

# National Digital Health Strategies

A Thematic Analysis from Selected G20 Countries

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The world of digital health is changing rapidly as countries around the world begin to adopt a more digital approach towards their healthcare systems. In this regard, national digital health strategic plans are important documents that help in defining a government's intentions regarding the future provision of health service delivery. Such documents also indicate to what extent the health needs of the young people, and values such as equity and human rights implementation are being prioritized.

This report seeks to gather and evaluate national digital health strategies from selected G20 countries. A better understanding of the approaches of G20 countries is important for several reasons. Firstly, over three-quarters of the world's young people aged 0 to 24 years old live in G20 countries so the approaches taken in these countries will have a significant impact on young people's health and well-being. Secondly, the G20 and its members play an important role in setting the global agenda around digital health. Digital health has been prioritized during recent G20 presidencies resulting in new initiatives such as the Global Initiative on Digital Health. (World Health Organization, 2024)

The objective of this research is to assess a selection of national digital health strategies from G20 countries in the context of the priorities established by a *Lancet* and *Financial Times* Commission and taken forward by Digital Transformations for Health Lab (DTH-Lab): namely, human rights, equity and a strategic focus on young people's health and well-being. (Kickbusch et al., 2021) In particular, DTH-Lab is interested in finding examples of young people's inclusion in the development of national digital health strategies.

Employing a qualitative approach, the report appraises the following four questions:

- 1. What are the emerging trends and themes within G20 digital health strategies?
- 2. How do national digital health approaches take into account equity and human rights, particularly with regard to universal access to healthcare for marginalized and vulnerable population groups?
- 3. To what extent do national digital health strategies prioritize the health and well-being of young people, and how do young people get involved in their development and governance?
- 4. To what extent do national digital health strategies address the digital determinants of health, such as digital literacy, access to technology and trust in digital health systems, especially in relation to youth populations?

# 2. METHODOLOGY

The methodological framework used to analyse national digital health strategies from eight G20 countries focused on data collection, organization and content analysis. The analysis examines alignment with Sustainable Development Goals, Universal Health Coverage, equity, human rights, and gender considerations. A coding framework was developed to classify strategies based on direct, indirect, or absent references to these priorities. The report will identify key trends and analyse how strategies address equity, human rights, youth involvement and digital determinants of health. Ultimately, the goal is to understand how digital health strategies can improve health outcomes, especially for vulnerable populations.

#### 2.1. List of selected G20 Countries

Eight countries were selected for the study. Five of these countries (India, China, Indonesia, USA and Brazil) were selected because of their large youth populations. Australia, Germany and South Africa were also included in order to incorporate examples from other regions of the world. South Africa was also selected because of its upcoming G20 presidency in 2025.

- 1. Australia
- 2. Brazil
- 3. China
- 4. Germany
- 5. India
- 6. Indonesia
- 7. South Africa
- 8. United States

# 2.2. Methodological Framework

The framework for analysis followed three main stages:

#### **Stage 1: Data Collection and Organization**

This stage involved ensuring the key columns of the data set are up to date and that the data is also up to date.

- Data was collected and organized in <u>a spreadsheet</u> and features the following rationale:
  - The data features eight G20 countries: Australia, Brazil, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, South Africa and the United States.
  - The list features national digital health strategies. The list also features supporting strategies that relate to digitization of healthcare. This is because in addition to the

country's national digital strategies, most of these countries have guidelines and plans that support the national digital health strategies.

#### **Stage 2: Content Analysis**

#### 1. Search for mentions of key global health priorities and key areas:

- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Are there any direct or indirect references to global goals like health and well-being(SDG 3)?
- Universal Health Coverage (UHC): Does the strategy mention access to healthcare for everyone?
- **Equity:** Are there mentions of providing equal healthcare to all, especially vulnerable groups?
- **Human rights:** Does the strategy talk about respecting people's rights in healthcare, particularly in terms of data privacy?
- **Gender:** Is there a focus on addressing gender disparities in healthcare?
- Youth: Is there a focus on improving the health of children, adolescents and/or youth?

