National eHealth Strategy Toolkit
Overview

World Health Organization

ITU

National eHealth Strategy Toolkit

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The case for eHealth

The *National eHealth Strategy Toolkit* reflects the growing impact that eHealth is bringing to the delivery of health care around the world today, and how it is making health systems more efficient and more responsive to people's needs and expectations. Technological advances, economic investment, and social and cultural changes are also contributing to the realization that the health sector must now integrate technology into its way of doing business. The daily business of health in all its aspects – from individual care to humanitarian action – relies on information and communication and, increasingly, on the technologies that enable it, at every level and in every country.

Countries that are now seeking to develop their own eHealth strategy will, however, face many challenges. The Toolkit reflects those challenges and acts as a comprehensive guide on how to overcome them for the benefit of public health.

As the major United Nations agencies for health and telecommunications respectively, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) have long recognized the importance of collaboration for eHealth in their global resolutions[1], which encourage countries to develop national eHealth strategies: this Toolkit supports those recommendations.

WHO defines eHealth as the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for health. In its broadest sense, eHealth is about improving the flow of information, through electronic means, to support the delivery of health services and the management of health systems.

The need for national planning

Experience shows that harnessing ICT for health requires strategic and integrated action at the national level, to make the best use of existing capacity while providing a solid foundation for investment and innovation. Establishing the main directions as well as planning the detailed steps needed is essential to achieving longer-term goals such as health sector efficiency, reform or more fundamental transformation. Collaboration between the health and ICT sectors, both public and private, is central to this effort.

Ministries of health play a pivotal role, not only in meeting people's needs for care and protecting public health, but also in preserving health systems through uncertain times. Ministries of information technology and telecommunications are crucial to development in all spheres, and can make a vital contribution to the health sector. Common goals and a predictable ICT environment enable coordinated action: building consensus on policy, facilitating better use of shared resources and involvement of the private sector, and investment in skills and infrastructure to improve health outcomes.

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1   World Health Assembly Resolution 58.28 (2005) and ITU World Telecomunication Development Conference Resolution 65 (2010).

A vision for national eHealth

A key element of the Toolkit is a national eHealth vision. This explains why a national approach to eHealth is needed, what a national eHealth plan will need to achieve, and how it will be done.

- *Why* – this is the strategic context for eHealth, encompassing the health of the population, the status of the health system, the health and development priorities, and the resulting implications for eHealth.
- *What* – this is the role eHealth will play in the achievement of health sector goals. It serves as a high-level message for policy-makers that answers the question of *where does our country want to go with health and how will eHealth help us get there?*
- *How* – this gives the various eHealth components – or building blocks – that must be in place to realize the national eHealth vision.

Working with stakeholders

Many stakeholders, including those from sectors other than the health sector, have an interest in eHealth and are keen to contribute to the process. It is essential from the beginning to understand their views, and to gain their collaboration, support and endorsement of the outcomes of the eHealth planning process.

Such an inclusive approach not only builds relationships; it also gains valuable perspectives on what eHealth should deliver. This commitment to open communication and a willingness to consider the views and interests of diverse groups needs to be nurtured throughout the process. Understanding stakeholders' perspectives gives a much fuller picture of a country's technical, political and social context.

The Toolkit: what it is and who it is for

The National eHealth Strategy Toolkit is a resource for developing or revitalizing a country's eHealth strategy, from countries just setting out to those that have already invested significantly in eHealth.

In some countries, eHealth integration is well-advanced; in others it has barely begun. Some countries are seeking to build on promising results from pilot initiatives, establish foundations for scaling up eHealth projects, or update strategies to reflect changing circumstances. For all countries, whatever their level of eHealth advancement, the Toolkit is a practical, comprehensive, step-by-step guide. It will help governments develop their own eHealth strategy, tailored to their own national policies, resources and requirements, and to the expectations of their citizens.

The Toolkit is directed chiefly towards the most relevant government departments and agencies, particularly the ministry of health, and the ministries of information technology and telecommunications. Although comprehensive, the Toolkit does not need to be comprehensively employed: individual governments and their departments can choose, refine and develop the parts that are best for them, and create their own unique eHealth vision.

It will also be useful to decision-makers who see the need for a national eHealth plan but are uncertain how to proceed in order to develop one. The successful application of the Toolkit requires a team experienced in strategic planning, analysis and communication. Thus, the Toolkit is intended to be read and used by professionals who are already familiar with eHealth technologies and practices.

While it is aimed at a specialized, professional readership, the Toolkit's approach keeps the general public firmly in mind, recognizing that it is the public who will be the ultimate beneficiaries of eHealth in their country.

The reasons for this are evident: eHealth saves lives, saves money, improves the health of individuals and the population at large; strengthens health systems, promotes equity and social justice, and does much more besides. Its strategic application by governments reflects the latest and best ideas, innovations and ambitions for progress in public and individual health.

