

21 September 2020, Cairo – The WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean discussed collaborative activities with the newly appointed International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Regional Director for Arab States Dr Adel Darwish during a joint WHO-ITU meeting on Thursday 17 September 2020. They emphasized the importance of inter-agency work, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic that has seen innovative digital technologies being used at an unprecedented scale to keep people connected, safe and productive, while being physically distanced.

Joint areas of collaboration include supporting utilization of mobile technology for health promotion and protection (mHealth), developing national digital health strategies (using the ITU/WHO toolkit), building capacity in digital health and holding joint expert consultations and webinars.

Discussion on the "Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being" focused on research and development, access and innovation, data and digital health. The regional directors promised to foster continued inter-agency work and move forward the common agenda of digital health and innovation focusing especially on work at the country level within the Region.

The "Global Action Plan on Healthy Lives and Well-being" represents collaboration between 12 health and development partners to support countries in meeting the targets of the health-related Sustainable Development Goals and was launched in September 2019. The 12 agencies, including The World Bank, have prepared a regional joint workplan (2020–2021) and a regional health alliance, which formally recognizes this collaboration, will be launched later this year.

WHO-ITU collaboration on research and development, innovation and access, data and digital health, include:

- mapping innovations on improved health care delivery, and key health technologies in the context of COVID-19;
- raising awareness of the importance of ethics in COVID-19 research;
- supporting countries on research prioritization towards achievement of health-related SDG targets;
- strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems in the Region, including birth and death registration;

- supporting generation of real-time data and initiatives to improve data quality and disaggregation to improve resource allocation and decision-making;
- assisting countries in developing national strategies for digital health and digital architecture blueprints for health;
- producing joint statements between WHO/ITU/UNICEF on COVID-19;
- promoting use of digital health technology and artificial intelligence in linkage of information using digital platforms;
- supporting mHealth projects in countries since 2016, such as the Be Healthy, Be Mobile initiative now operating in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Sudan, which includes work on diabetes control, tobacco cessation, tuberculosis, bronchial asthma control and cervical cancer control, and ensures the complimentary working of health, telecommunications, science and technology public/private sectors in countries –a reflection of the complimentary mandate of both agencies in support of health in the Region;
- building capacity to develop national eHealth strategies, including holding workshops in Cairo in 2017 and Beirut in 2018, based upon the joint ITU/WHO national eHealth strategy toolkit;
- holding conferences, meetings and consultations, such as an expert consultation on digital health and innovation in February 2020 and a regional webinar on digital health and innovation in May 2020.

### **Related links**

[Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All](#)

[National eHealth Strategy Toolkit Overview](#)

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