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Public health digitalization in Europe

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: As digitalization is progressively permeating all aspects of society, how can be it fruitfully employed to sustain the public health goals of quality, accessibility, efficiency and equity in health care and prevention? In this paper, we reflect on the potential of applying digital tools to public health and discuss some key challenges. METHODS: We first define 'digitalization' in its broader sense, as well as applied to public health. We then build a conceptual framework where key public health domains are associated to available digital technologies in a matrix that help to identify digital features that bolster public health action. We also provide illustrative data and evidence on the application of digital solutions on selected public health areas. In the second part, we identify the strategic pillars for a successful European strategy for public health digitalization and we outline how the approach being pursued by the European Public Health Association (EUPHA) applies to digital health. RESULTS: From a public health perspective, digitalization is being touted as providing several potential benefits and advantages, including support for the transition from cure to prevention, helping to put people and patients at the center of care delivery, supporting patient empowerment and making healthcare system more efficient, safer and cheaper. These benefits are enabled through the following features of digital technologies: (i) Personalization and precision; (ii) Automation; (iii) Prediction; (iv) Data analytics and (v) Interaction. CONCLUSION: A successful European strategy for public health digitalization should integrate the following pillars: political commitment, normative frameworks, technical infrastructure, targeted economic investments, education, research, monitoring and evaluation. EUPHA acknowledges digitalization is an asset for public health and is working both to promote the culture of "public health digitalization", as well as to enable its planning, implementation and evaluation at the research, practice and policy level.

Keywords: digital health, digital technologies, European Public Health Association, digital health strategy, p

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