

## Exchange of electronic health records across the EU

The European Commission has adopted a Recommendation on a European electronic health record exchange format to unlock the flow of health data across borders.



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The Recommendation on a European electronic health record exchange format seeks to facilitate the cross-border interoperability of electronic health records (EHRs) in the EU. It does so by supporting EU countries in their efforts to ensure that citizens can securely access and exchange their health data wherever they are in the EU.

The electronic health record exchange format will help citizens to quickly access and share their health data with healthcare professionals. For example, when consulting a specialist or receiving emergency treatment in another EU country.

### Secure access to health data

Enabling citizens to securely access and share their health data across borders is one of the priorities of the Communication on enabling the digital transformation of health and care.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) underlines that citizens have the right to access their personal data and provides the legal framework for the protection of personal data. It sets out directly applicable rules for the processing of the personal data of individuals, including health data. Rules for facilitating the access to safe and high-quality cross-border healthcare are covered in the GDPR on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare.

## **Benefits of access to electronic health records**

In a public consultation on digital health, respondents acknowledged the differences between EHRs as one of the main obstacles to exchanging health data and advancing digital health and care in Europe. Currently, most citizens cannot easily access their health data electronically across borders.

Better access to health data across borders will improve the quality and continuity of care offered to citizens. And, it will lead to reduced healthcare costs. For example, by eradicating the unnecessary duplication of medical tests and procedures.

## **The Recommendation**

The Recommendation sets out a framework for the further development of a European EHR exchange format that will enable citizens to securely access and exchange their health data across borders in the EU. It delineates a set of principles that should govern this exchange and a process for further development, monitoring and review. And, it lays down set of common technical specifications for the cross-border exchange of data.

The Recommendation underlines that moving towards interoperable EHRs in the EU should go hand in hand with ensuring data protection and security in line with the GDPR and in full compliance with the cybersecurity framework.

A joint coordination process involving EU countries and the Commission is envisaged in order to support the further elaboration of the European EHR exchange format. This process will also engage all relevant stakeholders, including healthcare professional organisations, national competence centres, industry actors and patients groups, and other EU and national authorities.

## **Background**

This Recommendation builds on several initiatives and projects put forward by the Commission and EU countries in their efforts to facilitate the cross-border exchange of health data in the EU.

Work on technical specifications for health data exchange has been carried out under the e-Health Digital Service Infrastructure (eHDSI), which is implemented by the Commission and EU Countries through the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Programme.

The eHDSI connects eHealth national contact points allowing them to exchange two sets of health data: patient summaries and ePrescriptions. The first exchanges took place between Estonia and Finland in January 2019. Twenty-two EU countries are expected to exchange such health information by 2021. This Recommendation builds on and contributes to the further development of eHDSI, by facilitating the EU-wide interoperability and exchange of comprehensive electronic health records.

Important groundwork on the interoperability of EHRs was carried out in the framework of the project Smart Open Services for European Patients (epSOS), a large-scale pilot funded by the Commission. epSOS tested the cross-border sharing of patient summaries and ePrescriptions, and with the support of the EXPAND project paved the way to the roll out of the eHDSI.

A number of other projects supported by the Commission, such as Antilope and HITCH, have also been instrumental to the development of the Refined eHealth European Interoperability Framework.

Health information on specific cases can currently be exchanged across borders through one of the 24

thematic European Reference Networks (ERNs). These networks enable virtual panels of clinicians to diagnose and treat patients suffering from rare, complex and low prevalence diseases.

About 900 highly specialised healthcare units located in around 300 hospitals of 25 Member States (plus Norway) take part in the ERNs. Individuals do not have direct access to these networks. Healthcare providers refer patients to the relevant Network, with their consent and in accordance with the national health systems rules.

Recommendation on a European electronic health record exchange format

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First calls for proposals under the Digital Europe Programme are launched in digital tech and European Digital Innovation Hubs

The Commission announced this week the first set of calls for proposals under the Digital Europe Programme. This follows the adoption of the work

programmes allocating nearly €2 billion for investments aimed to advance on the digital transition.

PRESS RELEASE | 18 October 2021

The EU Digital COVID Certificate: a global standard with more than 591 million certificates

The Commission adopted this week a report on the EU Digital COVID Certificate and its implementation across the EU. The report shows that the EU certificate has been a crucial element in Europe's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with more than 591 million certificates generated. The certificate, which covers COVID-19 vaccination, test and recovery, facilitates safe travel for citizens, and it has also been key to support Europe's hard-hit tourism industry. The EU Digital COVID Certificate is a success worldwide: it has set a global standard and is currently the only system already in

PRESS RELEASE | 21 September 2021

Coronavirus: 200th EU disinfection robot delivered to European hospital, a further 100 confirmed

This week the Commission delivered the 200th disinfection robot - to Consorci Corporació Sanitària Parc Taulí hospital in Barcelona. The robots, donated by the Commission, help sanitise COVID-19 patient rooms and are part of the Commission's action to supply hospitals across the EU to help them cope with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Further to these initial 200 robots announced in November last year, the Commission secured the purchase an additional 100, bringing the total donations to 300.

PRESS RELEASE | 01 July 2021

EU Digital COVID Certificate enters into application in the EU

As of the 1st of July, the EU Digital COVID Certificate Regulation entered into application.

This means that EU citizens and residents will now be able to have their Digital COVID Certificates issued and verified across the EU.

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### **Big Picture**

eHealth

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## See Also

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The European Innovation Partnership in Active and Healthy Ageing is an initiative that aims to foster innovation use of digital for active and healthy ageing.

Privacy code of conduct on mobile health apps

The privacy code of conduct on mobile health apps aims to promote trust among users and provide a competitive advantage for those who sign up to it.

European '1+ Million Genomes' Initiative

The 1+ Million Genomes initiative has the potential to improve disease prevention, allow for more personalised treatments and provide new impactful research.

Managing health data

The European Commission adopted a Communication and a Staff Working Document on Digital transformation of health and care to boost European Union action.

eHealth experts

The European Commission created two expert groups working on eHealth: the eHealth Stakeholder Group and a temporary eHealth Task Force.

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