



*Jude Odhiambo enters patient's prescriptions into the Antiretroviral Dispensing Tool as his colleague Sosten Kemboi picks the medicines from the shelf at the adult pharmacy at the Kenyatta National Hospital Comprehensive Care Center. The system ensures that drugs can be accounted for to the last tablet.*

# EAST AFRICA DIGITAL HEALTH INITIATIVE ROADMAP

## BACKGROUND

The adoption of digital health tools and technologies around the globe strengthens real-time health information collection, sharing and use across patients, health care professionals and in public health. Digitizing health information provides opportunities to improve care coordination, communication, patient and population health outcomes, access to data for decision making, decision support for healthcare professionals, as well as, inform public health planning, implementation and monitoring, amongst others.

## WHY DIGITAL HEALTH MATTERS

Lessons from Ebola outbreak in West Africa indicated that multiple disconnected health data systems posed a major challenge to containing the disease, where standalone digital systems

failed to support systems that needed to be working together, such as those for contact tracing, case investigation, treatment of patients and critical human resources supporting structures.

In recognition of this imperative, East Africa Community (EAC) prioritized digital technology platform to drive east Africa's health systems in the East African Health Research Commission (EAHRC) 2016-2021 Strategic Plan. Through support from USAID/Kenya and East Africa, EAHRC initiated in 2017 the consultative process for development of the Digital Regional East African Community Health (REACH) Initiative concept, which is described in detail in a ten-year Digital REACH Initiative Roadmap.

## Digital REACH Initiative

The Digital REACH Initiative will have a defined governance structure to coordinate regional action, oversee the creation of an enabling environment for digital health across the EAC region, and implement strategic regional best practices in the application of digital health solutions to realize defined goals. The Initiative aims to create a robust enabling environment for digital health including supportive leadership and governance, strategic investments, knowledgeable health workforce, harmonized regulations, policy and standards and interoperability.

The activities of the Digital REACH Initiative are designed to achieve specific outcome goals, including support for public health education, diagnostic and treatment, health worker education and training, surveillance and response, supply chain management, resource allocation and management.

The Digital REACH Initiative Roadmap is a first step toward realizing the Digital REACH Initiative and provides a detailed view of the Initiative's vision, mission, and outcome goals. The roadmap details the nine workstreams of the Initiative, their phasing, strategic approaches at both regional and partner-state responsibilities. The roadmap covers a ten-year period, and allows EAC to move into discussions with development partners, private sector and key stakeholders on how best to strategically accomplish the goals of the Initiative. Regional and country specific responsibilities and activities are clearly defined within each work stream.

## Regional and partner state development process

Created and owned by the EAC, development of the Roadmap incorporated design, direction, and input from over 100 cross-sector national, regional and international stakeholders.

Following the highly consultative, region-driven development process, the Digital REACH Initiative Roadmap was approved by the EAC Sectoral Council on Health – comprising the

**EAC** – A regional intergovernmental organization whose mission is to widen and deepen economic, political, social and cultural integration in order to improve quality of life for the people of East Africa. EAC Partner States are Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda

**Vision 2028** – Interconnected health systems for a healthy and prosperous East Africa

**Mission Statement** – Maximize the power of digital health in East Africa by ensuring an enabling environment and by implementing scaled, coordinated, transformational, and innovative approaches

**Nine work streams of the Initiative:** Organization Formation & Management; Health Programs Infrastructure; Services and Applications; Leadership and Governance; Strategy and Investment; Legislation, Policy, & Compliance; Workforce; and Harmonization, Standards, & Interoperability

Each work stream includes two to six outcome goals as well as delineated responsibilities at the regional and Partner State levels.

Partner State Permanent Secretaries and Ministers of Health and endorsed by EAC Council of Ministers during their scheduled meeting in November 28 - 29, 2017 in Kampala, Uganda.

## **Moving forward**

USAID Kenya and East Africa Mission has partnered with USAID Bureau for Africa, U.S. Global Development Lab and strategic private sector partners under the Digital Square Consortium to invest in sustainable, scalable, interoperable, standards-based digital health technologies in support of strong health systems in east Africa.

The EAC will play a major role in creating and supporting an enabling environment comprised of leadership and governance; strategy and investment; harmonized standards for interoperability; the development of and compliance with legislation and policy; and a skilled health workforce to ensure sustainability and scale.

## **Important timelines**

- Roadmap approved by EAC Council of Ministers - end of 2017
- Strategic plan completed - June 2018
- Costing plan completed - September 2018
- Resource mobilization donor round table - October/November 2018
- Official launch - end of 2018

This initiative is among investment priorities approved during February 22nd Joint EAC Heads of State Retreat on Infrastructure and Health Financing and Development.

The Heads of State Retreat aimed at accelerating the attainment of the objectives of the EAC Development Strategy, Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals in the infrastructure and health sectors.

## **VALUE TO BILATERAL MISSIONS**

EAC countries are in different stages in their digital-health strategies, however because citizens of EAC countries travel routinely from one country to another, the region is stronger as a whole with strong interoperable digital health systems.

This is the first time a region has come together to create an ambitious, unified digital health strategy to 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.

### **Strategic areas requiring bilateral missions support include:**

- Support towards real-time regional data warehouse for capturing, storing, retrieving, analyzing, and managing national and regional health in East Africa, creating a supporting structure for the seamless sharing of health data across EAC Partner States and facilitating the tracking of key performance indicators (KPIs).
- Support cross-border implementations that address key challenges associated with delivering quality health services to mobile populations and border communities. This includes the use of innovative health technology for disease surveillance, detection, and response.
- Support technical assistance for individual EAC Partner States to enable integration with regional digital health programs. Examples include providing pooled technical implementation expertise for country implementations as well as support for implementing unique IDs, and national strategies and policies in alignment with regional objectives.
- Support the proof of concept testing of new, transformational technologies to identify new efficiencies. Examples include GIS for predicative surveillance risk modeling, block chain for secure electronic healthcare records, precision health applications for personalized medicine, and automated data mining for early disease outbreak alerts.

**Accompanying this brief is a 6page Digital REACH Initiative-Infographics and FAQs**

For further information on the Digital REACH Initiative Roadmap, please contact:

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