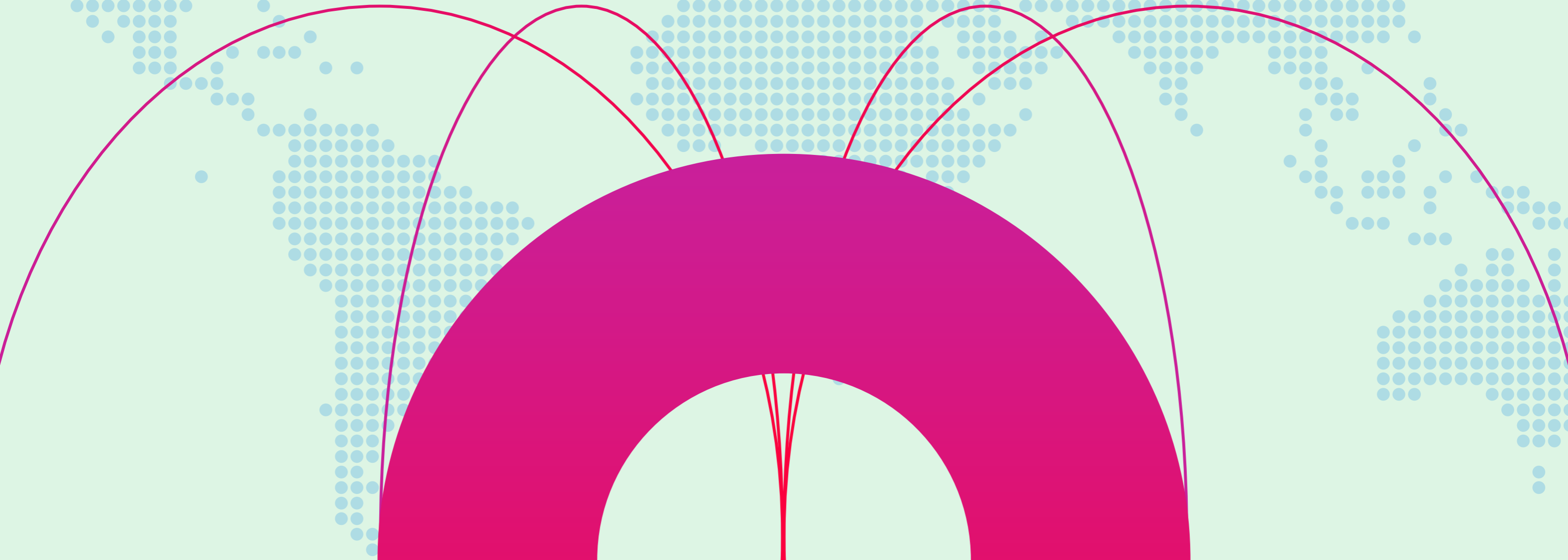




Annual report 2025



Foreword



When DTH-Lab first began work, we argued that digital transformations would become a defining force shaping the future of health. We highlighted the growing importance of data governance, the need to anticipate the health impacts of digital environments and the central role of young people in shaping these systems.

In 2025, these were no longer emerging issues, but central to the global health agenda – confirming the prescience of DTH-Lab’s vision.

2025 was a year in which the pace of technological change – particularly AI – outstripped existing governance approaches. At the same time, policymakers increasingly recognized that digital transformation is not just a technical issue, but a societal one. Questions of trust, equity, safety and accountability moved firmly onto the agenda. Encouragingly, there was growing acceptance that young people must be engaged not as passive users, but as legitimate partners in shaping the systems that will define their futures.

Throughout 2025, DTH-Lab worked to translate these shifts into action. Our collaboration with WHO Europe helped position the digital determinants of health as a public health priority. Our partnership with OECD, launched in 2025 and continuing into 2026, is

advancing practical thinking on AI governance and its implications for young people and health. Through high level convenings such as the World Health Summit, we also moved discussions from broad principles toward the practical governance questions that now require urgent attention.

At the same time, we have continued to invest in what we believe is essential for sustainable change: building capacity and leadership. Through our Regional Youth Champions, Research Fellows and the #MyHealthFutures network, we are helping to develop a generation of leaders equipped to navigate the intersection of health, technology and governance. This is not youth engagement as symbolism, it is a strategy rooted in trust and co-creation.

