# WHO urges lasting partnerships with tech giants to maintain digital health collaboration



A senior official at the World Health Organization (WHO) has called for an ongoing and institutionalised partnership between global health authorities and major technology companies, highlighting a decline in collaboration since the COVID-19 pandemic emergency began to subside. Andy Pattison, Team Lead for Digital Channels at the WHO, has expressed disappointment at what he sees as a waning commitment from leading tech platforms following the easing of pandemic restrictions.

Speaking to reclaimthenet.org, Pattison outlined his vision for establishing “a health online collective.” This would be a permanent alliance between health organisations and Silicon Valley giants, designed to maintain the level of cooperation achieved during the pandemic on an enduring basis, rather than solely in response to crises. His objective is to embed these partnerships into the digital realm so deeply that a comprehensive pandemic-level response becomes routine rather than reactive.

Pattison commented, “The health cluster work together in the real world, but in the digital world, we tend to start again.” This reflects the current situation where, despite close physical collaborations in health sciences, parallel digital engagement tends to reset with each new crisis. The proposed collective aims to enable consistent and unified messaging from health authorities and technology platforms at all times.

During the pandemic, a period characterised by unprecedented synergy between the WHO and technology companies, these collaborations expanded rapidly. According to Pattison, efforts had already begun before COVID-19, primarily targeting vaccine-related messaging such as on measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR). However, once the pandemic escalated, the partnerships intensified.

Meta, the company formerly known as Facebook, played an instrumental role in kickstarting this cooperative effort. Pattison revealed that Meta helped coordinate an initial roundtable involving other major tech platforms, which paved the way for a surge in coordinated actions. These included implementing stricter misinformation policies, embedding WHO-approved information within user feeds, and amplifying official WHO content across social media channels.

Pattison described the broad scope of these collaborations, stating, “The range of projects was from the policy side…to working with product managers…to amplify a lot of our content through their channels.” This approach involved managing the digital narrative surrounding public health by advising platforms on controlling information flow.

He also clarified that the WHO’s measure of success in these initiatives goes beyond metrics like likes or online impressions. “The actual proof of the pudding…is actually behaviour change,” Pattison said, emphasising that the ultimate aim is to influence public behaviour and decision-making rather than merely increasing visibility.

Part of this strategy involves enlisting healthcare influencers through a WHO programme called Fides. This initiative curates and supports individuals who can disseminate WHO messaging to their audiences in appealing formats, often using humour or emotional engagement. These influencers receive key messages and data from the organisation and, if their content resonates, they are encouraged to craft posts that enhance reach and impact.

“We work with the technology companies [to] boost those people,” Pattison explained, referring to the use of algorithm-driven promotion by social media platforms. This system creates a feedback loop between private companies, governmental institutions, and selected individuals, ensuring that health narratives are effectively shaped, distributed, and assessed for influence.

Pattison also highlighted the flexibility of this model to tailor official messaging to local contexts while maintaining central oversight. “It’s not WHO generically telling people about something,” he said. “It’s a creator from Uganda talking about… the latest scandal… making it relevant.”

As the WHO looks ahead to future public health challenges, it is clear that its digital communication strategy hinges on strengthening ties with technology giants, sustaining a central role in managing online health discourse, and focusing efforts on behavioural modification rather than simple information dissemination. Through the establishment of long-term collaborations and enhanced message control, the organisation aims to institutionalise a digital infrastructure capable of rapid and unified responses to future health emergencies.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://reclaimthenet.org/who-silicon-valley-digital-health-alliance-post-pandemic> - This article includes Andy Pattison's call for a permanent alliance between global health authorities and tech companies to maintain cooperation beyond pandemic emergencies, supporting the concept of a ‘health online collective’ and his disappointment at declining collaboration post-COVID-19.
* <https://www.devex.com/news/how-who-is-engaging-big-tech-to-fight-covid-19-97854> - The article covers WHO’s engagement with major tech platforms during COVID-19, mentioning early efforts on vaccine messaging and the escalation of collaborations during the pandemic, corroborating Pattison’s discussion of partnerships expanding rapidly during COVID-19.
* <https://bayareaglobalhealth.org/alliance-news/who-tech-task-force-and-bay-area-global-health-alliance-joint-meeting/> - This source confirms ongoing collaboration between WHO Digital Channels led by Andy Pattison and major tech firms including Meta, TikTok, and Google, illustrating the institutionalized partnership efforts mentioned in the article and Meta’s instrumental role.
* <https://aidevolved.com/podcast/who-chatbot/> - This podcast interview with Andy Pattison details WHO’s digital initiatives and partnerships with technology platforms to disseminate health messages, supporting the article’s points about WHO working closely with product managers and tech companies to amplify content digitally.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPKFtLNS1yU> - In this interview, Andy Pattison explains WHO’s use of AI and tech partnerships to combat health misinformation globally, including the role of Meta and Google, thus backing up the article’s description of coordinated misinformation policies and amplification of WHO content.