Harnessing e-health for improved service delivery

Fact sheet: August 2018

Key facts

**e-health** can make a major contribution to **advancing universal health coverage (UHC)** by improving access to and quality of health services and lowering costs for patients, service providers and systems.

**e-health** is the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in support of health and health-related fields. It includes electronic medical and health records, telemedicine, mobile health applications, clinical decision support systems, artificial intelligence, robotics and big data.

**e-health** can help to advance countries’ progress towards UHC. **It has the potential to revolutionize health service access and quality and can help contain costs.** But for many countries, implementing e-health initiatives is challenging, especially with the rapid pace of e-health technological developments. Many e-health pilot programmes have been initiated in the Region but not scaled up.

Progress on e-health adoption within countries and across the Region has been uneven. Many e-health applications are constrained due to poor ICT infrastructure and access, misalignment of investments and national policies, incompatible architecture and standards that limit scalability, and funding patterns that do not support sustainability and adaptation over time.

Member States need to systematically apply e-health to **accelerate progress towards UHC** in a way that builds on current efforts and is consistent with the country context. To maximize the benefits of e-health, countries should prioritize applications for individuals, health service providers, healthcare organizations and health systems, such as electronic medical and health records with unique health identifiers, as well as telemedicine and m-health.

To ensure e-health applications are properly applied and meet their objectives, **key foundations and enablers, must be in place.** These include ICT infrastructure, information sharing and privacy, and security mechanisms, and levers that support broader health system adoption. Successful e-health systems require strong leadership and governance, working with stakeholders and monitoring progress for continued learning.

**WHO response**

e-health technologies are being used across the Region today. With countries continuing to face health system challenges, including affordability, sustainable financing and adequate human resources, e-health will become an increasingly important means to **improve access, quality and cost of care.**

WHO has developed a **Regional Action Agenda on Harnessing e-health for Improved Service Delivery in the Western Pacific.** It recommends that countries use a stepwise approach to prioritize and implement e-health applications for service delivery. It builds on the regional action framework **Universal Health Coverage: Moving Towards Better Health,** adopted by the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific.

**WHO is supporting Member States to strengthen e-health policies and implementation** by raising awareness of the importance of systematic e-health deployment, engaging in policy dialogue to support e-health strategies and multisectoral coordination, and providing technical support to build institutional capacity and improve e-health implementation based on country context.

**WHO also helps identify priority e-health applications and strategies based on country needs.** Guidelines, tools and information standards will continue to be developed to assist Member States in the selection, adoption, management, monitoring and evaluation of e-health solutions.

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