

**AFRICAN REGIONAL HEALTH MINISTERS REVIEW MEETING ON E-
HEALTH
REPORT TO THE 2009 ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW SESSION**

**BY THE HON. MINISTER OF HEALTH, GHANA
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Your Excellencies

Colleague Ministers of health

Ladies and gentlemen

The meeting of African Health Ministers held in Accra, Ghana from the 10th to 11th June, 2009, considered the presentations, views and comments by representatives of governments from the African Region. The meeting also heard from experts from the United Nations system and other international organizations, academia and the private sector and noted the overwhelming consensus on the potential impact of electronic health solutions on health care delivery in both developed and developing countries and in accelerating the achievement of the MDGs.

Participants agreed that while significant developments have and continue to take place in the application of Information and Communication Technology in health there still remains challenges in the area of e-Health governance, policies, strategies and quality measures that will assure countries, particularly in Africa, of sustained and targeted investments in the health sector.

It was agreed that when systematically implemented, e-health would help solve some of the problems of underdeveloped infrastructure, shortages and inequitable distribution of health personnel in many developing countries. It will also help empower people by improving access to knowledge that will enable them to access services and make healthier lifestyle choices.

The application of e-health, in addition, has the potential for vast improvements in both management and technical efficiency of health workforce at all levels through reliable information dissemination systems and by supporting the decision making process.

Participants were concerned that despite these potentials, e-health activities have not been integrated in health systems development with many initiatives still vertical and have been in pilot phases for very long periods. In Africa, especially, it was observed that national e-health plans, policies, strategies, legal, ethical and legislative frameworks have remained very weak leading to very minimal progress in effective development and integration into mainstream health care.

The importance of standards and interoperability was underscored for the effective delivery of e-health services. The meeting recalled that the WHO had established an e-health Standardization Coordination Group as a platform to promote stronger coordination among the key players and called on countries to engage actively in this and in other processes for setting international standards.

The meeting observed that financing e-Health infrastructure and services required strong collaboration between the public and private sectors and concerns were raised over the inadequate medium to long term investment plan in developing countries. This notwithstanding, the forceful emergence of mobile telephony and its rapid diffusion into rural areas was seen as a huge e-health asset for cost effective expansion of health services especially in developing countries.

The difficulty in data communication and integration of solutions and the cost involved in the use of proprietary solutions were noted and the need for increasing commitment towards adopting Open Source software technology that is sustainable and flexible.

The meeting urged the Economic and Social Council in collaboration with the WHO and other UN organizations to:

1. Develop a global framework to guide the development of regional and country specific policies on e-health including standards for ensuring interoperability and integration
2. Undertake an inventory of e-health initiatives and to design a common evaluation framework in order to share lessons from different parts of the world. Lessons from implementation of large scale projects should be shared on a regular and systematic basis using existing mechanisms with international and regional organizations.
3. Create a repository of information and knowledge on e-health initiatives to share best practices.

The meeting also urged countries to:

1. Develop legal, policy and regulatory instruments for health data protection, confidentiality, ownership and access.
2. Engage with the private sector to develop appropriate infrastructure to support the effective deployment of information and communication technology for a sustained implementation of e-health solutions
3. Initiate steps to develop national strategic plans, standards and norms for e-Health in conformity with international standards and to explore ways of integrating ICT training in the curricula of health training institutions.

4. Establish centers of excellence in e-Health to train health professionals and to reach a critical mass of experts in scaling up country specific e-health initiatives.
5. Strengthen and enhance Public-Private Partnerships to promote multi-sectoral use of mHealth platforms and solutions in an integrated manner;

Your Excellencies, African Ministers present at the meeting expressed the need to ensure that the adoption of e-health solutions does not create a new divide between the developing and developed world but rather to focus on enhancing the capacity of developing countries to improve the health status of their population and to protect the human capital to sustain growth and development.

Thank you.