

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 19 October

Question: E11-487

OUTCOME 10: Health System Capacity and Quality

Topic: eHEALTH - STANDARDS

Written Question on Notice

Senator Boyce asked:

Consultant Ian Colclough, of Integrated Marketing & e-Health Strategies, said software developers could not be expected to adopt new standards until it was proven they worked and, importantly, "that they can be successfully implemented". Isn't that reasonable? Who wears the cost if standards created overnight are faulty?

Answer:

The standards development process requires the specifications to have been implemented and operational before consideration.

The personally controlled ehealth records (PCEHR) system is being built on existing international and Australian standards. A number of new industry standards, Australian technical specifications and Australian Standards are required to meet the unique characteristics of the PCEHR. Work on the specifications have been underway for over a year.

NEHTA engaged in extensive research and conducted an independent study to examine existing standards and advise on the appropriate architecture standards for the PCEHR. This process is articulated in the NEHTA Specifications and Standards Plan. This plan aims to have specifications at a level of maturity for software vendors to commence the development of their software while these specifications are taken through the formal Standards Australia processes. For example, the PCEHR will use HL7's Clinical Document Architecture which is used by software vendors within Australia and internationally. By following appropriate international standards wherever possible, software vendors will be able to leverage any investments internationally.

NEHTA advises that 23 bundles of specifications are needed, 11 of which will become standards over time. As at 31 January 2012, 16 areas of specifications are complete and have been tested. These are available on the NEHTA site for vendors, along with guidance material on how to implement the specifications. Through a quality assurance process an issue was identified with the guidance material for 5 of the specification bundles. This guidance material has been removed and is currently being updated.

The specifications are under change control to provide stability and certainty for vendors who build systems based on these specifications. If there are changes required to the specifications before the Standards Australia process is concluded, the vendor community will be consulted on the nature and the timing of any required changes.

Work on all of the standards has been maturing through the experience and feedback from the eHealth sites. The PCEHR will utilise and leverage appropriate existing proven international standards.

NEHTA has committed to working together with Standards Australia to deliver specifications which are suited to form the basis for development within the Standards Australia's IT-014 Health Informatics community. This close working relationship is supported by the Department of Health and Ageing.