

POLICY MAPPING ON EHEALTH POLICIES AND INITIATIVES (INCLUDING ON CANCER CARE) IN BELGIUM

This Country Factsheet was prepared for the eCAN Joint Action. It is prefilled with publicly available information and was sent for review to country experts on eHealth and cancer care. The Country Factsheet serves as the basis for the preparation of an overview of eCAN relevant policies and initiatives in all EU and EEA countries.

eCAN is a Joint Action (JA) of 16 partners in EU-Member States on ‘Strengthening eHealth including telemedicine and remote monitoring for health care systems for cancer prevention and care’. eCAN aims to bring the benefits of eHealth to all citizens and patients across EU-Member States (MS) focusing on cancer prevention and care. There is a need to harmonize telemedicine regulations and to explore the efficacy of teleconsultation programs and telemonitoring in the cancer field.

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The country factsheet includes chapters on:

1 definition

2 governance

3 strategies/policies

4 legislation

5 cancer specific eHealth solutions

Any questions? – Please get in touch via ecan@goeg.at.

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1 DEFINITIONS

Table 1 : Deviations in the use of international definitions for eHealth terms - Belgium

Term	Definition	Deviation
eHealth	The WHO defines eHealth as « the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for health ». It also says that « eHealth is the transfer of health resources and healthcare by electronic means. » ¹	No deviation from definition.
mHealth	« Mobile health (mHealth) is defined by the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Observatory for eHealth as « medical and public health practice supported by mobile devices, such as mobile phones, patient monitoring devices, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and other wireless devices ». ²	No deviation from definition.
dHealth	The EU defines digital health (dHealth) and care as referring to « tools and services that use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve prevention, diagnosis, treatment, monitoring and management of health-related issues and to monitor and manage lifestyle-habits that impact health ». ³ The WHO defines digital health as « the field of knowledge and practice associated with the development and use of digital technologies to improve health. Digital health expands the concept of eHealth to include digital consumers, with a wider range of smart-devices and connected equipment. It also encompasses other uses of digital technologies for health such as the Internet of things, artificial intelligence, big data, and robotics. » ⁴	The term is not used in official documents.
telehealth	The WHO defines telehealth broader than telemedicine « as it includes computer-assisted telecommunications to support management, surveillance, literature, and access to medical knowledge. » ⁵	No deviation from definition.
telemedicine	The EU Commission defines telemedicine as follows (EU Commission definition, COM(2008)689) : « Telemedicine is the provision of health care services, through the use of ICT, in situations where the health professional and the patient (or two health professionals) are not in the same location. It involves the secure transmission of medical data and information, through text, sound, images, or other forms needed for the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up of patients. » ⁶	No deviation from definition.
teleconsultation	PAHO describes teleconsultation (also sometimes referred to as remote consultation or telehealth), as « interactions that happen between a clinician and a patient for the purpose of providing diagnostic or therapeutic advice through electronic means. » ⁷	No deviation from definition.

¹ [6. eHealth, Factsheet for European Parliament \(who.int\)](#)

² World Health Organization *Frequently asked questions on Global Task Force on digital health for TB and its work.* [2017-02-27]. <http://www.who.int/tb/areas-of-work/digital-health/faq/en/> *website*. In *mHealth Assessment: Conceptualization of a Global Framework - PMC (nih.gov)*

³ [Events - Smart4Health](#)

⁴ [Digital health EURO \(who.int\)](#)

⁵ [Telehealth – DigitalHealthEurope](#)

⁶ [Telemedicine – DigitalHealthEurope](#)

⁷ <https://www3.paho.org/ish/images/docs/covid-19-teleconsultations-en.pdf?ua=1>

Term	Definition	Deviation
health app	Essén et al. 2022 define health apps as « a computer program or software application (designed to run on a mobile device) “intended to be used specifically for managing, maintaining, or improving the health of individual persons, or the delivery of care” (ISO https://www.iso.org/standard/78182.html (2021), p 5). »	Not explained directly in laws or regulations.

2 GOVERNANCE

Table 2 : Overview on eHealth governance - Belgium

Question	Answer	Comments/Experience
Is there a Ministry or State Secretariat explicitly in charge of eHealth/dHealth? If so, which Ministry ?	Yes	The Federal Public Service (FPS) Public Health, Food Chain Safety, and Environment ⁸ oversees eHealth. And responsibilities on eHealth are a joint responsibilities of the Federal state and the federated entities.
Does the Ministry who oversees healthcare also have a specific Department or Unit in charge of eHealth/dHealth?	N/A	No further information available.
Is there a national eHealth governance board?	Yes	The Interministerial Conference on Public Health (IMC Gezondheid) acts as the national eHealth governance board for Belgium. ⁹
Is there a public eHealth agency such as Elga GmbH in Austria or ANS in France? At which level (national, regional)? Which functions does this agency cover?	No	The eGezondheid portal acts as the relevant forum of several actors engaged in eHealth in Belgium. ¹⁰
Are dHealth / eHealth tools in the outpatient sector publicly paid or covered in your benefits package (e.g. by sickness fund or national health service). If yes, please describe how.	Yes, some	Certain dHealth/eHealth tools in the outpatient sector may be covered or reimbursed as part of the benefits package provided by health insurance funds or the national health service.
Are dHealth / eHealth tools in the inpatient sector automatically covered in your benefits package or do you need to pay extra (e.g. for telehealth consultations or telereha) compared to standard treatments?	Yes, some	It varies and depends on several factors, including the specific health insurance fund and the nature of the dHealth/eHealth service. ¹¹
Are there any comprehensive cancer centres focussing on eHealth or telehealth treatments? If yes, which ones and for which specific fields?	No	Yes, the UZA, UZLeuven, UZGent, Saint Luc, Institut Jules Bordet and Erasme. All work in different fields.

