

YOUTH STATEMENT

+ Call for Action





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- 16 Youth LEAD
- 17 Global Health Young Professionals Initiative (GHYPI)
- 18 Commonwealth Youth Health Network (CYHN)
- 19 Mentally Aware Nigeria Initiative
- 20 Young Team Caribbean & African Health Network (CAHN)
- 21 Junior Doctors Network (JDN)
- 22 International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation (IPSF)
- 23 Australian Medical Student Association
- 24 Foraus The Swiss Think Tank on Foreign Policy
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GHFutures2030 Youth



For the first time, a joint The Lancet and Financial Times Commission on Governing health futures 2030: Growing up in a digital world (hereafter: GHFutures2030, or the Commission) is exploring the convergence of digital health, artificial intelligence (AI), and universal health coverage (UHC) with a focus on improving and safeguarding the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Digital and data tools and technologies are fundamentally changing approaches to health and the design of health systems - but governance models have not yet followed the pace of innovation. Striving for integrated digital development that improves the health and wellbeing of children and young people in an ever more digital world, the objective of the Commission is to deliver a clear set of recommendations on the governance of digital health taking full account of geopolitical, economic, and social factors. The Commission brings together independent Commissioners from a range of sectors and disciplines to deliver a final report scheduled for late 2021.

For children and young people (hereafter: youth) to truly have agency with respect to digital technologies and approaches for which they are the intended end users or beneficiaries, they need to be enfranchised and empowered to participate – beyond just being loosely engaged – in every step of the process. The meaningful enfranchisement of youth is a central

tenet of the Commission's work. GHFutures2030 strives to ensure that digital health (DH) governance is codesigned and co-governed for and with youth to drive forward the agenda of achieving desired health futures for all.

Thirty-five participants representing twenty-three global youth networks participated in a two-part GHFutures2030 Youth Consultation, titled "What do youth want to see in the future of health governance?" (Annex 1 Participant Demographics). The aims of the consultation were threefold: first, to hear from youth as to how they identify as a group; second, to understand their main concerns and proposed solutions with respect to the digital transformations in health; and third, provide space for Commissioners to hear from youth on the health futures they they want (Figure 1).

In order to entrench youth voices as a mainstay to promising health futures, we, as youth leaders, look to the Commission's report to address our main concerns (Figure 2). First, the right to digital health and a human rights-based approach to digital health must be recognised. Second, fostering digital health skills is vital for innovation, trust, and equitable uptake. Youth must be involved as equal stakeholders throughout the continuum of research and learning as well as digital innovations, programme development, and policy making decisions.

