Action plan for cooperation on implementing the

Vision for eHealth 2025

2017–2019

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Introduction

Vision for eHealth 2025

To continue harnessing the opportunities offered by digitalisation, and to strengthen the long-term development of health and medical care and social services, the central government and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities (SALAR) have entered into an agreement on the Vision for eHealth 2025. The shared vision is:

Sweden will be best in the world at using the opportunities offered by digitalisation and eHealth to make it easier for people to achieve good and equal health and welfare, and to develop and strengthen their own resources for increased independence and participation in the life of society.

The agreement states that this vision will replace the eHealth strategy from 2010, while also continuing to build on parts of it.

Increased digitalisation can support the situation of users, clients and patients, and provide more appropriate support for staff to ensure that social services, health care and, where relevant, dental care are equitable, gender-equal, accessible and high-quality. Digitalisation also offers staff and entrepreneurs the opportunity to create new tools that can make services more efficient, contribute to new and innovative methods, improve procedures and increase opportunities for research, development and innovation. A gender perspective is to be applied in the work to ensure equal health services, care and service, resource distribution and influence for girls and boys, women and men.

A joint action plan

The vision states that one or more action plans will be developed, and the parties have fulfilled this commitment through the present document. The action plan has been jointly developed by the central government and SALAR, and presents how the joint work in the field of eHealth will be organised, governed and moved forward.

Becoming best in the world at using the opportunities offered by digitalisation requires consensus on goals and joint efforts across both organisational and professional boundaries and between health care, social services, academia and the business sector. This means that many actors must take action, participate and be involved. This is why a key starting point of the action plan is establishing structures to continuously identify needs, include the vision's perspectives, create arenas for cooperation and provide opportunities for relevant actors to help achieve the vision. To realise benefits, efforts will focus on initiatives requiring joint actions or commitments. The action plan also clarifies the division of responsibility in the work and establishes the structure for a joint governance and cooperation organisation.

The responsible actors, e.g. the central government, SALAR, responsible entities, individual care providers, etc. will create the necessary conditions for their services to use the opportunities offered by the digital transformation. This must take place both in day-to-day activities and in long-term improvement and development efforts.

It is also important to take into account the opportunities afforded by digitalisation from the perspective of research and innovation. Sweden enjoys a strong position in the field of life sciences, and this must be safeguarded. There is great potential to assume a leading position in digital health and become a world-leading test environment in the field through the development efforts highlighted in this action plan. Continuing to attract research, development and production will ultimately contribute to improved health, strengthened competitiveness and increased exports. Cross-sectoral cooperation and increased mobility between research, business, health care and social services are important success factors.

The field of eHealth is linked to many other fields and ongoing initiatives, which is why it is essential to consider any opportunities for cooperation with these initiatives, including certain research and innovation initiatives, special areas such as the National Pharmaceutical Strategy, the quality registers and work relating to the National Innovation Council.

The following terms are used in the action plan:

- Areas for action – strategic priority areas identified in the vision that the parties will focus on.

- Initiatives – projects or undertakings covering the sub-areas of, or shared by, the areas for action, including actions or commitments.

- Actions or commitments – concrete measures within initiatives to realise benefits.

- Action plan – this document, for cooperation on implementing the Vision for eHealth 2025.

- Coordination plan – an annual plan for initiatives, actions and commitments linked to the areas for action.

Time frame and conditions of the action plan

The action plan specifies how efforts to achieve the vision will be carried out in 2017–2019. Annual coordination plans will be drawn up by the national governance and cooperation organisation to ensure implementation of the various actions.

The following conditions apply to the implementation of the joint efforts:

- initiatives must have a clear link to benefits for patients, users, citizens, family members or staff;

- initiatives must have goals with associated actions or commitments, and a plan for the follow-up and realisation of expected benefits;

- initiatives must be developed from a gender perspective;

- initiatives must facilitate research, development and innovation;

- proposals for concrete actions or commitments must be managed within the regular preparatory processes of each organisation; and

- financing of each organisation's own actions or commitments is the responsibility of the organisation.

The action plan does not override any existing division of responsibilities between state actors taking part or between the central government, municipalities and county councils; rather it aims to create structured cooperation in the field of eHealth.

Actions within the framework of the action plan

In the Vision for eHealth 2025, the following three areas for action were highlighted as fundamental conditions for enabling the more rapid development of eHealth:

Regulatory frameworks	Ensure quality and efficiency, and satisfy the need for protection of privacy and security.
More consistent use of terms	Enable the exchange of information by using consistent terms and structures to guarantee quality and security.
Standards	Provide better conditions to make it technically possible to exchange information while ensuring quality and security. This applies e.g. to national specifications and services for authorisation or processes.

