



DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATIONS
FOR HEALTH LAB

GOVERNING HEALTH FUTURES 2030

CoE thematic dialogue on social media and children's mental health

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More and more children and adolescents turn to social media for health and mental health information and advice.

Our global poll of 23,000 children and young people highlighted importance of digital tools for obtaining health information and accessing confidential advice and support (Governing Health Futures 2030 Commission, 2021).

- Young people use digital spaces to seek information, connection, advice, peer support, and a sense of belonging - this includes for matters of their health.
- Social media is not separate from young people's health environment. It is one of the spaces where health is now lived, shaped, discussed, and understood.
- Online spaces can empower and enable in a way that many young people may not find offline: access they would not normally have, voices they normally do not feel is heard in a stigma-free environment.

The key question is not only how to protect young people from social media, but how to ensure digital spaces support their health, agency, and rights (DTH-Lab, 2025).



Users are aware of the risks and want systems that work for them, not against them.

Young people are not naïve about digital risks.

- Young people highlighted concerns about the accuracy of information they find online and about lack of privacy and wanted to be protected from harmful content.
- They want reliable health information from sources they trust, and digital systems where their data is handled safely.
- Governance must balance children's rights to protection and provision.
 - Focusing on individual responsibility only misses the point.
 - Blanket restrictions alone are not enough; young people want balance between protection, participation, and access that considers their needs.

Health-promoting online environments need trustworthy governance, youth-friendly information, and genuine youth co-creation.



Young doctors are not currently equipped to meet this new challenge in clinical practice.

European medical students report low levels of digital health literacy (Machleid et al., 2020).

- Medical curricula have not kept pace with rapid digital developments in recent years.
- Being a “digital native” is not the same as being trained to assess digital harms, online health information-seeking, or platform-related risks.
- Health professionals need digital, health, and civic literacy too: they must understand how digital environments shape patients’ well-being, trust, behaviour, and access to care.

The digital literacy of future medical doctors cannot be left up to the “hidden curriculum”.



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