

Shaping digital health futures

Annual Review 2024



Welcome

2024 marked DTH-Lab's first full year – and what a year it has been. Building on the momentum of our 2023 launch, we have grown into a trusted convener and thought leader in digital transformations for health.

We were especially proud to see the *WHO Youth Declaration for Healthy and Inclusive Societies* launched in October 2024 at the World Health Summit. DTH-Lab played a key role in supporting the early development of the WHO Youth Council in 2021 and, in 2024, we led the drafting and publication of the Declaration. It has been a privilege to champion youth leadership in digital health and to help bring young people's voices and priorities to the global stage.

The convening power of our global consortium has brought together youth, policymakers and a wide range of academic, public and private partners working with OECD, WHO, UHC2030, Council of Europe and Africa CDC to co-create digital solutions rooted in equity and public value.

A standout moment was our work with WHO Europe and the EU Polish Presidency to lead a rapid review on social media and young people's mental health. This pivotal effort will help shape a 2025 policy brief to guide governments on reducing harm, promoting digital well-being and strengthening digital literacy for young people and their families. It reflects our growing impact and our ability to turn research into action. As 2024 closed, the EU Polish Presidency allocated top priority to digital health and youth protection – an agenda we are proud to continue supporting in 2025.

Throughout 2024, we continued to advance the recommendations of *The Lancet & Financial Times Commission*, publishing and collaborating with journals including *The Lancet*, the *BMJ*, *Health Promotion International* and *PLOS*. We have also shared our work at significant conferences worldwide.

On behalf of the DTH-Lab consortium, we would like to thank all our partners, collaborators and the brilliant young people shaping this work. Let's keep building a digital health future that works for everyone.

Ilona Kickbusch
Director

Aferdita Bytyqi
Executive Director



We drive inclusive and equitable digital transformations of health through

Policy

Co-creating innovative policies and practice

Partnerships

Convening to shape the public and political agenda

Research

Generating evidence to drive impact

Youth

Strengthening the next generation of leaders today



About DTH-Lab

DTH-Lab is a global consortium of partners working to drive implementation of *The Lancet* and *Financial Times* Commission on Governing Health Futures 2030's recommendations for value-based digital transformations for health co-created with young people. Our work is led by three core partners: Ashoka University (India), DTH-Lab (hosted by the University of Geneva, Switzerland) and PharmAccess (Nigeria), with funding from Fondation Botnar and co-funding from our consortium members and other partners.



Digital and data governance

We are advancing value-based governance of digital transformations to support better health outcomes, with a focus on data solidarity and strengthening digital governance.

Digital determinants of health

We address the digital determinants of health by developing new knowledge and evidence on how digital determinants intersect with other determinants to impact young people's health and well-being and why they ultimately require new forms of governance.

Digital first health systems

We are co-creating digital first health systems with young people. Our research and policy analysis focuses on how countries' journeys towards digital first health systems can have the greatest impact on young people's health and well-being.

Digital citizenship for health

We work with young people, academics and policymakers around the world to promote the importance of digital citizenship for health – empowering people to critically engage.

Research

We continued to produce high-quality evidence on topics including digital determinants of health, data solidarity and AI governance. Our cutting edge research informs policy and practice, and shapes the future of digital health.



Public health interventions to address digital determinants of children's health and well-being

In a *Lancet* article, Louise Holly, Ilona Kickbusch and Sandro Demaio called for public health strategies to protect young people from digital harms.

[Learn more](#)

Tackling digital harms

In the *BMJ*, Louise Holly responded to Australia's proposed social media ban for under-16s, arguing that instead we need to redesign digital platforms to make them safer and healthier for young people.

[Learn more](#)

“Mitigating the physical and mental health risks posed by digital platforms is an urgent public health priority... but limiting children's online participation will not tackle the root causes of these harms.”

Louise Holly, Research and Policy Coordinator



17
new publications

Exploring AI governance

In a working paper, DTH-Lab Founding Partners Rohinton Medhora and Anurag Agrawal explored the varied approaches to AI governance by different nations, suggesting a universal testing approach to advance broader goals, with a focus on the health sector.

