Memorandum of Understanding on Collaboration in the field of "Digital Health"

Background

The Swiss healthcare system faces major challenges in the area of digitalization. Federalism and the private-sector orientation of the healthcare system make coordinated cooperation difficult. International experience shows that, above all, political will and the clarification of responsibilities at the political level are needed to create a health data space in which information can be recorded and exchanged with as little media discontinuity as possible. The gradual improvement of "interoperability" in all data flows of treatment, billing and official services, as well as in subsequent research projects, must be carried out in a coordinated manner.

The "Swiss eHealth strategy" of the federal government and cantons postulates the use of international standards for coordinated digitization in the healthcare sector. The federal government's DigiSanté program for promoting digital transformation also aims to improve data exchange between stakeholders and to adopt internationally established standards. This principle can also make it easier for Switzerland to participate in international projects. For the providers of information systems, borders are also opening up: on the one hand, Swiss companies can become active within the EU, and on the other hand, companies from abroad have the opportunity to establish innovative products on the Swiss market. Users, for their part, benefit from long-term investment security.

Technical, syntactic and semantic standards are needed for the specific implementation and development of an "interoperable health data space". Their use must be coordinated. This is the only way to ensure that the developed solutions are compatible with each other and enable a seamless data flow. At the international level, the "Joint Initiative Council" has been working together on the standardization in health informatics since 2009.

In the same spirit, the organizations active in the field of "digital health" in Switzerland are establishing a collaboration based on the following objectives, principles and activities:

Objectives

• Develop recommendations for the use of standards.
• Establish a permanent dialogue between the organizations.
• Increase awareness for standards (create transparency).
• Support interoperability through professional coordination.
• Avoid divergent approaches.
• Identify overlaps or parallel developments. Agreeing on how to deal with them.
• Identify and close gaps in a coordinated manner.
• Support the ability to connect to international projects and promoting cooperation at the international level.

Principles

• In the specific selection, internationally established standards are preffered.
• As a rule, several approaches from different organizations contribute to a specific solution. The appropriate choice must be taken in a coordinated manner.
• If an existing data exchange is adjusted, those responsible for the project should check whether it is possible to switch from an in-house development to an international approach.
• If internationally established standards are available for an area of application, no new national solutions will be developed.

- If the international approach is considered insufficient for a specific area of application, an adaptation or extension of the international approach will be sought together with the responsible organization before new national solutions are developed.
- National adaptations should only differ from the international version if specific requirements make this necessary (e.g. legal bases).
- Standards that have been developed, consulted and approved by the partners to the agreement are mutually respected and referenced without public consultation.

Collaboration

- The partners respect each other's areas of expertise and scope. It must therefore be transparent which standardization organizations are active in which areas (treatment, billing, administrative or research processes). They jointly create an overview of their activities and their respective scope. This is actively communicated and regularly updated (at least once a year). This creates transparency and supports the common goal of using existing standards and avoiding new stand-alone solutions.
- The organizations meet at least once a quarter to exchange information and coordinate their activities (status and need for action regarding the objectives and principles of the agreement).
- The partners are also actively informed about important developments in their own area of application outside of the regular meetings. This includes, for example, relevant international developments in their own area, the start of new standardization activities or the start of a hearing/consultation. This is to ensure that parallel activities are identified early and avoided if possible.
- Enquiries or consultations from authorities or other relevant organizations are communicated to the partners and, if possible, answered jointly.
- The partners decide whether additional measures are necessary to achieve the common goals.
- The partners bring important developments or additions/extensions of standards to the international level of their organizations.

Joint activities

- Joint website as an entry point for providers and users of digital projects in healthcare (at https://www.ehealthstandards.ch). The minimum objective is an overview of the participating organizations and their professional orientation.
- Annual information event for stakeholders in the healthcare sector (in particular providers and users in the IT community).
- Development of suitable instruments for providing technical support to those responsible for private or official digitization projects. This includes information formats and a point of contact for help in selecting standards.
- If required, joint temporary working groups can be established – for example, for the technical support of digital projects.
- Joint representation in national or international committees (e.g. FDMG "Fachgruppe Datenmanagement").
- One of the partners is responsible for coordinating the joint activities. This role changes every two years. If more than one organization is interested, the "coordinator" is elected by a simple majority of the partners.

Duration and new entries

- The cooperation is for an unlimited period.
- Amendments to the principles can be proposed by all partners, but any amendment must be approved by all participating organizations.
- Other organizations can join the collaboration if the following criteria are met:
  - o Focus: Development and/or maintenance of standards in the area of "digital health" with a certain range of topics (more than one specific process/use case);
  - o Transparency: All essential information about the ongoing work programs and final results are published;
  - o Openness: Participation is open to all affected parties;
  - o Impartiality: All affected parties have access to the working groups;
  - o Effectiveness and relevance: The developed standards must be relevant and respond effectively to the needs of the stakeholders. They must not distort the market, influence fair competition or hinder innovation.
  - o Unanimity: Agreement of all partners to the agreement.

Semantic standards

- Relevant semantic standards such as SNOMED, ICD-10/11 or CHOP are managed by federal agencies that cannot be partners in this agreement.
- The aim is for federal agencies to actively participate in the collaboration between the agreement partners and to get involved in joint activities.

The seven organisations have agreed to establish the cooperation in the framework described above and to evaluate the initial experiences by the end of 2025 at the latest.

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