

CHAPTER 10

A Step-By-Step Approach to Policy Development

Two types of e-health investment are known as ‘big bang’ and ‘step-by-step’. In e-health, big bang is not a good idea. It incurs high costs and carries high risks. A big picture is essential for a step-by-step approach that breaks your activities into short-term, medium-term and long-term timescales. E-health is complicated and inherently high risk, so breaking it down into manageable chunks, or a jigsaw, makes sense. However, the step-by-step approach extends investment timescales, which is also inherently risky, so this form of investment does not reduce risk but acts as a way for you to manage risk. It also helps with affordability by spreading the costs over several years. Inevitably, the step-by-step approach defers the benefits too. It also requires sustainable policies that support the large-scale picture.

Step-by-step’s big picture must be clear from the outset, then assembled piece-by-piece by each e-health project. A challenge for you and your colleagues in the workshops is to select the ICT and priorities in a timeframe where implementation takes place in a rational, feasible sequence and according to a plan that matches the affordability and change constraints.

A major advantage of step-by-step policy development is the scope it offers you to identify and engage healthcare stakeholders, and work with them so they are sensitised to the complexities and potential impact of e-health. Step-by-step is more manageable than big bang, so offers more chance of success. Yet the step-by-step approach needs policies to promote scalability and net benefits, both from trials and from e-health functionalities that are specific for services dealing with one disease, such as HIV/AIDS, to services dealing with several diseases and different types of citizens.

