White Paper on boosting active cooperation between patients and healthcare professionals

This White Paper builds on the DigitalHealthEurope work done so far, its milestones and deliverables across various work packages – described in the first section of the White Paper. In addition to the DHE Empowerment Roadmap and two dedicated validation workshops, this White Paper **identifies a set of key elements deemed crucial to drive digital health uptake** with a focus on the role of patients and healthcare professionals.

Digitalisation is undoubtedly changing health and care. **The road to a full uptake of digital, however, is still very fragmented.** If it is true that the COVID-19 crisis has strongly accelerated this process, it has also put under the spotlight once again how access to digital health is very much unequal, organised in different way across Europe. Furthermore, digital health is not yet fully enabling nor based on collaboration between patients and healthcare professionals nor on co-design.

Much remains to be done to achieve digital health uptake and better collaboration between patients and healthcare professionals. However, **by adopting a comprehensive framework and building on best practices, it is possible to move towards more inclusive, safe and accessible digital transformation of health and care**.

❝ This White Paper identifies a set of key elements deemed crucial to drive digital health uptake with a focus on the role of patients and healthcare professionals **❞**

Key Points of the White Paper

1 Develop, analyse and exchange knowledge on health and care systems and services

Driving our health systems and services towards a **successful digitalisation requires knowledge on how they work, how they communicate, how they are organised, and how the different stakeholders and users are involved** in their functioning. Especially regarding healthcare professionals and patients' collaboration.

2 Prepare a harmonised ecosystem for health and care digitalisation

Preparing the ecosystem for digital transformation of health and care starts with analysing, building, and transferring knowledge on our health systems. This is key in **developing evidence and knowledge-based policies, collaborative frameworks and platforms, funding instruments and the necessary infrastructures**.

The development of such ecosystems is crucial to achieving a safe, trustworthy, and collaborative space for patients and healthcare professionals.

3 Empower and train key digital health stakeholders

Empowering key stakeholders is vital for successful engagement and digital health uptake, especially when it comes to enhancing collaboration between patients and healthcare professionals. Aspects of empowerment include health literacy, shared decision-making and self-management.

To boost patients' empowerment it is therefore necessary to adopt measures to equip patients and people with digital health literacy and digital skills. Digital health skills development, education and training is equally fundamental for healthcare professionals, and it should be better embedded in their professional development pathway.

4 Co-design digital health: From innovation to policy

A co-design approach is necessary for more person-centred digital health solutions. If patients and healthcare professionals feel stronger ownership of digital health solutions as true 'partners' in designing digital health, their trust and willingness to engage and learn more about digital health can strongly improve.

5 Implement, use, take up, and collaborate on digital health

To drive adoption and use of digital health it is important to ensure that users are informed on the availability and features of digital health tools and platforms. Furthermore, **to drive a true European-wide digital transformation of health and care it is necessary to address different level of digital health access to avoid increasing inequalities**.

Digital health can be fundamental to enhance integration between health and social care and to better manage healthcare systems and services. This requires enhanced collaboration also with social care and health management stakeholders to make positive digital health ecosystems a reality.
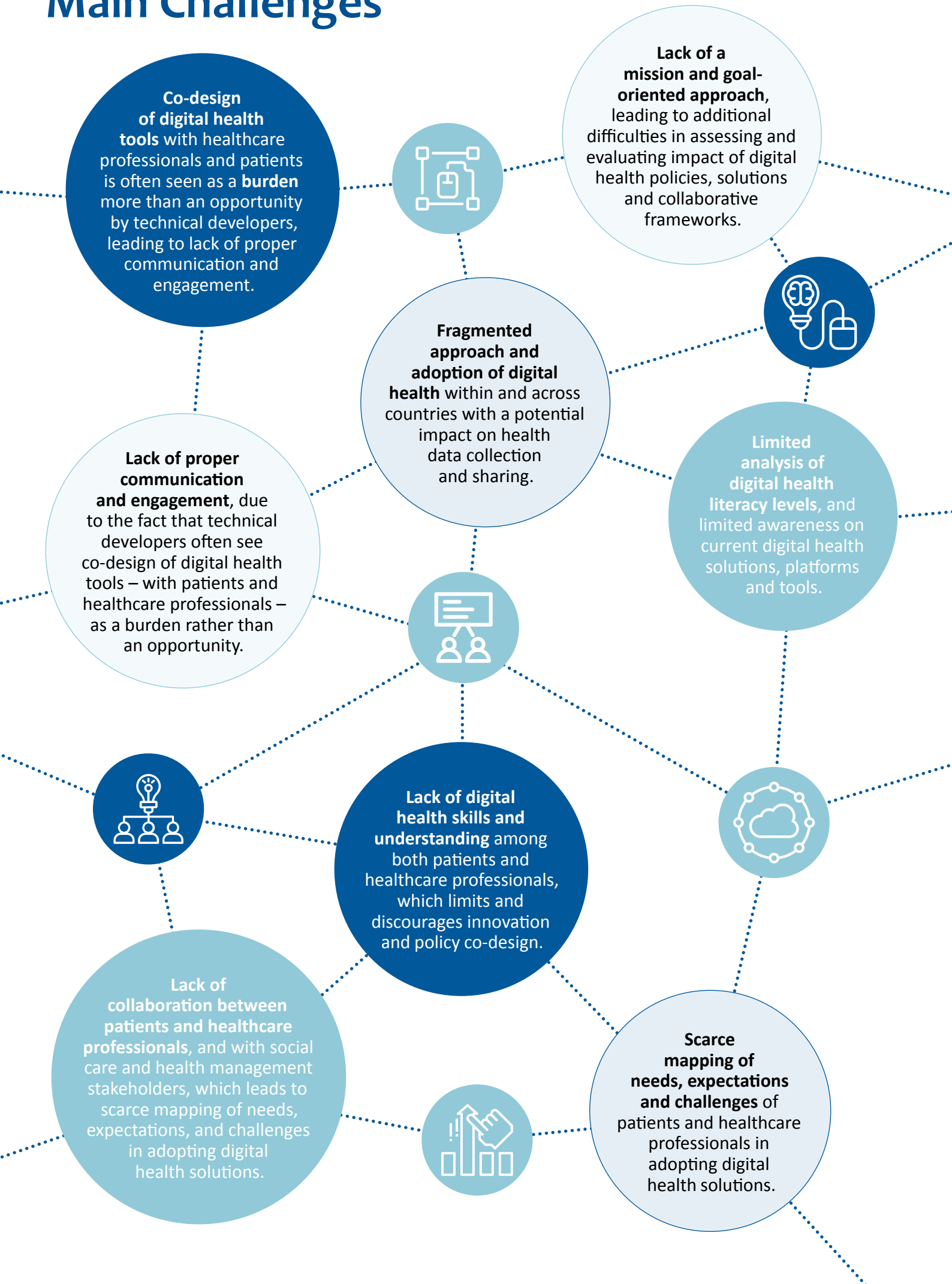
6 Assess and evaluate digital health innovation, policies and collaboration between patients and healthcare professionals towards adaptation and improvement

