

# **A Business Case Approach to e-Health Sustainability**

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## **Introduction**

Despite best efforts, many e-health (telehealth + health informatics) initiatives still fail to become sustainable, even in developed countries. A variety of ‘human factor’ causes may be responsible, from a lack of e-health readiness to poor change management. For some time business cases have been used to describe and justify alternative business and healthcare options, yet this is not typically the case for e-health applications. Indeed, use of business cases in e-health is poor. Yet such a tool could assist in sustainable deployment of e-health initiatives in both developed and developing countries.

## **Methods**

A literature review (PubMed, Medline, and Google searches) failed to identify any specific or recommended business case format, model, or template for e-health initiatives. Similarly, a review of local, provincial, and national telehealth project reports from Canada revealed a lack of any consistent business case format. Those that were present were only rudimentary, unstructured, and lacking in content. Given this dearth, design of an e-health specific business case template was undertaken. A generic business case template (and associated usage guidelines) developed by the Government of Alberta was selected. This template was then critiqued to identify missing elements identified in the literature as important to successful e-health implementation and adoption. The value of the draft e-Health Specific Business Case Template was validated through its application by mid-career professionals in various healthcare settings.

## **Results**

Six “e-distinctive” components, considered to be missing or requiring specific acknowledgement or greater focus, were identified from the literature. These were incorporated into the generic template to create an ‘e-health specific business case template’. From the subsequent validation exercise, one additional “e-distinctive” component was identified. The seven “e-distinctive” components were: needs assessment, e-health readiness assessment, integration, change management, policy, rigorous pre-planned evaluation, and privacy impact assessment.

## **Conclusion**

An e-Health Specific Business Case Template and complementary guidelines have been developed and validated. The template applies sound business case principles, but focuses attention on key issues known to be essential for successful implementation of e-health solutions. Use of business cases in e-health will become more of a political and management expectation. The Template will assist the e-health community in developing business cases for sustainable e-health initiatives, not merely pilots or projects.