

EU CONSULTATION ON EHEALTH INTEROPERABILITY



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The European Commission has recently launched a public consultation on eHealth interoperability. The basis for this is that the Commission itself has acknowledged that a major obstacle to the widespread take-up of eHealth applications in the EU is the lack of interoperability in systems and services such as electronic health records, patient summaries and emergency data sets.

In its Draft Recommendation adopted on 16 July, the Commission stresses that the requirement for eHealth interoperability is perceived as being based fundamentally on the citizen or service needs. It is considered as having importance and benefits for both in-country and in-region health systems and services.

The interoperability of eHealth systems and services is principally required in four specific circumstances between the health systems of different Member States, whether those systems are organised in a centralised or a decentralised manner: (1) when an individual citizen is traveling in another Member State and is then taken ill; (2) when a citizen exercises the right to travel to a different Member State in order to receive the health service of his or her choice; (3) when health services are sought remotely using electronic means, either by a citizen or by a health professional in the form of store-and-forward diagnostic service or real-time communications; (4) in transnational settings where, in effect, a local health economy crosses a single border.

Through this informal public consultation, the Commission is seeking to clarify the technical definition of the term that relates to connecting systems and exchanging information while at the same time taking into account the relevant social, political, regulatory, business, industry and organisational factors.

The need to develop interoperable healthcare systems across the EU was already identified in the EU's 2004 e-Health action plan in which it defines its priorities until 2010. A new strategy was adopted in June 2006 by

the Commission's ICT for Health Unit to promote the transformation of the European healthcare landscape, in line with the Commission's new policy framework i2010. The Unit is currently in the process of drafting guidelines for good practice on eHealth interoperability.

The document proposes actions at political level such as building a political platform to set up the necessary legal and regulatory environment for eHealth interoperability with more effective coordination and harmonisation of national legislation to address a number of initiatives in relation to privacy and confidentiality issues. It also proposes the creation of the organisational framework or process and interfaces, in and through which national eHealth infrastructures and services can interact. Further actions focus on the standardisation of applications, on monitoring and evaluation, and on architectural and technical interoperability to establish common communication platforms which, for example, would address security-related issues and agree on a single certification and accreditation process.

The final recommendation is expected to be adopted later on in 2007, so that it would then contribute to the achievement of "a European health information space" by the end of 2015.

The deadline for feedback of consultation is 10 September 2007. The document can be downloaded from http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=3540

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