

eHealth in Europe: Succeeding Together

European Co-operation on Europe-wide Electronic Health Services

Member States and the European Commission declare their intention to take steps towards implementing a roadmap for cross-border eHealth services.

Since 2004, the European Commission and Member States have been working together to create a European health information space, building on almost twenty years of prior cooperation. At the eHealth 2005 conference, the high-level attendees declared their commitment to taking up the challenge of creating this information space over a five-year period.¹ As a result, the Member States have been making concrete progress to implement the European Commission's Action Plan for a European eHealth Area² by including eHealth initiatives in their national programmes. eHealth is vitally important to enhance healthcare provision to Europe's citizens.

eHealth will enable higher-quality, effective healthcare that is safe, empowering, and accessible for patients, and cost-effective for governments. A reliable organisational and technical framework will also support a growing market for European industry. To provide Europeans with a continuity of healthcare that is accessible across borders, high-quality and efficient, the European Union will build on existing national and regional healthcare systems and services.

Engineering eHealth in Europe: Establishing a European framework for interoperable eHealth services is a complex task. It needs to be underpinned by an explicit European roadmap and appropriate political actions. To succeed, the Member States, European Economic Area countries, and the Commission, will initiate or strengthen the following six specific actions:

- **Engaging in the initiative:** Based on common values and through improvements in organisation and cooperation, Member States will facilitate citizens', patients', and health professionals' mobility, with the support of integrated and interoperable eHealth initiatives. European-wide eHealth services will require the support of political actions, within an EU framework of secure cross-border eHealth services. A well-organised national infrastructure, with appropriate processes and procedures, is considered a prerequisite for European-wide exchange of data that will facilitate citizen, patient, and health professional mobility, where necessary.
- **Organising Europe-wide cooperation:** Within an international setting, European collaboration will establish eHealth solutions. This will offer industry a larger market for infrastructure-oriented and other products, and create cost-effective solutions for national eHealth implementations. Member States will work to resolve issues of common concern, such as the legal and regulatory aspects of eHealth solutions including the protection, confidentiality, and security of personal and patient data. They will engage more pro-actively with all the relevant eHealth and health professionals. A commitment will also be forged to create a shared technical framework that is based on prevailing standards. Interaction and collaboration will include bi-lateral and multi-lateral organisational arrangements, and will permit a variety of solutions as long as they contribute to the overall objective.
- **Building on national eHealth roadmaps:** A European health information space can only be built on the basis of accepted and existing national systems that respect institutional, cultural, and linguistic national preferences. Every Member State needs its own national eHealth roadmap that fits logically with what it is doing internally in health care, including actions planned

¹ eHealth 2005 Conference, Tromsø, Norway: "In a Europe in which our citizens are increasingly mobile - whether within the borders of their own Member State or among different countries - we need to raise awareness of the pressing need for a more integrated and interoperable European health information space. The Ministers commit to taking up this challenge in a staged and structured approach over the next five-year period."

² COM (2004) 356 final e-Health –making healthcare better for European citizens: An action plan for a European e-Health Area.

or taken at a regional level. It is crucial to share information and understanding while acknowledging the wide variety of national roadmaps. There will be an increased focus on the deployment of eHealth systems, setting up of targets for interoperability, use of electronic health records, and reimbursement of eHealth services.

- **Creating innovative eHealth services:** There is consensus on a need for more synergy between research and education, not only implementation and application.³ The latest technologies are being developed in Member States or at a wider European level in various research programmes. Modern European health services and infrastructures need to benefit from these improvements. A deployment strategy that spans research to final adoption by patients and health professionals needs to be developed. Member States and the European Commission will join efforts to reach a better understanding of user needs for technology development and deployment, and to transform this into efficient, new services for all citizens. The Commission will facilitate this shift from pure research in eHealth to deployment-related implementation.

- **Combining standardisation and safety in eHealth:** Patient safety needs to be improved dramatically. This can only be achieved if information concerning patients is managed in a more systematic manner among all those who are concerned in the provision or healthcare or preventive services. Key steps will involve the development and coordination of eHealth standards on user identity, user authentication, technical criteria, and semantic concerns. Commitment from all Member States and all relevant stakeholders to work on these standards will be necessary. Agreed eHealth standards will contribute to an increased quality and efficiency of health services. It will enable interoperability, facilitate economic benefits, and lead to major cost savings in the delivery of high quality and effective health services.

- **Involving and supporting the eHealth Industry and other stakeholders:** Industry representation is vital to this initiative. Collaboration will be enhanced between Member States and those industries considered important to these developments. eHealth business potential needs to be unlocked, and a more favourable business environment created for eHealth. This engineering process will influence the efforts made by the eHealth industry to build an eHealth market in Europe, and have benefits for European employment. Stakeholder involvement should encompass patients' and health professionals' organisations and health service providers, which are crucial for a full adoption and implementation of information-technology related to healthcare processes and techniques.

Given their citizens' increasing mobility, the European Member States and the European Commission commit themselves to engaging in this joint initiative. The immediate next steps in this phased and structured collaboration will involve starting carefully planned pilot activities. These Large Scale Pilots will test the application of improved patient summaries in different health contexts such as medical emergencies and prescription dispensing. They will be based on a variety of carefully-prepared descriptions of common patient contexts such as chronic care and care for Europe's ageing adults. The participants will be involved in systems development, design, prototyping, and validation. The work on the technical framework will be complemented wherever necessary by appropriate efforts related to the legal and regulatory framework for eHealth services. As part of this joint initiative, progress will be made in relation to improving interoperability; use of electronic health records; deployment of research results; and development and coordination of eHealth standards essential to cross-border applications. This European-wide cooperation on electronic health services will lead to the successful formation of the European health information space.

³ Agreed at the Hampton Court European Council in October 2005, (Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council 23/24 March 2006), and reiterated in the European Council Conclusions of March 2007.