ACTION PLAN 2023-2026

1. Background
Digital psychiatry has greatly expanded its focus over the last years and, by the implementation of its different technological solutions applied in routine psychiatric settings, it displayed the potential to exert a significant positive impact on mental health and care on a global scale [for details, see WPA Position Statement on Global Digitalization in Mental Health and Care]. However, the digitalization process in psychiatry is proceeding at different paces worldwide sometimes with relevant inequalities. These inequalities may prevent some people, such as those with limited digital literacy or from low socioeconomic sectors of the population, from accessing valuable digital resources, like telemental health (Ramalho et al., 2020; see reference list of WPA Position Statement on Global Digitalization in Mental Health and Care).

Along the WPA commitment to coordinate international efforts to implement capacity building and training in global digital mental health and care, over the last triennium, this Working Group (WG) has carried out a series of different activities aimed to create the optimal conditions for digital capacity building and upscaling of mental health services. Those included the elaboration of an official WPA Position Statement on Global Digitalization in Mental Health and Care, scientific reports of WG activities (published in World Psychiatry and in the Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science), an internal detailed report to be presented at the 2023 WPA General Assembly, and an international survey on digitalization in mental health and care, in collaboration with the WPA Member Societies.

2. Global Digitalization Action Plan
The WPA Working Group on Digitalisation in Mental Health and Care Action Plan suggested for the next triennium is based on the Work Report 2023, which includes a prospective Position Paper*, selected findings from a global survey**, professional contact with Zonal representatives and WPA Member Societies, and longstanding expertise in the field of psychiatric digitalization.

2.1 Global Digitalization Work Plan
The global aim of the Action Plan is to promote mental health and reduce the burden of mental health disorders across WPA member countries by upscaling digital technologies in mental health and care. To help achieve this aim, we propose the following actions:

a) the WPA Position Statement on Digitalization in Mental Health and Care (2023) will serve as a blueprint for a set of guidelines to be approved by WPA leadership, published in an international scientific journal, and distributed to all WPA Member Societies. This set of guidelines will help define proper strategies to implement digital mental health and care in all different world regions.
b) the Working Group will draw a detailed baseline representation of the global digitalization process in mental health using the information collected by a baseline survey conducted by the Working Group, with the support of the WPA leadership and WPA Zonal representatives. This baseline representation will help define specific needs and barriers to be addressed at the country and regional levels. The Working Group will also organize a series of webinars with individual WPA Member Societies to further discuss the results of the survey and further identify gaps, barriers, and facilitators for digitalization in mental health and care. These webinars will be complemented by interviews with key stakeholders in the region, e.g., clinicians, trainees, service users, and policymakers. The outcome of these webinars will be a set of educational materials to be distributed at the local/regional level and a Delphi consensus set of statements to ensure smooth and efficient adaptation of digital technologies to local/regional contexts. This method will allow selecting target interventions, populations, and actions, matching the identified gaps and needs with the best approaches to integrate digital technologies with traditional mental health and care services.

c) Based on the above baseline evidence, the Working Group will develop tailored educational programs in cooperation with WPA Zonal Representatives and Member Societies. These programs will include elaborating local/national digitalization blueprints and providing educational courses organized on a regional/zonal basis. These programs will cover scientific evidence about digital mental health and care, technical issues, legal-administrative frameworks, and ethical issues, and will be run by Working Group members in collaboration with WPA Member Societies’ representatives, WPA Zonal Representatives, and internationally renowned and local experts. Awareness and capacity building will be part of the implementation process. The program will include providing educational courses within official WPA Congresses and/or WPA co-sponsored conferences to cover all WPA Regions.

d) Finally, the Working Group will conduct a follow-up survey on the digitalization process with each participating WPA Member Society within two years from the events’ completion. This follow-up survey will assess the impact of the action plan and changes in the digitalization of mental health and care in the country/region. It will also allow the Working Group to perform a cost-effectiveness analysis on the impact of digitalization in psychiatry at the global level.

The Working Group will carry out the Action Plan in liaison with WPA leadership and its relevant components contributing with their expertise to the goals of this Action Plan.

Expenses for the organization of such activities could be covered by WPA, NPAs and/or external funding sources. All above actions will be performed in collaboration with all WPA relevant representatives, bodies and sections.

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