CHAPTER 1

Introduction

You can use this workbook to help you to take the decisions for an e-health strategy and identify the policy issues that you need to address. It is best to use it in workshops with a team of people from many different backgrounds, such as senior civil servants responsible for health, healthcare, information and communications technology (ICT) and finance, doctors, nurses, healthcare managers, ICT managers and ICT suppliers. A team like this often has different views and ideas and using the workbook can help to put these together.

You can use the workbook in many different ways. You can use it as a checklist for the team's agenda and topics. You can use the parts that are most important to you, and you can change and add to the templates so they fit your precise needs better. The templates are in Microsoft Word, so they are easy to modify.

Because e-health is a core resource for healthcare systems, every country needs good policies, strategies and plans for ICT and the associated organisational changes that support improvements in health and healthcare. E-health is this combination of ICT and organisational change. It is not a single project with a fixed timescale and permanent solution. The effort and investment needed has many parts; it is complex, it changes constantly and it is continuous. That is why this workbook covers so many topics.

The main e-health activities included in the workbook are:
- Providing the information needed, when and by whom to support health and healthcare delivery, strategies and services
- Implementing the ICT needed to capture and deliver the information
- Changing the clinical and working practices needed to realise the benefits.

The Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting (CHMM) in May 2008 agreed to hold high-level meetings between ministers of health and ministers for ICT so they could:
- Identify regional priorities and challenges
- Foster strategic partnerships
- Reach a consensus on e-health projects in selected countries
- Promote the exchange of information on e-health expertise.

The first high-level meeting was in the Seychelles for ministers in the East, Central and Southern African Health Community (ECSA) in September and October 2008. Ministers and their colleagues identified the need for a methodology and templates to help with e-health policies and strategies. The topics are consistent with this, and

with the findings from the second high-level dialogues for West Africa in Nigeria in December 2009. They are:

- Develop user-friendly and comprehensive e-health policies and strategies and projects
- Develop a step-by-step approach to develop e-health policies, strategies and projects with minimal external assistance
- Identify the information that may not be readily available and needs collecting to complete e-health policies, strategies and projects.

The workbook disaggregates the themes and complexities of e-health so you can deal with each of these topics separately and link them back together. Then assessments and decisions can follow through in a continuous loop. A separate workbook is available to help you to describe e-health proposals to secure finance. A third workbook came out of the ECSA ministers' second initiative, which set up an e-health working group to develop a generic questionnaire for you to use to identify and assess the current e-health situation.

This workbook's content also draws from the e-health experiences of the World Health Organization (WHO), the Bellagio Conference on e-health, the European Union (EU), selected countries in the ECSA and the West Africa Health Organisation (WAHO) regions and other Commonwealth countries. These have several common themes that you can adopt. However, differences between member states may be more important than these similarities, so it is important that your e-health polices and strategies reflect the realities of your country and organisation. The workbook aims to bridge this gap by helping you to build from your current efforts, knowledge, experience and initiatives to:

- Identify and share the lessons and challenges, and learn from each other
- Identify practical steps to achieve each country's e-health goals
- Identify the stakeholders and their approaches to engagement in e-health.

E-health policies and strategies must be one of the topics of your country's overall health and healthcare strategies. You can use the workbook to show how e-health fits in. You must also integrate e-health with strategies for social and economic development and reflect the nature of your country's health economies, especially where there is a mix of public, private, faith-based organisations (FBOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and charities delivering healthcare services. E-health policies and strategies in these mixed health economies are demanding to prepare. Dealing with the situation successfully will help you to be clear about the costs and benefits that can be realised by each type of healthcare organisation from each e-health project, and so will help to direct the required e-health investment.

When you use the workbook, you must also reflect the dynamic context of e-health. The templates are not a set of forms that you can complete in one go. Opportunities, policies, strategies and projects are always changing and developing, so you can change the workbook to reflect these developments.