Advancing health equity by bridging the digital divide for persons with disabilities

Side Event on the margins of the 17th session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

13 June | 13:15-14:30 EST | Conference Room 7, UNHQ, New York

Concept note

Background

Approximately 1.3 billion, or 1 in 6 people in the world, have significant disability. Many of them experience health inequities, such as earlier deaths or poorer health, due to avoidable and unfair conditions at health system and societal level. In recent years, advancements in digital health technologies have provided the potential for more equitable access to healthcare and long-awaited opportunities for persons with disabilities to receive evidence-based healthcare comfortably in their own homes.

Different barriers to the use of digital health solutions, however, have created a "digital divide" faced by persons with disabilities and other marginalized populations. From inaccessible telehealth platforms, through lack of connectivity in remote areas, to unaffordability of services for many population groups – the 'digital divide' exacerbates the health inequities that persons with disabilities face. Therefore, it is critical to upscale efforts to address the 'digital divide' for persons with disabilities and advance equity in health.

Some of the entry points to bridge the 'digital divide' include involving persons with disabilities and representative organizations in the design process of digital technology, adopting a systems-approach to the digital delivery of health services with health equity as a key principle, and following international standards for accessibility of digital health technologies. Implementing strategies that harness the potential of digital health technologies to ensure persons with disabilities can access health services is essential to overcome the digital divide and achieve health for all.

Join us at this side event, co-hosted by the Permanent Missions of Ireland, Qatar and Australia, ITU, WHO, International Disability Alliance, International Disability and Development Consortium, Humanity & Inclusion and Sightsavers, to discuss the importance of making digital health services inclusive for persons with disabilities. The event will bring together perspectives from different stakeholders, including Member States, organizations of persons with disabilities, UN agencies and civil society, on the potential solutions to bridge the 'digital divide' and advance health equity for persons with disabilities.

Accessibility: Closed captioning and international sign language will be provided.

Provisional Agenda

Moderator: Werner Obermeyer, Director, WHO Office at the United Nations

00:00 Introduction
Werner Obermeyer, Director, WHO Office at the United Nations

00:05 Setting the stage: Linking the situation of persons with disabilities and digital health technologies
Heba Hagrass, Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities

00:10 Opening segment
Honorable Anne Rabbitte, Minister of State at the Department of Health and at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Government of Ireland

Her Excellency Shaikha bint Jassim Al-Thani, Assistant Undersecretary for Family Affairs, Ministry of Social Development and Family, Qatar

Amber Shuhyta, Assistant Secretary - Allied Health & Service Integration, Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care

00:25 How to ensure accessibility of telehealth services
Kaloyan Kamenov, Technical Officer, Disability Programme, World Health Organization

00:30 Panel: Advancing health equity for persons with disabilities through digital health solutions: the perspective of different stakeholders

International Disability Alliance member, TBC

Francesca Cesa Bianchi, VP, Institutional Relations and Advocacy, G3ict, Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs

Ursula Wynhoven, Director and Representative to the United Nations/Head of UN Affairs, ITU

Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame, Chairperson, United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Global Advocacy Manager (Social Inclusion), Sightsavers

Marijke de Pauw, Inclusive Governance Specialists, Humanity & Inclusion

00:55 Questions and answers

01:10 Closing remarks
Seta Macanawai, CEO of the Pacific Disability Forum

01:15 Closing
Werner Obermeyer, Director, WHO Office at the United Nations