We are grateful to our funder Fondation Botnar and our partners for sharing our belief that shaping digital transformations for health requires collaboration across sectors, disciplines and generations. Their support enables DTH-Lab to act not only as a research partner, but as a trusted convener and catalyst for new ideas and alliances.

Looking ahead, our focus is on implementation and amplification – ensuring our research and policy recommendations reach those who can put them into practice. DTH-Lab was never intended to be simply a project delivery unit. Our role is to help shape the direction of travel and to ensure that digital transformation advances health, strengthens equity and reflects the needs and rights of future generations.

Ilona Kickbusch
Director

Aferdita Bytyqi
Executive Director

2025 in numbers

36

research and knowledge products published

1000+

#MyHealthFutures network members

4000

young people engaged (+248% from 2024)

28

global partnerships

100+

events participated in

46

events convened

12700+

views of journal articles published in 2025

About DTH-Lab

DTH-Lab is a global consortium driving inclusive, equitable and rights-based digital transformations for health by generating research, advancing policy innovation, and shaping public and political agendas through multi-sector partnerships and youth co-creation. DTH-Lab focuses on ensuring that digital transformations contribute to healthy societies, with a particular focus on safeguarding the well-being of young people and future generations.

Highlights

2025

JANUARY

PMAC 2025

Bangkok, Thailand

Executive Director Aferdita Bytyqi, Founding Partner Anurag Agrawal and DTH-Lab's Regional Youth Champions speak at sessions on digital health workforce resilience, data solidarity and youth leadership in digital health.



FEBRUARY

Council of Europe study session

Budapest, Hungary

DTH-Lab's five-day Council of Europe study session, in partnership with the International Youth Health Organization, brings together 30 passionate young changemakers sparking conversations on digital health and civic literacy.



MARCH

Exploring digital transformations for health

Research Fellows' dissemination series

DTH-Lab celebrates our first cohort of Research Fellows with a two-part webinar dissemination event sharing their key findings.

[Learn more](#)

Risk and opportunities of AI for children

Pontifical Academy of Sciences, The Vatican

Alongside religious leaders, UN agencies, academics and global tech representatives, Regional Youth Champions contributed to the Final Statement on AI and Children at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in March 2025.

[Learn more](#)



APRIL

EU 25

Krakow, Poland

Director, Ilona Kickbusch, moderates the closing summary of the Polish Presidency of the EU conference on Promotion and protection of mental health of children and adolescents in the digital era.



Special issue: Digital determinants of health

Health Promotion International

DTH-Lab leads a special issue exploring the digital determinants of health and its role in health promotion.

[Learn more](#)

World Health Summit

New Delhi, India

DTH-Lab hosts a booth at the inaugural regional World Health Summit held by consortium partner Ashoka University.



JUNE

G7 publication

The Kanaskis Summit, Canada

Director, Ilona Kickbusch, highlights the urgent need to act on digital health transformation in the official publication for the G7 summit in Canada.

[Learn more](#)

MAY

Global Initiative on Digital Health Partnership

DTH-Lab joins the Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH), a WHO-managed network, building on support since the network's launch in 2024.

[Learn more](#)

WHO Europe policy brief Addressing the digital determinants of youth mental health

WHO/Europe, DTH-Lab and the Ministry of Health Poland publish a new policy brief urging coordinated action to protect youth mental health.

[Learn more](#)



Africa Digital Health Summit Lagos, Nigeria

DTH-Lab hosts a panel session on Improving Health Outcomes for African Youth and Research Fellows Esther Opone and Helen Adesoba share their findings. Our Events Coordinator Tomiwa Akinsanya receives an award for her outstanding role as a Session Proposal Contributor.



JULY

Digital Public Health Conference Madeira, Portugal

Policy & Research Coordinator, Louise Holly, presents on Digital Technologies and Youth Health and Research Fellow Preetika Banerjee wins the student paper award for her work on Digital Technologies and Youth Health: Insights from a Comprehensive Scoping Review.



SEPTEMBER

Building a blueprint for digitally enabled health systems Regional findings

We publish findings from our regional consultations on digitally enabled health systems.

[Learn more](#)



AUGUST

Inside the Lab International Youth Day

DTH-Lab celebrates International Youth Day by hosting 'Inside the Lab' a webinar showcasing the work of current and former Regional Youth Champions.

