

Question 14-2/2: Telecommunications for e-health

1 Statement of the situation

Today, everybody knows that e-health solutions and applications can play a very important role in health-care delivery, in particular in developing countries, where the acute shortage of doctors, nurses and paramedics is directly proportional to the enormous unsatisfied demand for health services, and that e-health could not be achieved without using telecommunication facilities to achieve the objectives of the health-care system.

The 58th World Health Assembly adopted a resolution on e-health in May 2005 "stressing that e-health is the cost-effective and secure use of information and communication technologies in support of health and health-related fields ..."

2 Question for study

The Question shall:

- 1) Take further steps to assist in raising the awareness of decision-makers, regulators, telecommunication operators, donors and customers about the role of telecommunication and information technologies in supporting healthcare and a healthy life in developing countries.
- 2) Encourage collaboration and commitment between the telecommunication sector and the health sector in developing countries, in order to maximize the utilization of limited resources on both sides for implementing e-health-care applications.
- 3) Disseminate experiences and best practices with the use of telecommunications in e-health in developing countries.
- 4) Encourage cooperation among developing countries in the field of telecommunications for e-health.
- 5) Promote development of telecommunication standards for e-health applications in conjunction with ITU-T and ITU-R in particular.

3 Expected output

The output expected from this Question will include:

- Report on how hospitals and other health-care institutions can benefit from the broadband telecommunication access infrastructure to be used for e-health solutions.
- Report and guidelines with regard to the use of mobile telecommunications for e-health solutions in developing countries.
- Collect and summarize the requirements and effectiveness of telecommunication infrastructure for the successful implementation of e-health applications, taking into account the environment of developing countries. This information will be presented to ITU Study Group 16 which deals with standardization in e-health.
- Prepare, in close cooperation with WHO, training courses for nurses and paramedics, to be posted in the primary health-care centres in developing countries. These courses will teach how to operate some simple e-health systems and applications, where ITU will cover the telecommunication part and WHO the health-services part.
- Collect information on how e-health can be useful for persons with disabilities and the handicapped.
- Global dissemination of e-health information using the e-health directory.

4 Timing

The work undertaken by the study group can be phased over the next study period. The participation of experts from the group using telecommunications for e-health projects will be encouraged, in order to ensure that the contributions to the study reflect the needs of the developing countries for such telecommunication facilities.

5 Proposers

The Question was originally approved by WTDC-98, and then revised by WTDC-02 and WTDC-06.

6 Sources of input

Inputs will be expected from Member States and Sector Members, experts in e-health/telemedicine institutions, etc. Contributors to and contacts have already been established during the study period 2002-2006 and new contacts will be invited as well. Question 14-1/2 supported the mobile health initiative for developing countries launched in 2004.

7 Target audience

Target audience	Developed countries	Developing countries	Least developed countries (LDCs)
Telecom operators	Yes	Yes	Yes
Telecom regulators	Yes	Yes	Yes
Manufacturers	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ministries of health	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hospitals	Yes	Yes	Yes
E-health organizations	Yes	Yes	Yes
International organizations			

a) Target audience

This Question aims at stimulating collaboration between the telecommunication and health communities, between developed and developing countries, and among developing countries as well. The experience gained from telecommunications for e-health applications in developing countries will also be expected to benefit equipment suppliers and service providers in developed countries, giving them a better understanding of what is cost-effective in third-world markets.

b) Proposed methods for the implementation of the results

The outputs of this Question will be made available via the ITU-D website. Hard copies could be provided on request.

8 Proposed methods of handling the Question

Within Study Group 2.

9 Coordination

See section 8 above.

10 Other relevant information

The activity for the next study cycle can be based on the final report, and on other initiatives which resulted from Question 14-1/2 of the last study period, namely telecommunication broadband connections for hospitals and health institutions.
