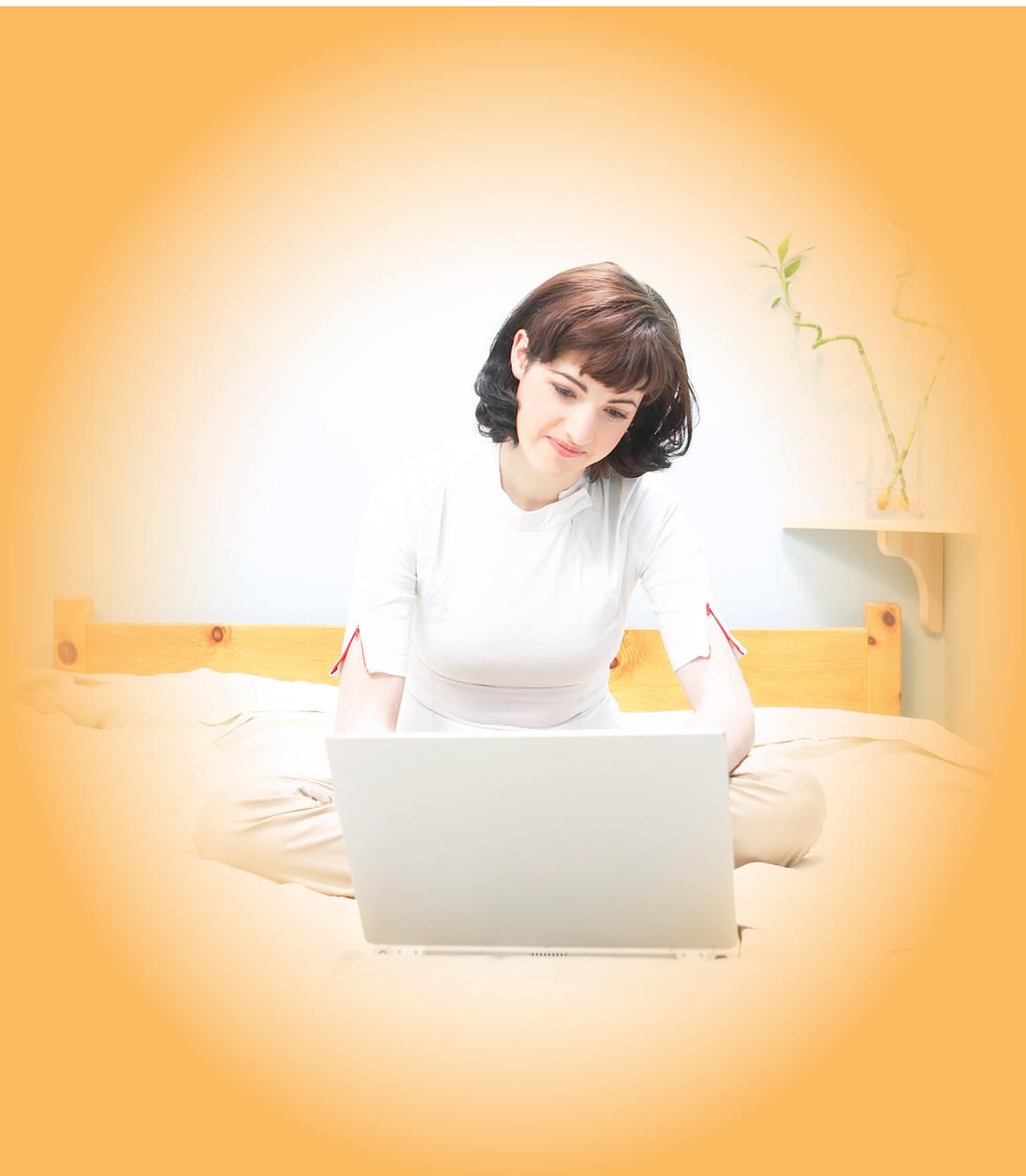SVERIGES
RIKSDAG

THE SWEDISH PARLIAMENT

eHealth – benefits and business potential

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Preface

There are good opportunities in Sweden for improving health and social services using modern IT solutions, i.e. eHealth. eServices can provide increased access to health and social services, and make health services better adapted to specific needs. eHealth as a business area also offers great opportunities for innovative Swedish companies. The heavy demand for smart eHealth services creates conditions for growth and exports. In parallel with the development of eServices, it is always important to safeguard the privacy of the citizens as more and more information is made available via the Internet.

An overview of and future assessment on eHealth has been prepared on behalf of the Committee on Industry and Trade. The report is based on reports from public agencies, surveys, scientific articles and interviews with various actors in the field. The task has been to highlight how eServices in the health and social services sectors can contribute to higher quality, and at the same time stimulate growth. The authors take full responsibility for the contents of the report. Here follows a summary of the main conclusions. The full report in Swedish, eHälsa – nytta och näring (2011/12: RFR5), may be downloaded from the Riksdag website: www.riksdagen.se.

