

Playbook on Digital Innovation for Supporting Families

A framework for **transformative digital support** to parents





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Playbook on Digital Innovation for Supporting Families



The landscape of parenting – including the support available to parents and families – has fundamentally shifted. Parents today navigate an unprecedented digital ocean, filled with endless information, conflicting advice and rapidly evolving technologies. They need support that meets them where they are: stressed, time-poor and seeking guidance they can trust. Digital innovation offers a powerful pathway to reach and empower parents globally with timely, trusted and actionable support.

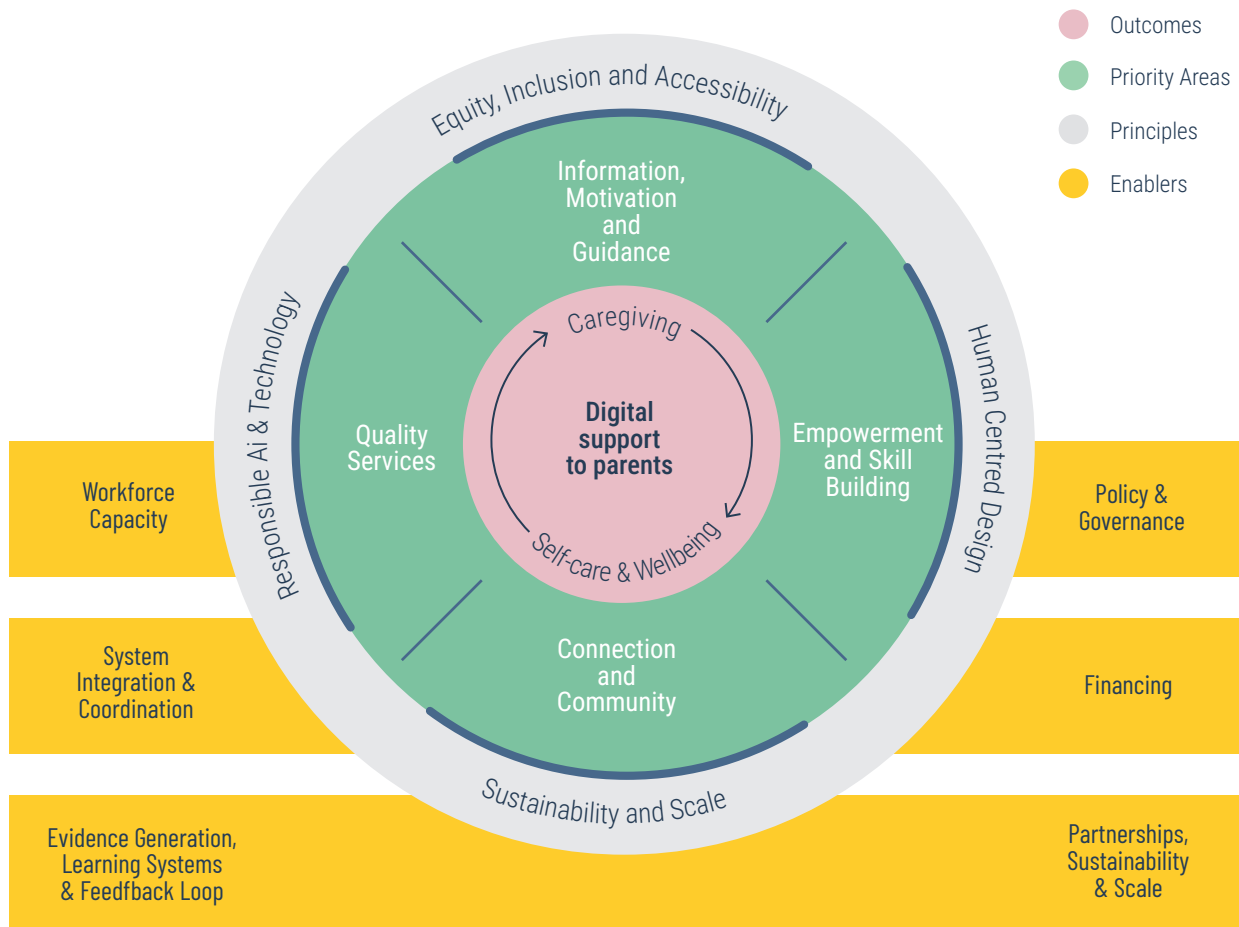
The Playbook presented here is the result of the Expert Dialogue on Digital Support for Parents, held from 10 to 11 November 2025 in Geneva. Organized by UNICEF in collaboration with the Van Leer Foundation, the dialogue brought together leading experts, technologists, major foundations, private sector leaders and partners from WHO, UNESCO, IRC and others to explore how digital solutions can strengthen support to parents globally. Over two days of rich discussion, participants examined the current state of digital support to parents, explored emerging opportunities through new technologies including artificial intelligence, and identified the conditions required to build integrated, sustainable and equitable digital support ecosystems.

