Advocacy & Messaging Framework of Young Experts: Tech for Health
about Young Experts: Tech for Health

Young Experts: Tech for Health (YET4H) is a youth-led organisation that aims to create a global youth network that re-imagines healthcare in a digital age. Led by youth, for youth, YET4H believes in a world where young people are resourced and empowered to interrogate the status quo in digital health, represent the diversity of youth, and shape more inclusive and equitable paradigms in the global digital health agenda. YET4H aims to achieve its vision of a global digital health ecosystem that meaningfully engages young people, catering to their unique needs and challenges, recognising them as equal stakeholders and partners in achieving Universal Health Coverage.

acknowledgments

This document was drafted by Nigel James, an independent consultant of YET4H, with contributions and reviews by YET4H’s founding cohort (Richard Dzikunu, Marwa Azelmat, Yacine Ndiaye, Lucy Fagan, Sahil Tandon, Neira Budiono, William Yeung, Satish Melwani, Ahmed Aboushady) and YET4H’s second cohort (Caesar Kogoziga, Shelani Palihawadana, Miriam El-Mahdi, Jeffery Maesala, Ruben Avila, Marian Murunga, Mohamed El-Zemety, Shannon Thom).

INTRODUCTION

This document is part of the strategic advocacy and communication plan for YET4H. It provides a framework approach for developing key advocacy messages to advance meaningful youth engagement in decision-making processes, planning, implementation, and evaluation of digital health interventions. It is designed to help advocates, fundraisers, program officers and communication teams at large to identify, prioritise, and package key messages in support of digital transformation of healthcare systems and the broader universal health coverage (UHC) agenda. While this framework provides high-level messaging guidance, users can and should draw and tailor key messages to reflect their lived experiences as well as suit the specific needs of a targeted audience and/or a specific communication goal.

In line with YET4H principles and values, the framework puts youth at the front and centre of re-thinking health in a digital age. Both the main messages and talking points have been built around the Problem, Solution, Impact, and Call to Action messaging framework, segmented by audience type. The audience segments covered include youth, civil society organisations, healthcare providers, researchers/academia, policymakers, private sector, and funders. YET4H recognizes that structural inequalities within and across countries are a significant barrier to achieving health for all. As such, these audience segmented messages aim to espouse the distinct yet sometimes overlapping “rights holder and duty bearers” roles of the various stakeholders within the digital health space. Through mainstreaming the role of youth across all segments and all framework levels, this messaging tool aims to highlight the untapped potential of youth leadership and engagement to enhance quality healthcare that is inclusive, affordable, equitable and accessible to all.

Furthermore, YET4H believes that addressing and dismantling racism is vital to ensure the success of digital health tools. All stakeholders mentioned above strive to center, support, and amplify the voices of those experiencing discrimination. Racism harms health and should be addressed just like any other health risk. In this spirit, these key messages advance a digital health transformative agenda that is anchored in anti-racist and anti-oppressive approaches.

Practically, the key messages outlined in this framework can be adapted for social media campaigns, blogging editorials, event speeches, panel/discussion forum talking points, press releases, grant proposal development, etc. The figure below summarises the step-by-step process used in the development of this communication tool.
Documentary review
Audience segmented approach
Evidence based

Brainstorming and reflexive development of key messages:
- Problem/gap
- Solution
- Impact
- Call to action

Publishing on YET4H’s key platforms
Dissemination to YET4H’s strategic partners
Promotional social media content which includes summarised points from the document
Inclusion in YET4H’s presentation and talking points materials

Fig. 1: Conceptual Model
PROBLEM STATEMENT:
Although young people constitute a large proportion of digital technology consumers—including digital health technologies¹—they are not always equally or well represented within the digital health development spectrum, from innovations building to policy making. As rights holders and future duty bearers, young people must be integrated into the vanguard to help shape digital adoption, in an increasingly digital world.

- Young people are underrepresented and overlooked, when it comes to designing and making key decisions within the digital health space. In some cases when they are involved, the engagement is usually tokenistic as it is about “box ticking”, that unfortunately, does not harness young people’s full potential.
- Young people are concerned about misinformation, disinformation, data privacy, cyber bullying, exposure to risk of self-harm, and behavioural disorders.³
- Vulnerable groups including youth, women, children, people living with disability, LGBTQI, and the poor continue to face digital marginalisation— including lack of access to digital technologies, tools, and skills.
- A non-inclusive health digitalization process that does not recognize unique needs for these diverse populations will expand inequalities and delay the attainment of UHC.

