



News Release

For Immediate Release

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eHealth Still Unfinished After 14 Years and \$8 Billion: Auditor General

(TORONTO) Ontario's health-care sector spent more than \$8 billion between 2002/03 and 2015/16 on various electronic health records (EHR) projects and related initiatives, but significant components are still not operational, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2016 Annual Report*. The government had committed in 2008 to providing an EHR for every Ontarian by 2015.

"The initiative has certainly advanced since our last audit in 2009," Lysyk said today after tabling her Report in the Legislature. "However, it is still not possible to say if it is on budget because the government never set an overall budget for it. In effect, we cannot say if \$8 billion is a reasonable figure."

An EHR is a digital lifetime record of an individual's health and health-care history, updated in real-time and securely available to authorized health-care professionals. Benefits include access to complete patient records at point of care and less duplication of lab tests.

Implementation of EHRs is an enormous challenge involving many different publicly-funded entities that often operate with information-technology systems that are not always compatible with others.

The government has never established an overall strategy or budget for the entire EHR initiative. However, it did create a formal \$1.06-billion budget in 2010 (which also covered prior periods) for completion of some EHR projects under the responsibility of eHealth Ontario. This budget excluded eHealth Ontario's annual corporate administration expenses.

As of March 2016, a year after its deadline passed, eHealth Ontario reported that it had completed about 80% of the projects covered by the \$1.06-billion budget. Total project costs including project-related operational support costs were \$1.03 billion as of March 2016. eHealth Ontario expects to incur \$48 million to complete the remaining 20% of the projects.

Other significant findings in the Report include:

- Buy-in from and participation of health-care organizations and professionals such as hospitals and labs in the EHR initiative is critical—but eHealth Ontario lacked the authority to compel these parties to contribute patient information to EHR systems, and the Ministry has not used its authority to require it.
- Most of the health-care professionals we surveyed did not fully use the available systems, and over one-third said they had little awareness of the systems' capabilities. Almost half said they experienced information-technology barriers such as cumbersome log-ins, and difficulty in readily finding information.
- Many of the EHR projects operational as of March 31, 2016, still lacked some promised features and/or contained incomplete data.

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