Consultative process for co-creating the Youth Statement

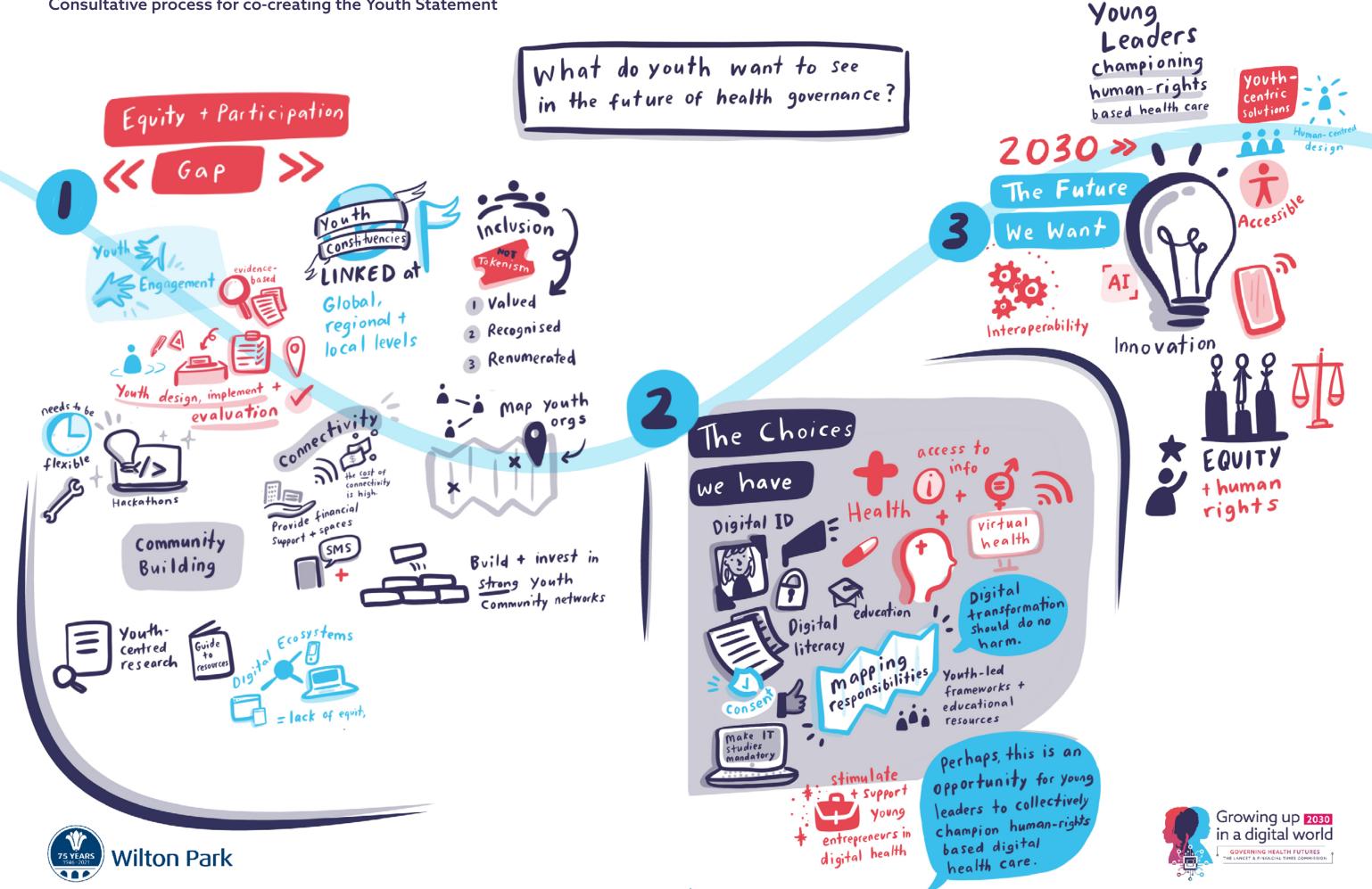
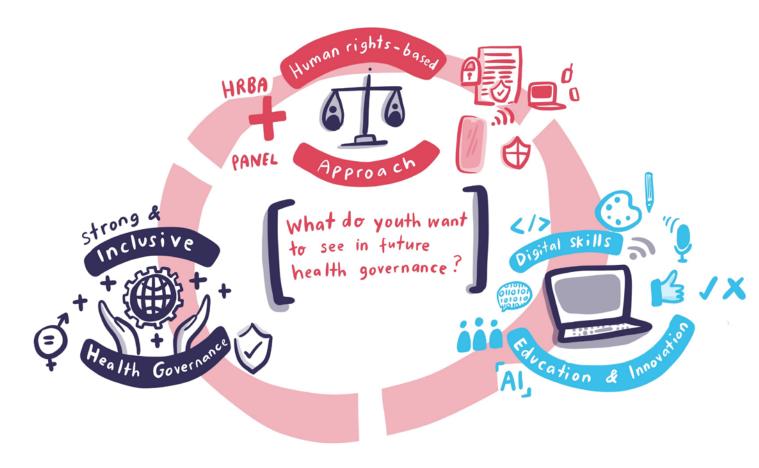


FIGURE 2

What youth want to see in the future of health governance



Introduction

Today, there are 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10 and 24 – the largest youth population in history – 90 percent of whom are living in developing countries. This population represents an unprecedented powerhouse of human potential and digital engagement that could positively transform the future of health and sustainable development.