SOLUTION:
Entrench youth voices and participation and develop their active role across the continuum of digital health development process including the roll out of digital innovations. This process should be anchored in principles of meaningful youth engagement including co-creation, co-ownership, co-leadership, accountability, and intersectionality.⁴

- Put young people at the centre of the digitisation process, uniquely positioning them to shape their healthy future.
- Develop stronger policies and laws that promote human rights, including rights of children, building people’s trust in digital health systems.
- Invest in developing digital skills through training and technology access for all.

**IMPACT:**

The youth constituency is active, energised, and transformative, with vested interests in digital systems. A youth-centred health digitalization approach is needed to shape the transformation of healthcare, including accelerating UHC progress.

- Young people represent the largest and fastest-growing demographic, globally. They are rights holders and future duty bearers with potential to lead the scale up of digital health solutions. Tapping into this strength presents a unique opportunity for shaping a sustainable digital health future.⁵

**CALL TO ACTION:**

The needs, preferences and capabilities of youth are not homogenous, both within and across countries and also across social groups. Recognizing the varying levels of digital literacy, technology access and digital health governance tools will help direct resources to areas of most need, bridge the digital divide, and maximise health for all.

- Prioritise young people’s input at every level of digital health technology development, focusing on developing their agency and power as both innovators and end users of digital health technologies.
- Prioritise funding innovation by youth, youth start-ups and/or youth led organisations—who are unlikely to have significant capital resources or access to mainstream lines of credit.
- Young people should leverage their existing digital familiarity, invest in acquiring skills, and meaningfully engage in the healthcare systems digitalization discourse.
- Promote sharing of lessons and best practices to ensure adoption and adaptation of digital health technologies that respond to community local needs.
- Safeguard the rights and agency of young people as they engage with digital health technologies including online spaces.

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The digital transformation of healthcare systems offers a remarkable chance for the expansion of health services and increasing service utilisation. However, poor governance, and lack of investments disproportionately impact marginalised society members including but not limited to youth, Indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees, internally displaced people, people affected by extreme poverty, minority communities, people with disabilities, people who live in residential institutions, people in detention, people who use drugs, and LGBT and gender diverse people,⁶ deepening existing health inequalities.

Poor health literacy, lack of digital skills, government mistrust, disinformation, and misinformation—all pose significant threats to optimum adoption of digital health technologies in these communities.

Civil society groups, grassroots organisations, and community leaders are gatekeepers and catalysts of social change. Sustainable digital transformation of health systems should involve these important stakeholders at every stage.

Digital health interventions should not treat communities and/or local groups as passive recipients of technological innovation. They are an equal partner in development who come to the table with an investment of local talent and a good understanding of the “problem definition”

Closing the digital divide will require championing local solutions to address local problems.

IMPACT:
Empowered communities can form a critical mass of a political voice that can be effective in driving digital health justice, holding elected officials accountable, and fostering sustainable change.

CALL TO ACTION:
A digital transformation of healthcare systems that contributes to the “health access for all” goal should prioritise at its core, the health needs and the participation of vulnerable groups who face greatest burden of diseases and challenges in navigating and accessing healthcare.⁷

- Amplify the voices and health needs of the vulnerable, ensuring that no one is left behind.
- Leverage the unique role and positionality of youth constituencies, actively engaging them at every level of the digitization process.
- Incorporate a human rights lens in development of policies and laws that govern digital health.
- Invest in generation and use of quality local data to design and scale up digital health interventions that speak to the felt needs of local communities.

healthcare providers &
HEALTHCARE MANAGEMENT

PROBLEM STATEMENT:
Approximately half of the world’s population still lacks access to essential health services. Most developing countries face critical health worker shortages due to limited investments in health worker compensation, training and brain drain. Young people face a lot of challenges when interfacing with healthcare systems, including but not limited to insufficient health literacy, financial barriers, and stigma and discrimination.

- Health workforce is not sufficiently trained or involved in the digitalization of healthcare systems.
- Most health workforce (including community health workers) lack relevant digital health skills to utilise technology effectively.
- There is a lack of awareness and incentives for health workers to adopt digital technologies, especially amongst frontline workers in primary health care.
- Digital health and data governance is usually not a part of pre-and/or in-service training programs for health workers.
- Health workers do not have access to health technologies.

SOLUTION:
Support implementation and expansion of digitisation of healthcare systems to increase access and utilisation of health services, expand scope of services provided and ease-up how services are financed.
Incentivize training and retention of health workers including community health workers.

- Equip frontline health staff with evolving digital knowledge, and skills
- Update health worker training curriculum to incorporate digital health training including digital health ethics and data governance.
- Ensure meaningful involvement of health workers—particularly those on the frontlines—to ensure smooth transitions from paper based to digital systems.

