

Commission makes it easier for citizens to access health data securely across borders

Currently the ability of European citizens to access their electronic medical records across the EU greatly varies from one country to another. Although some citizens can access part of their electronic health records at national level or across borders, many others have limited digital access or no access at all. For this reason the Commission is today making recommendations that will facilitate access across borders that is secure and in full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

Vice-President Andrus **Ansip**, in charge of the Digital Single Market, stated *"People ask for secure and complete online access to their own health data, wherever they are. Healthcare professionals need reliable health records to give better informed and faster treatment. Our health systems need the best resources for the best personalised care. Together, we need to speed up and develop the secure exchange of electronic health records across the EU. It will improve life for citizens and help innovators find the next generation of digital solutions and medical treatments."*

Commissioner Vytenis **Andriukaitis** in charge of Health and Food Safety, added: *"How many of us, when travelling or relocating to another Member State, have wished we could access to our own medical data and share them with a local General Practitioner? Moreover, being able to securely share medical information with doctors abroad has the potential not only to substantially improve the quality of care we receive but also to have a positive effect on healthcare budgets. It is less likely that expensive medical tests, such as imaging or laboratory analyses, would need to be repeated."*

Commissioner Mariya **Gabriel**, in charge of Digital Economy and Society, added: *"As part of our efforts to provide EU citizens access to safe and top quality digital services, today's initiative will help patients get their treatment wherever they are in the EU, including in emergency situations. The proposed EU framework for an electronic health record exchange will also allow doctors and other medical practitioners to assist citizens more efficiently and effectively."*

Member States have already started to make some parts of electronic health records accessible and exchangeable across borders. Since 21 January 2019, Finnish citizens can buy medicines using their [ePrescriptions](#) in Estonia and Luxembourgish doctors will be soon able to access the patient summaries of Czech patients.

Today's recommendations propose that Member States extend this work to three new areas of the health record, namely to laboratory tests, medical discharge reports and images and imaging reports. In parallel, the initiative paves the way for development of the technical specifications to be used to exchange

health records in each case.

As a result, access to complete and personal health records across the EU can offer immense benefits to European citizens, such as the following:

- If someone has an accident while travelling in another EU Member State, doctors will have immediate access to information about the patient (e.g. details of chronic conditions, allergies or intolerances to certain medications). This can significantly increase their ability to provide the most effective and timely treatment.
- Increasing the quality and ensure continuity of care for citizens as they move around the EU.
- Boosting medical research into major health challenges such as chronic and neurodegenerative diseases, by easing the sharing of data. This is subject to the citizen's consent, in a meaningful manner and in full compliance with [European data protection rules](#).
- Supporting the efficiency and sustainability of health systems by, for instance, sharing patient's recent laboratory or radiology tests of a patient. In this manner, a hospital in another Member State will not need to repeat similar tests, saving time and reducing hospital costs.

Next steps

To further develop this exchange of information, a Joint Coordination Process between the Commission and the Member States will be set up. This will allow for contributions and input from stakeholders such as industry representatives, health professionals and patients representatives at both EU and national level.

The Joint Coordination Process will ensure that all the relevant parties are involved in the process of developing the European Electronic Health Records (EHR) exchange format. The Member States, within the eHealth Network, will establish practical guidelines for the implementation and monitoring of its progress.

Background

The [Communication](#) on enabling the digital transformation of health and care in the Digital Single market, adopted in April 2018, identified three areas for action:

- (1) Citizens' secure access to and sharing of health data across borders;
- (2) Better data to advance research, disease prevention and personalised health and care;
- (3) Digital tools for citizen empowerment and person-centred care.

In addition to Finland, Estonia, Luxembourg and Czech Republic, [18 countries](#) are expected to exchange patient summaries and e-prescriptions by the end of 2021. Supported by the [Connecting Europe Facility](#) (CEF) Telecom programme, many Member States are already working on an [eHealth Digital Service Infrastructure](#) within the eHealth Network.

The recommendation supports Member States to take these exchanges further. It builds on patient summaries and e-[prescriptions/e-dispensation exchanges](#) and proposes specifications for new use cases, such as laboratory results, medical imaging and reports and hospital discharge reports, in the first phase. The Recommendation underlines that moving towards interoperable Electronic Health Records in the EU should go hand in hand with ensuring data protection and security, in line with the [General Data Protection Regulation](#) (GDPR), and in full compliance with the [cybersecurity framework](#).

Related to this EU action, a revised Implementing Decision on providing the rules for the establishment, the management and the functioning of the network of national authorities responsible for eHealth (2011/890/EU) is also in preparation. The Decision aims to clarify the functioning of the eHealth Network, in particular in relation to the eHealth Digital Service Infrastructure. The call for feedback process closed today. The Commission will process the input received from stakeholders and will release the results within the coming months.

For More Information

[Commission Recommendation on a European electronic Health Record exchange format](#)

[Questions and Answers](#)

[Infographic Impact of European Exchange format of Electronic Health Records](#)

[More information on the Recommendation](#)

[Digital Economy and Society Index Report 2018 – Digital Public Services](#)

[Special Eurobarometer 460: Attitudes towards the impact of digitisation and automation on daily life](#)

[Electronic cross-border health services](#)