#### 2. Check stated positions on the following areas:

- **Digital transformation priorities:** Does the strategy outline main goals for digital health (e.g., improving healthcare access through technology)?
- Increasing access to connectivity/technologies: Does it address how to improve access to technology for underserved groups or boost digital literacy?
- Increasing access to digital skills: Does the strategy include steps to educate people about how to use digital health tools and understand health information?
- **Digital governance:** Are there rules or approaches mentioned on how to manage digital health systems (e.g., security, data protection)?
- Data governance: Look for any guidelines on how health data is handled, including privacy and consent.
- **Involvement of youth:** Are young people involved in designing or governing digital health systems?
- Impact of digitization on well-being: Does the strategy discuss how digital tools affect overall health, beyond just healthcare?
- **Building public trust:** Is there a plan to ensure people trust digital health systems? (e.g., transparency in data use)

#### 3. Analysis using a simple tracking and coding system

Develop a coding framework to classify whether each strategy includes:

- Direct, indirect, or no reference to each global health priority.
- Clear positions on digital governance, equity, and the other issues listed.

#### **Stage 3: Report Findings**

Using the coding framework, the strategies will be analyzed, taking into account a couple of research questions:

- The emerging key trends among the strategies. This includes showing which strategies and which countries reference each priority area. Looking at the trends, seeing which key priorities have been referenced the most in the strategy documents. Identify trends (e.g., some regions may focus more on equity, while others prioritize digital governance).
- How, in the national strategies by the G20 member countries, do national digital health approaches take into account equity and human rights, particularly with regard to universal access to healthcare for marginalized and vulnerable population groups? This is a key question to understand just how far national strategies in digital health consider equity and human rights without leaving anyone behind in the transformations that digital health brings about.
- To what extent does the national digital health strategy prioritize the health and well-being
  of young people, and how do young people get involved in their development and
  governance? This will provide criteria upon which to examine if there is a specific policy
  that focuses on young people not as mere beneficiaries, but as part of the active shapers
  and governors of the digital health ecosystem.
- To what extent do national digital health strategies address the digital determinants of health, such as digital literacy, access to technology, and trust in digital health systems, especially in relation to youth populations? Such a question would try to reach the broader issues of what digital technologies hold for the future regarding the improvements they have on people's health and well-being, thus bringing out how these strategies seek to bridge the gap in using technologies and creating trust, particularly with younger populations.

# 3. NATIONAL DIGITAL HEALTH STRATEGY OVERVIEW

National digital health strategies and other supporting strategies were compiled to aid a better understanding of the priorities of the selected countries. Sub-national strategies were also considered; however, this presented a challenge. For almost all of the selected G20 countries, no specific sub-national digital health strategies were identified as distinct from the national framework. Most digital health initiatives are part of national strategies that are rolled out across states under the Ministry of Health's direction.

There was an exception of two countries:

- India: The state of Tamil Nadu has developed its Health Information Management System (HIMS), focusing on state-level digital health management. This strategy is a notable sub-national effort aimed at integrating patient data across state hospitals and primary health centers.
- United States of America: Several U.S. states, such as California and New York, have developed their digital health equity programmes focusing on underserved populations. The California Digital Health Equity Initiative is a prime example of a state-level digital health strategy addressing regional healthcare needs and disparities.

Table 1: Overview of Reviewed Strategies

Country	Name of Strategy	Document Summary	Year Published	Category		
Australia	National Digital Health Strategy	This comprehensive strategy outlines Australia's vision for improving healthcare through digital means. Through digital health technologies, it focuses on seven strategic priorities for better patient outcomes and more efficient healthcare services. Key priorities: my health record expansion, interoperability and data quality, secure messaging, medication safety, etc.	2018	National Strategy		
Australia	National Telehealth Strategy	In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia greatly expanded its telehealth capabilities. This strategy focuses on sustaining and building on that expansion to make telehealth a permanent part of the healthcare system. Key issues: expansion of medicare-subsidized telehealth services: making telehealth consultations a permanent part of Medicare, improving access to care for remote communities: Using telehealth to overcome geographic barriers in healthcare, and promoting the use of virtual care: ensuring that virtual consultations and digital monitoring are integrated into mainstream healthcare.	2021	National Strategy		
Brazil	Brazilian National Digital Health Strategy	The Brazilian National Digital Health Strategy 2020-2028 document outlines a comprehensive plan to modernize Brazil's healthcare system through digital transformation. It is structured around three main pillars: Strengthening the actions of the Brazilian National Health System (SUS), Establishing a regulatory framework for collaboration, and implementing a collaborative environment for digital health. The strategy emphasizes the importance of governance, leadership, and interconnectivity across different levels of care, with a focus on integrating private and public healthcare sectors. The document also details the need for digital health education, innovation, and monitoring to ensure the successful implementation of the strategy. It aims to promote the adoption of electronic health records, improve patient care, and facilitate data sharing among healthcare providers to enhance overall health outcomes across the country by 2028.	2020	National Strategy		

