Enabling environment — policies and strategies to support the information society

Finland reports that the majority of the listed actions to promote an enabling environment for information and communication technologies (ICT) in the health sector were implemented between 1995 and 2004. They will be reviewed and continued over the next two years. The promotion of availability of information in local languages and the recognition of cultural diversity has been very effective and will continue. Private funding for ICT support has been secured since 1998 through the research and development programmes of the National Technology Agency (TEKES). The promotion of information in local languages and the recognition of cultural diversity has been very effective in Finland and will continue. The most effective initiative started in this field is the introduction of an evidence-based decision support system called Duodecim. Now in country-wide use, this system provides incentive to health-care professionals to use ICT in their daily work. Finland reports that it is a challenge to implement norms, standards and interoperability of ICT as health-care providers are decentralized.

Infrastructure — access to information and communication technologies

ICT infrastructure development for the health sector is supported in Finland through intersectoral and nongovernmental cooperation. This cooperation has been only slightly effective since 2003 and will be reviewed and continued over the next few years. A national plan for the development of ICT in health, which sets targets for health sector connectivity, will be implemented within the next two years. Similarly, a national policy to reduce the costs of ICT infrastructure for the health sector will also be implemented. Finland highlights the importance of other initiatives in this field such as national services for ICT in health care, and Code Server.

Cultural and linguistic diversity, and cultural identity

The development of electronic multicultural health content is promoted in Finland through the support of translation and cultural adaptation of existing high-quality content (created either locally or abroad). Special projects are planned to begin over the next few years to promote the development and use of new electronic health content in multiple languages.
Online access to health content (for health-care professionals and the public) has been provided through various national and international electronic journals and a digital national open archive. Access to Medline was introduced in 1994 and has been very effective for the medical and research communities. The Finnish national open archive, Helka (introduced in 1995), has been very successful in providing national scientific and health research information. The most effective accomplishment in this field has been the provision of access for all health-care professionals to information databases such as Medline and the national medical database kept by the medical association of Duodecim with other partners. The most significant challenge in this field is that not all access is free of cost.

Capacity – human resources knowledge and skills

ICT capacity in Finland has been built through undergraduate and postgraduate training in ICT, continuing education in ICT, and eLearning in health sciences. These actions are rated from moderately to very effective and will continue over the next few years. ICT skills courses as part of university curricula for health sciences students have been offered since the late 1980s and are rated as very effective. Since the 1990s ICT skills programmes in the ongoing training of health-care professionals have been introduced and have so far been moderately effective. The shortage of health-care professionals is a significant challenge in this field.

eHealth tools and eHealth services

Directories of health-care professionals and institutions, and national drug registries are respectively rated as extremely and very useful. All other listed eHealth tools are rated from slightly to moderately useful if the World Health Organization could offer these as generic prototypes for adaptation. Advice on methods for monitoring and evaluation of eHealth services, and information on effective/best eHealth practices are considered as very useful. All remaining listed eHealth services are rated slightly to moderately useful.