[Learn more](#)



New rules are required for WHO's engagement with Big Tech The BMJ

Ilona Kickbusch, Louise Holly and Barbara Prainsack argue that Big Tech needs the same level of scrutiny as Big Pharma.

[Learn more](#)

European Parliament Brussels, Belgium

DTH-Lab Executive Director, Aferdita Bytyqi attends the European Parliament meeting on child safety in the digital space.



Regional Youth Champion annual meeting Ashoka University, India

Our Regional Youth Champions hold their annual meeting at Ashoka University exploring best practice in youth engagement.



European Health Forum Gastein

Austria

Ilona Kickbusch along with Barbara Prainsack and Magdalena Eitenberger from our partners at the University of Vienna hold a launch event for the Data Solidarity Implementation Guide.

[Learn more](#)



World Health Summit

Berlin, Germany

DTH-Lab and Bertelsmann Stiftung host a high-level panel on the role of public health agencies in governing digital platforms, bringing together policymakers, public health leaders and civil society, and featuring a keynote by WHO Europe Regional Director Dr Hans Kluge.

[Learn more](#)



Regional Youth Champions

Our latest cohort join the Lab!



European Public Health Conference

Helsinki, Finland

At WHO Europe and DTH-Lab's roundtable experts and youth voices deliver a united message: as digital harms to youth mental health grow, we must move beyond individual responsibility to systemic change.



PLOS & DTH-Lab event

Digital Health Week

DTH-Lab and PLOS Digital hold a webinar to launch the mini-collection on digital citizenship for health.

[Learn more](#)

Global Digital Health Forum

Nairobi, Kenya

DTH-Lab's Enow Awah Georges Stevens moderates a panel on Digital Determinants of Health: Reimagining Public Health in a Digital Age, featuring a keynote by Founding Partner, Njide Ndili.



Health AI Global Governance Forum

Nairobi, Kenya

DTH-Lab hosts an interactive workshop on Youth-Led Approaches for Inclusive AI in Health, featuring Research Fellow Shajoe Lake's work on youth co-creation in equitable, rights-based AI governance.



2026

Follow DTH-Lab in 2026 as we continue to shape the agenda and put policy and research into practice.

Putting young people
at the centre of
digitally enabled
health systems

Advancing value-driven
approaches to digital
transformations in
health

We are ensuring
equitable and inclusive
rights-based digital
transformations

Addressing the digital
determinants of health
and well-being

Building a new
generation of
health leaders

Towards a framework for digitally enabled health systems

In 2025, DTH-Lab published findings from our regional consultations on digitally enabled health systems. Building on previous global consultations, the regional perspectives highlighted shared priorities and unique challenges, giving stakeholders a clearer picture of what works for diverse youth communities.

In 2026, DTH-Lab will finalize and disseminate our Framework for Digitally Enabled Health Systems that translates young people's voices into practical guidance for policymakers, technology companies and health leaders. We will collaborate with countries and intergovernmental organizations to pilot the framework through integration into national digital health strategies, aligning implementation with existing WHO processes and guidelines.

[Learn more](#)

Putting young people at the centre of digitally enabled health systems



600+

Young people consulted on digitally enabled health systems



Aferdita Bytyqi

Designing digitally enabled health systems with young people

Since early 2023, DTH-Lab has held consultations with over 600 young people under 30 from 80 countries, to develop a global framework for digitally enabled health systems. This work builds on the vision of the *Lancet and Financial Times Commission on Governing Health Futures 2030*, which recommended that young people should be enfranchised to co-design and critically engage with digital health systems.

These consultations showed that young people have clear expectations for how digital technologies should support their health and well-being. They also highlight the need to move beyond consultation toward meaningful co-creation, recognizing young people not just as users but as partners in shaping digitally enabled health systems.

Founders' perspectives

“ DTH-Lab’s global and regional youth consultations highlighted the persistent gap between ambitious digital health visions and the lived realities of young people and the need to move beyond consultation toward meaningful youth-led decision-making. The Framework for Digitally Enabled Health Systems seeks to embed young people’s needs, priorities and rights across national digital health ecosystems, spanning governance, service delivery, workforce readiness and accountability.”

