Chapter 21
eHealth Saskatchewan—Sharing Patient Data

1.0 MAIN POINTS

By January 2019, eHealth Saskatchewan and the Ministry of Health implemented the two outstanding recommendations in relation to eHealth's processes to share patient data among healthcare professionals (through provincial electronic health records).

eHealth set standard requirements for data in clinical records. Having standardized data for clinical encounters ensures relevant, comparable, and timely information is readily available for patient care.

eHealth began working with other key health sector agencies (e.g., Saskatchewan Health Authority) to determine IT priorities for the health sector, including enhancements needed to provincial electronic health records. eHealth makes IT funding requests to the Ministry of Health based on these IT priorities.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Since 1997, Saskatchewan has been developing provincial electronic health records for patients to allow for the sharing of patient data among healthcare professionals.[1]

Since 2010, eHealth has had the mandate to develop and implement the provincial electronic health records for Saskatchewan. eHealth has created a provincial electronic health records system by compiling and standardizing patient data into provincial data repositories. Key data repositories included patient data related to lab results, drug information, and diagnostic imaging.

eHealth provides healthcare professionals with access to data collected in provincial data repositories through two main ways:

➤ **Electronic medical records (EMRs)** – EMRs enable physicians to centrally record relevant patient information in IT systems located in physician clinics, primary care clinics, and in hospitals. EMRs that integrate with eHealth's provincial health record system allow physicians to readily access data in provincial data repositories.

➤ **Web-Based Viewer (eHR Viewer)** – this website has operated since the end of 2011. eHR Viewer allows authorized users to view data (from provincial data repositories) over the internet.

As of January 2017, the Minister of Health directed eHealth to consolidate, into a single service, IT services that the Saskatchewan Health Authority, Saskatchewan Cancer

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[1] Patient data is patient health information in electronic format. Healthcare professionals include physicians, pharmacists, nurses, and radiologists.

Agency, and 3sHealth previously provided. Consequently, during 2017-18, the Authority moved the majority of its IT systems into eHealth Saskatchewan's data centre.

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

Our *2014 Report—Volume 1*, Chapter 9 concluded that, for the period from April 1, 2013 to February 28, 2014, eHealth had effective processes to share patient data among health care professionals, except in a few areas. We made five recommendations. In *2016 Report – Volume 2,* Chapter 35, we found that eHealth implemented three recommendations. This chapter sets out the status of two outstanding recommendations—one directed to eHealth and one directed to the Ministry of Health.

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate eHealth's progress towards meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. eHealth's management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

We interviewed key eHealth and Ministry staff and examined relevant records, plans, and reports.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at January 31, 2019, and eHealth's and the Ministry's actions up to that date.

3.1 Provincial Standardized Data Requirements Set

We recommended that eHealth Saskatchewan establish standard data requirements for all provincial repositories. (*2014 Report – Volume 1*, p. 61, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 12, 2015)

Status – Implemented

eHealth uses standardized data requirements for each of the seven provincial data repositories (i.e., data collection systems).[2] Standardized data helps to ensure relevant and timely information is readily available for patient care.

As we reported in our 2014 audit, eHealth identified the following seven key data repositories: laboratory results, drug information, diagnostic imaging reports, clinical records (discharge summaries), immunization information, chronic disease information, and synoptic reports.[3] Each of the repositories include related patient data.

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[2] eHealth compiles patient data from various sources (e.g., pharmacies) into standardized and organized collection systems referred to as provincial data repositories.
[3] Synoptic reporting captures data items in a structured, standardized format, and contains information critical information for understanding a disease, the technical details of a procedure, and the subsequent impacts on patient care.

At the time of our last follow-up (September 2016), eHealth set standard data requirements for all the data repositories except for clinical records.

By January 2019, eHealth developed standardized reports for various clinical records (e.g., discharge summaries, referrals, consults, inpatient progress notes).

Health care providers throughout the province can use these reports for consistently recording clinical encounters with patients.

3.2   Consolidated IT Approach Established

We recommended that the Ministry of Health allocate IT capital funding based on a provincial strategy for electronic Health records. (*2014 Report – Volume 1*, p. 65, Recommendation 5; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 12, 2015)

Status – Implemented

With the consolidation of health-sector IT into eHealth, almost all of the IT funding for the health sector flows into eHealth.[4]

In 2018-19, the Ministry provided $102.6 million to eHealth for IT funding, which includes IT capital funding ($40 million more than 2017-18). It expects to provide $103.1 million to eHealth in 2019-20. The Ministry based its IT funding for 2019-20 primarily on a funding request from eHealth.

eHealth, as the IT service provider for the health sector, is responsible for determining health sector IT priorities including those related to the maintenance and further development of the provincial electronic health records. It works with other health sector partners (e.g., Saskatchewan Health Authority, Saskatchewan Cancer Agency) to determine IT priorities for the health sector and formulate a funding request to the Ministry.

Consolidated IT priorities and services help to reduce duplication of IT systems across the health sector, reduce costs, and create efficiencies.

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[4] In response to recommendations from the *Saskatchewan Advisory Panel Health System Structure Report* in 2016, the Minister of Health directed eHealth in January 2017 to consolidate all IT services in the health sector throughout the province and to coordinate IT work. www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/health/health-system-transformation/advisory-panel-on-health-system-structure (22 March 2019).