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Investments in digital to accelerate improvements in healthcare: World Bank

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Pragmatic, low-cost actions can help countries improve equity and health outcomes



Digital technology can strengthen health systems, improve health financing and public health, and increase reach to underserved populations, according to a new World Bank report launched recently. The report also finds that digital technology and data are especially helpful to prevent and manage chronic diseases, care for both young and aging populations, and prepare for future health emergencies and health risks triggered by climate change.

The report, Digital-in-Health: Unlocking the Value for Everyone, was launched during the G20 Health Ministers Meeting in Gandhinagar. It presents a new way of thinking from simple digitisation of health data to fully integrating digital technology in health systems: Digital-in-health. This means, for example, infusing digital technologies in health financing, service delivery, diagnostics, medical education, pandemic preparedness, climate and health efforts, nutrition, and aging.

The report also underscores that the successful use of digital technologies must be inclusive of all population groups, and ensure access to digital infrastructure, modern technologies, and skills, especially for vulnerable people.

“Designed with people at the centre, digital technology can make health services more personal, prevent healthcare costs from increasing, reduce differences in care, and make the job easier for those who provide health services,” said Mamta Murthi, Vice President for Human Development, World Bank. “We hope that this report will give governments confidence and practical guidance, regardless of the country’s stage of digital maturity or fiscal challenges.”

To help countries embrace a digital-in-health approach, the report proposes three essential areas to guide investments:

1. Prioritise evidence-based digital investments that tackle the biggest problems and focus on the needs of patients and providers.
2. Connect the regulatory, governance, information, and infrastructure dots so that patients know that data is safe and health workers can use digital solutions transparently.
3. Scale digital health for the long run based on trust with sustainable financing, and improved capacity and skills for digital solutions.