Global Initiative on Digital Health

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Why is in news? WHO launches digital health platform agreed upon in India's G20 presidency

Achieving one of the three priority areas agreed upon during India's G20 presidency in 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the **Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH) virtually**, **a platform for sharing knowledge and digital products among countries.**

About GIDH:

It is a WHO managed network **aiming to amplify and align resources toward country-led digital health transformation** through strengthened collaboration and knowledge exchange.

It is a platform for sharing knowledge and digital products among countries.

Objectives:

Assess and prioritize the country's needs for sustainable digital health transformation.

Increase the alignment of country-level digital health resources and unfunded priorities.

Support the accelerated achievement of the strategic objectives of the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-2025.

Build capacity and converge efforts to encourage local development, maintenance, and adaptation of digital health technologies to continuously changing needs.

Four main components:

country needs tracker

country resource portal (a map of resources available in a country)

transformation toolbox that will share quality-assured digital tools

knowledge exchange.

GIDH will **support countries in three ways**: by listening to their needs, by aligning resources to avoid fragmentation and overlap, and by providing quality assured products.

Membership: Membership is **open to all institutions** engaged in digital health.

Significance:

Democratization of Digital Health Technologies: The platform will help in democratising digital health technologies, especially for countries of the Global South.

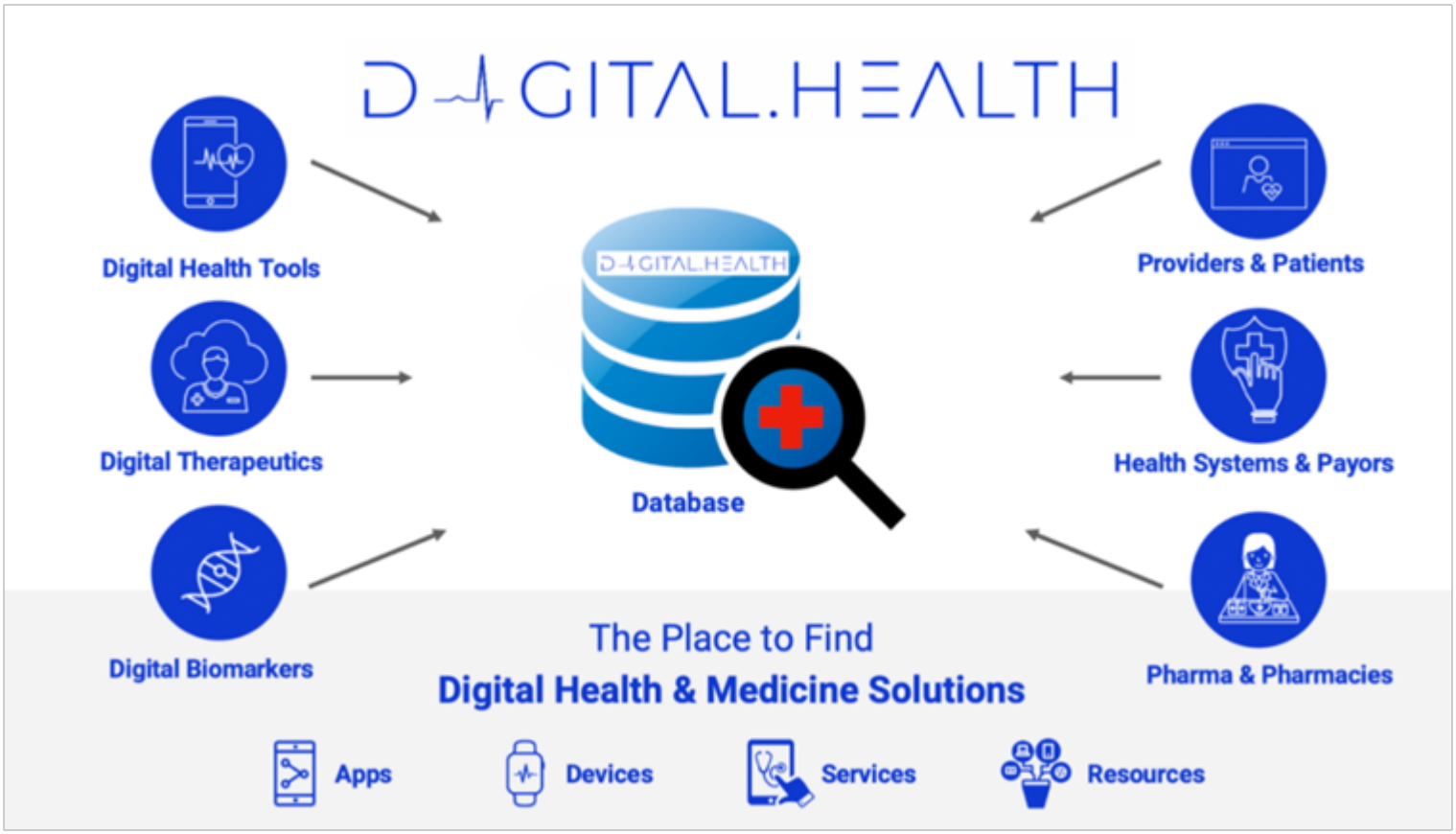
A Platform for Shared Vision: There is fragmentation and overlap because new tools are built without following common standards or shared vision. GIDH is in the direction of systems that can speak to each other.