A brief guide to the Toolkit

The Toolkit provides a framework and method for the development of a national eHealth vision, action plan and monitoring framework. It is designed in three parts, with the second and third parts building successively on the work of the first.
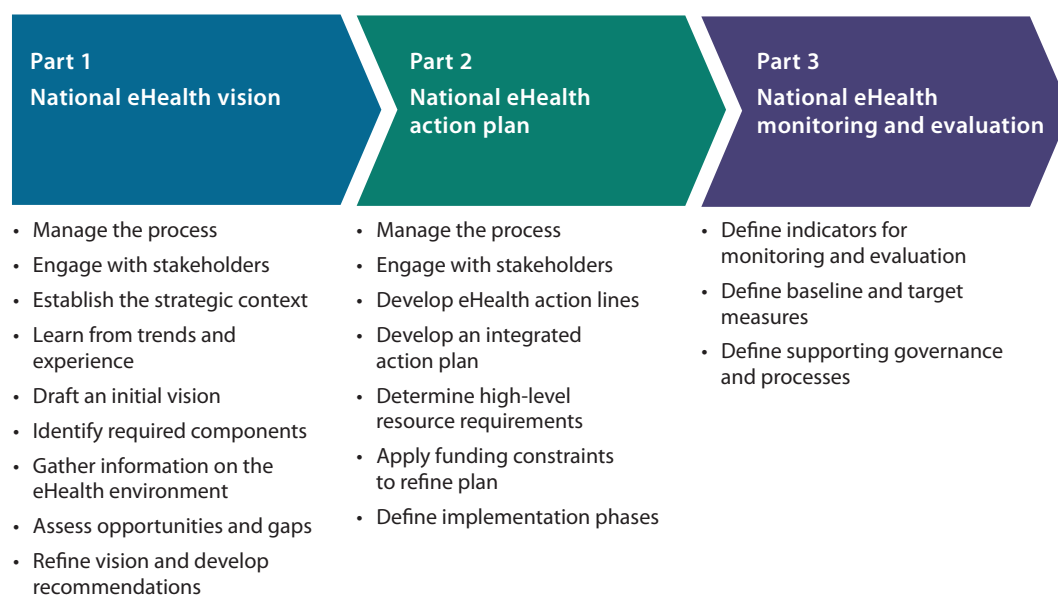
Part 1 develops a national eHealth vision that responds to health and development goals. It explains why a national approach is needed, what the plan will achieve, and how it will be done.

Part 2 lays outs an implementation roadmap that reflects country priorities and the eHealth context. It structures activities over the medium term, while building a foundation for the long term.

Part 3 establishes a plan to monitor implementation and manage associated risks. It shows the progress and the results of implementation and aids in securing long-term support and investment.

Each of these three sections describes the activities required, along with practical advice informed by real-world experience. Countries can undertake the entire set of activities, or those specific to their context and constraints. How the Toolkit is used, and the end result, will depend on a country's context, priorities and vision.

Toolkit for developing a national eHealth strategy

Part 1 National eHealth vision	Part 2 National eHealth action plan	Part 3 National eHealth monitoring and evaluation
• Manage the process • Engage with stakeholders • Establish the strategic context • Learn from trends and experience • Draft an initial vision • Identify required components • Gather information on the eHealth environment • Assess opportunities and gaps • Refine vision and develop recommendations	• Manage the process • Engage with stakeholders • Develop eHealth action lines • Develop an integrated action plan • Determine high-level resource requirements • Apply funding constraints to refine plan • Define implementation phases	• Define indicators for monitoring and evaluation • Define baseline and target measures • Define supporting governance and processes

Moving forward with the Toolkit

Countries can focus on a range of structured activities that lead to the progressive development of a national eHeath strategy.

- *identifying the key health and non-health sector stakeholders* who will need to be involved in the development of a national eHealth vision and plan and its subsequent implementation, and engaging with them;

- *establishing governance mechanisms* to provide improved visibility, coordination and control of eHealth activities;

- *establishing the strategic context for eHealth.* This provides the foundation for the eHealth vision and plan, and enables the government to assess and make informed decisions on whether to pursue opportunities that present themselves from the ICT industry and other stakeholders;

- *assessing the current eHealth environment* in terms of the eHealth components that already exist as well as existing programmes or projects that will deliver eHealth capabilities.

Finally, the Toolkit also identifies short-, medium- and long-term goals for countries, recognizing that it is important to demonstrate outcomes and benefits throughout the national strategy implementation process and to build and maintain momentum and support for eHealth, and thereby improve the health of their populations.

World Health Organization

WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries, and monitoring and assessing health trends.

International Telecommunication Union

ITU is the leading United Nations agency for information and communication technology. For over 145 years, ITU has coordinated the shared global use of the radio spectrum, promoted international cooperation in assigning satellite orbits, worked to improve communication infrastructure in the developing world, and established the worldwide standards that foster seamless interconnection of a vast range of communications systems. From broadband networks to new-generation wireless technologies, aeronautical and maritime navigation, radio astronomy, satellite-based meteorology and converging fixed-mobile phone, Internet and broadcasting technologies, ITU is committed to connecting the world. In the field of ICT Applications, ITU provides assistance to developing countries, among others, by advising on eHealth strategies and policies, creating guidelines and best practices on eHealth applications, and assisting in implementing technical co-operation projects.

Worldwide, the application of information and communication technologies to support national health-care services is rapidly expanding and increasingly important. This is especially so at a time when all health systems face stringent economic challenges and greater demands to provide more and better care, especially to those most in need.

The *National eHealth Strategy Toolkit* is an expert, practical guide that provides governments, their ministries and stakeholders with a solid foundation and method for the development and implementation of a national eHealth vision, action plan and monitoring framework. All countries, whatever their level of development, can adapt the Toolkit to suit their own circumstances.

Representing one of the most significant collaborations in recent years between the World Health Organization and the International Telecommunication Union, the Toolkit is a landmark in understanding what eHealth is, what it can do, and why and how it should be applied to health care today.

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