

# MedInfo 2023 International Policy Forum

Held on 8 and 9 July 2023 during the World Congress

## International Policy Forum Communiqué

The International Policy Forum (IPF), held as part of the global digital health and informatics congress, MedInfo 2023, brought together a wide range of senior executives from governments, international VIPs, ministerial delegations, as well as senior representatives from industry and the scientific community.

The focus of the IPF was on advancing efforts to modernise person-centred healthcare through the application and use of digital technologies and services, as well as leading healthcare into an ever-increasing digital society. The Forum was invite-only and consisted of a series of sessions under the Chatham House rule to facilitate productive discussions and foster international collaboration.

The Forum, conducted in the spirit of collaboration and driven by a shared commitment to improving healthcare outcomes, explored a wide range of topics across six themes, listed in order of importance, as voted for by participants in the IPF. This Communiqué summarises the outcome of these discussions.

### Theme 1: Leadership needs to be bold, radical, and stay the course

Leadership plays a pivotal role in driving healthcare transformation. The discussions emphasised the importance of consistent, fearless leadership from governments, clinicians and the health informatics community; and engagement in ongoing debates on critical topics. Clear outcomes and the resolution of real policy problems were deemed essential. For example, leaders across healthcare must make tough decisions, such as addressing workforce challenges, changing behaviours, introducing progressive enabling regulation and ensuring the healthcare system adapts to an ageing population using digital technology. It was recognised that this is not, and cannot be, the role of governments alone and that a spirit of learning from successes from all countries including emerging economies is required. Leadership should also contemplate alignment with shifts towards preventative healthcare in recognition of its greater efficacy and the benefits for public health.

### Theme 2: Collaboration: acting together, we achieve more

Collaboration is a fundamental enabler of successful digital healthcare transformation. The discussions highlighted the need to translate collaboration into tangible and actionable work plans with clear goals and mechanisms to amplify learnings. Instead of creating new institutions, it was suggested that the focus should be on strengthening and leveraging existing collaborations and embracing new ones including across borders. Multiple stakeholders including governments, professions, industry, consumers, patients, the public and clinicians, were urged to act in concert.

Collaboration should actively engage citizens (as patients and health consumers) and clinicians in leadership roles to ensure diverse perspectives and inclusive decision-making at what is a critical crossroads for digital health adoption and use. Excellent case studies, including the development of the *International Patient Summary* were highlighted.<sup>i</sup>

Digital health successes are underpinned by architecture derived from tried and tested global standards and specification pathways developed by collaboration amongst experts. This demonstrates how value can be generated by more than just government actors and nation states alone. It was seen as critical that we achieve more complete, reliable and accessible healthcare information via standards that enhance interoperability. This will drive better healthcare experiences, integrate care and support the rights of citizens to have access to their healthcare information. This challenge is common across nations and needs to be effectively addressed.

### Theme 3: Governance and people, not technology

The discussions stressed that the main challenges for digital health transformation lie in effective governance (including clinical governance) and leadership that stays the course, rather than the technology itself. Governance structures should support genuine collaboration at international, national and local levels. Barriers to collaboration should be identified and addressed through appropriate incentives and consequences. Good governance should be enabled by policies and regulations that advance integrated care, whilst adhering to and building from existing national and local policies. Enabling approaches can benefit all, without undermining principles such as subsidiarity.

### Theme 4: Design for tomorrow, not "now"

The Forum emphasised the importance of designing healthcare systems with a forward-looking perspective. Leaders were urged to strive for interoperable and accessible clinical systems that support achievement of the quintuple aim of:

1. Advancing health equity
2. Lowering the cost of care
3. Improving population health
4. Improving provider experience; and
5. Enhancing patient experience.

Achieving this requires leveraging of people, processes, and technology enabled by data and person-centric digital ecosystems. The current pace of digital transformation within healthcare globally must accelerate. Leaders need to grasp the opportunity to shape the future, even if it requires starting from scratch, and create an enabling environment that fosters innovation and collaboration.

### Theme 5: Agility and innovation, not bureaucracy

The discussions highlighted the need for agility and an innovation mindset in healthcare transformation. Collaboration with citizens and clinicians, involving everyone in a systems transformation approach, was seen as crucial to help manage the changes ahead. Bold education initiatives and decisive action were emphasised, urging leaders to embrace opportunities without hesitation. Breaking down silos and engaging industries outside government and healthcare can foster innovation. An example is the emphasis on convenience and patient-centredness arising in health providers in retail settings, eliminating unnecessary hurdles and prioritising patient convenience within the healthcare system, outside government pathways.

The discussions also noted that recent innovations such as deployment of AI require careful integration with existing healthcare systems to ensure health equity is maintained and that systems remain safe and trusted. This requires governance structures that have sufficient authority, while also being adaptable to rapidly changing technology capabilities.

It is incumbent on all participants in the healthcare system to ensure there is a staged landing for innovations such as generative AI and machine learning and that they are provided for by the mechanisms of funding, rules, incentives, and standards that governments set.

## Theme 6: Momentum and follow-through

The Forum recognised the current momentum in healthcare transformation and emphasised the urgency to follow through on commitments. Society expects action and transparency from leadership today. It is crucial to emphasise the need for a digitally capable workforce to enable success. Collaboration should involve sharing resources, success stories and key learnings, not just polite conversations. An example is the focus on data utilisation and integration, highlighting the importance of utilising data as an asset in healthcare and integrating different data sources to support a model system leading to better health outcomes.

## Conclusion

The two-day International Policy Forum at MedInfo 2023 provided a platform for valuable discussions on critical issues in healthcare transformation.

The outcomes and insights gleaned from the Forum underscore the importance of bold leadership, effective collaboration, innovative governance, forward-looking design, agility, and follow-through. As leaders in the international digital health sector, it is imperative that we build momentum, working collectively to enact meaningful change, support safe deployment of innovative technologies and deliver improved healthcare outcomes for all.

As consumer demand for information to aid personal decision making about health and care continues to exponentially increase, and delivery of healthcare continues to evolve in a digital world, governments have a responsibility to ensure its quality and efficacy. This disruptive transformation of healthcare provides the tipping point for governments to take a different path than from in the past. A unique opportunity exists now to respond to these disruptions in a timely, collaborative, and measured manner and to effect sustainable regulatory and policy pathways for a new era of healthcare.

With political will, collaboration amongst experts and consumers, and patients at the heart of what we do, a new path is possible for digital transformation in health care.

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<sup>i</sup> The International Patient Summary is a minimal and non-exhaustive set of basic clinical data of a patient, specialty-agnostic, condition-independent, but readily usable by all clinicians in unscheduled (cross-border) patient care. Further information is available at: <https://international-patient-summary.net/>