In addition to an age definition, 'youth' encapsulates a broad range of lived experiences including individuals with variations in technical expertise and relationships to the digital world. Today's youth are often referred to as 'digital

natives', as they were born in the digital era and, whether they are connected or not, are growing up in a technologically-driven environment.³ Moreover, it has been globally acknowledged that young people are the most active users of digital technology and digital media.⁴

However, like any other demographic group, these experiences are not homogenous. Youth are not a monolithic category, but rather, have vast internal diversity and disparities – on the basis of location, educational attainment, economic stability, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, physical and mental abilities, and other factors. Therefore, while

we are a turning point generation in terms of digital potential, pre-existing social norms, structural inequities, and systemic constraints continue to afflict our modern societies.

The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has uniquely impacted us as youth. As it has limelighted population health, it has also revealed inflated levels of anxiety, depression, gender inequity, isolation, substance abuse, and the need for social support and networks, particularly amongst young people.5 Many youth are experiencing upended education, increased mental and physical health concerns, lack of job prospects, and a lack of mentorship and peer support at a crucial stage in their development.⁶ This has disrupted future trajectories and led to the widening of existing digital divides, exacerbating inequities between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not.

Youth have demonstrated innovation and resilience in harnessing digital expertise to build community and remain connected and creative throughout the pandemic; however, we also recognise that meaningful access to digital technology remains a privilege and

is not an experience that is shared equally. Additionally, with online work and education having become the new norm, the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the need for the development of digital skills, while at the same time revealing and amplifying existing disparities in digital access and skills.

More than ever, COVID-19 has made clear that youth have been disproportionately impacted by the global environment and not only deserve a voice, but are and should be regarded as key agents of change. Furthermore, it has raised the importance of involving youth in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, programmes, services, and tools involving the use of digital health technologies. Within structures for meaningful youth engagement and improved digital health outcomes, it is important to not bifurcate the categories of youth and institutions of power, but rather, build bridges between them.8 Therefore, it is necessary that as policymakers recognise the potential of a digitally-raised generation, they need to build and expand youth's resources, skills, and opportunities to access and engage with digital as a critical tool to challenge and change current norms.

A human rights-based — approach to (digital) health

Digital health guided through a human rights-based approach (HRBA) framework⁹ presents several benefits that could lead to an inclusive and equitable digital transformation in health and means for the attainment of UHC, including and not limited to its accessibility in isolated areas, increasing the safety of health workers and the quality

of their services, and the spread and scope of easy-to-reach health information.

Through this GHFutures2030 Youth Consultation, youth called for (digital) health policy making and programming to



be guided by human rights standards and principles, 10 aimed at developing the capacity of duty bearers to meet their obligations, and for such actors to be held accountable for their actions. Health futures should empower rights-holders to effectively claim their health rights and to participate in every step of digital health design, development, implementation, and evaluation.

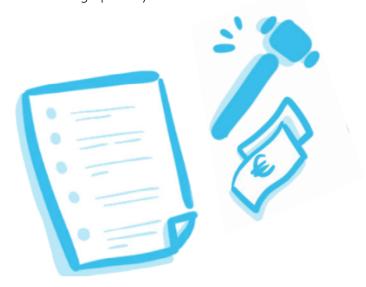
Digital health technologies have been heralded as a critical solution to challenges and gaps in the delivery of quality health care and essential in realising UHC. However, young people's use of digital technologies also raises concerns around privacy, safety, autonomy, accountability, and confidentiality, which can lead to discrimination and violence. Weak governance of digital technologies can potentially result in violations of the rights to health, housing, employment, freedom of assembly, expression, protection from arbitrary detention, bodily autonomy, and security. Digital transformations also present threats for adolescent health and wellbeing, particularly concerning online safety (e.g. cyber-bullying, sexual commercial exploitation, and social contagion around self-harm; violence; radicalisation; and eating disorders)¹¹. More broadly, without proper planning, usage, and safeguards in place, digital health technologies can contribute to health inequities, widening the digital divide that separates those who can and cannot access and/ or benefit from such interventions.¹²