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Recognizing that change is not an easy process, healthcare workers should embrace the adoption of digital systems, keep up with the pace of digital systems transformation in their practices, and be able to articulate benefits and threats to their clients.

As respected health education authorities, health workers’ buy-in on digital health systems can foster trust, manage disinformation, and promote adoption of digital health tools.

Leverage digital health tools to create friendly environments that promote healthcare utilisation especially among adolescents and young people — who are often a hard-to-reach population.

Provide constructive feedback regarding the impact of digital innovation on the practice, particularly with respect to safety, efficacy, and privacy.¹⁰

Engage the next generation of health workers (students and early career professionals) in the digital health development space.

IMPACT:

Digital transformation of health systems is a catalyst to the achievement of Universal Health Coverage. Healthcare providers are a key stakeholder, they should be consulted and be meaningfully involved at every stage of the digitisation process to ensure it appropriately meets their needs and requirements.

- Reduce anxieties amidst healthcare providers that digitalization will add to their already significant workload by emphasising how appropriate implementation can save time and improve care.
- A digitally empowered health workforce can improve and increase scope and quality of services provided and relay its merits to their patients and community.
- Tele-health and tele-medicine consultations can increase service coverage among hard to reach population groups such as youth and the rural population.
- Enhanced dissemination of evidence-based health information can empower communities to make more informed health decisions.
- Digitalization ensures innovative ways for enhancing medication adherence, strengthening the continuum of care by concentrating information together, streamlining medical decision-making and ultimately delivering better outcomes to patients.
- Digital health systems have the potential to reach underserved and marginalised populations with specific and targeted services.

CALL TO ACTION:

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- As respected health education authorities, they should be consulted and meaningfully involved at every stage.
- Leverage digital health tools to create friendly environments that promote healthcare utilisation especially among adolescents and young people — who are often a hard-to-reach population.
- Provide constructive feedback regarding the impact of digital innovation on the practice, particularly with respect to safety, efficacy, and privacy.¹⁰
- Engage the next generation of health workers (students and early career professionals) in the digital health development space.

Researchers at academic institutions, think tanks, and industry should embrace the digital health research agenda, focusing on new approaches of evidence generation that aims to strengthen evidence-based decision-making on digital approaches.

- Researchers are a strategic link between advocates/activists and policymakers. Research evidence equips the former with tools to call for digital health justice and, for the latter, it provides information necessary for policy formulation or change.

**IMPACT:**
A strategic research agenda on digital health will be helpful to evaluate the multi-faceted impact of digital technologies, including impacts over time.

- Good research is fundamental to formulation of guidelines and policies that uphold human rights explicating benefits, harms, acceptability, feasibility, resource use and equity considerations of digital health interventions.
- Digital technologies provide new opportunities to capture research data for measuring the effectiveness of implementations in real time, thus facilitating the ability to conduct evaluations more rapidly.

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CALL TO ACTION:

Digital health interventions are not a silver bullet to all health system problems and should not be viewed as a substitute for functioning health systems\(^2\). A well-coordinated research agenda should highlight both the potential and limitations of digital tools, be accessible and enable individuals to take control of their own health.

- Support youth-led research approaches, and promote early career researchers in the digital health space
- Innovative research tools and methodologies are needed to align the evidence generation process with the fast pace of digital evolution.
- Interdisciplinary research focused more heavily on evaluating the evidence for, and the impact and cost-effectiveness of, e-health services is urgently needed
- “Researchers should be realistic about the extent to which digital health interventions can impact on distal health outcomes, which are often affected by a variety of factors beyond the interaction with the digital intervention”\(^3\)
- Funders, publishers, and researchers alike should prioritise and expand the digital health research agenda to include a broader population setting and context to better understand and mitigate any potential negative impacts on gender, equity, and rights, as well as capitalise upon gains.
- Evaluate and highlight the critical role being played by youth in leveraging digital health, positioning them as early adopters with potential to civic development
- In this digital economy era, the role of youth—who are both consumers and producers of digital content cannot be over-emphasised\(^4\). Empirical evidence on youth engagement in digital health space can attract funding, promote diffusion of ideas and foster innovation sustainability.

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\(^4\) WHO Guideline. U-Report Poll.”
PROBLEM STATEMENT:
Weak and or inadequate data governance frameworks and policies along with a lack of digital infrastructure investments—across global, national, and local government systems—continue to pose persistent challenges to implementation and scale up of digital health interventions.