Country	Name of Strategy	Document Summary	Year Published	Category
China	Healthy China 2030	Healthy China 2030 is a breakthrough for ensuring that the Chinese population has access to health, through advocating the whole society's participation in the concept of "Health for All, and All for Health." The plan puts forward five strategies: promoting a healthy life, optimizing health services, improving health protection, building a healthy environment, and developing a healthy industry. These strategies address the health impacts of personal life and behaviour, health care and security, production and the living environment. This is a broader healthcare strategy that includes digital healthcare.	2016	National Strategy
China	National Health Informatization Development Plan (2018-2025)	This plan is a strategic roadmap for developing health information systems across China. It focuses on integrating health data, improving the infrastructure for electronic health records (EHRs), and promoting the use of big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence (AI) in healthcare. The plan aims to achieve full health informatization by 2025.	2018	National Strategy
Germany	The Digitalisation Strategy for Health and Care	This strategy outlines <b>Germany's long-term vision for integrating digital health into the national healthcare system</b> . It focuses on expanding digital health applications, improving data interoperability and ensuring data security and patient privacy.	2019	National Strategy
India	National Digital Health Blueprint	The vision of NDHB is to create a National Digital Health Ecosystem that supports Universal Health Coverage in an efficient, accessible, inclusive, affordable, timely and safe manner. This is facilitated through the provision of a wide range of data, information and infrastructure services, duly leveraging open, interoperable, standards-based digital systems and ensuring the security, confidentiality and privacy of health-related personal information.	2019	National Strategy
India	National Digital Health Mission The National Digital Health Mission is a comprehensive initiative aimed at creating a digital health ecosystem in India. It includes the development of a unique Health ID for every citizen, digital health records, and a robust infrastructure for telemedicine and e-pharmacy services.		2020	National Strategy

Country	Name of Strategy	Year Published	Category	
India	National Health Stack	The National Health Stack is a blueprint for creating a digital infrastructure for health services. It supports initiatives like NDHM by providing a standardized framework for electronic health records (EHRs), health data privacy and interoperability.	2018	Supporting strategy
Indonesia	Digital Transformation Strategy for Health 2020-2024	This strategy outlines Indonesia's plan to digitize its healthcare system by 2024. It includes the development of electronic medical records, telemedicine services, health information systems and the integration of digital health tools across all levels of healthcare. The strategy also emphasizes improving health data management and interoperability.	2020	National Strategy
South Africa	National eHealth Strategy South Africa 2012-2017	This earlier strategy laid the groundwork for the development of digital health infrastructure in South Africa. It focused on establishing national health information systems, improving data management, and promoting the use of IC in healthcare. The strategy aimed to enhance the quality of care and ensure that health data is used effectively to improve health outcomes.		National Strategy
South Africa	National Digital Health Strategy for South Africa 2019-2024	The strategy will strengthen digital health governance structures, create robust integrated platforms for the development of information systems and establish the requisite broadband network infrastructure in conjunction with other government departments.	2019	National Strategy
United States of America	Federal Health IT Strategic Plan	The Blue Button symbol signifies that a site has functionality for customers to download health records. You can use your health data to improve your health and to have more control over your personal health information and your family's healthcare.	2020	National Strategy

# 4. ANALYSIS

# 4.1. Key Themes Featured in the Selected Strategies

Following the methodological framework described above, the content of the collated strategies was analysed to identify whether references to 15 themes were present or not. Chart 1 and table 2 below provide a high level overview of which themes were included within national digital health strategies.

See <u>supporting document</u> for author's full analysis of the included strategies.

