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Item 5(k) Regional strategy for fostering digital health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (2023–2027)

The International Council of Nurses (ICN), representing more than 30 million nurses worldwide, welcomes this progress report on the regional strategy for fostering digital health.

Significant gaps persist in translating high-level plans into funded, implemented and scaled programmes. ICN is particularly concerned that gaps in digital literacy among health workers and the public risk undermining equitable progress. Insufficient workforce training limits adoption and affects data quality, while vulnerable populations may lack the access, skills and trust to use digital services, widening the digital divide.

Digital transformation must be built around the needs of people and the health workforce delivering care. As the largest professional group in the health workforce, nurses interact with digital systems across virtually every level of care, making their meaningful involvement essential. Poorly designed technologies can increase administrative burden and divert nurses from direct care, while nursing involvement in design, testing, implementation and evaluation can help ensure technology supports safe, people-centred care.

Artificial intelligence offers opportunities in areas including clinical decision support and education, but also introduces risks, including bias, over-reliance and widening inequities. Human oversight, professional judgement and accountability must remain central wherever AI is introduced into care.

ICN urges Member States to ensure formal nursing representation in national digital health strategies and roadmaps, including through Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officers and national nurses associations; integrate digital health, data and AI competencies into nursing education and continuing professional development; embed co-design with frontline clinicians; and invest in equitable digital infrastructure and interoperable systems.

Digital health and AI must also be governed by clear safeguards for patient safety, privacy, cybersecurity, transparency, accountability and equity, with impacts on health outcomes and workforce workload evaluated before scale-up.

ICN's Learning Hub, including its focus on digital innovation and AI, illustrates the potential of accessible learning platforms to strengthen digital capability. ICN and its national member associations stand ready to support Member States and WHO in advancing this agenda.