These threats should not dissuade the use of digital health, but rather, draw attention to the need for health futures shaped by digital transformations to be grounded in shared values with governance structures which support the attainment of health for all through a human rights-based

approach to health, while promoting targeted efforts to the most vulnerable.¹³

The HRBA framework¹⁴ is of particular relevance to youth, especially for those living in areas where human rights are under constant threat. A HRBA to digital health specifically aims at realising the right to health and other health-related human rights through a multidimensional and holistic framework, guided by the PANEL Principles: Participation, Accountability, Non-Discrimination and Equality, Empowerment, and Legality.¹⁵ It is also important to highlight that a HRBA to digital health will guarantee that the right to health - digitally - is fulfilled to all human beings, including vulnerable populations, leaving no one behind.

The implementation of digital technologies in health must also be aligned with the right to health and its basic standards – availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality. This means that duty bearers must ensure that digitally-enabled health systems and digital health technologies are accessible and are available to all, of good quality, and do not cause financial hardship. Simultaneously, as to ensure the acceptability of these technologies, digital health literacy and education should be provided to all, as a tool to bridge the "digital divide" intergenerationally and demographically.



Digital skills, education, & innovation

Around the world, digital technologies are becoming increasingly pervasive in young people's lives. 16 Globally, 71% of young people ages 15-24 are online, versus just under half (48%) of the overall population.¹⁷ Yet, today, 360 million young people (1 in 10) are without digital connection, limiting the most vulnerable to fulfill their potential.¹⁸ Despite the spread of digital technologies in many parts of the world, major inequities persist for youth across geographies and demographics (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status). 19 It therefore becomes clear that although youth as a demographic have a high level of connectivity, they are not all participating in the same conditions. On one hand, the digital divide may widen as a result, with the most digitally connected youth accumulating opportunities to shape their futures in a digital economy, to the detriment of those who are poorly connected.

However, on the other hand, digital technologies are allowing youth to engage in different –and at times, new – types of content creation (e.g. podcasting or coding). These activities, in turn, can lead to pathways toward more inclusive health futures.²⁰

Digital skills and frameworks for developing skills

To successfully support young people in addressing digital skills gaps, the design of frameworks and learning materials for learning spaces has become an increasing priority for decision-makers in public and private sectors. Some examples include UNESCO's framework around Media and

Information Literacy²¹; the International Society for Technology in Education's Standards for Students²²; and the European Commission's DigComp.²³ A number of organisations have also, based on these frameworks, started to develop educational content that aims to teach digital health skills.

Amidst rapid globalisation and digitalisation, it is crucial that youth are provided with opportunities to develop a range of skills needed to thrive academically, socially, ethically, politically, and economically in our rapidly evolving digital world.²⁴ This may range from understanding how to engage with others in positive and respectful ways online to using digital tools to develop creative content. In the context of digital health, several skills may be particularly relevant, such as: an understanding of how one's health-related information is collected, stored, and used online; knowing how to leverage online and offline tools to advocate for health issues one is passionate about; understanding the ethical implications of Al-based health platforms and services (e.g. mental health chatbots) and being aware of prevention efforts to reduce biases created by AI; and being able to discern factual from false online health information.

Consent, privacy, data ownership, and use of personal data

Youth recognise the great potential for digital transformations to support youth in learning and gaining new skills, and studies have highlighted the positive implications such learning environments in education have for policy, practice, and research internationally.

However, while young people have on average higher levels of engagement with digital platforms and technology, factors such as the vulnerability associated with their young age, digital illiteracy, coupled with an underdeveloped digital regulatory ecosystem continue to make them vulnerable to

various challenges and potential harms on such platforms. Some youth lack specific digital skills around data protection and privacy, which are making the digital realm fraught with risks to vulnerable users.

Through this GHFutures2030 Youth Consultation, youth spoke largely on the need for a robust 'consent culture' and the choice to opt in to data sharing, without repercussions on access to services and information. Additionally, youth acknowledged the need of the relevant parties to assume responsibilities to ensure that choices regarding data sharing are not limited to either giving up one's data or ceasing to use technology at

all. Safeguarding of digital identities and data autonomy can further be improved by making complex Terms and Conditions agreements on digital platforms easier to understand, so users can know their options and make meaningful, informed decisions. With improved digital skills and autonomy, the user can have more knowledge about digital health, the data generated, how it is used, and their rights over it.