“ The health sector is a good example of one where the potential gains from the proper use of Big Data and AI are high, as are the potential risks to personal and public safety, privacy and human rights.”

Rohinton Medhora & Anurag Agrawal, Working paper: Apply new AI Governance Regimes to Health First to Test Their Benefits

Learn more



The case for data solidarity

In an opinion piece for *The BMJ*, Barbara Prainsack and Ilona Kickbusch explored how a data solidarity approach can help tackle current power imbalances in digital regulations.

Learn more

“ Public value assessments carried out by organizations or corporations to see who is likely to benefit from their data use, and who is likely to carry the cost, would help to make data use more democratic”

A new public health approach to data: why we need data solidarity



Beyond banning

In the *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, we argued that digital spaces should be made safer for young people, drawing on public health approaches used in the control of tobacco, alcohol and road safety.

Learn more



Research Fellowship programme

In May 2024, we welcomed our first nine Research Fellows who researched a range of topics – from analyzing national approaches to health system transformation and examining the practices of digital technology companies, to exploring high-level concepts such as trust and digital citizenship for health.

Our Fellowship Programme was set up to provide students and early-career professionals from low- and middle-income countries with the opportunity to contribute to key areas of DTH-Lab’s research and analysis.

“

Our first cohort of Research Fellows has exceeded our expectations and deepened DTH-Lab’s understanding of a range of issues. Their findings and recommendations are already being incorporated into our projects and we will seek opportunities for them to present their work throughout the year.”

Executive Director **Aferdita Bytyqi**

“

Policymakers and industry players must work together to implement policies that are more transparent, enforceable, youth-centric and Africa-informed.”

Research Fellow **Esther Opone**, *Safeguarding the Digital Generation: A Qualitative Analysis of African-based Digital Technology Companies’ Policies*

“

Our review of longitudinal studies underscores the critical role of digital technologies in shaping youth well-being, with mental health emerging as a key concern.”

Research Fellow **Preetika Banerjee**, *Digital Interventions for Youth Health: Insights from a Comprehensive Scoping Review*

“

Teaching students to critically assess information, understand algorithms and protect their data will empower them to navigate digital spaces responsibly.”

Research Fellow **Erza Selmani**, *Analysing Major Tech Companies’ Policies and Strategies for the Health and Safety of Young Users*



Spotlight on the Digital Determinants of Health

What are the digital determinants of children's health and well-being?

Children's use of digital technologies and their engagement in digital environments profoundly influences their physical and particularly mental health and well-being, both positively and negatively.

Since the term 'Digital Determinants of Health' was coined by the *Lancet* and *Financial Times* Commission in 2021, global support for digital environments to be made fit for children has strengthened.

DTH-Lab advocates for a public health approach to build safe and healthy digital environments for children:

- **Tech companies** must be held accountable for keeping children safe online – ridding platforms of addictive algorithms and harmful content.
- **Governments** need to prioritize digital well-being and build safe and healthy digital and real world environments for children.
- **Parents** need support to offer alternatives to screen-based entertainment and to help young people to enjoy digital spaces in a healthy and balanced way.

“

The real world has to be healthy and the virtual world has to be healthy. If you take digital away, then give young people something else. Where's the playground? Where's the youth centre? The real world has to empower children, as does the virtual world. As health promoters we have to show how they best interact: that one cannot replace the other. It is at this interface that we can create well-being societies.”

Ilona Kickbusch, Keynote speech, Global Forum for Health Promotion, Geneva, 21 November 2024.



Policy

We continued to drive innovations in policy and practice to shape equitable digital transformations of health – working with global platforms like G20, supporting regional initiatives with WHO and contributing to national policy discussions.

WHO Europe and youth mental health

In December 2024, we were commissioned by WHO Europe to conduct a rapid literature review and policy mapping on social media and young people's mental health. This critical work will feed into a 2025 WHO policy brief to guide governments on how to mitigate the harms associated with social media use, promote digital well-being, and empower young people and their families with digital literacy skills.

