



CONNECTINGHEALTH:
Connecting the dots within digital health innovation ecosystems

Fostering Innovation in the Digital Health Sector: Policy Recommendations for the EU

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Project Consortium:



Executive Summary

The recommendations are a result of the main outputs of the CONNECTINGHEALTH project, a 2-year preparatory action funded by Horizon Europe, co-funded by the European Union (EU). CONNECTINGHEALTH is dedicated to fostering interconnected and inclusive innovation ecosystems across Europe, focusing on maximising the value of digital health innovation.

The project has integrated collaborative input from diverse stakeholders across government, academia, civil society, and the private sector to gather outputs with the potential for real-world impact. Through extensive co-creation and stakeholder validation sessions, alongside the completion of our Multi-Year Action Plan, the CONNECTINGHEALTH project Policy Recommendations aim to shape the future of (digital) health in Europe by 2030.

Through providing these succinct recommendations, we aim to support EU policymakers for future decision-making, while empowering them and other stakeholder groups to advocate for meaningful policy reforms that promote digital health innovation and contribute to a preferred future for health in 2030.

Current Insights

The current landscape of digital health innovation in the EU presents a blend of promising opportunities and obstacles to navigate. Stakeholders across sectors collectively share interests in shaping this evolving terrain, emphasising the need for a Multi-Year Action Plan that accommodates diverse perspectives to drive effective implementation across sectors.

Unlocking Potential Through Data Sharing:

The potential realisation of the Common European Data Spaces¹ holds promise for the digital health environment, offering secure and standardised data sharing across borders to fuel research and development. This initiative is aligned with the EU's Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2025-2027 for research and innovation,² underscoring a user-centric approach and aiming to dismantle silos between sectors. Recent regulatory advancements such as the Artificial Intelligence Act³ and ongoing developments in Natural Language Processing technology are expected to influence digital health evolution significantly.

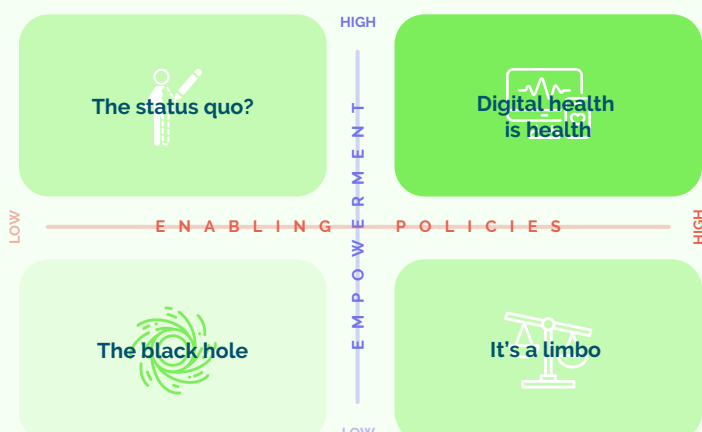
Navigating Policy Challenges:

Public trust in data privacy and security remains crucial, necessitating regulations that act as enablers rather than barriers to innovation. Policies fostering collaboration across stakeholder groups are essential, alongside initiatives to cultivate a culture of continuous learning and workforce upskilling.

Stakeholder Perceptions and Expectations:

- **Stakeholder Perceptions:** Various stakeholder groups express a mix of excitement and concerns regarding digital health innovation. Civil society highlights issues like isolation in innovation and data privacy concerns. Industry stresses the need for collaboration and user-centred development, while academia calls for better communication (especially in conjunction with government), and utilisation of innovations.
- **Vision for Implementation:** Success in digital health requires a collaborative approach with shared responsibility. Each sector emphasises specific needs, from clear communication and supportive policies to user-centric design and regulatory streamlining. Ultimately, a collaborative approach involving all stakeholder groups with government leadership is seen as key to successful implementation.
- **Expectations Across Sectors:** Collaboration emerges as crucial for successful digital health implementation. Expectations range from clear communication and user-centric design from civil society to improved training programs and academic involvement in industry. Governments are urged to foster cross-sector collaboration and ensure regulations that facilitate innovation, not hinder it.

Futures Scenarios of Digital Health



Addressing Key Challenges and Moving Forward:

Challenges in digital health implementation and adoption include: funding shortages, weak cross-sector collaborations, lack of education among healthcare professionals, data privacy concerns, and interoperability issues within nation borders and beyond. Future plans focus on enhancing telehealth, adopting AI-driven solutions, and emphasising skill development and user-friendly technologies to realise the full potential of digital health in Europe.

