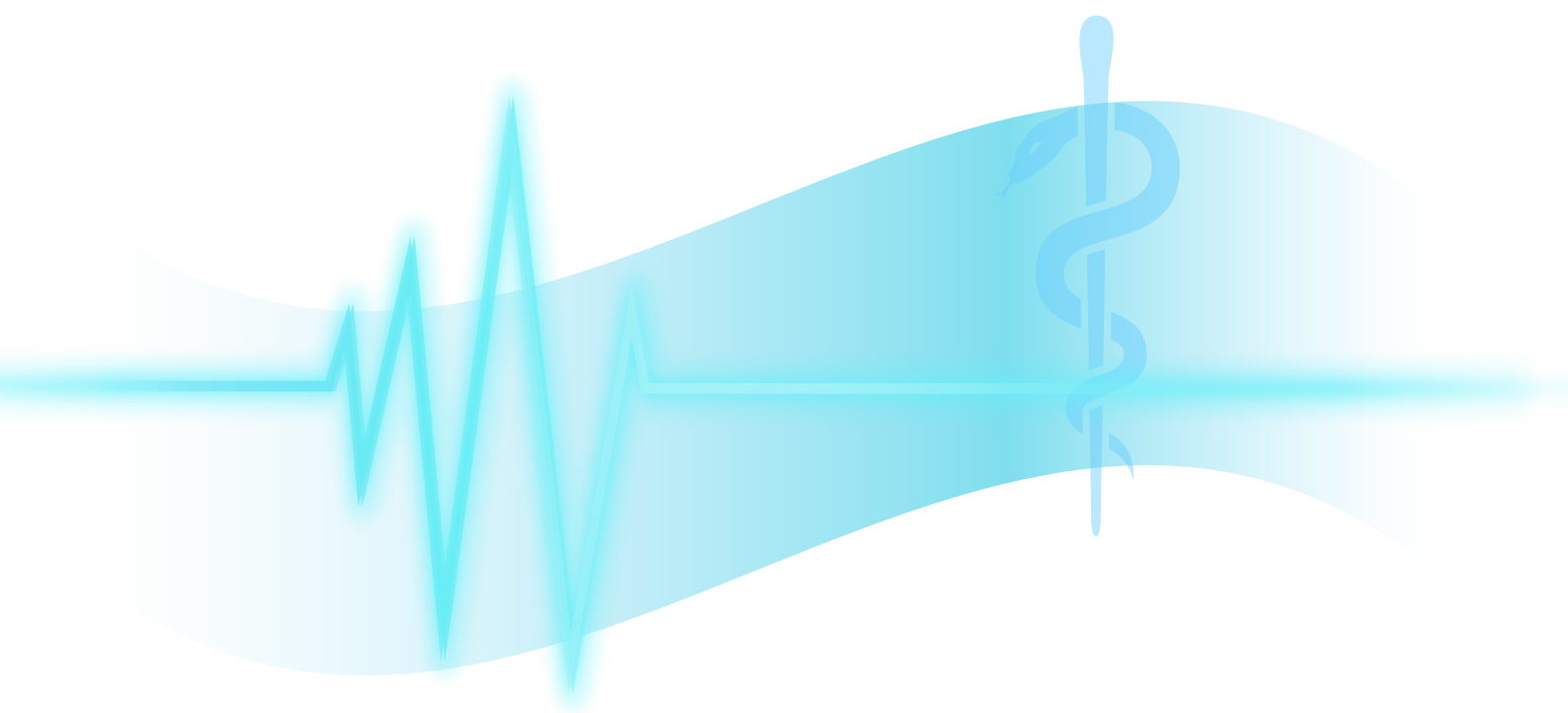


National eHealth Strategy Toolkit



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Foreword

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) are pleased to present this *National eHealth Strategy Toolkit*. WHO and ITU have a long history of working together, and this new publication represents one of our most substantial and significant collaborations of recent years. It fully reflects the importance that the governing bodies of our two organizations attach to the development of national eHealth strategies.