- Globally, about 3.6 billion people still have no access to internet.¹⁵
- Current uneven and inconsistent state of data governance policies creates overlaps, confusion, and inefficiencies.
- Globally, health data governance is lagging behind the pace of digital innovation, sometimes ratification of policies and guidelines takes too long and is non-inclusive.¹⁶

SOLUTION:

Digitalisation of health systems need to be a country’s decision,¹⁷ backed by strong political will, demonstratable through increased and sustained investments in closing the digital divide. A harmonised digital governance framework will ensure efficient and effective data sharing, protection of privacy whilst addressing local community needs.

- Digital health systems have the potential to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), through increasing both utilisation and coverage of healthcare services, enhancing quality, and improving processes related to healthcare financing.
- COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of digital health governance and technologies. For healthcare systems with robust digital health infrastructure (mainly high-income countries), e-health and telemedicine enabled sustained health care provision for some critical health services during the pandemic.
- Ensure digital governance is co-designed and co-governed for and with youth, in order to promote equitable, affordable, and universal access to health for youth in today’s digital world.¹⁸

IMpact:
Increased and sustained investments in digital health systems will strengthen health systems—including health governance—thereby accelerating realization of Sustainable Development Goals.

- Increased local, national, and international investments can help narrow the existing digital divide, bolster primary health care systems, and empower communities to have control over their own health.
- Ensuring that youth, women, and other marginalised groups are included throughout the whole process of digital health development will promote equity, acceptability, and sustainability, making sure that the digital age is inclusive and works for everybody.¹⁹
- Addressing and dismantling racism is vital to the delivery of effective digital health technologies and the achievement of universal health coverage.

²¹ Transform Health Coalition, “The Case for Digital Health: Accelerating Progress to Achieve UHC.”

Call to Action:
Digitalisation of healthcare systems should be a key policy priority at all levels—local, national, and global. Closing the digital divide should go beyond just providing internet access, but focus on human rights and ensure that youth, women, and other marginalised groups are included.

- Foster greater collaboration between public and private sector in digital health
- Strengthen leadership and political will, demonstrable through right levels of funding, and policy frameworks that promote multisectoral partnerships.
- Commit to narrowing the digital divide, gender gaps and the rural-urban divide
- Promote inclusiveness—migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, older persons, youth, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples.²⁰
- Leverage young people’s interest in health, tapping into their expertise through meaningful engagement in the design, implementation, and governance of digital transformation processes.
- Create a global governance framework for health data to maximise the public benefits of data whilst safeguarding individual privacy, ownership, and security.²¹
- Develop an anti-oppressive, anti-racist and decolonial digital health polices
- As duty bearers, policy makers “should ensure that digitally enabled health systems and digital health technologies are accessible and available to all, are of good quality, and do not cause financial hardship”²²
PRIVATE SECTOR

 enquanto digital technologies present a platform for advancing health access for all, limited investments, and expansion of digital technology infrastructure in some parts of the world along with lack of accountability mechanisms fuel unethical practices and widen social and health inequalities

- Almost half of the world's population is not connected to internet. Furthermore, for those connected, it is sometimes irregular and unreliable, and or prohibitively expensive, disproportionately impacting young people and other marginalised societies groups.²³
- In limited resource countries where the digital divide is widest, strategic public-private partnerships are still lacking, 72% of digital health funding is through donor aid, raising serious concerns about sustainability.²⁴
- The current patenting systems—though geared toward promoting innovation,²⁵ ²⁶ a market demand rather than health needs-based research priorities, limits access to full utilisation of digital health technologies especially among youth and the marginalised.
- Inadequate data privacy, misinformation, poor accountability, and monopoly creates social mistrusts and impedes effective adoption of digital health systems.
- Some of the available digital health technologies are embedded with racist technology that perpetuates coloniality and is therefore not user friendly for many health care providers of color.

²³ Kalvin Bahia and Anne Delaporte, “The State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2020,” GSMA Reports, 2020, 61,
CALL TO ACTION:
Digitalisation of healthcare systems should be a key policy priority at all levels—local, national, and global. Closing the digital divide should exceed internet access, focus on human rights and ensure that youth, women, and other marginalised groups are included.