In these three areas for action, a large number of actions are already being implemented, which in various ways aim to improve conditions to harness the opportunities offered by digitalisation in social services and health care. Sweden must focus its national efforts to more effectively realise the benefits that can be expected in relation to the resources invested. To achieve the vision, we need to create conditions for relevant actors to agree on and implement jointly prioritised actions that drive development forward.

Actors must also take into account the needs at regional and local level. If the results of national coordination are to be useful, the conditions of health care and social service providers must be known and understood.

The EU has identified eHealth as one of the strongest areas of growth in Europe, which is why ongoing efforts and potential areas of cooperation in international, particularly Nordic, contexts must be utilised and developed.

In future work, the central government and SALAR have agreed to implement initiatives, actions and commitments in each area for action, and overall initiatives in the areas of standardisation, follow-up and international monitoring. The basic premise is that the governance and cooperation organisation will manage initiatives and associated actions and commitments described in the action plan above, as well as any further initiatives that may arise during the period of the action plan.

The three areas for action

Regulatory frameworks

The acts, ordinances and regulations governing services must guarantee the various rights or interests of the individual, and must also be able to manage the specific issues resulting from the digital transformation. The actions accordingly aim to achieve appropriate regulatory frameworks that guarantee the privacy and security of the individual, while also promoting digital transformation. This is a matter of balancing rights, such as protection of personal privacy, against equal and accessible health care that ensures patient safety. The opportunities offered by digitalisation with respect to managing current regulations, e.g. concerning access rights, must be harnessed.

The central government and SALAR will jointly and continuously identify and, where possible or warranted, take action regarding any need for change arising as a result of the digital transformation.

With respect to the division of responsibilities in the regulatory framework action area, the vision emphasises that the responsibility for establishing norms lies with the central government, while SALAR will work to support the work of responsible entities in complying with existing legislation and implementing new or amended legislation in their services.

Goal and planned initiatives

The goal of work on regulatory frameworks within the framework of the action plan is to:

Create appropriate regulations that both guarantee the privacy and security of the individual and promote digital transformation; and facilitate the application and introduction of regulatory frameworks in relevant services.

The central government and SALAR will therefore:

- establish a procedure to jointly identify and understand any need for information regarding existing regulations or future changes to these;

- create conditions to ensure safer pharmaceutical processes in patient care and treatment; and

- safeguard interests, share knowledge about initiatives and, where necessary, produce national guidelines regarding EU cooperation.

More consistent use of terms

The possibility of sharing and using information for various purposes may improve the quality and safety of services. Citizens, patients, users and relatives also have the opportunity to gain a better understanding and overview of their own situation, thus improving their opportunities to be involved and participate in decision-making. This makes it easier to work for more equitable and gender-equal social services and health care, and helps ensure staff have a better digital working environment and simpler administration routines. More consistent use of concepts and terms also results in better conditions for using the information in research, innovation, development of services, quality assurance, follow-up and evaluation. More consistent use of terms is also fundamental to enabling relevant services to benefit from the technical standardisation described below.

Since health care services and social services procure new or adapt existing systems based on local or regional needs, enhanced national coordination is required that, as far as possible, ensures uniform application in matters concerning 'semantic interoperability', thus contributing to effective information transfer within and between services.

The vision states that the Government is to work to provide the responsible entities with national support in their work. SALAR is to work to ensure that the responsible entities, where warranted, cooperate among themselves and with relevant central government actors in implementing common concepts, terms, classifications or structures in their services.

Goal and planned initiatives

The goal of the work on more consistent use of terms within the framework of the action plan is to:

Ensure that the concepts, terms and classifications necessary for services can consistently be managed and interpreted in a similar manner in exchanges between systems or services; and increase the rate of introducing common concepts, terms and classifications in services' IT support.

The central government and SALAR will therefore:

- openly report and, where necessary, clarify which central government, regional or local actors or organisations will provide the concepts, terms and classifications in various areas;

- establish a national coordination organisation that manages the selection, prioritisation, application and development of common concepts, terms and classifications;

- define and categorise services' needs in such a manner that the various services measure and refer to the same thing when using the same concepts, terms and classifications; and

- further develop support in application at regional and local level based on national specifications or guidelines.