Chart 1: Inclusion of themes within national digital health strategies of eight G20 countries

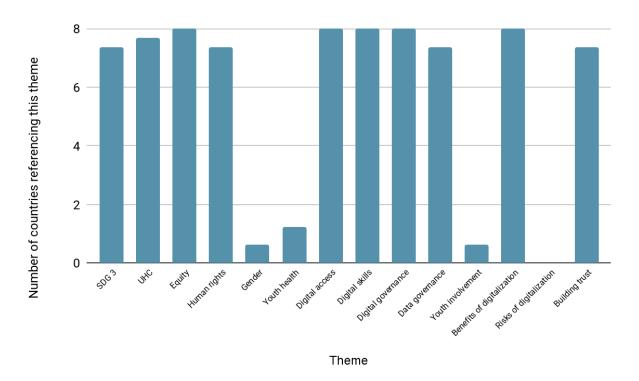
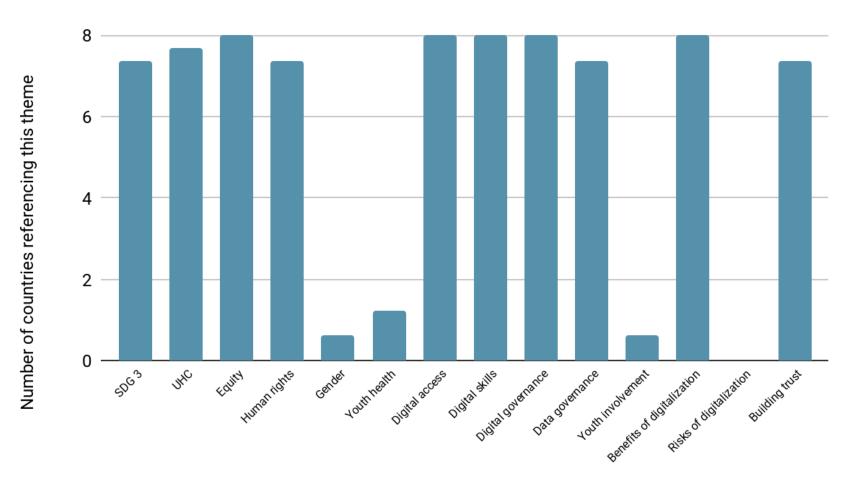


Chart 1: Inclusion of themes within national digital health strategies of eight G20 countries



Theme

Table 2: Inclusion of themes within the national digital health strategies of eight G20 countries

Theme	Australia	Brazil	China	Germany	India	Indonesia	South Africa	USA
Alignment with SDG3	?	<b>V</b>	V	V	V	V	<b>V</b>	V
Universal health coverage (UHC)	<b>V</b>	<b>V</b>	×	V	V	V	V	V
Equity	<b>V</b>	<b>V</b>	V	<b>V</b>	V	V	V	V
Human rights	×	V	V	V	V	V	V	V
Gender	?	×	×	×	×	×	×	V
Youth health and well-being	<b>V</b>	?	V	?	?	×	V	×
Increasing access to connectivity/technologies	<b>V</b>	<b>~</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>V</b>	V	V	V	V
Increasing access to digital skills	<b>V</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>V</b>	V	V	V	V	V
Digital governance	<b>V</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>V</b>	V	V	V	V	V
Data governance	V	V	<b>V</b>	V	V	V	×	V
Involvement of youth in strategy development	×	×	×	×	×	×	?	×
Positive impacts of digitalization on well-being	<b>V</b>	V	<b>V</b>	<b>V</b>	V	V	V	V
Negative impacts of digitalization on well-being	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Building public trust	×	V	V	V	V	V	V	V

Key: ✓ = term included in strategy; X = term not included in strategy; ? = term indirectly referenced in strategy

An analysis of the strategies showed the following trends:

- Widespread support for SDG3, UHC, equity and human rights: Most countries directly referenced these areas in their strategies, showing a strong alignment with global health goals.
- Low focus on gender and youth involvement: Very few countries addressed gender disparities and youth involvement in digital health strategies remains underrepresented.
- **Digital transformation, governance and skills:** Almost all the countries included digital transformation, strengthening governance, and enhancing digital skills which suggests the world is moving towards heavy usage of technology in health care.
- Building public trust: Most strategies touched on this but some did not.
- **Digital determinants of health:** Most strategies highlight the positive impacts of expanding access to digital health technologies, such as increasing access to care and improving efficiency, without highlighting the potential adverse effects or challenges that could arise. There weren't any explicit mentions regarding potential health-related risks or negative impacts that health systems may need to adapt to due to digitalization in the reviewed national digital health strategies.