There are good opportunities in Sweden for improving health and soci-al services using modern IT solutions, i.e. eHealth. eServices can help to make health and social services more accessible and to better adapt them to specific needs. eHealth is also a strong area for growth in Sweden and Europe, offering good business opportunities for innovative Swedish com-panies. In parallel with the development of e-services, it is important to safeguard the privacy of the citizens as more and more information is made available via the Internet.

Good opportunities for IT solutions in health and social services

With a greater number of people in need of health care combined with fewer people of working age, more needs to be achieved with fewer resources. This places new demands on health and social services in tomorrow's Sweden. Part of the answer is to use modern IT solutions in the health and social services, for which there are good opportunities in Sweden. The development and introduction of eTools means that processes and work procedures in the health and care services need to change. With smart eTools, certain aspects of health care can be mana-ged irrespective of time and place. With efficient processes that focus on the patient's individual needs, the quality of health care can be enhan-ced and resources liberated to create more time for everyday meetings in the health and social services. In Sweden, considerable advances are currently being made in the development of information systems and eServices in the public sector and at national level in the health and social services sectors. At the same time, this requires active leader-ship from operational managers and local politicians who invest in new technology and in the development of new working procedures.

A growing market

eHealth is an important topic on the international agenda and has been identified as one of the strongest growth areas in Europe. There are considerable opportunities in Sweden, for example, for competitive companies to emerge in the eHealth sector and to develop products that are attractive on the international market too. In addition to export opportunities for the private sector, there is a potential to export publicly financed and managed e-services. These primarily involve web-based services to citizens, such as information and advice about health, lifestyle and illnesses.

eHealth innovations

In an international perspective, Sweden has good potential for developing eHealth innovations. In order to create sustainable innovations, however, it is important that they are based on the genuine needs of the health and social services sectors. There are a number of innovation-promoting measures, with the aim of creating strong environments in which academia, industry, principles from the health and social services and end-users can interact. Innovation procurements, that is, procurement of unknown solutions to actual problems or needs, can be a further way of fostering innovative thinking in the health and social services. Through targeted investments in innovation procurement in the public sector, the innovative capacity of the principles and private companies can be enhanced.

Improved quality of health care

Irrespective of whether eServices are intended for individuals, personnel or decision-makers in various areas of activity, the overall goal must be that they benefit the recipients of health care and social services and improve public health. In addition to achieving good public health, other values are important, such as satisfaction and participation. This means that good care involves high quality both as regards medical aspects and as regards accessibility, information and respectful treatment. Good care should also be cost effective. In order to ascertain benefits, risks and cost-effectiveness, it is necessary to follow up and evaluate services thoroughly when they are introduced.

Information on the Internet – opportunities and risks

E-services create both accessibility and flexibility for citizens, patients and their families, and care-givers. eHealth tools can empower the patient in the health services by providing greater opportunities for participation and access to care. By being given the opportunity to take part in the planning of one's own treatment and information about oneself, the patient is given greater power. Giving authorised groups of personnel easy access through eTools to comprehensive patient information can help to save time and increase patient security. Effective information management creates more time for meetings with patients, and minimises the risk of medical malpractice or medication errors. At the same time, it is important to be aware of the risks connected with having large amounts of information about an individual stored in one and the same place. The damage can be great if this information is handled incorrectly. Electronic information management must be combined with high security as information that ends up in the wrong hands can be spread rapidly. In order to maintain credibility, both as regards national action and other eServices, the issue of privacy needs to be scrupulously taken into account. It is important to develop secure solutions as regards, for example, granting of authorisation and log-in procedures.

E-services are not always the right solution

Certain eServices in the health services can entail that greater responsibility is placed on the individual who can consequently feel greater demands on his or her own participation. It can, for example, be difficult to make use of services on the Internet if you are seriously ill or have certain functional disabilities. It is therefore important that eHealth developments do not lead to a risk of exclusion of certain groups in society, but that conditions are created, for example, for help by proxy and that an individual assessment is always made of whether eServices are appropriate or whether other options are needed.

Consistent systems and cooperation

It is important that the same standards are applied so that different information systems are compatible, that is, that they can communicate with each other. It is also crucial that the systems are robust and reliable. At the same time, an information structure that clarifies what is to be documented and how the information can be made easier to use is needed. Like the technical systems, the information must, in other words, be standardised. Clear rules for documentation in the health services secure high quality levels and enable the information to be adapted to the user.

Based on operational needs

In order to ensure a positive development in the area, it is important to prioritise services that are based on actual operational needs and that have the support of the users. The introduction of eTools must also be coordinated with the prevailing conditions. Participation is thus a keyword.

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