Standards

Technical standards for information management need to be implemented in a similar way to enable technical interoperability. Continuous development and systematic work on interoperability standards aims to enable the exchange and sharing of information in an effective and efficient manner regardless of the organisation or system in which the information has been generated. The area is complex and it is seldom sufficient to merely point out which standards are to be used. Consensus is frequently required concerning the actual application of standards in various situations, for example by producing common national specifications.

Standardisation efforts are under way at many different levels, much of which is taking place in the EU. It is important in future efforts to take account of the

processes and initiatives being undertaken within and outside the country by international and European standards organisations that may have a bearing on standards in the eHealth field. As far as possible, common and cross-border solutions should be promoted to prevent special national solutions.

With respect to the division of responsibilities in the standards action area, the vision emphasises that the Government's primary role is to work to ensure that national and international standardisation efforts linked to social services and health care can be implemented smoothly, while SALAR's role is to seek to ensure that responsible entities introduce agreed standards in their systems.

Goal and planned initiatives

The goal of work on standards within the framework of the action plan is to:

Enable services' information and communications systems to send and receive relevant amounts of information in an appropriate manner, without need for additional measures.

The central government and SALAR will therefore:

- establish a national procedure in which application and development takes place on the basis of a common framework of interoperability standards;

- develop a reference architecture, i.e. descriptions, models and guiding examples that facilitate the design of technical solutions, and that support the development of health care and social services that can be provided independent of geographical proximity to these services;

- support the implementation of standards and common national specifications;

- secure long-term administration of a common framework of interoperability standards; and

- increase engagement in international standardisation efforts and more clearly link this with needs regionally and locally, and among researchers and the business sector.

Overarching actions

Improved coordination and enhanced cooperation concerning standardisation in eHealth

Although issues of semantic and technical interoperability in certain dimensions both differ and necessitate including different fields of expertise, there is considerable interdependence requiring that, at a general level, these issues be managed in a common context. Many activities are currently under way in Sweden in the areas of architecture, informatics and interoperability, which is constructive. Both public organisations and business-sector representatives have contributed to the work, which is positive as it shows the priority placed on the area by several different parties. A commonly recurring view, however, is that actions are taken in parallel and not in as coordinated a manner as is needed. Many partnership projects have been implemented, but greater coordination between municipalities, county councils, government agencies, the research community, associations in various occupational categories and the business sector are required to achieve even more effective and long-term development efforts. The central government and SALAR are therefore taking an initiative to increase standardisation in eHealth.

The initiative aims to speed up the development of technical and semantic interoperability, standards and their application. The initiative is primarily limited to eHealth and digitalisation in social services and health care, with a focus on national, regional and local actions. In this area, there is much to gain from earlier work done at national level. Existing or established structures and actors in the standardisation field, e.g. relevant standardisation bodies and bodies within the Swedish Standardisation Federation, are to be included in the work to best manage the expertise and knowledge already available regarding standardisation processes.

The central government and SALAR will also work to put in place structures to follow up and ensure that agreed and adopted standards in eHealth are followed and developed.

National forum for standardisation in eHealth

As a step in implementing the initiative, the central government and SALAR will establish a national forum for standardisation in eHealth. The forum will be an arena for broad cooperation that is characterised by clarity, openness, joint procedures and a long-term approach.

The forum's mandate will include:

- being an arena for strategic coordination of ongoing development actions of common interest nationally in standardisation in the field of eHealth;

- identifying needs and creating the conditions for cooperation between ongoing development actions;

- establishing joint procedures and agreements; and

- identifying and calling attention to areas of importance for joint initiatives.

The specific details of the forum will be developed within the framework of the joint governance and cooperation organisation.

Follow-up

Follow-up of the eHealth field must be improved. There are a large number of studies, both ongoing and ad hoc, that all provide a certain or limited picture of the field of eHealth. A framework for follow-up is needed to give relevant parties access to the information required to ensure that actions are carried out on a correct basis.

The central government and SALAR agree that government agencies, county councils and municipalities need to develop tools and methods to show how digitalisation is advancing towards the vision and how the benefits of digitalisation are being realised. A system enabling international comparison is a prerequisite for measuring the achievement of the vision's objectives.

From the individual's perspective, open comparisons in health care and social services are currently available. When appropriate, similar comparisons are to be made in the eHealth field.