This analysis highlights the widespread inclusion of global health concerns and the growing discussion on the digital determinants of health. However, issues of gender and youth participation, as well as discussions on the health-related risks of increasing digitalization, remain on the margins within country policies.

#### 4.1.1. Country Performance Across Key Themes

#### Australia

- Strengths: Australia does well in the areas of telehealth integration, digital health tools and improving patient outcomes. The nation also focuses on data quality and secure messaging.
- Weaknesses: The strategy has limited gender and youth engagement components like most other countries.

#### Brazil

- Strengths: Brazil has very good performance in digital transformation priorities, governance and access to technology. The country also values equity and universal health coverage.
- Weaknesses: Brazil's digital health strategies do not provide any details on gender or youth involvement in digital health initiatives.

#### China

- Strengths: China's central focus areas are advanced technologies, health for all, and the development of digital skills. Strategies related to this area also cover human rights and equity in detail.
- Weaknesses: Gender and youth involvement are selective with regard to this strategy in China.

#### Germany

- Strengths: Germany demonstrates its dedication to data security, privacy, interoperability and provision of digital health applications. Governance and building public trust are also additional focus areas.
- Weaknesses: This strategy places limited emphasis on gender issues and lacks adequate measures for youth involvement.

#### India

- Strengths: India's strategies emphasize digital transformation, universal health coverage, and data governance equity. Their scope is broad and includes ambitions to expand digital skills and healthcare access through holistic approaches.
- Weaknesses: In this regard, Gender and Youth Involvement are subsidiary in nature demonstrating that they can seek further development.

#### Indonesia

- Strengths: Indonesia pays particular attention to digitization of healthcare, interoperability and access to technology. The strategy is also strong with respect to digital transformation.
- Weaknesses: Like other countries, gender and youth involvement is also not addressed.

#### South Africa

- Strengths: South Africa's focus is strong on governance structures, broadband infrastructure, and ICT integration. Equity and universal health coverage are other attributes that are brought into focus too.
- Weaknesses: The country falls short in youth involvement and gender in its digital health interventions.

#### **United States**

- Strengths: The U.S. strategy is about data empowerment, in the patient control of health information, and telehealth expansion. It also enhances privacy and security.
- Weaknesses: Gender and youth engagement have not been well embedded in the digitized health approach in the United States.

#### 4.1.2. Key Observations

- Common Strengths: For most countries, there is emphasis on digital transformation, governance, equity as well as expanding access to technology. These areas are constantly found in the strategies presented.
- Common Weaknesses: Gender and youth engagement has continuously been a weak area for almost all strategies reviewed. Countries must take greater action to meaningfully involve youth in strategic decision-making and to address persistent gender biases in health care.

# 4.2. Equity and Human Rights

How, in the national strategies by the G20 member countries, do national digital health approaches take into account equity and human rights, particularly with regard to universal access to healthcare for marginalized and vulnerable population groups? This is a key question to understand just how far national strategies in digital health consider equity and human rights without leaving anyone behind in the transformations that digital health brings about.

In the digital health strategies of the selected G20 member countries, there is a relatively strong focus on equity and human rights, specifically regarding efforts to ensure universal access to health services for vulnerable and marginalized populations.

Below is a summary of these aspects found in the strategies across member countries.

- Equity: All of the G20 member countries that were analysed included equity as part of their national digital health strategies. These countries have placed significant importance on providing access to health services for all populations, particularly for vulnerable populations. Evidence of this can be seen in the identification of strategies to reduce disparities in access to care, and ensuring that digital health transformations benefit all population groups, irrespective of their socio-economic status or geographic location.
- Human Rights: Most countries (12 out of 13 strategies examined) made specific reference to human rights as part of their health digital strategy, with a focus on protecting patient data and patient privacy. These strategies ensure that their systems preserve human rights, and specifically address privacy protection and obtaining informed consent prior to collecting digital health data.
- Universal Health Coverage (UHC): The commitment towards UHC within the strategies
  was also strong, as 12 out of 13 strategies indicated the importance of universal access to
  health services. Many of these strategies even include specific initiatives to utilize digital
  health technologies to change policies and procedures broader access to healthcare with
  an understanding that some marginalized groups within their populations may not share
  the advantages of digital technology.