Anyesha Mitra, Policy Research & Impact Assessment Consultant

Putting young people at the centre of digitally enabled health systems



1 Equitable

2 Trustworthy

A CORE SET OF SHARED VALUES TO FORM THE FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS OF ANY DIGITALLY ENABLED HEALTH SYSTEM (DEHS):

3 Humanistic

4 Ethical

5 Inclusive

6 Accountable

TOP 8
 YOUTH-IDENTIFIED BARRIERS TO REALIZING DEHS:

1 Weak data governance

2 Digital divides

3 Under-equipped health workforce

4 Fragmented digital health services

5 Low political will to engage youth

6 Digital illiteracy

7 Unreliable digital infrastructure

8 Resistance to change

1 Affordability

Data privacy

2 Accessibility

Innovation

3 Existing

New

THE 5 KEY TENSIONS
 IDENTIFIED BY YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL THAT STAKEHOLDERS MUST AIM TO BALANCE WHEN DESIGNING DEHS:

4 Online

Offline

5 Sustainability

Scale

THE MAIN HEALTH CONCERNS TO YOUNG PEOPLE THAT DEHS SHOULD FOCUS ON:

1 Mental health

2 Fitness and nutrition

3 Sexual and reproductive health

4 Climate-related health issues

5 Non-communicable diseases

Putting data solidarity into practice

In 2025, DTH-Lab continued to collaborate with the University of Vienna to operationalize ‘data solidarity’ – an abstract governance principle for equitable health data sharing – into actionable tools.

In 2025, the project’s flagship Data Solidarity Glossary was translated into German adding to the previous Dutch translation and marking DTH-Lab’s commitment to making resources available in different languages.

At the European Health Forum Gastein in September 2025, the team relaunched the PLUTO tool along with an Implementation Guide to help put data solidarity into practice. In Austria, the Gesundheit Österreich GmbH (GÖG) which advises the Ministry of Health on European Health Data Space implementation, integrated PLUTO’s equity-focused criteria into its policy workshops.

[Learn more](#)

