

WHO Europe finds 8% of countries have a health AI strategy, but most use AI already

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Govern AI in health before the gaps become irreversible

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Statement by WHO Regional Director for Europe, Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge

Lisbon, 15 July 2026

Good day to you all.

Let me begin by thanking the Minister of Health of Portugal – Ms Ana Paula Martins – for hosting us here in Lisbon.

Portugal's commitment to this agenda - as a country that has consistently invested in health innovation is exactly the kind of leadership that makes this work possible. Obrigado, ministra.

Now, let me start with a number: 8 percent.

That's the share of countries in the WHO European Region that have a health-specific AI strategy. Just eight percent.

At the same time, nearly two-thirds are already deploying AI in diagnostics. And half have introduced AI-powered patient chatbots.

This means we are deploying a technology that will reshape healthcare and medicine as we know it, yet only 1 in 12 countries has a strategy to govern it responsibly.

That gap - between deployment and governance - is the defining challenge of AI in health right now. And it's why we are here in Lisbon today.

WHO/Europe recently completed the most comprehensive assessment of AI readiness ever conducted across our 53 Member States. The findings are clear. 98% of Member States identify improving patient care as the primary driver for AI adoption. And the technology is working.

In Coimbra, here in Portugal, AI-powered image analysis is helping clinicians identify thoracic diseases and bone fractures faster, reducing waiting times in primary care and emergency settings. Real patients receiving better care today because of AI.

But the governance picture across the European Region is concerning.

Only 1 in 5 countries provides AI education for health professionals before they qualify.

Only 1 in 4 offers training once they are in the workforce.

Fewer than half have assessed whether their legal frameworks are fit for purpose.

And almost 40 percent of countries still have no ethical guidance on AI use in health at all.

The longer governance lags behind deployment, the higher the human cost. A biased algorithm can produce a wrong diagnosis, for a real patient, with real consequences. A health worker trained to trust an AI system they can't interrogate is not empowered, leading to mistakes outside their control. And all of this erodes public

trust in health systems more broadly.

To move the dial, three things need to happen.

First, governance has to keep pace with deployment. Every country deploying AI in health needs a strategy, liability standards, and training for the workforce who use these tools.

Second, no country should navigate this alone. That's why WHO has brought 37 countries together in Lisbon from all six WHO regions, to find common ground and listen to what they actually need to make AI in health a reality for everyone.

Third, the Portuguese-speaking community has a specific and important role to play. Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Mozambique and their partners share something deeper than a language - they share decades of trusted institutional relationships, academic exchange and technical cooperation. That's the foundation for a Lusophone Cooperation Roadmap on AI and Health, which we aim to launch at the Regional Health Summit in Brazil in 2028.

The future of AI in health won't be decided by algorithms. It will be decided by the frameworks we build now, the partnerships we forge, and the political will we bring to making sure this technology serves everyone - not just the countries and communities wealthy enough to shape it on their own terms.

That work starts here. Today. In Lisbon.

Thank you. Muito obrigado.

ENDS

This statement was delivered at a press conference in Lisbon on 15 July alongside the Portuguese Minister of Health, Ms Ana Paula Martins, and the Brazilian Minister of Health, Dr Alexandre Padilha.

PRESS RELEASE: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/15-07-2026-who-brings-37-countries-together-in-lisbon-to-get-ai-governance-right-and-make-it-work-for-every-patient>

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