¹ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/data-spaces>

² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_24_1572

³ <https://artificialintelligenceact.eu/>

Main Themes for Policy Recommendations

To advance digital health innovation within the EU framework, key policy recommendations across varying levels should prioritise:

Creation of Multi-Stakeholder Ecosystems:

Establish collaborative networks among governments, healthcare providers, technology developers, and academic institutions to facilitate cross-border exchange of ideas and resources, fostering innovation and addressing common challenges.

Digital Health Curriculum Development:

Integrate digital health education into existing healthcare professional curricula at national levels to equip healthcare workers with necessary skills. Support standardisation efforts across Europe to ensure uniform training standards where and when possible.

Expansion of Awareness Initiatives:

Financially support conferences, workshops, and networking events to raise awareness and visibility of digital health initiatives at regional and national levels with representation across all stakeholder groups. Promote engagement to stimulate interest and investment in digital health innovation.

Incorporation of Key Policy Elements:

Consider and incorporate collaboration frameworks, funding mechanisms, interoperability standards, and education initiatives into regional, national, and EU policies to create an optimal environment for digital health innovation.

Critical Insights:

What are the Key Findings for EU Digital Health Innovation?

The CONNECTINGHEALTH project consortium emphasises the urgent need for the European Commission to implement key policy recommendations to advance digital health innovation in the EU.

Taking into consideration the previous project-led research, findings, and deliverables, we concluded that to advance digital health innovation within the EU framework, key policy recommendations across varying levels should be considered, with immediate focus required on four key domains:

1. **Collaboration and networking regulatory frameworks**
2. **Funding and investment**
3. **Interoperability and data sharing**
4. **Education and training**

By addressing these domains, the various stakeholders can work more efficiently together to revolutionise healthcare delivery and empower citizens across Europe.

The consortium calls for the European Commission to lead policy reforms, encourage cross-sectoral collaboration, and invest in digital health infrastructure to unlock the full potential of digital health innovation for a healthier future.

Specific policy recommendations for each are listed below:

| Key Domains | Policy Recommendations |
|--|--|
| Collaboration and networking regulatory frameworks | Establish robust collaboration mechanisms among EU regulatory authorities, industry, healthcare providers, and research institutions |
| | Develop standardised EU-wide regulatory frameworks for digital health to ensure clarity and consistency |
| | Implement adaptable frameworks for continuous evaluation and adjustment to match the pace of technological advancements |
| | Foster partnerships between regulators and industry for innovative yet safe digital health regulations |
| Funding and investment | Prioritise funding allocation across the digital health innovation lifecycle, from research to market entry |
| | Emphasise public-private partnerships in regional, national, and EU policy development for impactful investment |
| | Explore diverse financing mechanisms like venture capital and innovation funds to attract private sector investment |
| | Address investment barriers such as regulatory uncertainty and market fragmentation to foster a conducive environment for digital health innovation |
| Interoperability and data sharing | Prioritise development and implementation of interoperability standards across regional, national, and EU levels for seamless health data exchange |
| | Emphasise governance mechanisms and data sharing agreements to ensure responsible and secure health data sharing, while protecting patient privacy |
| | Promote adoption of open standards for transparent and accountable data exchange among stakeholders |
| | Address technical and organisational barriers to interoperability and data sharing to foster collaboration and innovation in EU digital health |
| Education and training | Prioritise national-level development of tailored education and training programs for the evolving healthcare workforce in the digital era, followed by EU-level initiatives |
| | Emphasise lifelong learning and continuous professional development for healthcare professionals in national and EU policy |
| | Foster collaboration among academic institutions, healthcare providers, and industry stakeholders to create practical education and training programs at all policy levels |
| | Address disparities in education and training access across underserved populations and regions in EU policy implementation |

These recommendations seek to promote collaboration, skill enhancement, awareness, and policy coherence to cultivate an optimal future for digital health in Europe and beyond. Embracing these suggestions will not only expedite the integration of digital health technologies but also aid in enhancing health outcomes, streamlining healthcare delivery, and enriching patient experiences.

Implications for Digital Health Innovation in the EU

Failure to implement collaborative and networking regulatory frameworks, secure adequate funding and investment, ensure interoperability and data sharing, and invest in education and training would significantly hinder digital health innovation in Europe.

Fragmented regulations would constrain interoperability and standardisation efforts, limiting the impact of new technologies on healthcare delivery. Inadequate funding would suppress innovation and scalability, impeding Europe's competitiveness. Without prioritising interoperability, siloed health data would impede care coordination and innovation. Neglecting education and training would result in a workforce unprepared to leverage digital technologies effectively, hindering efforts to improve healthcare quality and accessibility. All of this emphasising why **the time is now** to pursue further action for the benefit of digital health innovation!

For more information or to collaborate, please contact
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