⁸ [FPS Public Health \(belgium.be\)](https://www.fps.belgium.be/)

⁹ [IMC Public Health | FPS Public Health \(belgium.be\)](https://www.fps.belgium.be/)

¹⁰ <https://www.ehealth.fgov.be/nl/over-egezondheid#partnersLogo>

¹¹ <https://www.ehealth.fgov.be/>

3 STRATEGIES/POLICIES

Table 3 : Overview on strategies and policies for eHealth and cancer care - Belgium

Question	Answer	Comments/Experience
Is there a national eHealth strategy?	Yes	<p>The strategy/roadmap¹² (as of 2021 for 2022 to 2024) encompasses the following key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interoperability: Promoting the interoperability of different healthcare systems and data exchange standards to enable seamless sharing of health information among healthcare providers, hospitals, and other stakeholders. • Electronic Health Records (EHRs): Encouraging the adoption and use of electronic health records to enhance care coordination, improve patient safety, and facilitate the exchange of patient information across healthcare settings. • Telehealth and Telemedicine: Supporting the integration of telehealth and telemedicine services, including remote consultations, telemonitoring, and telecare, to increase access to healthcare, especially in remote areas and for vulnerable populations. • Patient Empowerment: Empowering patients by providing them with access to their health records, promoting patient engagement, and supporting the use of digital tools for self-management and health promotion. • Data Security and Privacy: Ensuring the protection of personal health information and complying with relevant data security and privacy regulations in the implementation of eHealth solutions.
If yes, which stakeholder groups have been included in drafting the national eHealth strategy?	Several	<p>The national eHealth strategy in Belgium involves collaboration between various stakeholders, including government entities, healthcare providers, patient organizations, and technology vendors, to drive the adoption and advancement of digital health solutions throughout the country.</p>
Are there regional eHealth strategies? If so, can you indicate whether in all regions or only some? Can you provide some (exemplary) documents ?	Yes	<p>Flemish Region (Flanders): The Flemish Region has its own eHealth strategy called "eGezondheid Vlaanderen." This strategy focuses on digital health initiatives and the use of eHealth tools to improve healthcare delivery and patient outcomes in Flanders. You can find more information about eGezondheid Vlaanderen on the official website of the Flemish government's Department of Welfare, Public Health, and Family¹³.</p> <p>Walloon Region (Wallonia): The Walloon Region has developed its eHealth strategy called "eSanté Wallonie." This strategy aims to promote the use of digital technologies in healthcare, enhance the exchange of health information, and improve patient care in Wallonia. Additional information about eSanté Wallonie can be found on the official website of the Walloon eHealth Agency¹⁴.</p>

¹² https://www.ehealth.fgov.be/Actieplan_eGezondheid_2022-2024_protocolakkoord.pdf (fgov.be); Roadmap 4.0 | eHealth (fgov.be)

¹³ <https://www.zorg-en-gezondheid.be/>

¹⁴ <https://esante.wallonie.be/>

		Brussels-Capital Region: collaborates with the federal and regional authorities to implement national and regional eHealth initiatives.
If yes, which stakeholder groups have been included in drafting such regional strategy/ies?	Several	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Flemish Regional Government • Department of Welfare, Public Health, and Family (WVG) • eHealth and Information Systems (eGezondheid Vlaanderen) • Healthcare Providers • Patient Organizations • Industry and Technology Partners • Research and Academic Institutions
Are there strategy/ies explicitly referring to / including eHealth cancer care?	Yes	At NIHDI (National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance) level.
If not, are there discussions ongoing to develop a national eHealth strategy?	No	No further information available.
Is there a National Cancer Plan? And does it refer to eHealth?	No	Belgium applies a Cancer Policy approach focusing on aspects of unmet needs.
In the light of the EU „Beating Cancer Plan” – are there any recent plans to update or modify existing plans? If yes, what is the timeline?	No	The unmet needs identified at Belgium level are to a large extent also taken up in the EBCP. Belgium installed an EBCP-mirror group to align between both.
Are there any indicators in eHealth policy or national programmes on cancer care measuring the progress of the use of eHealth in cancer care?	No	But there are general indicators on health and cancer that are regularly monitored. ¹⁵
Are there any other cancer care specific eHealth initiatives, f.e. by other stakeholders than policy makers / public authorities?	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cancer Centres¹⁶ • Research Projects • Nonprofit Organizations and Patient Advocacy Groups • Industry and Technology Partners