Advancing value-driven approaches to digital transformations in health



Founders’ perspectives

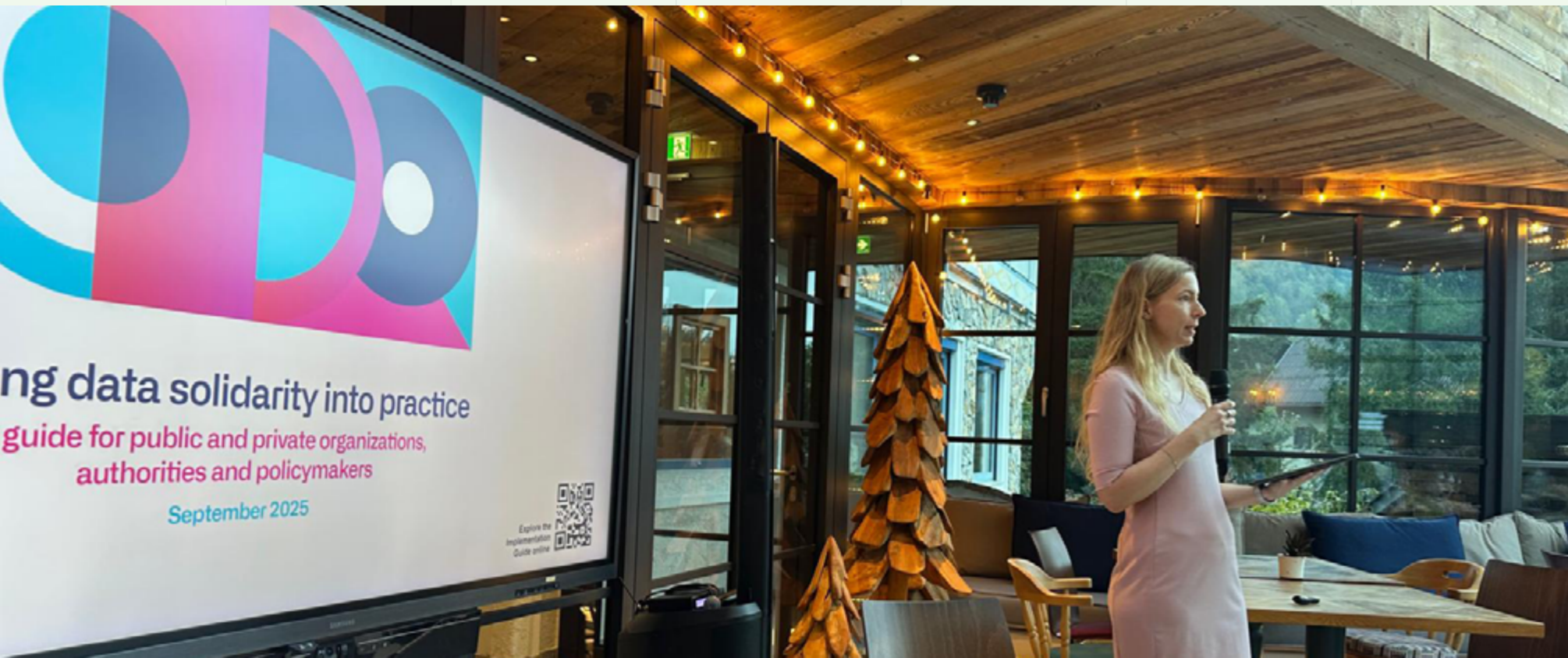
Anurag Agrawal

Balancing principles and pragmatism in AI governance

When we first began talking about data solidarity, the global environment felt more cooperative. Today the world is more fragmented. Countries are understandably focused on protecting their own data, infrastructure and supply chains, and trust in the global order has weakened. That makes the challenge of data governance more complex – but also more important. The path forward is not absolute openness, nor complete data sovereignty. Instead, we need a pragmatic middle ground: governance that is lean but balanced.

Countries must retain sovereignty while enabling responsible data sharing so that AI systems can be more reliable, transferable and beneficial across contexts. If governance is too restrictive, innovation will stall; if there are no safeguards, the risks to society are too great.

Our task now is to develop practical frameworks that allow governments and companies to innovate responsibly while still adhering to shared global principles.



Shaping AI governance with OECD

DTH-Lab has embedded data solidarity principles within AI governance through our partnership with OECD. In January 2025, we co-hosted a virtual consultation that mapped global AI policy gaps, workforce transformation needs and scalability evidence.

Building on this work DTH-Lab commissioned four young researchers to develop a collection of position papers on shaping AI governance for young people. The papers will be launched at the OECD-Spain Ministry of Health conference in Madrid in May 2026.

“ We are digital natives. My friends and I may talk to AI more than we talk to each other. But what the data is telling us is that the folks who are most affected by AI are actually not in the rooms where critical decisions about AI are being made.”

Shajoe Lake, DTH-Lab Research Fellow



Advancing value-driven approaches to digital transformations in health



Rohinton Medhora

Governing AI for health: balancing innovation, risk and youth participation

Artificial intelligence is advancing and evolving at unprecedented speed, yet our capacity to govern its impacts on health and society continues to lag behind. The question is no longer simply whether to adopt AI in health systems, but how governance frameworks ensure these technologies support well-being while balancing incentives to innovate with managing risk.

Young people sit at the centre of this transformation. Their futures will be shaped by AI, yet their voices remain largely absent from governance debates. At the same time, questions of privacy, representation in datasets, participation and equitable access are becoming central to how AI supports health.

DTH-Lab's latest research in this area highlights that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to governing AI and health. The way forward will require stronger oversight, greater international cooperation, investments in digital literacy and the meaningful participation of young people in shaping the technologies that will influence their health and well-being.

Shaping AI governance for young people: perspectives on health, policy and regulation will launch in Madrid, May 2026.

Founders' perspectives

Making digital determinants a public health priority

Addressing the digital determinants of health and well-being

In 2025, DTH-Lab worked with the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the Polish Ministry of Health to position the digital determinants of health as a public health priority, particularly for children and young people's mental health and well-being.

Launched in May 2025, the WHO Europe policy brief: Addressing the Digital Determinants of Youth Mental Health and Well-being translated this emerging concept into practical policy recommendations, arguing that digital environments – including platforms, algorithms and online infrastructures – should be treated as structural drivers of health rather than matters of individual responsibility.

Through high-level keynotes, convenings and strategic communications, DTH-Lab helped embed the policy brief's findings and recommendations within global public health discourse. For example, Executive Director Aferdita Bytyqi contributed to the European Parliament meeting on child safety in the digital space at the invitation of MEP Laura Ballarín Cereza. While at the European Public Health Conference in Helsinki, DTH-Lab and WHO Europe co-hosted a session on country-level implementation of the brief's recommendations.