International monitoring

The rate of digitalisation in society is high and will impact social services and health care in general. The central government and SALAR have agreed to develop a joint procedure and model for coordinated international monitoring. It is important to find a way to ensure that the international monitoring conducted by various actors can be collected and compiled to benefit all parties. In this as well, the work is to integrate an international perspective.
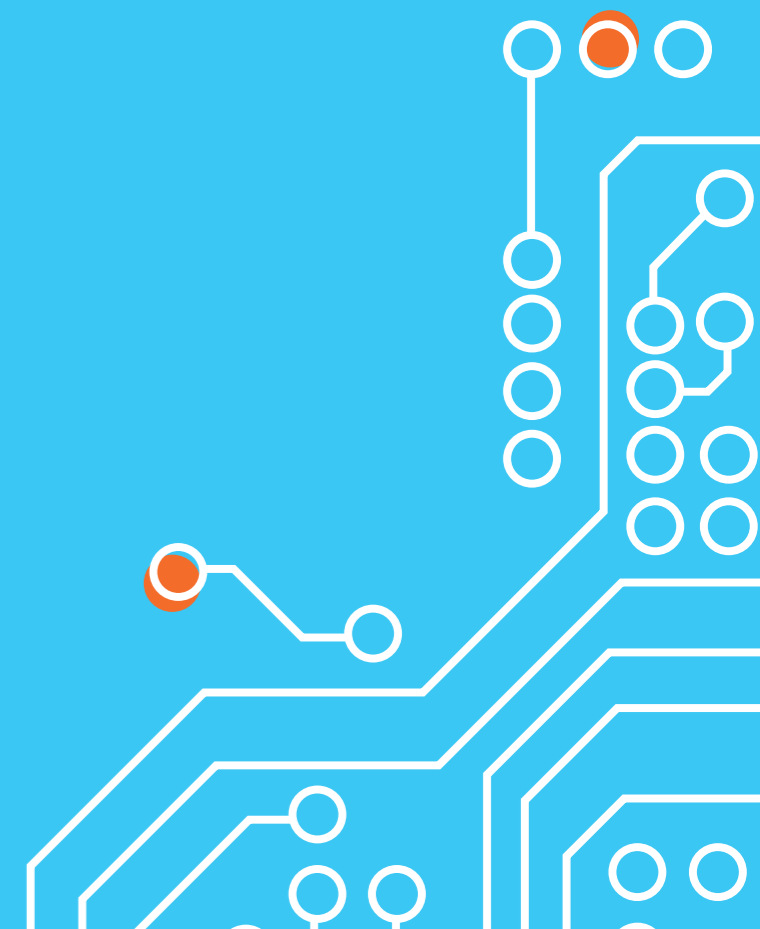
Governance and cooperation organisation

Through this action plan, the central government and SALAR will form a joint national governance and cooperation organisation. The starting points, principles, focus and areas for action, etc. stated in the action plan form the foundation for the future work of the organisation.

The organisation aims to strengthen cooperation so that the efforts of actors – together and individually within their areas of their responsibility and commitments – contribute optimally to achieving the vision. The organisation constitutes the joint arena for governance, cooperation, coordination and follow-up of the action plan's implementation. Efforts in their entirety are to serve to balance, coordinate and, as far as possible, consolidate interests to contribute to the development of consensus on goals and priorities in the implementation of the action plan.

Work on the action plan will be guided by the following principles, which are common to all actors. The principles aim to speed up the work of realising the vision.

- Equal participation – the overall cooperation organisation will consist of an equal number of representatives from the parties, i.e. central government, SALAR, municipalities and county councils.

- Gender equal participation – the overall cooperation organisation will be appointed from a gender perspective to ensure equal opportunities for women and men to exercise influence.

- Clear roles and rules of play between actors – so that the actors together and individually can contribute optimally to implementing the vision.

- Long-term approach and stability – to strengthen legitimacy of the work and provide clarity for various actors.

- Transparency and participation – everyone must know how and why priorities are set, and how actors can be given the opportunity to take part and which efforts are being conducted. This will increase compliance with common priorities.

- Cooperation and respect for each other's roles – to build confidence and resource-efficient joint efforts.