As more health interactions and services move to digital spaces, it becomes increasingly important to define what a human rights based approach to health means in this novel landscape. The range of potential harms from privacy breaches, intrusive data analytics, monetising personal/sensitive user information, to profiling and targeting, surveillance, are direct threats to users health, well-being and lives, and as such must be protected under a framework of human rights. Thus, there is a need to expand existing rights frameworks to include digital rights and support regulatory mechanisms from global to local levels that can safeguard users.²⁵

- Opportunities and implications for policy and programming

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has recently adopted General Comment 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. ²⁶ The general comment clarifies the implications of the digital environment for children's rights and freedoms, including their rights to privacy, non-discrimination, protection, education, play, and more. Furthermore, it provides guidance to Member States and other duty bearers as to how and

why such rights for children and young people should be supported by all stakeholders.

Digital technologies are often touted as a panacea. However, it is important to note that sociocultural and contextual differences as well as existing inequities with respect to access, skills, and opportunities all have implications for how digital technologies can be successfully used to engage with

youth and, therefore, must be accounted for when developing and implementing these programmes, services, and policies. In fact, there is immense potential to utilise such platforms and media to build capacity, facilitate access, and provide spaces for youth to flourish.

It is thus important that digital initiatives approach youth identities, needs, and realities through an intersectional lens, factoring in axes of gender, age, ethnicity, race, sexual identity, physical ability, geography, religion, socioeconomic status, national origin, and educational attainment. Against this backdrop, governments should work more closely with development and private sector partners to bridge the digital divide, by facilitating pervasion of digital literacy, resources, and infrastructure to support youth access to information, opportunity, and choice.

Furthermore, the existing evidence base must be broadened and strengthened in order to bridge knowledge gaps about what youth need and want, with respect to their digital skills, and the role they envisage digital to pay in their overall health and wellbeing. These insights could better inform future policies and interventions, for instance around demedicalisation of healthcare, support for self-care, peer-networks, and support community formation for an improved shared public value of the digital transformation of health futures.

In the context of COVID-19, greater investments in developing youth's digital skills is of growing importance, especially for underrepresented communities. As such, there is a need to support a digital health ecosystem with the capacities, infrastructure, and skills, particularly in LMICs, that can facilitate meaningful participation with and for youth.

Innovative and participatory methods of developing such digital skills programmes and initiatives may provide a viable path forward. Youth are eager to help determine the type of world that is created with and for them. The development of digital skill initiatives is an area where young people's involvement will have a positive impact, through, for instance, co-designing educational content on the digital world with them.²⁷ By involving youth in the process, stakeholders can work together with young people to ensure that educational materials and programs more strongly align with youth's unique backgrounds, needs, and interests.





Call for Action

On 18 February 2021, a Youth Call for Action was adopted by acclamation during the second part of the virtual GHFutures 2030 Youth Consultation.

This is a strong call upon stakeholders at all levels and in all spheres of work to take action toward strong governance of the digital transformations of health futures with youth involved at every level.

We, the representatives of global youth networks, including youth from across the sectors of health and social care, information and communications technology (ICT), and beyond, having gathered virtually at the Youth Consultation of *The Lancet* and Financial Times Commission on Governing health futures 2030: Growing up in a digital world.