Collecting feedback on the impact of the digitalisation of health and care will help determine performances and outcomes and build additional knowledge towards better evidence-based decision-making. This feedback should include a particular focus on the improvement of quality of care and on the collaboration between patients and healthcare professionals.

Main Challenges

Co-design of digital health tools with healthcare professionals and patients is often seen as a **burden** more than an opportunity by technical developers, leading to lack of proper communication and engagement.

Lack of a mission and goal-oriented approach, leading to additional difficulties in assessing and evaluating impact of digital health policies, solutions and collaborative frameworks.

Fragmented approach and adoption of digital health within and across countries with a potential impact on health data collection and sharing.

Lack of proper communication and engagement, due to the fact that technical developers often see co-design of digital health tools – with patients and healthcare professionals – as a burden rather than an opportunity.

Limited analysis of digital health literacy levels, and limited awareness on current digital health solutions, platforms and tools.

Lack of digital health skills and understanding among both patients and healthcare professionals, which limits and discourages innovation and policy co-design.

Lack of collaboration between patients and healthcare professionals, and with social care and health management stakeholders, which leads to scarce mapping of needs, expectations, and challenges in adopting digital health solutions.

Scarce mapping of needs, expectations and challenges of patients and healthcare professionals in adopting digital health solutions.

Main Recommendations

Better **harmonisation** of the digital health glossary. Collaboration and communication on digital health, within and across both stakeholders groups and health and care systems.

Dedicate a section of the **State of Health in the EU** on digital health to boost common understanding of challenges.

Carry out **comparative analysis of existing best practices and solutions**, and a regular analysis and mapping of the needs and challenges faced by healthcare professionals and patients.

Develop **policies focused on person-centricity**, collaboration between patients and healthcare professionals, co-design, empowerment, awareness and literacy, safety and protection of individual rights, trust, and equal access.

Adopt collaborative frameworks and platforms allowing **dialogue between stakeholders & with policy makers**. This will lead to more inclusive policy making and better identification of needed funding and incentives.

Foster **life-long learning activities for healthcare professionals** within their regular working hours, and link them to accreditation. Systems of incentives could further support health professionals participation in life-long learning activities.

Include the development of **digital skills as part of the core educational curricula of healthcare professionals** at European level by establishing minimum educational frameworks.

Innovators as well as **policy makers should be informed of and trained about the benefits of empowerment and successful collaboration** between patients and healthcare professionals.

Shape a new co-design-oriented mindset. Co-design should be perceived as a mutually beneficial process based on involvement of patients, professionals and innovators exchanging inputs on mutual needs, expectations and opportunities.

Facilitate the connection between innovators and policy-makers and a network of informed and skilled patients and healthcare professionals.

Introduce **labelling systems**, for example for mobile health apps, to provide easier to understand information enabling informed decisions.

Dedicated initiatives, led for example by local, regional or national levels supporting healthcare professionals to identify digital health solutions.

Make the inclusion of regular **digital health policy evaluation mandatory by design**.

Establish a **European multi-stakeholder network** to discuss harmonised methods to include assessment and evaluation results in policy-related decision-making.

Apply a more **thorough assessment and evaluation process to the development and adoption of specific digital health solutions** and research and innovation projects in the field of digital health.

Enhance collaboration with patients and healthcare professional organisations to **facilitate collection of inputs on the impact of digital health policies, tools and platforms**.