The Playbook has evolved through intensive discourse, moving from fragmented, standalone digital tools towards an integrated, intelligent ecosystem that strengthens parental wellbeing and caregiving capacity. It is grounded in a simple yet key insight emerging from the Geneva discussions: **Transforming digital support for families requires care, connection and continuity.**

¹ In the scope of this document, 'parent' refers to the child's primary caregiver and is not limited to biological or legal parents.

The Playbook: An Integrated Ecosystem

This Playbook positions **digital support to parents** as the central organizing principle within an integrated ecosystem, surrounded by four mutually reinforcing **priority areas** that together create a comprehensive system of support. These are not standalone pillars, but interconnected elements that work in concert to meet parents where they are and respond to their evolving needs. The framework is oriented towards two transformative outcomes that measure impact in family life: strengthened parental self-care and wellbeing, and improved caregiver capacity. To be effective, digital innovation must be guided by four key principles and supported by six key enablers that together ensure equity, quality, sustainability and scale.



The Central Core: Caregiving and Self-Care & Wellbeing Outcomes

At the heart of the framework sit two interconnected components that define the ultimate outcomes of digital support to parents: **caregiving, and self-care & wellbeing.**

Caregiving

Caregiving represents the transformative journey of nurturing a child: the responsive, attuned interactions that shape healthy development and strong parent-child bonds. Digital support must strengthen caregiving capacity by building parents' confidence, enhancing their understanding of child development, and equipping them with practical skills for everyday moments. This is where information becomes action, where motivation and guidance translate into responsive interactions, and where parents develop the emotional understanding necessary for effective caregiving.



Self-care & wellbeing

Self-care & wellbeing acknowledges a fundamental truth: Parents cannot pour from an empty cup. The stress, anxiety and information overload that characterize modern parenting are not peripheral concerns; they are central to whether parents can show up fully for their children. Mental health and wellbeing support, delivered safely and sensitively through digital innovations – including AI-driven conversational support – must blend seamlessly into parents' lived experiences, and parental wellbeing must be woven throughout the entire ecosystem. **When parents feel supported, less alone and more confident, they are better equipped to provide the responsive, nurturing care their children need.**



These two components are inseparable. Strong caregiving requires parental wellbeing, and parental wellbeing is nurtured through the confidence and connection that comes from effective caregiving. Digital innovation must serve both simultaneously, recognizing that **supporting parents is supporting children**, and that strengthening the parent-child relationship begins with strengthening the parents themselves. In addition, digital support to parents has a potential to return time to parents – simplifying life and freeing parents to connect more fully with their children, thus enabling responsive caregiving and parental wellbeing. These outcomes shift the focus from outputs (download rates, engagement metrics) to genuine transformation in family life.



