5. ICT Services, Applications & Products

5.1 eHealth

Why invest in eHealth?

eHealth implementation is identified by the Commission as one of the Societal Challenges for the upcoming decades. It covers the ICT-based interaction between patients and health-service providers, institution-to-institution data transmission, peer-to-peer communication between patients or health professionals. It also includes health information networks, electronic health records, tele-medicine services, including personal wearable and portable communicable systems for monitoring and supporting patients. Today, healthcare expenditure accounts for 9 % of GDP, but represents between 12% and 15% of government spending in most EU countries. As such, eHealth, with its promise of more efficient care, is critical to the sustainability of the healthcare systems in Europe.

Regions should invest in eHealth, in order to move towards a "European eHealth Area", helping to further coordinate actions and promote synergies between related policies and stakeholders. This could help develop better solutions, prevent market fragmentation and improve the dissemination of best practices. Specific objectives such as creating an electronic health record architecture supporting the exchange of information, the set-up of health information networks between points of care to coordinate reactions to health threats, the promotion of online health services such as information on healthy living and illness prevention, and development of teleconsultation or ePrescribing, are relevant actions. This should be client-centric and tailored to local and regional needs. Digital education is important to support citizen and client initiatives.

It is also crucial to invest in eHealth solutions that reduce levels and length of hospitalisation, for regions with a low population density, or with widely dispersed communities, as eHealth can be more cost effective than the traditional hub-and-spoke hospital model.

Health Innovation Platform[78] – One of the most remarkable examples of using ESIF for eHealth can be found in Galicia, and the "Health Innovation Platform". The platform supports projects that develop innovative healthcare through Public Procurement of Innovation (PPI) mechanisms. The platform has also developed the IANUS system of electronic medical records that makes clinical information available to all health centres and hospitals and to all pharmacies in Galicia (in total 36,000 healthcare professionals are connected).

epSOS – European Patient Summary Open Services – EPSOS aims to design, build and evaluate a service infrastructure that demonstrates cross-border interoperability between electronic health record systems in Europe. There is a regional implication in this project, and Structural and Investment Funds may help in the take up of such solutions.

Noord Brabant (NL) – Smart Care programme focused on eHealth and ambient assisted living (2008) – Vision of future-proof care, independent living but also social inclusion with 16 network projects subsidised by region to implement tested tools across region: social organisations + end user + commercial party.

78 http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/active-healthy-ageing/20120403_galicia.pdf.

Barriers & challenges

The eHealth Action Plan 2012–2020 and its staff working paper recall that the main barriers to deploying eHealth solutions are (a) the lack of awareness and confidence in the benefit of eHealth, (b) the lack of user-friendly eHealth solutions, (c) the lack of interoperability between eHealth solutions, and (d) the limited large-scale evidence of the cost-effectiveness of potential improvements in healthcare processes.

Structural and Investment Funds may be a useful source for funding eHealth solutions, (ideally complementing other instruments such as PCP (Public-Private Partnerships), PCP (Pre-Commercial Procurements) and/or Procurements of Innovative Solutions) to open up new opportunities for local and regional primary and secondary care, healthcare professionals, eHealth industry as well as local and regional government authorities.

How to act?

Regions wishing to invest in the eHealth domain should consider the following steps:

1. Analysis:

a. Assess the regions concerned through a SWOT analysis, and propose specific ways in which they could benefit from eHealth projects and programmes.

b. Determine how this implementation could contribute to other European Commission policies (e.g. eInclusion).

c. Provide a cost-benefit analysis with a different time scale (short-, middle- and long- term) and investigate the potential sources of public and private financing.

d. Determine the necessary human and technical resources.

e. Find, promote and support successful projects and sustainable business models.

2. Governance/stakeholder involvement: The public regional and national authorities should engage with relevant stakeholders. The main stakeholders for eHealth are:

- The eHealth Governance Initiative (Until 2014);

- The eHealth Network (from 2012);

- The CEF Governance (from 2014);

- ICT Standards Multi Stakeholders Platform (From 2012);

- The public sector, such as national/regional authorities in charge of ICT and health, would need to be involved and form the relay to the eHealth Governance Initiative at the regional and local level;

- Healthcare providers (e.g. hospitals, healthcare professionals...) – as care givers;

- eHealth solution providers (start-ups, SMEs, large companies) – as solution providers;

- Patients and citizens at large – as care beneficiaries.

3. Priority setting:

a. Position your level of ambition *vis-à-vis* the relevant Digital Agenda Action (Action 76: Propose a recommendation to define a minimum common set of patient data; Action 77: Foster EU-wide standards, interoperability testing and certification of eHealth).

b. Prioritise projects with the highest foreseeable impact, as defined in the eHealth Action Plan 2020 objectives:

- Strengthen effective prevention and health promotion practices, and improve chronic disease and multi-morbidity (multiple concurrent disease) management;

- Increase sustainability and efficiency of health systems by unlocking innovation, enhance patient/citizen-centric care and citizen empowerment; and encourage organisational changes;

- Foster cross-border healthcare, health security, solidarity and universality;

- Improve legal and market conditions for developing eHealth products and services.

c. Establish roadmaps to reach the defined goals.

Regions are encouraged to help the take-up of successful EU funded projects as they are the prime beneficiaries of their activities, both in terms of the wellbeing of their citizens and the sustainability of their health and social services.

4. Policy mix: In this process, regions should also seek synergies with other national and regional initiatives and EU activities. Of particular interest in this area could be:

a. FP7/H2020 programmes and instruments (PCP, PPP);

b. Current CIP ICT Policy Support Programme;

c. Connecting Europe Facility (2014-2020), supporting inter-alia interoperability aspects (e.g. wider deployment and operations of EPSOS infrastructures);

d. A comprehensive national eHealth strategy should be developed to support the implementation of eHealth services, in line with the eHealth Action Plan and Digital Agenda.

5. Monitoring and evaluation: The Commission calls upon Member States and regions to further develop their planning and monitoring of eHealth services implementation and provides a number of targets.

Further reading

http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ehealth