



Wilton Park



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Report

**Visioning the future and governance pathways:
Horizons of health and digital technologies**

Thursday 3 – Friday 4 September 2020 | WP1786V1

Thursday 8 October 2020 | WP1786V2

In partnership with:





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Visioning the future and governance pathways: Horizons of health and digital technologies

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In association with The Lancet and Financial Times Commission *Governing health futures 2030: Growing up in a digital world.*

Two virtual Wilton Park meetings supported the work of The Lancet and Financial Times Commission *Governing health futures 2030: Growing up in a digital world.*

The first meeting 'Visioning the future: horizons for health and digital technologies' took place on 3 and 4 September 2020. Leading thinkers from academia, non-governmental organisations, international agencies and the private sector from around the world, came together to discuss health futures, digital frontiers, and the digital and political order of societies. These discussions raised questions about how we reframe governance for increasingly uncertain health futures.

A subsequent dialogue on 8 October, 'Visioning the future: governance pathways to better health futures', explored, in more depth, some of the themes raised at the previous meeting, including governance opportunities at country and global levels. How can we translate governance concepts for better health futures into practical and tangible responses?

Key themes recommended to the Commission:

Key themes of the meeting's discussion will be considered as part of the broader work and deliberations of the Commission, and will inform the final Commission report to be published in 2021.

- Major gaps exist in the world's approach to governance of digital health; the timing is urgent.
- The future of health and digital technologies is uncertain; we need to identify progressive frameworks to guide us.
- How can digital health governance support principled engagement and equity?
- This is a fundamental issue of democracy; how can individual and collective human rights guide us to harness the benefits of health data?
- What symbolizes solidarity and a social contract in the data sphere?
- Is it possible to establish an interoperable governance architecture of values with norms and standards?

Key discussion points

“Digital systems have not yet given us the benefits that were intended or that are possible.”

“We need to carpool, and get different actors in the same vehicle, agree where we want to go, and travel there together.”

“There is no straight pathway and no perfect digital health system. But there are proposals that can help manage risk.”

“We cannot have health security without social protection. We cannot have digital futures without human rights futures.”

1. During the discussions, participants identified key issues around terminology, frameworks, tensions, and challenges. Terminology needs to be accessible and mutually understood.
2. Frames help imagine health futures and governance in a digital world, but what frames can be chosen for the best outcomes? There is a danger that gaps in the world's approaches to governance and digital health can lead to greater divergence and inequities, yet the future is open and opportunities exist to construct new frames that support better health futures for all.
3. Importantly, those leading this global discussion must not remain comfortable in an echo chamber, operating within an epistemic bubble, but instead must genuinely engage with a range of new actors.
4. Much of the discussion was not focused on digital transformation as a technological process, but rather about the social and political dynamics of this transformation and how critical these aspects are to achieving the longer-term vision of equitable health futures. Digital governance principles around transparency, participation, inclusion, equity, and sustainability emerged strongly throughout the debate.
5. Some key challenges that participants raised concerned the uncertainty of health futures, and whether feminist, equitable, and other frameworks might help navigate the way forward. The emerging role of digital in health futures raises important questions around how digital health governance can support equity and engagement.
6. Concerning fundamental issues of democracy, how can the potential health benefits of data be calibrated with deeper issues of human rights? Social solidarity was a key theme throughout the meeting, encapsulated in the notion that if universal health coverage is the symbol for solidarity and a social contract, what is the equivalent in the data sphere for health?
7. Tensions exist between individual versus social rights, and different digital, data, and policy architectures in the world, requiring new voices and further discussion to build consensus.
8. Different geopolitical constellations result in different forms of governance over data and connectivity. With different ‘splinternets’, such as those in China, United States, and Europe, can we define a shared vision for governing health futures, while acknowledging that, in a digital health ecosystem, there might be different geopolitical routes to realising this vision?
9. To explore governance pathways nationally and globally, participants asked whether an ecosystems perspective and support to establish an interoperable architecture of values with norms and standards would be an effective approach.
10. Governance pathways in digital health futures are located in an interlocked ecosystem involving a wide range of stakeholders and processes. Stronger and more effective forms of governance can emerge through focusing on the holistic nature of this ecosystem, rather than engaging separately with different parts.
11. The notion of health rights needs to take into account both individual rights and the public good. Public good is strongly linked to inclusion, equity, and access for all.
12. No sector alone can have an impact on digital health. The conversation needs to start with non-traditional partners outside of health, including the private sector. There is a need to transcend boundaries to deliver at country level and a mechanism to bridge sectors. A higher concept of governance that employs a whole-of-government approach and a shared infrastructure is needed.

Alison Dunn

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