Urging G20 to bridge the youth, health and digital siloes

As the G20 Health Ministers met for the last time in Rio, we launched a new policy brief exploring the actions that Brazil and subsequently South Africa could take to build health systems and digital environments that support better health and well-being for young people. The answer: a multisectoral public health approach which actively involves young people.

[Learn more](#)

T20: inclusive digital transformation

DTH-Lab's Rohinton Medhora and Louise Holly together with University of Vienna's Barbara Prainsack developed a policy brief for T20 Brazil arguing for a solidarity-based approach to data and AI governance.

[Learn more](#)

“Balancing the public value of data and AI with their considerable benefits lies at the heart of the concept of «data solidarity». The health sector provides opportunities to create sandboxes, bridge divides and enhance the potential for global cooperation to deliver results for all.”

Founding Partner **Rohinton Medhora** on the T20 brief.



Partnership

We engaged with national public health officials, international organizations, academia, civil society and the private sector to co-create solutions and build consensus on the digital transformations of health.



Ashoka University

Our consortium partner at Koita Centre for Digital Health at **Ashoka University** mentored the student-led Ashoka Health Research Club in 2024. Through the club, DTH-Lab has been able to collaborate with students from different disciplines to support our research work and other activities.

For example, Ashoka launched a digital-first cohort study on campus, where participants use a smartwatch, continuous glucose monitor and mobile app to log diet and lifestyle. This data will generate a robust evidence base, enabling the development of highly personalized recommendation systems for promoting health.

“Health is possibly one of the most complex yet least understood social constructs. Ironically, ‘healthcare’ is widely interpreted as ‘sickcare’ focused on treating illness rather than promoting well-being.”

Mayank Garg, Simons Ashoka Fellow at Ashoka University



PLOS

In September, we launched our strategic partnership with the **Public Library of Science (PLOS)** to increase youth participation in science. The collaboration will include mentorship opportunities, amplifying youth voices in scientific publishing and building a body of research in digital citizenship for health.

Bertelsmann Stiftung

In October 2024, our partners **Bertelsmann Stiftung**, in collaboration with WHO Youth Council, organized the Young Leaders for Healthy Societies Conference in Berlin. Our 2023–2024 Regional Youth Champions took an active part in the conference which was divided into three parts: capacity building, working groups and intergenerational dialogues.



Council of Europe

In December, we met with Theodoros Rousopoulos, President of the Assembly of the **Council of Europe** to discuss an upcoming Council of Europe Study Session on advancing digital citizenship for health.

PharmAccess

In June, DTH-Lab and consortium partner **PharmAccess** actively contributed to the Africa Digital Health Summit in Nigeria, hosting a youth co-creation workshop and multi-stakeholder dialogue on strengthening data governance for health in Africa.

“Digital health technologies are crucial in our quest to achieve universal health coverage in Nigeria. By harnessing these innovations, we can enhance efficiency, improve health outcomes, and ensure that no Nigerian is left behind.”

Founding Partner **Njide Ndili** speaking at Nigeria's Fifth Annual Legislative Health Summit in July 2024.



UHC2030 and OECD

In October, DTH-Lab began collaborating with **UHC2030 and OECD** to mobilize support for continued action to harness the momentum and potential of digital health technologies in our journey toward universal health coverage (UHC).

“Digital health is an enabler of accelerating progress towards UHC by strengthening health systems, including through more inclusive, equitable and efficient health financing, service delivery and health governance.

Unlocking health equity in every byte, Op-ed with OECD and UHC2030

[Learn more](#)

University of Vienna



Prof. **Barbara Prainsack** from the University of Vienna presenting the Data Solidarity Glossary the State Minister for Health Dr. Tunji Alausa

In September, DTH-Lab and **University of Vienna** launched the Data Solidarity Glossary at the European Health Forum Gastein. The Glossary aims to promote a better understanding of data solidarity and its relationship to other governance approaches. It has since been translated into Dutch, with German and Portuguese versions pending.

[Link to Glossary](#)

DHRP

At a World Health Assembly side event, DTH-Lab partnered with the **Digital Health and Rights Project** to explore how to achieve UHC through an inclusive and rights-based digital transformation. Speakers from WHO, United Nations and the Government of Barbados delved into key issues impeding the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 including digital divides, meaningful participation of young people in all their diversity, and the governance of AI and digital technologies for health.