Within six months, the brief was downloaded over 3,000 times and cited in national and regional policy discussions, including in Ireland's Online Health Taskforce and in Swedish, Danish and EU policy discussions. In Canada, the Chief Public Health Officer's 2025 Report cited DTH-Lab's work in calling for a public health approach to digital harm.

What began as a conceptual framing is now shaping policy dialogue across Europe and beyond, helping to establish the digital determinants of health as a recognized and actionable public health priority.

[Learn more](#)

Policy brief recommendations

- 1 Make young people's digital well-being a policy priority.
- 2 Apply proven, intersectoral public health strategies.
- 3 Develop clear guidance on healthy technology use.
- 4 Hold industry and commercial interests accountable.
- 5 Support future laws and regulation for safe digital environments.
- 6 Bolster health workforce capacity.
- 7 Increase research into social media's impacts.
- 8 Invest in offline alternatives for play, parenting and social connection.

“ The collaboration with DTH-Lab in developing this policy brief has been critical for its success. They supported us to ensure the evidence and policy analysis were understandable and relevant for policymakers, and helped us synthesize complex material for our target audience.”

Cassie Redlich, Technical Officer, WHO Regional Office for Europe

Addressing the digital determinants of health and well-being



Founders' perspectives

Ilona Kickbusch

Applying proven public health strategies to keep children safe online

Forty years ago, the Ottawa Charter stated that health is created in the context of everyday life. Today, the digital world has become part of that context. Children and young people are growing up in digital environments that shape their well-being, yet too often these environments are designed without health in mind.

The reality is simple: the digital world is not designed for children. Our work on the digital determinants of health highlights that the issue is not only individual technologies, but the broader digital environments in which young people live, learn and interact. In our policy brief with WHO Europe, we argue that governing digital and AI transformations must become a public health priority. Governments, industry and health systems need to work together to design safer digital spaces, apply proven public health strategies and ensure children's rights are protected online.

If we treat digital environments as settings for health, we can shape them to promote well-being rather than undermine it.

[Learn more](#)



Holding Big Tech to account

Rising concerns about the mental health and other negative impacts of social media platforms are prompting several countries to raise age limits and strengthen online safety regulation. This largely reflects the failure of technology companies to adequately self-regulate or protect users' safety and well-being. In 2025, DTH-Lab continued to advocate for big tech to be held to account.

DTH-Lab researcher and former Research Fellow, Erza Selmani highlighted how platform practices reveal a significant gap between what companies know about the risks of their products and the safeguards they put in place.

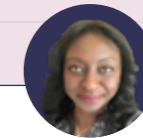
In a BMJ opinion piece, Ilona Kickbusch, Louise Holly and Barbara Prainsack called for WHO to develop stronger governance frameworks to address Big Tech's growing influence in global health, including a WHO working group and a Global Compact on digital health and AI governance.

Navigating the digital playground

New rules are required for WHO's engagement with Big Tech | The BMJ



Addressing the digital determinants of health and well-being



Founders' perspectives

Njide Ndili

Building Nigeria's digital future with equity and safety at its core

Nigeria's rapid digital transformation presents enormous opportunities to expand access to health information, services and innovation, particularly for its young and growing population. But as connectivity accelerates, we must also recognize that digital systems are becoming a new determinant of health.

The same technologies that improve access to care can also expose people – especially children and young people – to misinformation, harmful content and poorly governed digital environments. Looking ahead, Nigeria has an opportunity to lead by ensuring that digital expansion goes hand in hand with strong governance, digital literacy and safety-by-design in the technologies people use every day. This means closing the remaining digital divide while also anticipating the risks that come with being online.

If we embed public health, youth perspectives and responsible innovation into digital systems from the start, Nigeria can build a future that is not only more connected, but healthier and more equitable for all.

How DTH-Lab does youth engagement differently

DTH-Lab's approach to engaging young people shifts the focus from numbers reached to meaningful participation. Rather than treating youth engagement as an add-on, the Lab places young people at the centre of co-designing digitally enabled health systems. Through structured pathways such as the long-running Regional Youth Champions programme, Research Fellowships, peer review mentorship and the global #MyHealthFutures network, DTH-Lab builds the skills, confidence and influence of emerging leaders. The real impact lies not only in outputs, but in the experience young people gain as trusted contributors shaping research, policy and partnerships.