This is a shared work that reflects a shared goal – responding to the needs of countries, at every level of development, who seek to adapt and employ the latest information communication technologies (ICT) in health for the measurable benefit of their citizens. The *National eHealth Strategy Toolkit* is a milestone in our understanding of what eHealth is, what it can do, and why and how it should be applied to health care today.

The Toolkit is a comprehensive, practical guide that all governments, their ministries, departments and agencies can adapt to suit their own circumstances and their own vision and goals. Its publication is very timely. This is a period when all health systems face stringent economic challenges, greater demands for efficiencies and higher expectations from citizens. There is, everywhere, an urgent challenge to provide more care and better care to more people, especially those most in need.

This Toolkit expertly demonstrates how all nations can rise to that challenge, each in its own way. While it brings the sectors of health and ICT much closer together, the Toolkit also encourages the active participation of a wider range of stakeholders, including the general public, reflecting important issues of social justice and equity. By bringing all of these interested parties together, the Toolkit offers them a chance to share in a unique national project whose ambition is nothing less than to achieve lasting progress in public and individual health.



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Introduction to the National eHealth Strategy Toolkit



The Toolkit: What it is and who it is for

This *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.

The Toolkit provides a framework and method for the development of a national eHealth vision, action plan and monitoring framework. It is a resource that can be applied by all governments that are developing or revitalizing a national eHealth strategy, whatever their current level of eHealth advancement.

It is a practical, comprehensive, step-by-step guide, directed chiefly towards the most relevant government departments and agencies, particularly ministries of health and ministries of information technology and communication.

Although the Toolkit is comprehensive, it does not need to be comprehensively employed. Individual governments and their departments can tailor it to their own national policies, resources and requirements, and to the expectations of their citizens. They can choose, refine and develop the parts that are best for them and create their own unique eHealth vision.

The successful application of the Toolkit does, however, require a team experienced in strategic planning, analysis and communication process. One of the team's early priorities should be deciding at what point to bring stakeholders into the process. This is important in managing the process itself, because the team will have to work closely and continuously with the many stakeholders, not just those from the health sector, who have an interest in eHealth and are keen to contribute. Deferring their involvement until the core team is well established and has begun its work, rather than engaging the stakeholders from the very start may prove more efficient in the long run.

Like all strategies and plans, the outcomes of this Toolkit are not static and represent a point-in-time understanding of what a country needs to achieve in order to address its particular goals and challenges. Changes in a country's strategic context will require a dynamic approach to updating the eHealth vision and the associated action plan so that they remain relevant. This requires understanding the key triggers for refreshing the vision and action plan, whether these are specific events that change a nation's strategic context for eHealth or a defined period of time after which a revision is required.

Ongoing engagement with essential health and non-health stakeholders must also be maintained. Success in implementing a national eHealth vision is heavily dependent on having the continued support and guidance of stakeholders, and thus does not reach a conclusion after a national strategy has been developed.

Continued communication is also vital. Stakeholders should be regularly informed on the progress of the programme, and in particular, any impacts or results that implementation of the progress has realised. This ensures transparency, which is essential to maintaining stakeholder support and momentum for further activity and investment in eHealth.

The Toolkit is designed in three parts, with the second and third parts building progressively on the work of the first:

- ▶ Part 1: A national eHealth vision that responds to health and development goals
- ▶ Part 2: A national eHealth action plan that reflects country priorities
- ▶ Part 3: A plan to monitor implementation and manage associated risks.

Part 1 develops a national eHealth vision that responds to health and development goals. It 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.

Part 2 lays out an eHealth action plan 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 helps 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 contexts and constraints. How the Toolkit is used, and the end result, will depend on these factors and on each country’s priorities and vision.

Countries can focus on a range of structured activities that lead to the progressive development of a national eHealth strategy. These include:

- ▶ involving the key health and non-health stakeholders in creating a national eHealth vision and plan and its subsequent implementation.
- ▶ establishing governance mechanisms to provide improved visibility, coordination and control of eHealth activities that are occurring across the country’s health sector.
- ▶ establishing the strategic context for eHealth to provide the foundation for the eHealth vision

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