Convening to co-create solutions and build consensus

In March, DTH-Lab and WHO's Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH) co-hosted a key stakeholder meeting for partners working at the intersection of health and digital governance. The meeting participants issued a statement urging Heads of Government to ensure that digital transformations intentionally contribute to, and do not undermine, healthy futures for all.

[Learn more](#)

“As DTH-Lab's Youth Officer, I was proud to support Africa CDC in laying the foundation for the Youth in Digital Health Network (YiDHN). From shaping strategic priorities to mobilizing young leaders across the continent, our collective efforts have created a platform where youth voices and innovations are not just acknowledged, but are actively shaping Africa's digital health future. This work is a testament to the power of collaboration, purpose and youth-led transformation in health tech.”

Enow Awah Georges Stevens, Youth Officer



239

stakeholders engaged
through flagship
events

Youth

DTH-Lab is committed to strengthening youth as co-creators of equitable digital health systems – to build the capacity of future health leaders to shape policy and governance issues related to the digital transformations of health.

“

To me youth engagement means empowering young people to be the leaders of today and tomorrow. It means giving them the skills, capacity and literacy to make change. And it definitely means bringing young people together to design and co-create solutions that will build healthy societies for all.”

Whitney Gray, Youth Engagement Coordinator

1,170
youth engaged



Regional Youth Champions

DTH-Lab’s Regional Youth Champions (RYCs) play a key role in our work. The overarching goal is to support young people at the local and regional level to become informed and enfranchised digital citizens for health, co-creators of digital first health systems and innovative thought leaders with the skills and capacities to be key stakeholders in the governance of the digital transformation of health. In 2024, we saw a nearly 350% increase in applications to join the next cohort of RYCs.

“In Africa, we often say “if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.” This journey with DTH-Lab has epitomized this thinking. Our collective efforts have demonstrated the power of unity and collaboration in achieving our shared goals.”

Lydia Jummai Gara, RYC for Sub-Saharan Africa 2023-2024





WHO Youth Council

Since its inception in 2021, DTH-Lab has been a member of the WHO Youth Council, actively sharing technical advice and governance related to the digital transformation of health. In 2024, RYC alumni Imane Lackbachi took over from Whitney Gray as DTH-Lab's focal point, continuing to engage with this dynamic network to amplify youth voices and to leverage young people's expertise, energy and ideas to promote public health.



Co-designing digital first health systems with young people

DTH-Lab is collaborating with young people around the world to develop a blueprint for digital first health systems. This blueprint will set out young people's vision for digital first health systems and guide different actors – from policymakers to technology companies – on the steps required to make it a reality.

In the first phase of work, DTH-Lab consulted more than 100 young people under 30 from 36 countries through a social media campaign, call for essays and series of six virtual consultations with global youth networks.

[Click here for findings from the global consultations and DTH-Lab's research](#)

“ Digital first health systems designed right, have the incredible potential to serve as catalysts for enhanced health literacy. By placing reliable, high-quality health information at the forefront and actively involving patients in their healthcare journey, these systems can pave the way for a new era of informed well-being.”

Caroline Knop, Regional Youth Champion for Europe 2023-2024



Spotlight on the WHO Youth Declaration

On 14th October 2024, the WHO Youth Council launched its Declaration on Creating Healthy Societies at the World Health Summit in Berlin, outlining ten calls to action empowering young people to shape their health and futures. As a WHO Youth Council member, DTH-Lab led the drafting and delivery of the declaration, playing a pivotal role in making this vision a reality.

[Endorse the declaration here](#)

Join our network!

The #MyHealthFutures Youth Network on LinkedIn brings together under-30s invested in the health and well-being of young people and the future of health governance. The network provides space for young people to network and share their experiences as well as capacity building and training opportunities.

Interested in helping us to build a movement inspired by the needs of children and young people and to drive action in the field of global health governance?

[JOIN HERE](#)





Connect with us



WWW.DTHLAB.ORG