Information, Motivation & Guidance

In an age of information overload, parents don't need more content, **they need the right content, delivered at the right time.** This priority area focuses on providing evidence-based, culturally relevant and digestible information through multiple channels and multiple formats. The shift from microlearning to nano and pico-learning – shorter, more targeted learning formats – reflects the reality of parents' lives: They need just-in-time support that fits into the fragments of their daily lives. However, information alone is not enough. Trust and sustained engagement are built through informational relationships that are timely, motivational and caring, along with repeated touchpoints that create a sense of connection and belonging. Messages and information become the main unit of impact, transforming static content into dynamic, responsive guidance that evolves with parents' needs. **The way information is provided matters as much as the information itself.**

The Four Priority Areas



Empowerment & Skill Building

Digital platforms can do more than inform – they can also transform capability. Through interactive, personalized guidance based on socio-technical design principles, this priority area helps parents build confidence and develop responsive caregiving skills. Just-in-time adaptive interventions (JITAI) and hybrid generative AI approaches enable support that adapts to individual contexts, learning styles and pain points. Critically, this priority area recognizes that **technology should empower both parents and the professionals who support them.** Frontline workers benefit significantly from digital enablement such as job aids, training modules and quick-reference materials that strengthen their capacity to serve families. In this way, technology becomes a force multiplier for human connection, not a replacement for it.

Connection & Community

Parenting can be profoundly isolating. Digital communities reduce loneliness and provide peer support, creating spaces where parents can share experiences, seek advice and find solidarity. However, inclusion remains a critical challenge. Language barriers, digital literacy limitations and safety concerns can exclude the very families who need support the most. This priority area emphasizes that digital communities must complement, not replace, offline social support. As needs become more specific, moving from universal support to targeted interventions, the importance of sub-communities increases. These flexible, user-driven groups form organically around shared interests, challenges or identities, creating networks of belonging that evolve with parents' journeys.



Quality Services

Digital pathways to services represent a fundamental shift in how families access healthcare, education and social welfare. Compared to traditional approaches, digital innovations reduce costs, increase the likelihood that parents will find what they need when they need it, and create more touchpoints for continuous engagement. When embedded into existing workflows (through QR codes on birth registration forms, health worker job aids or integrated government portals) digital innovations enable seamless continuity of care. Case studies, including Finland's integrated family centres coordinated by the National Health Institute and insights from Central Asia on telecom integration, illustrate how this integration can work on a national scale. Beyond facilitating access, digital solutions can directly provide services through telehealth and remote support, reducing inequity and expanding reach to rural and underserved areas. Government alignment is essential for credibility, reach and sustainability.

Guiding Principles: Innovation with Integrity

The Playbook is anchored in four core principles that ensure digital support serves all families, especially the most vulnerable:



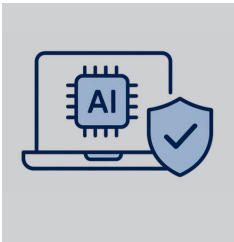
1. Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility

Digital divides, literacy levels and cultural contexts shape who benefits from digital innovations. Equity, inclusion and safety are not side streams, they form the system itself. Design must be intentionally inclusive and user-centric from the outset, addressing barriers related to connectivity, language, media and digital literacy and cultural relevance. Solutions must work for parents across all technology access levels, including low-tech and no-tech environments. Contextualization is essential: global content loses relevance without local adaptation to language, culture, service pathways and system realities.



2. Human-Centred Design

Solutions must be grounded in and tailored to parents' real needs and lived experiences, developed through co-design and continuous iteration. Technology should respond to these needs, rather than be driven by trends. This principle demands curiosity, empathy and ongoing engagement with families to understand their pain points, aspirations and daily realities. Hybrid "phygital" delivery combines digital reach with human interaction, recognizing that technology enhances, not replaces, relational trust. **The most effective approaches blend digital solutions with human support**, ensuring that innovation serves connection rather than replacing it.



3. Responsible AI & Technology

AI represents an area that requires deeper engagement, bearing enormous potential but significant risks. AI should augment human judgment, not automate it away. AI should serve as a collaborator (a coach, assistant or guide) while clear boundaries, transparency and ongoing human oversight remain non-negotiable. Guardrails must address accuracy, bias, data privacy and over-automation. Trust is built through transparency, consistency, evidence-based content and the robust protection of family data. Technology should ultimately simplify parenting, reduce decision fatigue and give caregivers back their time, rather than adding complexity or pressure.



