

Physicians, consumers lack trust in Aus healthcare

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Australia's Personal Health Record (PHR) program opens doors for private investment in eHealth across the country.



Singapore: Australia boasts an advanced healthcare system supported by both the public and private sector involvement. The country spent 9.3 percent of its GDP on healthcare in 2011 and is currently focusing on providing people with the tools to support independent aging care and improve healthcare services in remote regions.

While modernisation of healthcare facilities and investment in IT has been rapid over the past 10 years, adoption still lags amongst physicians and consumers due to lack of trust in information systems. This lack of trust stems from the failure of several regional health IT projects in recent years.

The Australian healthcare IT market was estimated at \$811.03 million (A\$ 783 million) in 2012, which includes software tools and applications leveraged by healthcare providers as well as the professional services needed for implementation and support. Government incentives towards adoption of Personally Controlled Electronic Health Record (PCEHR) and other healthcare delivery programs such as the Practice Incentives Program (PIP) will be the key driver for market growth. Private players on the other hand are focusing on enhancing customer awareness and engagement in their products.

According to Mr Rhenu Bhuller, vice president of Healthcare, Frost & Sullivan Asia Pacific, the healthcare IT market in Australia is driven by the shift in emphasis from acute care to prevention and [Locum Tenens physician](#) has changed the landscape of healthcare forever

This is apparent from the numerous incentive schemes listed in the PIP, which focus on long-term care including incentives for diabetes detection, cervical screening and asthma. In addition to these, the PIP also encourages digitisation of healthcare providers by incentivising adoption of healthcare IT at the GP level across healthcare organisations.

Australia's Personal Health Record (PHR) program opens doors for private investment in eHealth across the country. The Australian market for Electronic Medical Records (EMR) and Electronic Health Records (EHR) is expected to grow at a CAGR of 15.1 percent between 2013-18. On average, healthcare providers spend a little less than two percent of their operating expenditure on IT which is less than the global average spend of 3.6 percent as quoted by CeBIT, Australia.

This is essentially because hospital CIOs find it hard to justify significant budget allocations towards activities not directly impacting healthcare delivery, particularly when returns on investment are below expectations. Hospital spend on IT is expected to rise under the influence of government incentives to drive adoption.

However, the PCEHR has been received with strong apprehension and even criticism on some aspects across the country. Adoption of PCEHR has been dismal essentially due to the complexity of procedures and requirements for both physicians and consumers. So severe is the issue that the Australia Medical Association (AMA) has called for a step-by-step toolkit to help medical practitioners to participate in PCEHR. Even the PIP for eHealth, popularly termed ePIP, has been received with criticism and scanty adoption with only about half of all general practices in Australia applying for or assigned a Healthcare Provider Identifier - Organisation (HPI-O) number, a prerequisite for payment eligibility.

Mr Bhuller says, "Moreover, while digitization of health records has made it easier for people to manage their health information, most consumers are anxious about data security. Data privacy laws in Australia are expected to be amended in the next 15 months, but until then patients are concerned about how their medical information is being stored and shared. Legacy health IT systems in Australia have been largely uncoordinated. While the country has put tremendous effort in health IT from both a resource and investment perspective, it is difficult to say that these have been hugely successful due to the lack of integration across regional IT systems, as can be seen from the failure of the HealthSMART project."

By using some of these prior learnings to improve on implementation, government authorities are optimistic about the prospects of IT in healthcare. They are driving IT adoption by openly accepting and implementing feedback from the public and incentivizing eHealth practices. Private software vendors and system integrators expect significant returns from the market essentially because there are opportunities for implementing large-scale installations spanning several healthcare providers.

As cited in a recent Accenture report, EMR and EHR adoption was estimated at 78 percent across public and private healthcare providers from 2008-2013 and this is expected to grow. Bhuller finished by saying that as clinical systems advance, demand will flare for sophisticated intelligence and analytics tools to help healthcare providers manage and make sense out of the large volumes of data so that they may improve healthcare management and, in the long run, healthcare costs.