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Pressure for Progress

On Lead Markets for E-Health

In early 2008, the European Commission requested the strengthening of national co-operation on lead market opportunities for e-Health with the aim of improving the quality of health services and an increase in economic benefits. When talking about e-Health in this context, one should go back to the Aho Report on "Creating an Innovative Europe" that recognised the importance of information and communication technologies (ICT) in tackling specific challenges which the healthcare sector faces, thus identifying e-Health as a "lead market" with considerable potential and the necessity for specific and timely attention.

Therefore, a "lead market" is essentially a strategic one. It can be interpreted in terms of a market for innovative products and services or technological solutions with high growth potential; a market where EU industry can develop competitive advantage to lead in international markets; a market that requires action by the public authorities to deal with regulatory obstacles.

In late December 2007, the EU Commission published another report on accelerating the development of the e-Health market in Europe. On this occasion, it was stated that when predicting the return on investment in e-Health, it could be considered as being relatively high when compared to costs inherent in the health sector. Drafted by a Commission e-Health task force from several DGs, the report comprises a number of policy recommendations for areas of intervention up to 2010. These recommendations, directed at industry, Member States and other e-Health stakeholders, focus on four key challenges to the development of the e-Health lead market, namely:

- Ó Reducing market fragmentation and lack of interoperability through pilot actions, benchmarking, standardisation and certification
- Ó Improving legal certainty and consumer acceptance by possibly adopting a legal initiative for e-Health and telemedicine as well as an initiative to enforce personal data protection legislation, disseminating best practice and guidelines
- Ó Optimising funding opportunities through strengthened national and community R&D co-operation on e-Health; and
- Ó Improving procurement by facilitating the expression of public demand through more innovation-friendly procurement activities and networking public procurers.

As for the next steps to be taken in the field of lead markets for e-Health, it is expected that on a short-term basis, the Council should adopt the Lead Market Initiative. By mid-2008, the EU should propose concrete actions to help Member States launch public procurement actions in high-risk technological fields.

For more information, please visit: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society

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