Establish and uphold digital norms and standards to protect children and youth, especially in the fight against organised crime and violence in digital environments, such as cyberbullying, pornography, and trafficking;

Refocus digital solutions on long-term health prevention and promotion for all ages;

Develop frameworks for meaningful youth engagement in digital health interventions;

Develop regulatory











Support national governments to implement evidence-based, safe, and effective digital health technologies;

norms and standards, and regulate the equitable distribution of digital health interventions between and within countries;

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;

Facilitate a continued dialogue with relevant stakeholders with diverse groups of youth to involve them in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of digital health policies, programmes, and services;

a) this would 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 increasingly digital world;



Call upon national governments to:

Build a policy foundation that addresses the inequities of a deepening digital divide and ensures:

- a) data and child protection;
- b) digital safety;
- c) a human-rights based approach to digital health;



assurance system for the introduction and evaluation of digital tools;



Engage youth in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, systems, tools, and technologies related to digital health by:

- a) creating active roles for youth in government;
- b) building youth mentorship infrastructure;
- c) clarifying the processes for youth to participate in government;

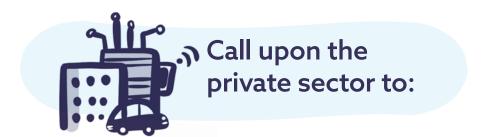


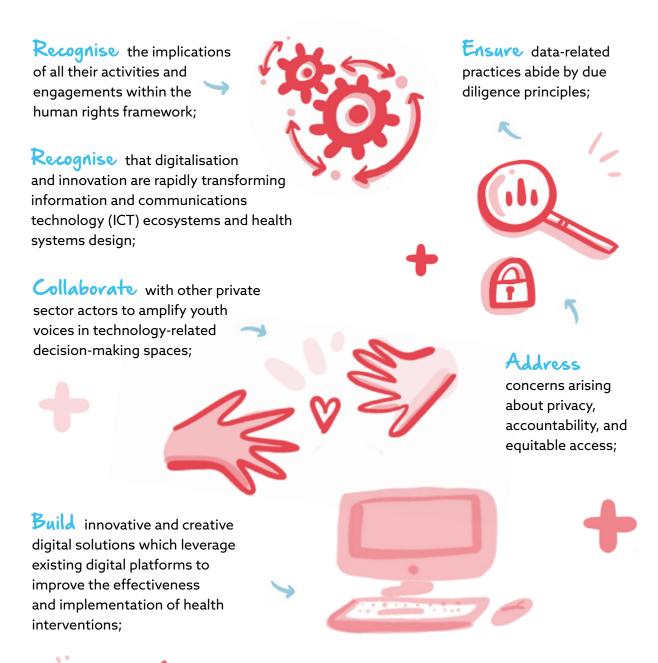
Invest in the development and uptake of digital tools for governmental, educational, and health institutions;



Pevelop a set of guiding Principles of Digital Leadership for working interoperably across different levels and areas of government leadership and influence, to hold them accountable to the people they serve;

concerns (e.g. responsible data sharing and exchange, interoperability to support youth in cross-border migratory populations) to ensure that priorities being called for at global, national, and subnational levels are also articulated and acted upon at the regional level;





Promote safe and equitable opportunities for health promotion and service delivery through the utilisation of digital technology encompassing digital media, AI, and machine learning;

global public goods including health;

Participate in wider cross-sectoral partnerships to rethink global governance models in an increasingly data-driven and networked era, in order to ensure access to



Call upon civil societies organisations to:

Represent the voices and needs of patients, communities, and marginalised groups in discussions around digital health to ensure no-one is left behind;

Recognise the key role of youth-led organisations as part of intergenerational civil society movements for digital health and amplify their voices;



Champion norms and standards for digital and data rights;

Actively engage in the development of national digital health strategies in their capacity as advocates and local service providers;







Provide assistance in the design and delivery of clear accountability frameworks for the implementation of digital health policies and programmes;

Generate local data,

intelligence and insight to target digital health interventions and ensure they are truly responsive to the needs of local communities;

Develop projects for the local community to increase digital literacy;



Call upon local/grassroots organisations to:

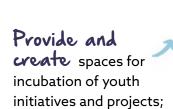
Directly consult with youth and ensure their voice is included in every step of the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of digital health services;

Develop projects for the local community to increase digital literacy;

Provide financial support, resources, and mentorship to facilitate youth entrepreneurship;



Raise awareness of and commit to ensuring data privacy and protection;





Ensure the needs of the community are adequately heard and included in the design of digital health services/solutions;



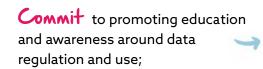
Call upon educational and healthcare institutions to:

Train and engage future health professionals in the usage and innovation of safe, evidence based, and effective digital health solutions;





Implement age-appropriate digital health skills programmes as mandatory in primary and secondary education systems;









Provide opportunities for the development of digital health programmes, services, and tools;

Encourage the use of climate-friendly education and teaching digital tools, bearing in mind that climate action is a key component of overall health and wellbeing;

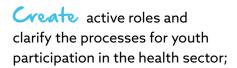
Actively create opportunities to decrease the digital divide (e.g. through continuing professional development);



Call upon health providers to:



Commit to improving the health literacy of the population and enhancing data privacy regulations;







Promote the utilisation of national accountability and monitoring frameworks;

Contribute to access to health through digital innovations that are safe, evidence-based, and effective;

Promote the use of digital tools to create sustainable, climate-friendly health solutions, and systems;

Provide feedback regarding the impact of digital innovation on the practice of their professions, particularly with respect to safety, efficacy, and privacy;

Ensure that youth, including future health professionals, have the adequate skills to engage in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of digital health





Remain up-todate with the latest developments in the field and create pathways for youth to be engaged in their research.

Conclusion

"Our lived experiences as youth, along with our own skills, make us experts in our own rights; this must be both recognised and valued in policy-making spaces."

The GHFutures2030 Youth Consultations highlights how we as youth view the right to health and a human rights-based approach to digital health as foundational pillars upon which the digital transformations in health should be built. In addition, we emphasise the importance of fostering digital skills for innovation, trust, and equitable uptake of digital health technologies to bridge the digital divide. Finally, we call for non-tokenistic approaches to youth enfranchisement in the governance of digital health futures. We want to be recognised as equal stakeholders and key agents driving the digital transformations in health forward throughout the continuum of research and learning as well as in digital innovation, programme development, and policy-making.

While the culmination of the GHFutures2030 Youth Consultations resulted in the development of this Youth Statement and Call for Action, the work is only just beginning. Further investment is needed in digital skills, education, and innovation to fully harness the potential of youth and fundamentally shape health futures in which they can survive, thrive, and transform. In the same ethos, the work of the GHFutures2030 Commission



in governing the digital transformations in health should extend beyond its report and continue to enfranchise youth in all future steps toward achieving an era of sustainable health futures for all youth.

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Adopted by acclamation on the 18 February 2021