¹⁵ <https://www.healthybelgium.be/en/health-status/non-communicable-diseases/cancer>

¹⁶ <https://www.uzleuven.be/en> and <https://www.uza.be/english>

4 LEGISLATION

Table 4 : Overview on eHealth and cancer legislation - Belgium

Question	Answer	Comments/Experience
How would you evaluate the current state of legislation of eHealth in your country in general?	Advanced	See roadmap.
Is there legislation on how to use telemedicine in general?	Yes	The ‘Law on Telemedicine’ (Wet op Telegeneeskunde), which was enacted on July 15, 2018. ¹⁷
Is there legislation explicitly referring to cancer prevention?	No	There was no specific legislation identified that exclusively focuses on cancer prevention. However, cancer prevention is addressed through various laws, regulations, and policies related to public health, environmental protection, occupational health and safety, and healthcare.
Is there legislation explicitly referring to / including eHealth cancer care?	No	Belgium has a general eHealth policy.
If yes, which of these legislation(s) do you consider most important in the context of eHealth and cancer care? And why?	N/A	N/A
If no, are there any reasons or barriers to the fact that there is no or only limited cancer specific eHealth legislation (i.e., discussions still ongoing, conflicting opinions or other).	Might be in the future but to date, a general policy is applied	
What could be improved or would need to be done to improve these legislation for eHealth in cancer care in your country?	N/A	N/A

¹⁷ <https://www.inami.fgov.be/nl/themas/kost-terugbetaling/door-ziekenfonds/Paginas/telegeneeskunde-mhealth-toepassingen.aspx>

5 CANCER SPECIFIC EHEALTH SOLUTIONS

Table 5 : Overview on cancer specific eHealth solutions in use – Belgium

Area of application/ type of solutions	Login Websites	Apps	Webinars	Multi-disciplinary teleconferences (HCP-HPC)	Teleconsultation (HCP-patient)	Telemonitoring via devices	Other, please specify
Ecosystem	Yes, esanté system ¹⁸ and eHealth platform ¹⁹ <i>specialising in health care, offers services to facilitate exchanges between the players in the health ecosystem. All Belgian residents have an electronic identity with which they can access their eHealth space.²⁰ This interface gives them control over their data.²¹</i>	Yes	-	-	Yes (e.g. for Covid)	-	Yes, e.g. mHealth Belgium, a platform with CE marked mobile applications ²² ; Healthdata.be a platform gathering individual health data collected from authorities ²³
Prevention of Cancer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Treatment of Cancer	-	Yes	-	Yes, molecular tumour boards	Yes (e.g. for Covid)	Yes, in pilots for chemotherapy	-
'Living with cancer'	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rehabilitation from Cancer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Palliative Cancer Care	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

¹⁸ [Homepage | eHealth | eSanté \(fgov.be\)](#)

¹⁹ [eHealth - Mission \(fgov.be\)](#)

²⁰ <https://masante.belgique.be/#/>

²¹ [eHealth in Belgium | G_NIUS \(esante.gouv.fr\)](#)

²² <https://mhealthbelgium.be/>

²³ [eHealth in Belgium | G_NIUS \(esante.gouv.fr\)](#) and [healthdata.be | data we care for \(sciensano.be\)](#)

Table 6 : Number of eHealth solutions available and in use – Belgium

Question	Answer	Comments/Experience
How many eHealth solutions (in the sense of medical devices and thus ‘authority approved/certified’) solutions are existing currently in your country in the context of cancer care/treatment?	15 (as of May 2023)	On mHealthBelgium, there are fifteen certified health apps when filtering for « cancer » as pathology. However, only some of those have a specific focus on cancer.
Is there a website or other information on solutions that are recommended to the public for use (e.g. a selection of health apps that are recommended to cancer patients or in general)?	Yes	mHealthBelgium, also known as mobile health Belgium, is the Belgian platform for mobile apps that are CE-marked as a medical device. ²⁴
Can you give an estimation on how the split between private and public apps are available? Give an estimate percentage of public solutions.	No	No data available
How can providers and patients assess if the apps are reliable? Is there a certification or quality approval procedure in place? If yes, which kind of procedure?	Via webpage and CE certification	The information is related to CE marking, data protection, communication security, interoperability with other IT systems and the way in which the app is financed. mHealthBelgium consists of a validation pyramid with three levels. An app always enters at the lower level, M1, and can climb in hierarchy via M2 to the top level, M3.
How many Health Care Providers use such solutions? Which sector uses rather which types of solutions?	No	No data available

Examples from HCPs/facilities: UZA is an example where chemotherapy is followed up through telemedicine apps – experience is very positive and the use of the app is being considered for reimbursement.

²⁴ <https://mhealthbelgium.be/>