



Pre-budget Submission to the  
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## Canada Health Inforoute

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## Overview of Canada Health Infoway

A not-for-profit organization funded by the Government of Canada, Canada Health Infoway (Infoway) improves health by working with partners to accelerate effective use of innovative digital solutions. The result: better access, quality and productivity of care across the country plus a vibrant and growing health IT industry that exports valued products and services around the world.

## Top Reasons to Reinvest in Infoway

- Demonstrated track record of sparking and spreading innovation across the country
- Delivers value for investment: better health care access, quality and productivity
- Works well with and respects all jurisdictions, big and small, as well as patient, clinical and other partners
- Enables economies of scale and sharing of best practices among provinces and territories
- Generates jobs and contributes to economic development in all regions of the country
- Internationally recognized for project management and results-based payment model.

## Canada's Health Care Challenges

There are cracks in Canada's health care system. As noted by several national reviews, including the recent report by the Advisory Panel on Healthcare Innovation, the core challenges of the Canadian health care system are: (i) a lack of an integrated and patient-centred health care system; (ii) a need to better ensure system sustainability with improved efficiency and value-for-money; and, (iii) a need to build a shared knowledge-base and learn from it to improve services for patients and overall system management. Digital solutions are an important enabler of the transformations required to address these challenges. They have the power to improve health, transform quality and reduce health system costs. Progress made with digital health to date is already yielding benefits, but more is possible.

In prioritizing shorter-term opportunities for progress based on alignment with stakeholder priorities, net benefits, readiness, complexity, risk and other factors, two pressing areas were identified where the federal government, through Infoway, has an immediate leadership role to play in driving meaningful change.

The first relates to **the safe and reliable administration and use of prescription drugs** through a multi-jurisdiction e-prescribing solution. The second involves **scaling proven patient-centred digital health solutions** that address access and quality gaps, while improving the patient experience. These two proposed initiatives leverage investments in electronic health records (EHRs), which Canada's provincial and territorial health ministers call **"one of the most transformational innovations in health care in a generation."**

The transition to EHRs is a pan-Canadian success that would not have happened without significant federal leadership through Infoway. As the trusted pan-Canadian organization for ensuring broad deployment of digital health solutions across the country, Infoway has driven strategic transformation through co-investments in scaling digital health solutions, forging coalitions with jurisdictions and health care providers, and acting on key policy, legislative, cultural and financial enablers of change.

## Safer and More Effective Medication Management

Increasing numbers of Canadians live with multiple chronic conditions and require safe and reliable use of prescription drugs. Medication is now the second largest area of health care spending in Canada (after hospitals), almost doubling as a share of total health expenditures from 9 to 16 per cent over the last 40 years. Growth in per capita drug spending is outpacing most other countries. In addition, medication safety continues to be an important issue, with many Canadians harmed through adverse events and misuse of medication, such as opioids.

To improve medication management, Infoway is proposing to work with the provinces and territories to develop a **multi-jurisdiction e-prescribing (eRx) solution** that will facilitate better, safer and more appropriate prescription drug use by Canadians.

Infoway has paved the way for the implementation of a multi-jurisdiction eRx solution through its co-investments with the jurisdictions in drug information systems (DIS) and electronic medical records (EMRs), making it possible to leverage proven technologies to rapidly scale this solution and replace antiquated paper and fax-based prescribing methods. Federal leadership is needed because the jurisdictions and the private sector cannot deliver a solution on their own.

eRx allows prescribers to transmit a prescription to a patient's pharmacy of choice electronically, eliminating the need for paper prescriptions. In this way, eRx facilitates: (i) **greater accuracy and less error in filling prescriptions**; (ii) **safer drug use and compliance for better health outcomes**; and, (iii) **less fraud and abuse through more and better information at the point of care**. All of these help governments address mismanagement of prescription medication (and thus spiraling costs), one of the significant challenges facing Canada's health system.

To date, jurisdiction and stakeholder responses to Infoway's eRx proposal have been positive. Ontario, Alberta and Nova Scotia have expressed interest in being early adopters. Professional associations such as the Canadian Medical Association, Canadian Nurses Association and the Canadian Pharmacists Association, retail pharmacy chains, and electronic medical record vendors have all expressed strong interest in Infoway taking a leadership role in creating a multi-jurisdiction eRx solution.

**Canada is one of the few developed countries without a comprehensive eRx solution.** There is a compelling need for federal involvement in delivering this solution because: (i) on their own, provinces and territories are sub-scale for an economically viable eRx solution; and, (ii) retail pharmacy and e-health vendors with a national presence have considered establishing an eRx solution but have failed to do so (likely due to the fragmented jurisdiction landscape).

# Scaling Patient-Centred Digital Health Solutions

The Commonwealth Fund's international surveys reinforce that Canada lags its peers in the ability to offer **same/next day appointments, after hours care, and access to specialists**. As a result, we have one of the highest rates of emergency department use. We are also falling behind others in the availability of patient-centred health solutions that enable greater access and portability to meet patient needs, such as secure online messaging with doctors.

