

Building E-health Capacity Conclusions

What is e-health?

E-health is today's tool for substantial productivity gains, and tomorrow's instrument for restructured, citizen-centred health care systems that respect the diversity of Europe's multi-cultural, multi-lingual health care traditions.

"E-health is also a state of mind, a way of thinking, a commitment for networked healthcare" (Marina Lupari).

Economic, Individual, Societal: What are the benefits of e-health?

Among the benefits of e-health, the most frequently advanced are efficiency, quality, accessibility, safety, comfort for the GPs, reduction in exposure to risk, time savings, a better allocation of resources, cost savings on the longer term, and the amount of information available from research that feeds into evidence-based standards.

To what cost?

E-health has obviously an economic cost that mainly consists of the cost of the necessary ICT equipment. This initial investment is followed by an adaptation period and by the need for changes in the organisation, that also leads to some costs.

E-health in Romania

E-health is a response to many challenges, by increasing sustainability, efficiency and transparency. It also constitutes a market opportunity. Therefore, ICT is a mandatory amendment to the healthcare system.

In Romania, the average condition of the hospitals is assessed as fairly good, slowly improving through constant investments.

Still, the system remains under-financed and there is a shortage of doctors, especially in the smaller hospitals, and in some specialities. Moreover, the equipment is there, but very often outdated. Modernisation is essential!

The main challenges identified are:

- Integrating the uninsured population and the medical service providers other than hospitals into the system;
- Establishing a partnership between the local hospitals and other service providers;
- Clarifying the access rights to the IT-system;
- Creating a secure network.

Proposals advanced by Covasna County Council:

- Creating a competent body to coordinate the system at national level;
- Creating the legal basis and introducing e-signatures.



Dos and Don'ts – How to reach large-scale implementation?

A clear vision

- Think first: what do you want to do, where, and why?
- Align EHR development with the regional government's health strategy, supporting it;
- Integrate e-health into your health policy;
- Develop clear objectives for your future healthcare system;
- Develop an IT strategy at local/regional level

Strong Governance

- Guarantee strong political leadership, and find enthusiastic leaders;
- Decide who is responsible for the whole e-health development and do not change it during the process – designate one competent body;
- Implementing e-health requires political courage to make difficult decisions in a slow-growth economy: “it is easier to build a hospital than broadband, but for the patient of tomorrow, broadband is more important, as it enables a better access to healthcare for the patient” (Agneta Granström);
- Ensure there is knowledge and experience of change management at all levels.

E-health is about people

- Shift from organisation-centred care to patient-centred care – the tools you are developing are for the patients, not for the medical staff!
- Adopt a bottom-up approach: the role of health care professionals in the design and development is critical;
- Developing e-literacy is a precondition to the acceptance of e-health: through education in schools, in elderly homes;
- Build the trust: starting with medical data might be tricky, as it is the most sensitive one; it may be best to develop e-health as an add-on to a wider e-government policy;
- Make sure healthcare workers benefit from sufficient IT training.

Funding e-health

- Start with analysing business processes in healthcare;
- Integrate e-health in your thinking of new reimbursement models;
- Identify funding opportunities at European level: health might not be a priority as such under the new Cohesion policy, but e-health is under every other priority (innovation, social inclusion, ICT, adaptation to change), you just need to be creative!
- Start developing national strategic programmes and thinking about health investments now;
- Support end-users with financial initiatives.

Sufficient IT infrastructure as a precondition

- Inadequate IT infrastructure is obviously an obstacle to the successful implementation of e-health;
- Make sure your public infrastructure is service-oriented;
- Find the best services to start with;
- Optimise processes before you go to standardisation.

And finally...

- Without knowing the process, do not start a project!
- Set realistic timescale for projects;
- Beware of unrealistic expectations;
- Stay away from technology fascination: e-health should not become an objective in itself – it is just a tool;
- Don't underestimate preparation for implementation;
- Beware of disappointing short-term results;
- Health is just one hook: we have other services that can benefit from IT solutions

The conclusions presented here are based on the outcomes of the "Building Capacity for e-health" meeting held on 3rd November 2011, jointly organised by the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and the County of Covasna (RO).
If you wish to receive more information on the work of AER's e-he@lth network, do not hesitate to contact us! (c.bullot@aer.eu)