners in discussions with healthcare professionals, rather than being seen as the recipients of care,' she said.

Through a series of training bootcamps, the Data Saves Lives initiative is equipping patients with the knowhow required to play an active role in conversations on health data. These events have connected patients with experts on topics such as the role of AI in healthcare and the design of community-led patient registries. It has also developed toolkits for patient groups and influencers to further understanding of health data. By taking this transparent approach, the initiative builds trust among communities.

SKILLS

The digital transformation has significant implications for the 15 million healthcare professionals caring for patients in Europe. Preparing the workforce for the opportunities and responsibilities that accompany data-driven healthcare is vital.

Lyudmil Ninov, EHMA, outlined how the BeWell Project is upskilling and reskilling the healthcare workforce, with particular focus on digital and green skills. 'The project aims to equip the health workforce with better skills to provide better quality care, but also to improve their wellbeing by ensuring they have a balanced workload,' he said.

Working with higher education institutions, vocational training providers, research organisations, labour market actors and NGOs, the four-year initiative is developing a blueprint for a healthcare skills strategy, which is currently open for feedback. It has developed nine digital courses and established the BeWell Skills Monitor – a repository of training courses for healthcare professionals.

LET'S BOOST THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

INTEROPERABILITY

Unlocking the value of health data requires that different IT systems, providers, data sources and software can 'speak' to one another. This can be achieved through standards that facilitate data to be interconnected at local, regional, national, and European level. 'Interoperability is a governance question pretending to be a technical problem,' said **Marc Lange**, EHTEL. 'It's not about technology, but about people, systems and organisations.'

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> SECRETARY GENERAL - EHTEL

The UNICOM project aims to implement a standard for medical products in a way that allows structured data to flow throughout the entire value chain down to the patient. UNICOM, a Horizon 2020 Innovation Action, advocates interoperability at source. This is the principle by which quality data is created in a way that facilitates its use by other systems downstream. This will reduce complexity and create opportunities for efficiency gains.

CAPACITY BUILDING

EU Member States are at different levels of digital maturity. There can also be regional differences in the pace at which the digital transformation is embraced. This makes it essential to work with regional and local health authorities to strengthen capacity. Sharing examples of good practices can help to raise standards and enhance implementation.

Michele Calabrò, EUREGHA, presented the Booklet on Regional Best Practices on Health Data which brings together examples of digitalisation, telemedicine, and the collection and use of health data. He presented examples from Catalonia, Scotland, the Apulia Region, and Zuid Limburg which illustrate how regions can be a laboratory for the application of digital and data tools. 'We are not starting from zero in digital health,' he said. 'It is not always about creating new practices, but seeing what is being done already.'

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> DIRECTOR - EUREGHA

LET'S BUILD A SUCCESSFUL EU DATA SPACE

TAKING STOCK OF THE EUROPEAN DATA STRATEGY: ARE WE THERE YET?

EU policy on data, AI and the EHDS has advanced significantly in recent years. However, there is still a long way to go before digitally enabled healthcare is a reality.

This panel discussion took stock of progress and looked ahead to how Europe can go further. A video message from **MEP Brando Benifei** highlighted the importance of fostering interoperability in the AI Act, balancing opportunities with the interests of patients and citizens. 'The journey towards a digitally enabled healthcare future is fraught with challenges, yet brimming with opportunities,' he said. 'Technology can serve as a catalyst for positive transformation, ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare for all.'

Michiel Sweerts, Head of Sector, eHealth, Well-being and Ageing, DG CNECT, **European Commission**, said the EHDS is in its final stages and would lay the foundation for digital health. 'We are moving in the right direction, and we are well on track,' he said. 'Where there is political will to achieve a common result, this can be done quickly.'

Dipak Kalra, President of the European Institute for Innovation through Health Data (i~HD), said healthcare systems are currently not sustainable and progress on the digital transformation has been too slow. There is still fragmentation across the system and a need for much more collaboration, he added.

Beatrice Credi, **EU Health Coalition**, said people must be at the centre of the health data conversation. While 75% of people are willing to share their health data, there are still questions over trust, highlighting the need to build a system that protects patient data and operates in their interests.

Thomas Metcalfe, partner in the H20 project, said investing in digital health technologies is essential if Europe is to meet the healthcare needs of its people at a time of population ageing and health workforce shortages. Public and private sector investments must proceed in parallel, he added.

CONCLUSION

There was strong agreement that digitally enabled healthcare is vital to addressing the needs of European populations. To make this happen, policy developments, infrastructure and investment must accelerate, alongside sustained efforts to build public trust and safeguard the privacy of patients. Enhancing health and digital literacy, and involving patients and other stakeholders at every stage, can help to build a data-driven system that works for all.

EU HEALTH COALITION

To find out more about the work of
the EU Health Coalition, please visit our website

www.euhealthcoalition.eu