Building a new generation of health leaders

“ Unlike traditional organizations, DTH-Lab places trust and autonomy in youth. DTH-Lab is distinct in how it centres youth as leaders, not just participants or passive beneficiaries.”

DTH-Lab RYCs 2024-2025, Shaping our health futures

[Learn more](#)



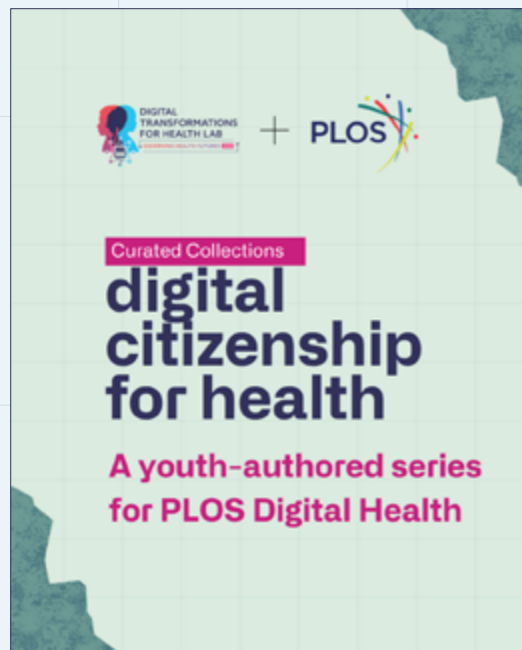
PLOS partnership: expanding youth participation in science

Building a new generation of health leaders

Through its strategic partnership with PLOS, DTH-Lab is widening young people's access to scientific publishing. In 2025, this included editorial mentorship, training five young people (pictured) in peer review and opportunities to serve as reviewers – helping demystify an often closed system while building lasting research skills.

In October 2025, PLOS Digital Health in collaboration with DTH-Lab published a dedicated mini-collection on digital citizenship for health. This included a peer-reviewed article by Regional Youth Champions on digital citizenship, health and environmental resilience.

[Learn more](#)



Caroline Knop



Gladson Vaghela



Lydia Jummal Gara



Soe Yu Naing



Maria Ines Francisco Viva



Equipping young people to critically engage with digital ecosystems

Building a new generation of health leaders

Digital citizenship for health means having the skills and confidence to use digital tools to support health safely and responsibly: finding trustworthy health information, managing services online, understanding how personal health data is used and having a voice in how digital health systems are designed.

In February 2025, DTH-Lab held a five-day study session in Budapest with the International Youth Health Organization and the Council of Europe. A key outcome was the first draft of a youth-authored statement, Digital Citizenship for Health: Overcoming Challenges for Youth. DTH-Lab subsequently convened a working group of participants and Regional Youth Champions to finalize the statement, which was launched at the Council of Europe's Digital Citizenship Education Forum in Strasbourg.

[Learn more](#)

“When we teach young people not just how to use technology, but how to use technology with empathy, balance and responsibility, we also help them build emotional resilience and healthier online habits.”

