ITAC Health Interoperability and Standards Committee (ISC) Position on Canadian Healthcare Interoperability Standards

November 14, 2016

ITAC Health is the health division of the Information Technology Association of Canada. It represents Canadian information and communication technology (ICT) firms that provide products and services in the healthcare sector. In the spring of 2016, ITAC Health surveyed its members on the topic of healthcare interoperability standards. There were 31 respondents, with an even split between product and services companies, as well as broad representation across all healthcare sectors: ambulatory, acute, community, home, long-term care, and primary care. The survey respondents are market leaders in many of those sectors.

The ITAC Health ISC reviewed the survey results and concluded that there is consensus within the Canadian Healthcare ICT Vendor community on the following positions. For these positions below, "standards" should be taken to mean "healthcare interoperability standards", which include both the international base standard, as well as the interoperability profile that details the specific use of that base standard in a jurisdiction.

1) Standards should be the same across Canada. There will be different standards used in different domains (e.g. DICOM in DI and HL7v2 in Lab), however every effort should be made to minimize variation between jurisdictions in how these standards are implemented.
2) Canadian jurisdictions should prefer standards that are commercially established internationally, particularly those established in the U.S.
3) Canadian jurisdictions should phase out the use of HL7v3, and promote the adoption of IHE/XDS and FHIR. The FHIR standard is currently under development; as such the FHIR profiles promoted within Canada should be prioritized according to the stability and commercial adoption of those profiles.
4) Canadian public healthcare Requests for Proposals (RFPs) should mandate compliance with interoperability standards on procured software systems. Specifically, ITAC Health supports mandating demonstrable interoperability through conformance testing.

Normalizing interoperability standards across Canada and harmonizing these standards with the U.S. will greatly increase the number of solutions available for provinces to deploy while at the same time lowering the cost to customize these solutions for each province. Aligning Canadian interoperability standards with the U.S. will have the added benefit of expanding the export market for innovative Canadian healthcare solutions.