4. Sustainability & Scale

Digital support to parents must be designed for sustainable, equitable impact at scale. This requires integration with national systems, diversified and reliable financing, coordinated partnerships, and alignment with government priorities. Governments play the central role in scaling digital support to parents, providing the mandate, infrastructure and reach necessary for universal coverage. However, achieving scale requires coordinated action across sectors and stakeholders. **Solutions must balance innovation with sustainability**, ensuring that promising approaches can evolve from pilots to programmes that serve millions of families over time.

Enablers: The Foundation for Scale

Surrounding the Playbook's central core are six critical enablers that determine whether digital support can achieve sustainable, equitable impact:

A:

Workforce Capacity: Frontline workers remain indispensable actors. Digital solutions must strengthen their capability, not diminish their role. Professional-mediated "phygital" approaches, where digital technologies expand reach and human interaction provides depth, represent the most effective model for impact.

B:

System Integration & Coordination: Digital solutions must work within, not outside of, national health, education and welfare systems to enable true continuity of care. However, integration must be pursued thoughtfully; in some contexts, standalone digital solutions may enable quicker progress or serve as necessary tools before full integration is feasible.

C:

Evidence Generation, Learning Systems & Feedback Loops: The design of digital solutions is an ongoing process. Imperfections are natural, as is evolution. Continuous iteration, adaptation and learning through robust feedback mechanisms ensure relevance and quality. Strong design and feedback loops are crucial for maintaining quality in a noisy landscape, and evidence of effectiveness is important.

D:

Policy & Governance: Strong ethical safeguards and transparent, accountable and rights-based governance are essential to building trust. Government leadership provides the mandate, stewardship and infrastructure required for national scale. At the same time, achieving scale often requires coordinated contributions from multiple stakeholders. Private sector, civil society organizations, development partners and others can play a critical role in driving innovation, expanding reach and supporting or complementing government-led efforts.

E:

Financing: Sustainable financing mechanisms are essential for long-term viability. Diverse funding approaches are required: blended financing mechanisms, philanthropic innovation funds, public-private collaborations with strong ethical safeguards, and government integration into national budgets. Foundations play a catalytic role in innovation and early-stage development through flexible funding. Diversification of funding streams ensures resilience and reduces dependence on single sources.

F:

Partnerships, Sustainability & Scale: No single actor can build the integrated ecosystem that parents require. Meaningful progress requires close collaboration across government, private sector technology providers, civil society organizations, academia and philanthropic foundations. Partnership models may include government-led integration, telecom partnerships and multi-stakeholder platforms. Impact is maximized when partnerships align around common goals, shared results frameworks and national priorities.

The Path Forward: From Fragmentation to Ecosystem

The vision is clear: Digital support to families should function like vitamins or nutrients (universal, preventive and continuously available), supplemented by targeted assistance for families with specific needs. We must support those raising children as they learn to swim in the digital ocean. Technology is no longer optional, it is the water we live in. The role of digital innovation is to equip parents to navigate it confidently and safely.

This Playbook sets out a roadmap for moving from fragmented digital offerings towards coordinated, ethical and scalable ecosystems. It recognizes that **digital support to families is an ecosystem**: a connected, intelligent approach that integrates information, empowerment, skill building, community and services into parents' daily lives, enabling deeper human connection rather than diminishing it.

The imperative is urgent. Globally, hundreds of millions of parents need support. Digital innovation, guided by this Playbook and collective expertise, represents the most powerful accelerator available to meet that need: responsibly, inclusively and at scale. Realizing this potential will require sustained collaboration across actors, continued investment, and a shared commitment to equity, trust and human-centred design. By working together, we can transform how parents are supported in the digital age, strengthening caregiving, enhancing parental wellbeing and improving outcomes for children everywhere.



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