- Address concerns on data privacy, accountability, and equitable distribution
- Build innovative and creative digital health solutions that can be adapted to context specific needs, optimising health outcomes.
- Collaborate with government other stakeholders including youth, health care providers, academic institutions, philanthropies, and donors to deploy e-health solutions effectively and efficiently.
- Ensure that investments and the whole project life cycle are designed and rolled out within a human rights framework, entrenching youth voices at every level, including but not limited to youth meaningful involvement, youth equitable remuneration and youth empowerment through decision making roles.
- Rethinking global governance models using data and demand driven evidence and treating health as a public good essential for social and economic development.
- Develop anti-oppressive, anti-racist and decolonial digital health technologies
- Meaningful youth engagement in the digital health space, demonstrable through paid internships and intentional youth empowerment.
- Ensure equity not only of the end-product but also equity in the technology development process.
- Place emphasis on understanding community local needs, building on existing technologies that have potential of wider coverage optimising health benefits for all.

IMPACT:
Leveraging digital technologies and data can bolster public health system and build resilient communities

- Increasing domestic and international investments will narrow the digital divide, bolster primary health care systems, and empower communities to have control over their own health.
- Ensuring that youth, women, and other marginalised groups are included throughout the whole process of digital health development will promote acceptability and sustainability, ensuring that the digital age works for everybody.
- Increasing domestic private sector involvement in digital health space ensures funding sustainability of projects

SOLUTION:
Private sector participation in digital health development is critical. Increasing sustainable financing averts interventions failure and narrow the digital divide. Customise digital health solutions and adapt technology to context.

- Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) create a win-win situation for advancing health communities
- Determining return on investment (ROI) should go beyond immediate financial perspective to include populational health and benefits from stronger health systems, which in turn enable greater profits from reduced absenteeism, presenteeism and worker motivation.
- Provide opportunities for young people to work in private sector, tapping into their lived experiences and expertise to design and deploy digital health solutions that speaks to youth and young peoples’ unique health needs and challenges.

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funding agencies
(donors, philanthropies, governments, international organisations)

PROBLEM STATEMENT:
The causes of both within- and across-country digital health inequalities divide are complex ranging from economic constraints to societal factors that hinder diffusion of innovations.³⁰ Regardless of the cause, such a divide exacerbates health disparities.

- Globally, about 3.6 billion people still have no access to internet.³¹
- Mostly in limited resources countries, fragmentation of health systems, duplication, and lack of interoperability are the most typical digital health system challenges.³²
- “Poor health sector governance results in inefficiency, waste, error and fraud, compromising the integrity of health services and the equitable delivery of patient care.”³³

SOLUTION:
Donors, international and domestic alike, should support country efforts to digitise health systems. However, countries should own the process of digital transformation, prioritising integrated approaches to services delivery, improving data and the capacity to use it.

- Engage young people beyond tokenistic “engagement”³⁴
- Funders should avoid a fragmented approach to investment, instead they should collaboratively support digital health innovations prioritised within the country’s national health strategies.
- Funding grants should emphasise understanding of local context, be flexible and responsive to local needs and should make room for funding support beyond the grant period for sustainability³⁵

³³ Isaac Holeman, Tara Patricia Cookson, and Claudia Pagliari, “Digital Technology for Health Sector Governance in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Scoping Review,” Journal of Global Health 6, no. 2 (2016),
³⁵ IDIA, “Good Practice Guides for Funders Scaling Innovation the International Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA),” no. June (2017): 1–33,
IMPACT:
Increased and sustained investments in digital health systems will strengthen health systems—including health governance—thereby accelerating realisation of Sustainable Development Goals.

- Young people remain an untapped potential to accelerate digital transformation of health systems. As digital natives, they can catalyse innovation acceptance, foster ownership maximising return on investments and sustainability.
- Aligning funding with national priorities will reduce costs through riding on existing human capital and physical infrastructure, harnessing program ownership and sustainability.
- Increased domestic and international investments will narrow the digital divide, bolster primary health care systems, and empower communities to have control over their own health.


CALL TO ACTION:
Digital transformation of health care systems is a promising tool for the realisation of Health for All goal. Strategic funding that prioritises digital health leadership, governance, implementation, oversight, and global good adoption, and donor coordination is key.

- Increase donor funding to support developing country governments to develop and implement innovative digital tools and data-driven decision making for overall health system strengthening.
- Investing in closing the digital divide will expand health services coverage amongst the most vulnerable, including youth.
- Prioritise digital health tools and approaches that are simple and can be readily utilised providing the biggest benefits for people’s health.
- Invest in and support young people’s ideas and digital health innovations.
- Need to change funding models that perpetuate neocolonialism, racism, and further marginalisation.
- Promote and fund youth-led organisations, including facilitating platforms for sharing digital health tools and interventions.
- “Convene cross-sectoral partnerships with national governments, private sector actors, and grassroots and faith-based organisations, to forge an innovative, global movement to bridge the digital divide while emphasising the role and value of youth as thinkers and leaders”³⁷