Record Maintenance Platform: Health workers should not have

Digital Health:

Digital Health refers to the **use of information and communications technologies** in medicine and other health professions to manage illnesses and health risks and to promote wellness

Basically, it is a **multidisciplinary concept** that includes concepts from an intersection between technology and healthcare.



Digital health has a broad scope and includes the use of wearable devices, mobile health, telehealth, health information technology, and telemedicine.

The **WHO Global Strategy on Digital Health** was adopted in 2020 by the World Health Assembly (WHO), which presents a roadmap to link the latest developments in innovation and digital health and use tools to improve health outcomes.

Significance of digital health:

Improve access to healthcare

Reduce any inefficiencies in the healthcare system

Improve the quality of care

Lower the cost of healthcare

Provide more personalized health care for patients

Health Sectors - Technology is used in India:

Telemedicine has gained momentum in India, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Teleconsultation** platforms allow patients to consult healthcare providers remotely, improving access to medical advice and reducing the need for in-person visits, particularly in rural areas.

mHealth or Mobile health apps offer a range of services, including symptom tracking, medication reminders, fitness monitoring, mental health support, and health education. These apps are becoming popular tools for managing health and wellness.

The adoption of **Electronic Health Records (EHRs)** is growing in India, enabling healthcare providers to access patient records digitally, leading to improved care coordination and patient safety.

Digital tools such as wearable devices and **remote monitoring platforms** help healthcare providers track patients' health conditions, especially for chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension.

Health Information Exchange (HIE) systems facilitate the secure sharing of patient information among healthcare providers, enabling better care coordination and reducing duplication of tests.

Digital platforms for ordering and delivering medicines (**e-pharmacies**) are gaining popularity, providing convenient access to medications and reducing the need for physical visits to pharmacies.

AI and Data Analytics: Artificial intelligence is being used for medical imaging analysis, predictive analytics, and personalized treatment recommendations, aiding in early diagnosis and treatment planning.

Digital health platforms offer **training and education** to healthcare professionals, especially those **in remote areas** , helping them stay updated with the latest medical practices.

Digital platforms are being used to **raise awareness** about health issues and provide information on preventive measures and treatment options.

The digital health sector in India has witnessed the emergence of numerous **startups working on innovative solutions**, ranging from diagnostic tools to patient engagement platforms.

Challenges of Digital Health:

Universalization of digital health and enabling of equitable access to healthcare services across the world, particularly for low- and middle-income countries is challenging.

The **issue of accessibility** becomes more daunting against the backdrop of low digital literacy and low-level of internet penetration.

The increasing digitization of healthcare and the growth of mobile and IoT devices as data collection tools **raises many ethical issues.** Such companies offer solutions for collecting, storing and analysing health data which raises **issues relating to privacy, data protection and informed consent**.

Ethical challenges related to **regularisation of digital health technologies.** The growth of apps and technologies developed for a consumer market blurs the lines between what is medical and non-medical devices. Hence, it raises ethical challenges relating to how to regularize such technologies.

Due to the **massive amounts of data collected** from a variety of systems that **store and code data differently**, **data interoperability** is an ongoing challenge.

India's initiatives towards Digital Health:

GIDH: This GIDH initiative was a key deliverable of India's G20 presidency and is a testament to the shared goal of digital health.

Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission: It creates safe health accounts for all and the tele-consultation platform E-Sanjeevni providing 140 million consultations so far.

CoWIN Platform: It helped to track covid cases digitally, maintaining vaccination drive and issue of digital, verifiable vaccination certificates.

National Digital Health Mission (NDHM): NDHM aims to create a digital health ecosystem with unique health IDs for citizens, electronic health records, and telemedicine services.

Unified Health Interface: The National Health Authority launched the Unified Health Interface (UHI) a digital healthcare service platform under the ABDM.

Conclusion:

Digital technologies are now integral to daily life, and the world's population has never been more interconnected. Innovation, particularly in the digital sphere, is happening at an unprecedented scale.

Even so, its application to improve the health of populations remains largely untapped, and there is immense scope for the use of digital health solutions.