Hein Thu, DTH-Lab Research Fellow



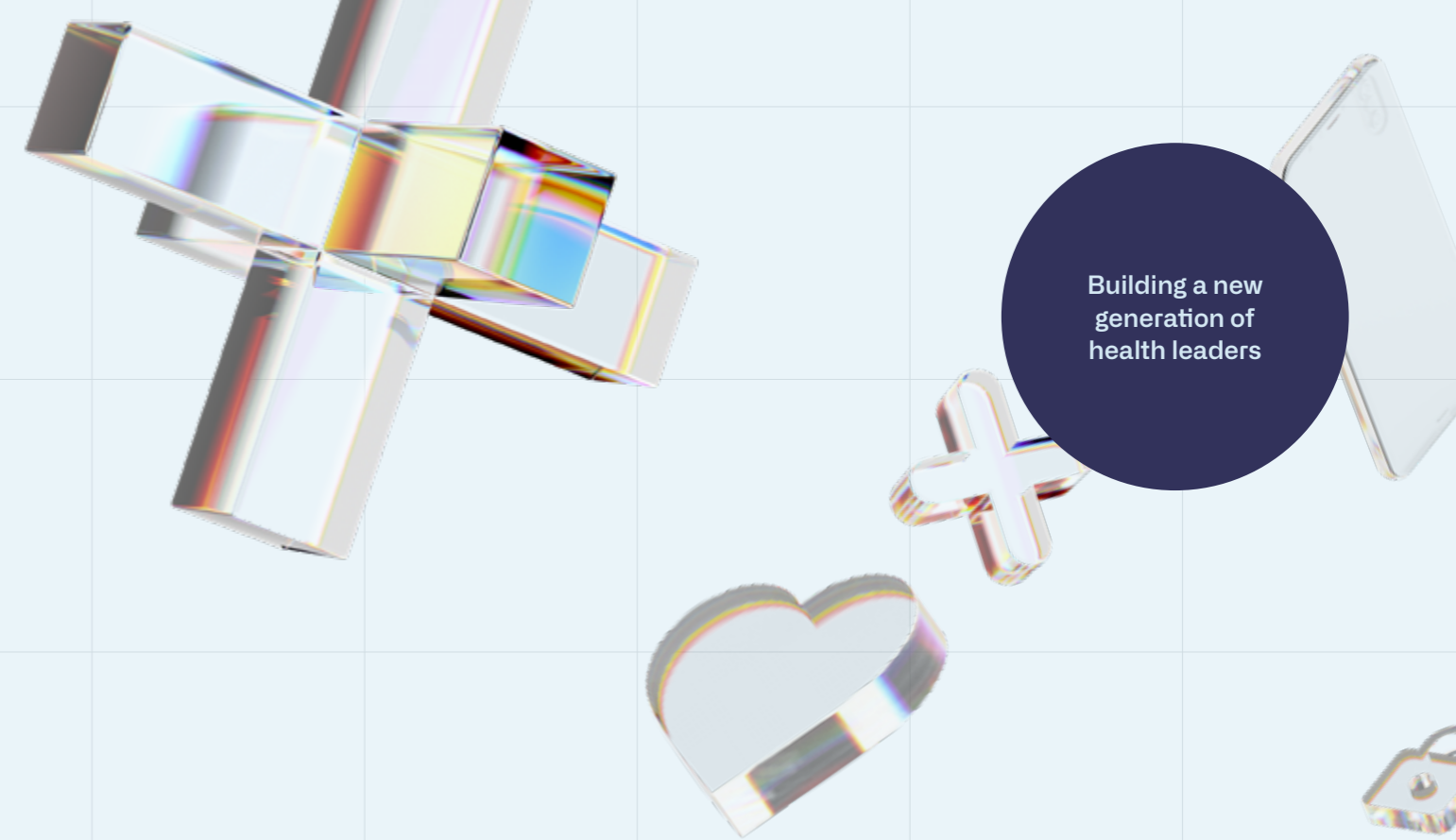
A place for young people to shape our health futures

Established in 2021 during The Lancet and Financial Times Commission, the #MyHealthFutures youth network connects young people across geographies and disciplines to amplify their voices in policy, innovation and accountability for digital health transformation.

In 2025, RYCs launched a series of exclusive fireside chats for #MyHealthFutures members, bringing together experts, policymakers, researchers and youth leaders to discuss key issues in digital health.

A recent impact survey shows members join to help shape equitable digital health systems, particularly in AI governance, data protection and digital determinants of health. They also value opportunities for policy engagement, global networking and career development through research collaboration, fellowships and high-level events.

Join the #MyHealthFutures network



“The #MyHealthFutures youth network is a vibrant and inclusive virtual space for young people interested in the governance of digital transformations in health to connect, share opportunities and collaborate in shaping the future of health. As a former Regional Youth Champion at DTH-Lab, I have been able to bring my experience in youth engagement, community building and global health advocacy to cultivate a community where young people can learn from one another, co-create ideas and meaningfully contribute to shaping the future of health systems.”

Imane Lakbachi, Community Manager of the #MyHealthFutures Youth Network

From Fellows to future leaders

In 2025, DTH-Lab disseminated findings from its first Research Fellows and welcomed a second cohort selected from 955 applicants. Fellows have consistently exceeded expectations, with several commissioned to carry out further work for the Lab. With a third cohort planned in 2026, the programme continues to build the capacity of future leaders shaping policy and governance in digital health.

[Learn more](#)

Building a new generation of health leaders

90%

Over 90% of DTH-Lab Research Fellows surveyed felt their fellowship had significantly or very significantly strengthened their knowledge and skills.





Connect with us



WWW.DTHLAB.ORG