



FACTSHEET

eHealth

What is eHealth?

eHealth is the encompassing name given to the use of tools based on information and communication technologies to assist and enhance the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, monitoring and management of health.

It covers the interaction between patients and health professionals, institution-to-institution transmission of data and communication between healthcare providers.

Possible applications are: Health information networks, telemedicine services, personal wearable and portable communicable systems and electronic health records.

Potential benefits

eHealth solutions could improve safety, quality and access to healthcare for consumers by:

- The Electronic Health Record (EHR) which can improve continuity of care and reduce medical errors; make healthcare systems more efficient and responsive to patients' needs; facilitate consumers' access to their health records.
- Collecting information for medical research. The use of telemonitoring can prevent unnecessary visits to the hospital.
- Telemedicine, which could help address shortages of healthcare professionals and optimise the use of scarce resources.
- e-prescribing which can help prevent side-effects due to interactions with other medicines. It could also be useful for repeat prescriptions for chronic patients - thus avoiding unnecessary visits to the doctor's surgery.

Barriers



- **Lack of security for privacy and data protection:** the storage, transfer and processing of health information using ICT tools might expose consumers to the risk that their health information could accidentally end up in the hands of unauthorised parties.
- **Lack of user acceptance and awareness** hinders the use of eHealth solutions by both consumers and healthcare professionals.
- **Internet constraints:** Access to the internet is not universal and many consumers do not have access to a fast connection. Any risks of degradation or blocking of Internet traffic would significantly affect the successful roll-out of eHealth services.
- **Lack of interoperability** is a current hindrance, mainly due to legal and technical issues.

But barriers relate also to the non-technical elements, in other words the underlying philosophy and ethics of healthcare and the complexities of the human relationships that make the technology work.



BEUC's solutions

Guarantee privacy, data protection and truly informed consent

- Health data have to be considered as sensitive data and be fully secured.
- Any set up of an eHealth system be preceded by a reinforcement of the legal framework on data protection and medical liability (e.g. in case of telemedicine)
- Consumers should be in charge of their own medical file, be able to 'log in' and inspect it.
- Consumers should give truly informed consent for the storage and sharing of their medical data.
- Set up different levels of confidentiality and 'access restrictions' on certain information to only selected healthcare professionals.

Ensure highest levels of quality and safety

- Develop eHealth solutions with, for and around the patient.
- The quality and the safety of the technology used should be carefully assessed by the competent authorities by way of a proper certification system.
- The technology should also ensure reliable identification of the patient and the healthcare professional(s).
- Secure the system from a technical point of view against breaches and crashes.

Inform consumers and healthcare professionals on the implications of eHealth

- Information campaigns for consumers.
- Training for healthcare professionals
- Consumers unable or unwilling to use eHealth technologies should be provided with suitable alternatives and support.

Improve interoperability

- Enable interoperability between information shared among different healthcare professionals and between different healthcare settings and systems

Conduct cost/benefit and risk/benefit analyses

- Research should not only be dedicated to finding innovative solutions, but also to assessing the safety, effectiveness and real benefits of existing eHealth applications.

For further information, see our position paper