

22 June 2016

Dr Clemens-Martin Auer, Director General, Federal Ministry of Health, Austria
Mr Xavier Prats Monné, Director General for Health and Food Safety, DG SANTÉ
Co-Chairs of the eHealth Network
c/o European Commission, eHealth units of DG Health and Food Safety and
DG Communications Networks, Content and Technology
Brussels, Belgium

Via email: ehealth-network@ec.europa.eu

Dear Dr Auer and Mr Monné,

The large scale deployment of telehealth systems, which involve the open and interoperable integration of personal connected health devices as well as healthcare ICT systems, has considerable potential to move healthcare from the hospital to the home, empower citizens and patients with timely information, and improve the health and the quality of life of patients and their families. The tasks are considerable (including addressing legal and regulatory issues, re-designing healthcare services, raising awareness and support, training patients and healthcare professionals, and others) and are best managed within each country or region. Yet some challenges about the technology, interoperability and the market require cross regional – and even cross-national – coordination to be adequately handled. We are writing today to highlight these challenges and request guidance from the eHealth Network in the area of cross national coordination.

“We” are a group of European national and regional authorities in charge of delivering healthcare services for our populations, represented (in some cases) by the departments or institutions in charge of the health ICT or telehealth infrastructure. We currently represent the countries or regions of Austria, Catalonia, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. We share a few common characteristics:

- **Confidence** in the benefits of telehealth when integrated with regular health service delivery and its supporting electronic health record systems;

- **Advanced plans** for, and in some case initial experience with, large scale deployment of telehealth systems; and
- **A commitment to open standards and interoperability**, including Continua Guidelines for open and interoperable personal connected health.

The initial experiences with telehealth have led us to the following observations:

- **Technical challenges:** The task of getting our health ICT systems ready for telehealth is formidable. We have spent years and sometimes decades in building ICT systems. Only recently have open standards and profiles emerged, but these standards compete with the staying power of legacy systems and the inertia of the health ICT industry. At the same time the industry, especially on the personal and consumer side, is rapidly evolving. Converging these trends will require years of solid planning and market guidance, patience and realism.
- **Continua Guidelines:** On the side of personal health devices and solutions, the Continua Guidelines provide the leading open framework for many technical interoperability aspects of personal connected health. Our countries and regions have either already publicly expressed a commitment to Continua, or are considering to do so. We are aware of Continua's continuing struggle to become universally adopted, yet we know that without a strong demand push from the public sector, the market may remain stuck.
- **Support for interoperability:** We recognise that we need an end-to-end interoperability framework based on international standards for integrating personal connected health with our systems. The Continua Guidelines provides many key elements for such a framework. Those of us who have advanced on adoption have been implementing ancillary measures including support and testing infrastructure, promotion of the market for interoperable devices, and engagement with vendors to preview our procurement plans and timelines.

This list is not exhaustive and we plan to document these and other lessons, and share them with interested parties in Europe and beyond. To support our efforts we have three requests from our Member States colleagues and the European Commission:

- **Request 1:** Please make time for a European evaluation of an end-to-end interoperability framework based on international standards for personal connected health, and please work towards a common European approach on this. We suggest this could be done with the advice of the eHealth Network and in the context of the refined eHealth European Interoperability Framework (reEIF) and the Joint Action to Support the eHealth Network (JASeHN). And to propose a high-level structure and

conceptual framework that supports both a content sharing and an appropriate technical framework that can support a single European market strategy for personal connected health.

- **Request 2:** Please continue supporting the large scale deployment of telehealth and the generation of appropriate evidence of the benefits of telehealth and personal connected health.
- **Request 3:** Please help us change the market dynamics for personal connected health. The ongoing work of initiatives such as the Personal Connected Health Alliance has started to move the needle, but for a market breakthrough we need more countries and regions to join.

In return we pledge to periodically come back to share with you our experiences in deploying interoperable personal connected health. For more information on Continua please contact europa@continuaalliance.org.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stefan Sauermann
Interoperability/standards consultant
to the Austrian Ministry of Health
UAS Technikum Wien
Austria

Francesc García Cuyàs
Director
TicSalut Foundation
Catalan Ministry of Health

Lisbeth Nielsen
Chief Executive Officer
Danish Health Data Authority
Denmark

Annakaisa Iivari
Director, Social and Health Services
Ministry of Social Affairs and Health
Finland

Roar Olsen
Division Director
The Norwegian Directorate of
eHealth
Norway

Sara Meunier
Chief Technology Officer,
Architecture & Governance
Inera / Swedish Association of Local
Authorities and Regions
Sweden