eHealth Action Plan 2012-2020 - Innovative healthcare for the 21st century

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PURPOSE : to set up an eHealth Action Plan 2012-2020.

BACKGROUND : EU health systems are under severe budgetary constraints, while having to respond to the challenges of an ageing population, rising expectations of citizens, and mobility of patients and health professionals. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) applied to health and healthcare systems can increase their efficiency, improve quality of life and unlock innovation in health markets.

Despite the economic crisis, the market potential of eHealth is strong. The global telemedicine market has grown from $9.8 billion in 2010 to $11.6 billion in 2011, and is expected to continue to expand to $27.3 billion in 2016, representing a compound annual growth rate of 18.6%.

The first eHealth Action Plan was adopted in 2004. Since then, the European Commission has been developing targeted policy initiatives aimed at fostering widespread adoption of eHealth throughout the EU. For instance, the Commission Recommendation on cross-border interoperability of electronic health record systems (2008/594/EC), theCommunication on benefits of telemedicine for patients healthcare systems and society.

The adoption of the Directive 2011/24/EU on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare establishing the eHealth Network, marked a further step towards formal cooperation on eHealth. The eHealth Network set up by this Directive is the main strategic and governance body at EU level to work towards interoperability of cross-border eHealth services.

Notwithstanding this substantial progress, barriers continue to exist that need to be addressed in order to reap all the benefits from a fully mature and interoperable eHealth system in Europe.

CONTENT : the new eHealth Action Plan outlines the vision for eHealth in Europe, in line with the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Digital Agenda for Europe. The vision of this Action Plan is to utilise and develop eHealth to address several of the most pressing health and health systems challenges of the first half of the 21st century:

- to improve chronic disease and multimorbidity (multiple concurrent disease) management and to strengthen effective prevention and health promotion practices;
- to increase sustainability and efficiency of health systems by unlocking innovation, enhancing patient/citizen-centric care and citizen empowerment and encouraging organisational changes;
- to foster cross-border healthcare, health security, solidarity, universality and equity;
- to improve legal and market conditions for developing eHealth products and services.

The Action Plan addresses the barriers and the following operational objectives:

(1) Achieving wider interoperability of eHealth services : the Commission recognises the need for an eHealth interoperability framework, building on eHealth roadmaps and the general European Interoperability Framework with its four levels of interoperability: legal, organisational, semantic and technical.

(2) Supporting research, development and innovation in eHealth and wellbeing to address the lack of availability of user-friendly tools and services : short-term and mid-term research priorities include health and wellbeing solutions for citizens and health professionals, better quality of care, including of chronic diseases, while increasing citizens autonomy, mobility and safety. Particular attention is paid to the design and usercentricity of mobile technologies and applications. There will be an additional focus on ways of analysing and mining large amounts of data for the benefit of individual citizens, researchers, practitioners, businesses and decision makers. The Commission shall support:

- Public-Private Partnerships and other actions involving research and innovation and translation of knowledge to clinical trials and demonstration projects;
- actions to improve the market conditions for entrepreneurs developing products and services in the fields of eHealth and ICT for wellbeing.

(3) Facilitating uptake and ensuring wider deployment : the Commission will leverage the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the large scale deployment of innovative tools, the replicability of good practices and services for health, ageing and wellbeing, with a particular attention to improving equal access to services.

From 2013, starting with the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme and continuing under Horizon 2020, the Commission will support activities aiming at increasing citizens digital health literacy.

From 2014, sets of common indicators will be made available to measure the added value and benefit of eHealth solutions, based on work funded by the Commission in partnership with

stakeholders.

(4) Promoting policy dialogue and international cooperation on eHealth at global level : the Commission shall enhance its work on data collection and benchmarking activities in health care with relevant national and international bodies (WHO, OECD) to include more specific eHealth indicators and assess the impact and economic value of eHealth implementation. It shall promote policy discussions on eHealth at global level to foster interoperability, the use of international standards, develop ICT skills, compare evidence of the effectiveness of eHealth, and promote ecosystems of innovation in eHealth.

The Action Plan emphasises cross-border activities but it should be noted that work done at the EU level has a strong effect at the national level and vice versa. Therefore, the Action Plan encourages national and regional authorities, healthcare and social care professionals, industry, patients, service providers, researchers and EU Institutions to closely work together.