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Committee on Regional Development

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DRAFT OPINION

of the Committee on Regional Development

for the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

on eHealth Action Plan 2012-2020 - Innovative healthcare for the 21st century
(2013/2061(INI))

Rapporteur: Juozas Imbrasas

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Regional Development calls on the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Welcomes the Commission communication on the eHealth Action Plan 2012-2020 and considers that it offers an important set of guidelines for national, regional and local institutions on how to prepare the healthcare systems in the EU for today's challenges, which include the ageing of the population, the spread of chronic diseases, growing demand for quality care and specialised services, the need for more efficient use of ever-scarcer resources, reducing red tape and corruption, and creating a stable market environment to encourage innovation;
2. Considers that eHealth opens up great opportunities for improving the accessibility of healthcare services for all EU citizens, irrespective of their location, citizenship, income or social status, or of disability and age; stresses that health literacy of patients, digital skills of patients and medical personnel, broadband access and user-friendly eHealth ICT tools are essential in order to strengthen social and territorial cohesion, eliminate health inequalities and provide access to preventative healthcare measures and medical advice in remote, sparsely populated and otherwise disadvantaged regions; considers that in this regard local and regional authorities have an essential role to play in spreading information, educating and organising training according to the needs of local communities, and involving civil society organisations and volunteers;
3. Notes that in many Member States health policy is to varying extents entrusted to regional and local authorities, and welcomes their active involvement in eHealth project design and implementation; calls for the role of regional and local authorities in developing eHealth infrastructures to be strengthened; takes the view that a well-functioning multi-level governance approach is a precondition for successfully setting and implementing eHealth;
4. Stresses that the organisation of healthcare systems is a competence of the Member States; urges the Commission, nonetheless, to play a more active role in coordinating Member States' actions and encouraging cooperation, clarifying conditions and identifying common barriers to crossborder health provision, as well as assessing the efficiency of existing eHealth applications in terms of fostering the exchange of best practice at EU level;
5. Deeply regrets, especially given the current crisis of competitiveness in the Union, the proposed cuts to the Connecting Europe facility for broadband and digital services; hopes that financing for this area under Horizon 2020 will be maintained; encourages local and regional authorities to make use of EU funds for financing eHealth.