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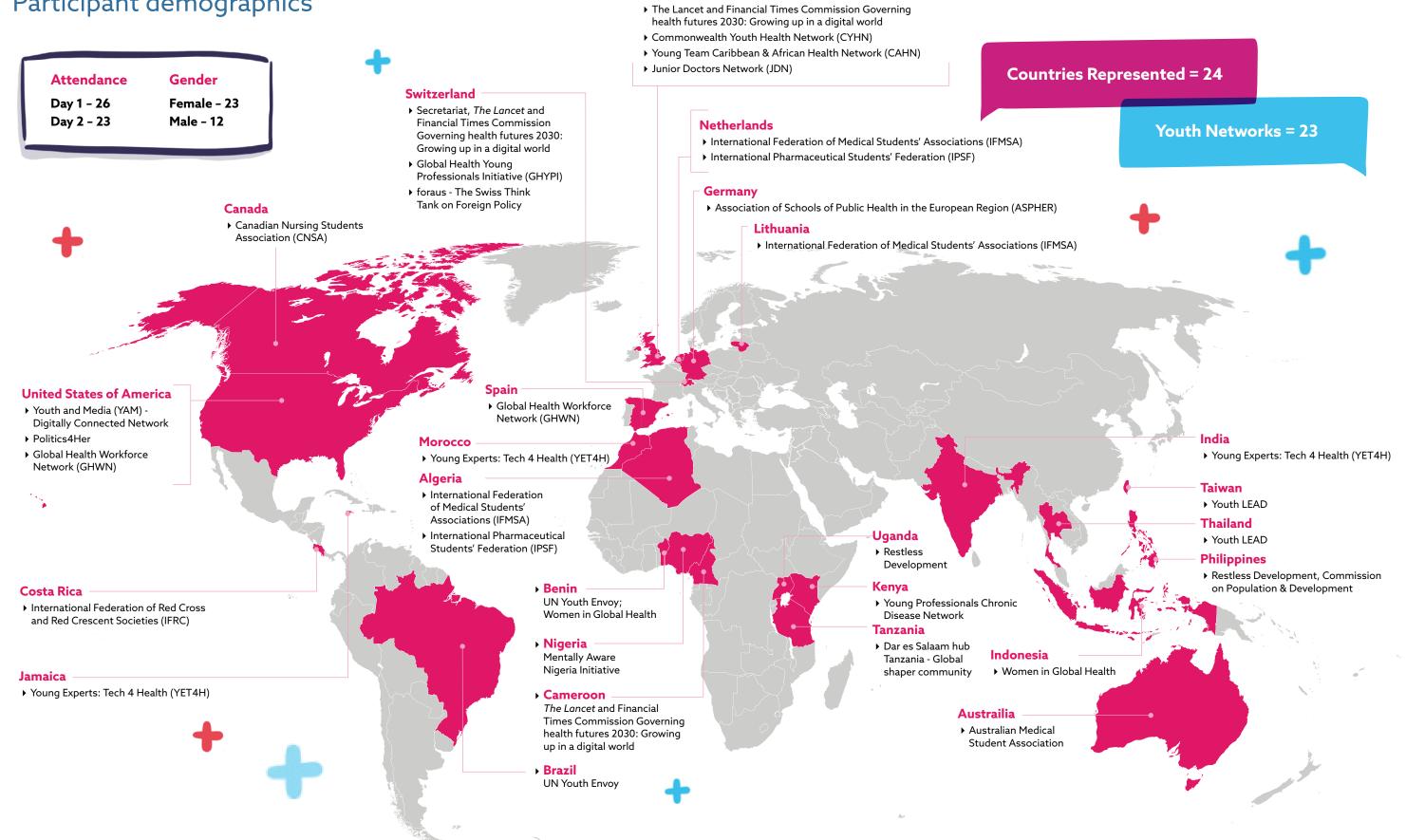
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Annex 1

Participant demographics



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Endnotes

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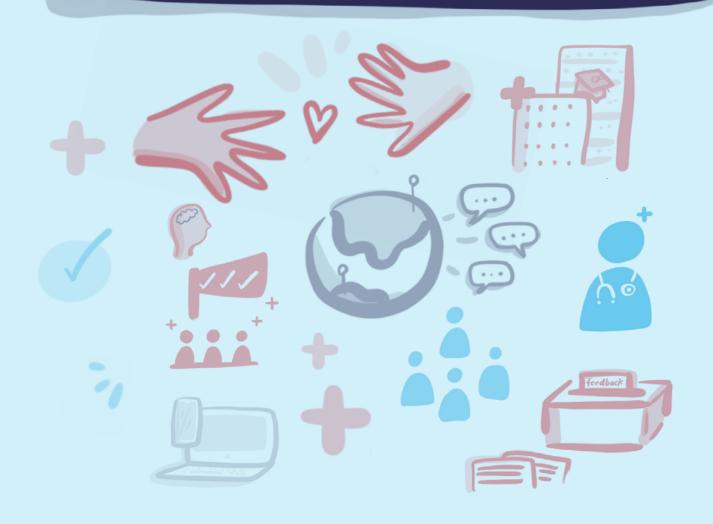
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Join the GHFutures2030 Youth Network

The GHFutures 2030 Youth Network was launched at the ECOSOC Youth Forum in April 2021. The goal of the Network is to take forward the recommendations of the Governing Health Futures 2030 Commission. Members of the Network will co-create and co-lead future research, advocacy, and dissemination activities to steer positive health futures with and for youth.

All youth who are interested in being part of the ongoing work of the Commission are encouraged to join the Network. **To express your interest go to: twtr.to/OvAj**







The Lancet and Financial Times Commission on Governing health futures 2030: Growing up in a digital world

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