

Dear Fellow Canadian,

The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) has issued its report on our organization, Canada Health Infoway (*Infoway*), and we welcome their insights and helpful suggestions. These reports are vital; they provide you with the information you need and deserve to judge how well your tax money is being spent, and they provide useful analysis and advice to the organizations being audited.

What's in the Report

We're very pleased that the Auditor General found that *Infoway*, in her words, has accomplished much in the eight years since we were established. While we still have a lot of work ahead of us to achieve our ambitious goals, this audit tells us we are on the right track. It acknowledges that we have been working with "due regard" for taxpayers' money, and that we have sound systems in place for managing projects efficiently.

The Auditor General provides us with important recommendations for making *Infoway* even more efficient and effective. We accept all of her recommendations wholeheartedly and will implement initiatives to address every recommendation by March 31 of next year – just five months away. In fact, we had already started doing a number of the things the OAG refers to in its report – because we recognized they made sense and felt they were appropriate to implement as soon as possible ([Read the full list of the recommendations and our responses](#)).

Infoway and eHealth Ontario

Of course, the Auditor General's report has drawn extra attention because of the concerns over the provincial e-health initiative in Ontario. While our organization is also involved in helping create electronic health records (EHRs) for Canadians, it is important to understand that *Infoway* has not had any contracts with eHealth Ontario nor its predecessor, the Smart Systems for Health Agency (SSHA).

That said, we *have* funded some key projects in Ontario – for example, putting a viewer in emergency rooms throughout the province to provide medication histories for seniors, contributing to a system to help reduce wait times, funding the expansion of telemedicine initiatives. Our primary role is to set the national strategy and standards for EHR systems, aid capable organizations that are developing them, and ensure that all of these systems being implemented across the country will be able to link to one another in the future.

Infoway's Strict Rules

Infoway has to operate under strict funding requirements set by the federal government. We fund projects once deliverables have been completed and the standards have been met. Generally, we assign half the funding to the development of a system; the remaining half would be paid only when the system has been developed *and* demonstrated use levels have been achieved. We believe there is no point investing in technology that is not being used. Working under these clear policies, to date we have spent just over half of the money allocated to us. The other half of the funds, while earmarked for jurisdictions, will remain unspent until projects are delivered and health care providers begin using the system.

Success Stories

Infoway has worked with every province and territory, supporting almost 300 EHR projects nation-wide. The results are improving the quality of health care, reducing wait times, avoiding costly and dangerous errors, improving access in remote and rural communities, and cutting costs for taxpayers. For example:

- We have helped fund systems to transfer X-rays and other medical imaging to digital formats. This will ultimately save up to one billion dollars a year (when fully implemented) and importantly has increased radiologist productivity by 23%, getting patients their tests and treatments faster.
- In British Columbia, we are upgrading and enhancing the province's existing PharmaNet system which gives pharmacists electronic access to complete health records. Last year, 2.5 million potential cases of drug interactions were avoided that could have led to serious complications or even death.
- In Alberta, the WebSMR system we helped fund has improved post-surgical reporting from a month in most cases to less than an hour 91% of the time. That's a significant breakthrough in post-surgical care.
- In Ontario, the Ontario Drug Profile Viewer has been implemented in emergency departments in 177 hospitals. This system enables health professionals in emergency departments to instantly access drug information for Ontario's seniors. In September 2009, the system was used to view medication information over 95,000 times.
- The investments that *Infoway* has been making in the area of telemedicine are making a substantial impact throughout Canada. In Ontario, *Infoway's* support has enabled the expansion of the Ontario Telemedicine Network, through which over 2,000 health care professionals are now delivering care to over 660 rural and remote sites throughout the province.
- All communities north of 60 are telehealth enabled or are in the process of being so. *Infoway* is on track to get 40% of First Nations communities telehealth-enabled with focus on mental health and drug addiction services.

We're pleased to say these are only a few examples of how *Infoway's* efforts to support EHRs are improving health care across the country. [See how EHR systems are delivering tangible benefits to Canadians today.](#)

Why This Matters To You

As a taxpayer, you deserve to know that we have been using public funds wisely. The Auditor General concludes that we have made good use of public funds; she also made eight recommendations to further strengthen our reporting abilities, contracting processes and documentation (*Infoway* accepts these recommendations and has already implemented a number of initiatives in response to the Auditor General's recommendations; we will implement changes to address any outstanding issues by March 31, 2010).

As a Canadian, you deserve to have the best possible health care system – one that is available when and where you and your family need it, that provides high quality care and that does not waste your tax money.

Electronic health records are helping to accomplish all of these goals. When we've finished our work, all authorized health care practitioners will have your health information at their fingertips wherever it's needed. There won't be any time wasted tracking down your

records or repeating tests before you can get your treatment. Potentially dangerous drug errors or inadvisable treatments can be avoided. And the ease and speed of EHRs will continue to reduce the cost burden for taxpayers.

Previous generations built up a health care system in Canada that is the envy of the world. It's our challenge now to preserve and improve that system, using the power of modern technology. At *Infoway*, we are proud of our efforts and achievements to date and are completely committed to our goal of better health care for you and your family.

Sincerely,
Richard C. Alvarez

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