Organisation and responsibility

Figure 1 below outlines the structure of the governance and cooperation organisation, which is further described in the text.
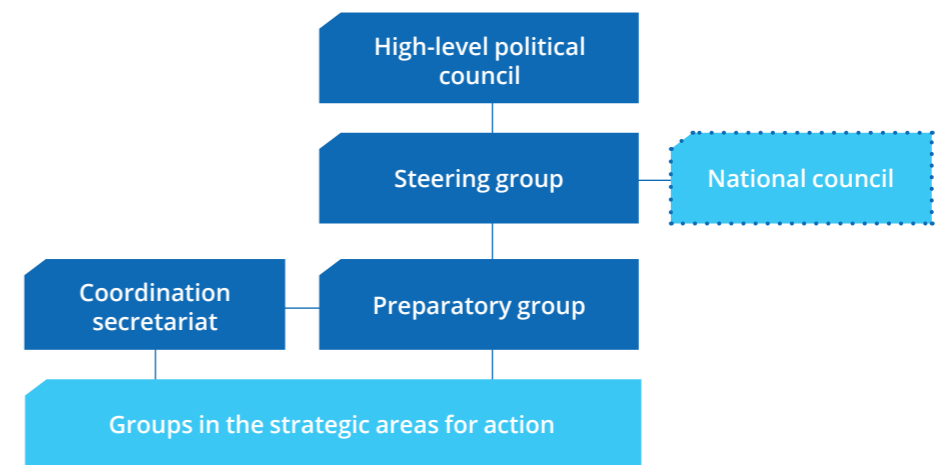

Figure 1. National organisation for implementing the eHealth vision

High-level political council

A high-level political council will be established comprising political representatives from central government and SALAR. The council will follow the development of the action plan and the achievement of its goals. As a complement to the council, an international council may be formed at a later stage to place Sweden's efforts in an international context and contribute to learning, quality assurance and innovation.

Steering group

A steering group will be established comprising political representation from central government and SALAR. The group's chair will be a representative of central government.

The group's mandate is to steer and follow up the action plan's implementation, and establish and develop the joint cooperation organisation based on the guiding principles.

National council

A national council will be established comprising decision-makers from e.g. business, industry organisations, research institutes, health care and social services providers, academia and representatives of various staff groups, and patient, user and family organisations.

Council meetings will be organised twice a year to strengthen broad and constructive coordination between all parties and to guide the organisation of the work on the Vision for eHealth 2025. This will involve reporting views and ideas on various issues in the eHealth field to the steering group and sharing information about the discussions conducted at national level back to each of the organisations.

Preparatory group

A *preparatory group* will be established comprising officials from central government, SALAR, municipalities and county councils, and will be chaired by SALAR. The group will identify needs, initiate analyses and investigations, and provide knowledge and decision-making input to implement the action plan and ensure that the work complies with the current coordination plan, that there is support for the input to the steering group and that relevant aspects are taken into account.

The group is also responsible for coordinating adopted actions and activities, and ensuring effective cooperation within and between the areas for action. The group is to work for broad and appropriate representation in the action groups.

Coordination secretariat

A *coordination secretariat* will be established to support operation and development of the national governance and cooperation organisation. The coordination secretariat will be organised by the Swedish eHealth Agency in close collaboration with SALAR, and will comprise resources from central government and SALAR. The coordination secretariat will be responsible for ensuring that the work on the common organisation proceeds in accordance with the current coordination plan.

The coordination secretariat will support the work of the steering and preparatory groups by producing plans and input for knowledge-building and policy decision-making that have been commissioned. This may also involve hosting broad dialogues or following up and documenting the action plan's implementation. In its work of implementing the action plan, the coordination secretariat is to be characterised by transparency, collaboration and participation.

The coordination secretariat will also produce and provide up-to-date information about the action plan's implementation on a website. The website will regularly publish information about ongoing and completed projects in eHealth to facilitate coordination among smaller actors.

Groups within the areas for action

One example is the above-mentioned national forum for standardisation in eHealth. However, the central government and SALAR also intend to establish additional groups within the various areas for action as necessary. The purpose and mandate of these groups will determine their composition, working methods and meeting frequency. Members of the preparatory group may chair these various groups.

Annual process

The work of implementing the action plan will follow an annual process according to the proposed model in figure 2. The aim is to create a structure for a proactive approach to regular planning, implementation, follow up, governance, reporting and dialogue arenas.

The preparatory group and groups for strategic areas for action meet regularly during the year

Figure 2. Action plan's annual process

The annual process aims to provide transparency and the opportunity to create a common plan and shared approach among all the actors involved with respect to upcoming and ongoing strategic actions. The annual process begins with a common coordination plan for the year. The plan for any given year is gradually prepared during the previous year through strategic analysis, status reports for ongoing initiatives, follow-ups and broad dialogues with stakeholders. The plan is launched after it has been adopted by the high-level political council.

The work in 2017 is focused on implementing this action plan for the coming year.

Government Offices of Sweden
Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

Swedish Association
of Local Authorities
and Regions