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**News release:** Boosting digital health can help prevent millions of deaths from noncommunicable diseases



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**WHO News release**  
**Boosting digital health can help prevent millions of deaths from noncommunicable diseases**

<https://www.who.int/news/item/23-09-2024-boosting-digital-health-can-help-prevent-millions-of-deaths-from-noncommunicable-diseases>

23 September 2024 - An investment today of an additional US\$0.24 per patient per year in digital health interventions, such as telemedicine, mobile messaging and chatbots, can help save more than 2 million lives from non-communicable diseases over the next decade, says a new report released jointly by the World Health Organization (WHO) and ITU (International Telecommunication Union). This investment could also avert approximately 7 million acute events and hospitalizations, significantly reducing the strain on healthcare systems around the world.

The publication titled "[\*Going digital for noncommunicable diseases: the case for action\*](#)" has been launched at an event hosted by the Government of The Gambia during the 79<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly, in collaboration with the ITU and WHO.

"The future of health is digital. But to make this vision a reality, we need both resources and collaboration," said WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. No single organization can do it alone. We call on governments, partners, and donors to come together, invest strategically, and ensure that these life-saving innovations reach those who need them most."

"The digital revolution has the potential to unleash a health revolution," said ITU Secretary-General Doreen Bogdan-Martin. "At ITU, universal meaningful connectivity is a priority because digital is a catalyst for delivering targets in key sectors such as health and education. We call for greater collaboration between the health and tech sectors, including the development of strong digital public infrastructure, essential for the delivery of digital health services that can benefit people everywhere without leaving anyone behind."

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as cardiovascular diseases, **cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases, are responsible for over 74% of global deaths annually**, many of which are preventable. While significant progress has been made in combating NCDs, the integration of digital health technologies into mainstream health systems remains a challenge. The report shows that there is an urgent need to harness these technologies to scale up effective interventions and mitigate the growing burden on healthcare systems worldwide.

Four major risk factors linked to our everyday environment – **tobacco use, unhealthy diet, the harmful use of alcohol and physical inactivity – drive responses in our bodies that also increase NCD risk: raised blood pressure, obesity, raised blood glucose and raised cholesterol.** Digital tools, including mobile messaging and chatbots, can support individuals to understand their modifiable risk factors and encourage them to develop healthier habits.

People living with NCDs require regular monitoring and continuous management, and many need long term and specialized care. Digital tools such as telemedicine can help them to overcome barriers to accessing healthcare. Real-time data and tools for health care professionals can also help them make informed decisions about their patients.

While over 60% of countries have developed a digital health strategy, there is often a lack of integration of new technologies into the existing health infrastructure. The report calls for countries to invest in digital public infrastructure and promote standards and interoperability which can overcome critical barriers to realizing the full potential of digital health.

The report serves as a blueprint for action, complementing the [WHO Global Initiative on Digital Health](#) and Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-2025. The [United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force for the prevention and control of NCDs](#) (UNIATF) Secretariat, in collaboration with WHO and ITU, including through the [Be He@lthy, Be Mobile programme](#) are committed to providing tailored strategic planning and advocacy support to governments.

#### Note to editors:

- In Senegal, the integration of a **mHealth** solution has brought numerous benefits to diabetes prevention and control. The "mRamadan" campaign, a part of the Be He@lthy, Be Mobile programme launched in 2014, uses mobile technology to provide preventive advice and promote a healthy lifestyle during Ramadan. By leveraging a cultural tradition that is deeply significant for Senegal's Muslim population, the campaign has achieved greater popular engagement, reaching more than 200 000 users. The initiative has contributed to advancing technical capabilities and cross-sectoral partnerships to promote public health outcomes.
- [WHO's prototype of a digital health promoter, S.A.R.A.H.](#), started off as a chatbot to fight misinformation around COVID-19 and offered information on living healthily during the pandemic. The platform has since been expanded to provide messages for individuals at risk of hypertension and diabetes, offering accessible health information in multiple languages via messaging apps like WhatsApp.
- In Zambia, the **Be He@lthy, Be Mobile** programme, a joint WHO-ITU initiative, leverages telemedicine and mobile technology to promote NCD prevention and management. The initiative connects patients in remote areas with healthcare professionals for real-time consultations and monitoring of NCD risk factors, such as obesity and high blood pressure, helping to improve health outcomes.
- Kyrgyzstan has made significant progress in developing its digital health infrastructure, driven by the national digital transformation concept "Digital Kyrgyzstan 2019-2023". The country has focused on creating a unified health information system, establishing the national e-Health Centre and promoting ICT-based solutions. This effort has led to the pilot-testing of electronic health record platforms, capacity-building for medical personnel, and the introduction of e-clinical information forms in primary healthcare. The strategic benefits of this transformation were evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Kyrgyzstan rapidly developed a digital register for vaccination certificates, eliminating the need for

paper forms and saving approximately 850 000 hours of work by health workers and public employees.

### **About UN NCD Task Force**

The United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (UN NCD Task Force) was established in 2013 by the UN Secretary-General to provide support to Member States in scaling up action on NCDs. Its role is to bring the United Nations system together to tackle NCDs and mental health conditions. It uses its networks and expertise to help governments develop and introduce effective responses to prevent and control NCDs. Bringing together over 46 UN agencies, as well as the World Bank and regional development banks, the UN NCD Task Force promotes a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

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*Digital copies of the report are available [online](#).*