

Ministry of Electronics & IT



Day 3 of Regional Open Digital Health Summit 2025 highlights need for sustainable financing, regional Collaboration, and AI-enabled governance

Member States reflect on framework for South-East Asia Digital Health and Artificial Intelligence Collaborative Network (SEA-DAC)

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The Regional Open Digital Health Summit (RODHS) 2025 wrapped up its third and final day of progressive discussions in New Delhi, bringing together leaders from government departments and experts from international organisations and the health technology sector to put in motion a framework for Digital Health and AI collaboration across the South-East Asia region.

The day's sessions focused on four critical pillars: person-centric digital health systems, sustainable financing models, governance framework for digital and AI-enabled health, and regional collaboration mechanisms. The sessions underscored that technology alone cannot drive healthcare transformation, unless accompanied by robust governance, interoperability, and inclusive implementation strategies.

UNICEF facilitated a session on Person-centred Digital Health Systems, bringing together digital health leaders from India, Sri Lanka, and the Asia-Pacific region to articulate a shared vision of building person-centric, interoperable, and intelligent digital health systems that improve access, quality, and efficiency.

Uttar Pradesh emerged as a compelling case study, with speakers highlighting the state's progress in integrating with the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), adopting Scan & Share, and building digital citizen health records.

Sri Lanka's digital health development highlighted a crucial shift from merely gathering data to implementing actionable, outcome-driven systems. UNICEF representatives stressed the importance of responsible use of artificial intelligence and harmonized frameworks to ensure seamless continuity of care and evidence-based planning throughout the region.

Sustainable financing model also emerged as a critical pre-requisite for digital health transformation, especially in the face of shrinking fiscal space, rising health costs, and declining global aid flows. India, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Thailand, and Timor-Leste listed common

challenges like fragmented financing channels, donor dependence, and insufficient long-term budgeting that threaten to undermine digital health progress.

A key theme was the urgent need for legal and regulatory reforms, including data protection laws, digital health acts, procurement modernisation, and improved governance to ensure stability for long-term digital health investments. Panelists also emphasised blended financing approaches, including public funds, public-private partnerships, pooled budgets, and insurance-linked investments.

Shri Abhishek Singh, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and CEO, IndiaAI Mission, gave a keynote presentation on Reimagining Governance for a Digital & AI-enabled Health System. Shri Singh called for building a safe, inclusive, and globally relevant AI-enabled health system through collaboration between government, States, hospitals, technologists, academia, WHO, and the Global South.

Session on 'Advancing Regional Collaboration on FHIR Standards and Digital Public Infrastructure under GIDH' centred on a historic proposal of South-East Asia Digital Health and Artificial Intelligence Collaborative Network(SEA-DAC), a member state-led mechanism for structured, continuous regional collaboration on digital health and FHIR standards.

All member states unanimously acknowledged both the urgency and opportunity for such a framework. While countries across the region operate at different stages of digital maturity, they share common aspirations: stronger digital governance, interoperable health information systems, improved knowledge exchange, and agile learning mechanisms to avoid repeating mistakes and accelerate success.

The summit concluded with a valedictory session featuring keynote addresses:

Dr Karthik Adapa, Regional Advisor for Digital Health, WHO-SEARO, emphasised on the distinction between integration and interoperability. He highlighted essential components of a robust digital health system: infrastructure, Digital Public Infrastructures, applications, governance, and capacity building.

Ms. Meredith Dyson, Regional Health Specialist, HSS, UNICEF, reiterated that "Technology alone does not equal transformation. True impact comes from addressing real-world needs, empowering frontline workers, protecting rights, and ensuring equity." She underlined the importance of interoperability by design and country-specific blueprints aligned with Digital Public Infrastructure principles.

Shri Vikram Pagaria, Director of ABDM, National Health Authority, focused on the importance of digital health as an investment, not a cost, and its essential role in achieving universal health coverage. He underscored technology's potential to overcome critical challenges—such as doctor shortages—and reach underserved rural communities.

Shri Nand Kumarum, President & Chief Executive Officer of the National e-Governance Division, offered a thought-provoking perspective, drawing parallels between nature and system design. He advocated for organic, incremental growth rather than abrupt changes, emphasising patience, clear direction, and thoughtful implementation to ensure sustainable transformation.

The three-day Summit collectively conveyed a unified message that **digital health transformation is not merely a technological upgrade; it is a fundamental journey requiring standards, governance, interoperability, and deep inclusion.**

The sessions highlighted that digital health must prioritise people, focusing on citizen needs, empowering clinicians, and improving outcomes rather than just technology. Sustainable funding is essential, with countries integrating digital health into national budgets as a vital public infrastructure. Continuous regional collaboration, led by member states, should promote peer learning and coordinated efforts. AI should be governed ethically and safely to strengthen health systems and reduce disparities, especially in the Global South. Ensuring equity is crucial so that digital gaps do not create health divides and all nations have access to the resources and support needed to progress.

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