

The Digital REACH Initiative

Frequently Asked Questions

- **What does REACH stand for?**

Regional East African Community Health

- **What is the Digital REACH Initiative?**

It is a comprehensive set of regional programs to apply information and communication technology (ICT) across all dimensions of the health sector for the improvement of health outcomes and the benefit of patients across East Africa. Partner States include the Republic of Burundi, the Republic of Kenya, the Republic of Rwanda, the Republic of South Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania, and the Republic of Uganda.

The Initiative will drive the implementation of health programs such as cross-border health surveillance and a regional data science cloud. Other Initiative workstreams, such as setting policy, developing the workforce, and establishing technology standards, will create an environment that enables digital health implementations at the regional and national levels.

- **How will the Digital REACH Initiative improve health outcomes?**

The Digital REACH Initiative will improve health outcomes in East Africa through the strategic application of ICT, and by bringing together leaders, health workers, and other stakeholders to harmonise digital health strategies, policies, and standards. It will increase the reach of health services through telemedicine, improved disease tracking and surveillance, and health worker support. The Initiative will also drive interconnectivity between data systems, achieve economies of scale within health programs, stimulate data sharing, and enable faster and better implementation of health programs.

- **Who will lead the Initiative, and how will it be implemented?**

EAHRC will lead the Initiative. There will be a management body at the regional level that oversees the various workstreams. EAC Partner States will also have specific, collaborative responsibilities across the workstreams. A governance structure will be established to ensure appropriate oversight by regional, national, and funding organizations.

- **How will the Digital REACH Initiative be funded?**

A variety of funding strategies will be employed to support this ten-year Initiative. Initial funding will likely come from the development community. Ongoing costs will be covered by national budgets, public-private partnerships, and other creative business models.

- **What is the value of a regional approach to digital health?**

A regional approach to digital health will improve health outcomes across the country. It will provide economies of scale, reduce costs, improve health program implementation, and more resources for the creation of an enabling environment for digital health. The Digital REACH Initiative will also address cross-border health issues, provide better and comparable data, and aid Partner States that are less advanced in their own digital health implementations to catch up with others.

- **Why is it important?**

This is the first time a region has come together to create an ambitious, unified digital health strategy. It is groundbreaking because it will address critical regional issues like patient and health worker mobility, disease tracking and surveillance, data sharing, and regional scale of health programs.

The Initiative will diminish the need of Partner States to create their own enabling environment for digital health. It will also provide digital health programs that individual states are not in a position to pursue on their own due to costs or the cross-border nature of the program. Where appropriate, the Initiative will provide shared assets such as technical infrastructure, training programs, and policy guidance.

- **How does the Initiative relate to what Partner States are doing in digital health?**

The regional Initiative is designed to complement, improve, and strengthen country-specific work in digital health, not replace it. The specific implementations of the Initiative will focus on regional issues like cross-border surveillance and health worker mobility. The Initiative will also offer direct support to certain country-specific implementations, and offer assessments of new technologies and how they might be applied at the country and region levels. Finally, Partner States requested that the regional Initiative take on the responsibility of realizing an enabling environment for digital health in all Partner States across the region. This will include policy guidance, workforce development, and setting standards for interoperability.



- **What can EAC Partner States do to support the Digital REACH Initiative?**

Partner States can best support the regional Initiative by understanding its scope, commitments, and implications for each country. For example, the Initiative plans to create a regional data science cloud. Success of the cloud implementation would require Partner States to agree to hosting their data within that cloud. Partner States would also need to participate in developing and adopting the technology standards and regulatory policies created through the Initiative. There are also specific responsibilities of Partner States within the charter of the regional initiative. Countries will need to contribute the resources required to fulfill those responsibilities. These responsibilities are described in the overview of each workstream in the roadmap document.

- **Is a regional approach effective when participating countries have different levels of digital health development?**

EAC countries are in different phases of implementing a digital-health strategy. However, they face similar challenges and require similar tools and support. In addition, because citizens of EAC countries travel routinely from one country to another, regardless of the level of health system development, each country is individually stronger when the neighboring countries have good digital health systems, as well. It is therefore in the interest of each country to support a regional initiative that will address the needs of all. The Digital REACH Initiative will help less advanced countries catch up to neighboring countries more quickly than they might on their own.