Overall, there are still some elements not addressed in these strategies, specifically concerning gender inclusion and meaningful youth involvement. While who in or what in-terms of equity was stated in these strategies the overall mention of these underrepresented groups would break down barriers for inclusivity across all vulnerable populations.

# 4.3. Young People's Health and Well-Being

To what extent does the national digital health strategy prioritize the health and well-being of young people, and how do young people get involved in their development and governance? This will provide criteria upon which to examine if there is a specific policy that focuses on young people not as mere beneficiaries, but as part of the active shapers and governors of the digital health ecosystem.

The analysis of national digital health strategies reveals significant differences in how countries prioritize the health and well-being of young people and involve them in the development and governance of these strategies.

#### Prioritization of Young People's Health and Well-being

- China, India and South Africa: These countries specifically address the health and well-being of young people, often highlighting efforts to improve healthcare access for youth or focusing on adolescent health.
- All the other countries included do not explicitly prioritize young people, instead concentrate on broader digital health issues without a specific focus on youth health.

#### Involvement of Young People in Development and Governance

- **South Africa:** Clearly states the involvement of young people in the design and governance of digital health systems, showing a commitment to including youth in shaping the digital health landscape.
- Most countries do not mention youth involvement, highlighting a gap in engaging young people as active participants in the governance of digital health systems.

In summary, while some countries, like South Africa, actively work to include young people in prioritizing their health and governance, most strategies either neglect youth participation or address their health in a limited way.

### 4.4. Digital Determinants of Health

To what extent do national digital health strategies address the digital determinants of health, such as digital literacy, access to technology, and trust in digital health systems, especially in relation to youth populations?

Such a question would try to reach the broader issues of what digital technologies hold for the future regarding the improvements they have on people's health and well-being, thus bringing out

how these strategies seek to bridge the gap in using technologies and creating trust, particularly with younger populations.

National digital health strategies are addressing the digital health determinants, which range widely from digital literacy and access to technology to trust in digital health systems.

- Digital technologies and connectivity access: A majority of countries identify the need for improvement in access to digital technologies, with particular attention to the most underserved populations. This constitutes a broad recognition of the importance of technology generally in health systems and for promoting inclusion and equity.
- **Digital literacy and skills**: A majority of the countries touched on digital literacy and skills. 12 out of the 13 strategies discuss improving the level of digital literacy and skills so that the people, including youth, will be able to use the digital health tools appropriately. The reason this is so crucial is for the long-term sustainability of the digital health ecosystems.
- **Building public confidence**: Most strategies place importance on building public confidence in digital health systems, with particular emphasis being placed on the need for data transparency and privacy. It is a major factor for consideration and encouragement toward the wide adaptation of digital health technologies.
- Youth Involvement: Only one country directly addresses youth involvement in design and governance, while most strategies fall short in actively involving young people into shaping the digital health environment.

# 4.5. Youth Involvement in Strategy Development

Overall, national digital health strategies are generally centered around themes of access to technology, digital literacy and trust-building. However, youth populations are often not as prominent in the strategic development of digital health ecosystems. Even when strategies mention youth involvement, there is room for improving the ways in which young people are involved in governance and development processes.

# 5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of national digital health strategies from selected G20 countries reveals a predominant focus on aligning digital health initiatives with global health objectives, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and Universal Health Coverage. This emphasis on health equity and human rights aligns with the broader goal of ensuring accessible healthcare for all.

However, the analysis also highlights a significant gap in addressing gender and youth inclusion. Few countries have effectively integrated these concerns into their digital health strategy development and implementation. Additionally, while the benefits of digitalization are frequently touted, the potential risks and adverse impacts are largely overlooked.

This analysis suggests that future research should prioritize a broader focus on gender and youth inclusion, as well as risk mitigation strategies. Proactive measures, such as fostering public trust in digital health systems, also warrant further investigation.

In conclusion, while G20 countries are making strides in digital health transformation, greater attention to ethical considerations and potential negative consequences is essential for maximizing the benefits and minimizing the risks of digital health systems.

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#### **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. DTH-Lab operates through a distributive governance model, led by three core partners: Ashoka University (India), DTH-Lab (hosted by the University of Geneva, Switzerland) and PharmAccess (Nigeria).

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