



**World Health Assembly
Side Event**

**INCLUSIVE DIGITAL
INNOVATION:
CONNECTED
COMMUNITIES
TO CLOSE GAPS**

**A 'Dinner X Dialogue' side-event session hosted by
Rabin Martin during the 77th World Health Assembly**

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Introduction

Access to digital health is becoming an increasingly important determinant of health. The development and adoption of digital health technologies has significantly increased over the last few years and the potential to unlock the transformation of patient health experiences worldwide — whether through seamless point of care provision or the reimagining of workforce scale-up. Yet these benefits are not accessible to everyone. The potential of digital innovations to revolutionize health experiences and outcomes is being undermined. The ‘great digital divide’ is reinforcing, and in some cases exacerbating, health disparities, in already overburdened health systems.

In 2024, Rabin Martin, a leading global health consulting firm, convened the inaugural ‘Dinner X Dialogue’ session during the 77th World Health Assembly (WHA) to discuss the critical ingredients needed to define, design, develop and deploy inclusive digital innovation that transforms accessibility of health for all, not the few.

Participants included representatives from industry, multilateral institutions, policy/advocacy institutions, development financial institutions and the health tech start-up community working across various health areas — NCDs, infectious diseases and urban health. They reflected on principles and partnerships needed to maintain the conducive, fastpaced environment that encourages digital innovation whilst establishing pathways to close gaps and ensure no-one gets left behind. Rajni Samavedam, CEO, Rabin Martin and Dr. Afua Basoah, co-moderated the discussion.

This session is part of a series of future-forward dialogues that Rabin Martin will convene — bringing together multi-disciplinary stakeholders to surface and shape inclusive, scalable, modern-day global health approaches during this new era of digital innovation — from dialogues to decisive action.



Key Insights



A digital-first ambition requires a people-first approach

Local communities — those most likely to benefit from the digital health technologies — need to be in the driver's seat, actively codesigning, customising and codeploying digital health solutions. They are best placed to understand key challenges, needs and potential solves. A 'beyond the product' approach is required to engage patients and healthcare providers alike. After all, they ultimately drive the demand for the digital tools being developed.



Partners can unite through a common language

True digital inclusion requires a wide range of multi-sector stakeholders at the decision-making table, this includes representation from civil society, private sector, public sector, multilaterals and funding institutions. Each has a role to play in transforming patient health experiences and building resilience in the healthcare system — it is important to understand and recognise each stakeholder brings. A shared vision and common language, across stakeholders and sectors, that aligns how digital health is defined and incentives to drive digital transformation (e.g. investment priorities), will engender stronger partnerships through trust.



Private sector is not a foe

The public sector can generate the demand for digital health technologies, but not the supply. Ultimately, the private sector provides the supply and capacity. As such, it is important that a conducive local environment is created to enable private sector engagement and collaboration. Best practice of private public partnerships can be found in the fintech sector, which has proven favorable to local innovation. In order to unlock the innovative power of the private sector, effective governance is required to stipulate minimum standards to operate. In addition, alignment on vision, goals, incentives and desired outcomes, will begin to build the trust required to address the lingering aversion to private sector involvement.



Data is King (or Queen)

Data provides the critical intelligence layer that informs decisioning when optimising health experiences. All stakeholders across the healthcare ecosystem need equitable access to data, which is often fragmented — and therefore need to ensure data information design and infrastructure allows for its frictionless use and sharing. Effective data governance models are therefore needed to enable the co-creation of data ecosystems across public and private systems.



Horizontal vs. vertical scale-up

As one digital health solution will not solve all healthcare challenges, a more holistic approach is required when governments are procuring solutions. The procurement, scaling and use of digital tools can create barriers if considered in a vacuum and only in a vertical. Digital tools should be integrated into healthcare systems as more of a horizontal — maximising systems-wide efficiencies, effectiveness and outcomes. This horizontal approach extends to patient healthcare provision, enabling the shift from vertical disease models of care towards a more holistic and connected, care model. Ultimately, these tools serve as facilitators for personalized care.



The imperative gender-lens

Digital health disparities disproportionately affect marginalised women, making it challenging for them to access healthcare services. Given that up to 70% of the global healthcare workforce is female, an intersectional lens is required when considering digital inclusion. The gender digital divide is the fastest growing divide and requires a multi-sector approach to address it. It is known that the rate of female cell phone use is one of a country's strongest predictors of innovation, and as such female representation is needed everywhere, including at the design phase.



Co-financing mechanisms needed to aid scale-up

Financial investment is required to realise the digital transformation ambitions for healthcare. Earlystage funding to develop digital health solutions is more readily available than 'gardening money' needed to help start-ups become successful scale-ups delivering impact. There is opportunity to riskshare the closing of funding gaps through thoughtful public-private partnerships.





Moving Forward

There is no single path to ensure the design and deployment of truly inclusive digital health innovations, customised to meet the needs of all, and that results in better health outcomes and greater equity.

A systems-wide approach, guiding both principles and partnerships, is needed to maintain a conducive, fast-paced environment that encourages innovation yet enables the closure of equity gaps, ensuring no one gets left behind.

The key is to:

- ✓ Proactively engage the community for whom the digital health solutions are being developed at the beginning of the process. They should become co-designers, customisers, co-deployers and co-evaluators.
- ✓ Leverage sandbox environments to establish a common language, test models of collaboration and build trust. Private sector play an invaluable role in bringing to life the digital transformation ambitions of the healthcare sector through R&D, supply, capacity-building, co-funding and data-sharing activities — so must have a seat at the table.
- ✓ Ensure digital platforms have an intersectional lens that appropriately represent the full range of its users' identities and realities. Strong legislative, policy and institutional frameworks rooted in gender-based data are important not only to empower women and girls on digital platforms.



Participants

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Farid Fezoua

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Mathilde Forslund

Executive Director, Transform Health

César Velasco Muñoz

Innovation & Digital Strategy Director, AstraZeneca Spain; *nominated by Ryan Bate, Senior Director-Global Strategy and Operations at AstraZeneca*

Patty Mechael

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Gesa Pellier

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Rajni Samavedam (Moderator)

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Jeffrey Sturchio

Chairman, International Society for Urban Health; Chair, Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, TB, and Malaria; Board Member, Corporate Council on Africa; Senior Advisor, Rabin Martin