Scaling proven, innovative patient-centred health solutions can help the federal government address these challenges and **deliver in the near term on a number of health care commitments outlined in the campaign platform and Ministerial mandate letters**.

Two categories of solutions are ready now to be scaled across provinces and territories: (i) **patient online services**; and, (ii) **telehomecare**. Both support the government's stated goals of improving access to integrated primary care; creating more and better homecare services; overcoming obstacles to innovation in health care delivery; disseminating/scaling successful new practices; and increasing the availability of high-quality mental health services for Canadians.

## Enhancing universality, portability and accessibility through patient online services

Increasingly, Canadians want to take a more active role in managing their own care. They want to know what is wrong, what they can do about it, and how they can achieve better health outcomes. For example, **more than 80 per cent of Canadians** want the ability to renew prescriptions and view laboratory test results online, yet **just six to seven per cent have access** to such services<sup>1</sup>, a rate which is far below many other developed countries according to Commonwealth Fund surveys.

Patient online services empower Canadians through online appointment booking and secure messaging with their clinicians, ready access to their health information (e.g., laboratory results), and the ability to request prescription refills online. Conference Board of Canada and McKinsey analysis show that these types of services would **free up to almost 70 million hours** of family, work or volunteer time and deliver estimated annual health system **gross benefits** of approximately **\$1.6 billion**.

Federal leadership through Infoway will assist in expanding patient online services across the country by scaling innovations that are working at the local level today. This also fosters portability because patients could access and share health records with care providers when they travel or move. This is particularly important for **federal populations** as many tend to be highly mobile, receiving services from health systems in several different jurisdictions.

## Expanding accessibility and engagement through telehomecare

Telehomecare uses digital technology to monitor patients remotely and can alert health care providers to a change in their patient's condition before a hospital visit is required. It is an intensive intervention for patients with complex health problems who frequently seek care in hospitals and other care settings.

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<sup>1</sup> IPSOS Reid, March/May 2015.

Telehomecare **enables patients and their caregivers to acquire the necessary skills to manage their own health** and is often not required beyond six months because patients become self-sufficient. It has been shown to improve patient and caregiver quality of life by providing peace of mind and preventing unnecessary hospital visits.

Infoway has partnered with jurisdictions or delivery organizations to invest in telehomecare projects that are delivering value to more than 5,000 patients with chronic diseases such as congestive heart failure (CHF) or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island. But more can be done. In addition to expanding Infoway's work with patients managing CHF and COPD, evaluation projects for diabetes, youth mental health, dialysis and high-risk pregnancies are underway to confirm additional scaling opportunities.

These investments are about **new models of care** as much as about new technologies. Infoway will continue working with partners to support updates to policies and regulation, to use proven change management strategies, and to facilitate new modes of professional practice to optimize benefits for Canadians and for the health system. Federal leadership could also hasten this process in a variety of ways, such as by leveraging reimbursement for services for federal populations.

## Strong Federal Leadership Required: Infoway's Role

Federal leadership is required to spark the innovation needed to respond to the key challenges facing Canada's health system. Developing and scaling a multi-jurisdiction eRx and set of patient-centred digital solutions requires strong working relationships with jurisdictions and other stakeholders; Infoway possesses these relationships. New patient-centred digital solutions also require the ability to effectively test and scale innovations across the country; **Infoway has proven experience in these areas**, including deep knowledge of pan-Canadian change management and clinical networks.

Promoting common standards for digital health solutions and ensuring they are **deployed broadly and economically** across the country will also require national leadership, strong jurisdictional collaboration and new partnerships to **avoid duplication** among jurisdictions and **overcome inefficiencies** related to sub-optimal scale. Infoway continues to drive **thought leadership and inter-jurisdiction collaboration** in this respect, including current work examining new models for procuring, financing and sharing risk to **modernize legacy health and hospital information systems** that are critical to enabling better integrated patient care. Modernizing these systems is an acute issue for many jurisdictions.

Infoway is uniquely positioned to advance pan-Canadian collaboration on health innovation to encourage the adoption of new digital health technology. By supporting and fostering a pan-Canadian digital health ecosystem, the federal government can play a key role in driving and replicating innovation within the health care system as a whole. These innovations will deliver on **government commitments to improve access** to health care in **community, home and long-term care** settings; create **further efficiencies** within the system; and, most importantly, **improve outcomes** for patients.

All past funding received by Infoway in federal grants has been allocated and contractually committed to projects. Infoway has no further resources to launch new programs or to sustain current activities.

Without new funding, the proposed eRx solution and scaling patient-centred digital health solutions will not proceed, and other leadership activities such as provincial/territorial coordination for interoperability, certification, privacy and security cannot continue either. This will mean that digital health will become a higher risk investment for jurisdictions, health silos will persist and Canadians will be even worse off relative to citizens in other developed countries.

Infoway strongly believes the universality and sustainability of Canada's health system requires continued federal leadership in fostering a pan-Canadian ecosystem of digital health solutions. We look forward to our continued work with federal, provincial and territorial governments to make health care more accessible for patients and more sustainable for funders.