

Embracing Disability



SEMINAR

Is Telehealth Accessible for People with Disability?

25 March 2021

14:00 – 15:30 CET



World Health
Organization



International Disability
and Development Consortium

BACKGROUND

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, the use of telehealth services has increased substantially in many countries and telehealth has become a basic need for the general population, especially for those in quarantine, enabling people to access advice on their health problems in real time through contact with health care providers. In fact, a recent World Health Organization (WHO) report showed that telehealth is the most common modality adopted by countries for service provision during the pandemic. However, due to the lack of standards and guidelines for accessibility of telehealth services, many people with disability experience difficulties accessing and using such services and are often forgotten.

Some of the most common challenges identified by people with disability include:

- Difficulties that people with vision impairment and blindness face, such as lack of compatibility of online platforms with screen readers or assistive devices like Braille keyboard; lack of colour contrast and screen magnification; inaccessible websites or images.
- Difficulties that hard of hearing or deaf people face, such as lack of captioning, sign language interpretation, text messaging, distracting background music in videos.
- Difficulties that people with speech difficulties face, such as lack of voice synthesizers and text-to-speech generators.
- Difficulties that people with mobility issues face, such as challenges with fine motor coordination, e.g., double clicking instead of single clicking, or difficulties scrolling or using menu options to access information.
- Difficulties that people with mental health conditions face, such as inappropriate content; lack of safety, privacy and security control over the personal data; complicated and effortful user interfaces; complicated language.

The common challenges faced by people with disability can be addressed through standardization and regulation. The development of guidelines and standards for telehealth is an important and valuable process to help ensure accessible, effective, and safe delivery of quality healthcare. The WHO and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) have initiated the development of a global standard for accessibility of telehealth services which is expected to be finalized and published by the end of 2021. As part of the development process, WHO is planning to engage with and involve civil society, and more specifically organizations of people with disability, to identify relevant areas of telehealth accessibility which need to be addressed by the standard.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SEMINAR

In the light of the above, a seminar will be held with the following objectives:

- Discuss the use and potential of telehealth for people with disability
- Identify difficulties that people with disability face when accessing telehealth services
- Outline concrete solutions that healthcare providers and manufacturers of telehealth platforms need to ensure when delivering telehealth services

TARGET AUDIENCE

People with disability and their representative organizations, healthcare providers, nongovernmental organizations, academia.

AGENDA

TIME	TOPIC	SPEAKER
5 Mins	Welcome and introduction	Alarcos Cieza Unit Head, Sensory Functions, Disability and Rehabilitation Unit, World Health Organization
10 mins	Telehealth 101 – what is it?	Derrick Muneene Unit Head, Capacity Building and Collaboration, Digital Health and Innovation Department World Health Organization
10 mins	Personal experiences	Moderator International Disability and Development Consortium
10 mins	WHO-ITU standard for accessibility of telehealth services	Masahito Kawamori Professor, Keio University, Japan International Telecommunication Union Kaloyan Kamenov Technical Officer, Sensory Functions, Disability and Rehabilitation Unit, World Health Organization
40 mins	Break out groups	Moderators: International Disability and Development Consortium World Health Organization
15 mins	Feedback from group chairs	Group Chairs
5 mins	Concluding remarks	International Disability and Development Consortium