

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) for the creation of “IHE-Belgium”

Purpose and scope

The purpose of this MOU is to create a platform between the different interoperability actors (care providers, industry, government) in Belgium that will lead to the founding of IHE Belgium.

For a successful IHE Belgium it is important that each stakeholder category is represented.

Background

IHE is an initiative by healthcare professionals and industry to improve the way computer systems in healthcare share information.

Systems that support IHE Integration Profiles cooperate better, are easier to implement, and help care providers to use information more efficiently. The goal is to deliver optimal patient care. Worldwide several hundreds of products support one or more IHE Profiles.

IHE will start from a real-life clinical task that needs to be supported by several IT-systems. For example “ordering a radiological exam” is such a clinical task where a scheduling IT-system, the ADT-system and a radiology information system need to interact.

IHE does not define new additional communication standards. It will rather make a selection from the various existing international standards and adopt the standards and their specific implementations that best support the task at hand.

Standards are typically selected from renowned international standards like HL7, DICOM, XDS... Such a combination of standards including IT-standards (eg. Webservices, XML...), semantic standards (eg. SNOMED, ICD9...), messaging standards (eg. HL7...) and their specific use for the task at hand are called an IHE-profile.

IHE profiles describe specific solutions to integration problems. A profile documents how standards will be used by each system to cooperate to address the problem.

Referring to IHE Profiles ensures that implementers and users are talking about the same solution, without having to reevaluate the many technical details that ensure actual interoperability.

IHE allows vendors to test their solutions against validation-tools and on a yearly “connectathon” actual interoperability between vendors can be tested and validated.

Mission and benefits of IHE Belgium

Mission

The creation of IHE Belgium will give shape to IHE within the country.

- As a neutral entity IHE Belgium will ensure the values of IHE International and disseminate them to maximize their acceptance and / or adoption
- IHE Belgium will promote the use of IHE profiles in interoperability towards:
 - Public initiatives, in their IT solutions
 - Vendors in Belgium, in their products and services
 - Healthcare providers in Belgium, in their tenders, requirements, own developments

Benefits

Healthcare providers can specify IHE profiles to be provided by vendors in their tenders. It is a clear definition of the interoperability needs. Different systems that support the same IHE profile will be able to interact correctly without the need for costly custom development or integration engines. In the evaluation of different vendors, one can verify if a certain vendor has proven the requested interoperability with another vendor during an IHE-connectathon.

Vendors can focus their resources for interoperability on the IHE profiles instead of on investigating, implementing and maintaining custom interoperability efforts for each customer separately.

Adopting IHE profiles will allow healthcare payers to minimize costs for custom interoperability solutions when the use of IHE profiles is widely spread. This initiative will also act as an accelerator for on-going public projects in healthcare interoperability.

IHE Belgium activities

IHE Belgium will demonstrate the usefulness of using IHE profiles and technical frameworks with several interoperability use cases, which can be submitted by the members. This includes for example (without limitation):

- Exchange of laboratory data within the domain of Clinical Biology
- Gathering information on clinical trials
- Use of XDS as the profile for exchanging of documents between different actors (The creation of context tailored for the Belgian context is a possible scenario)
- Interoperability between healthcare actors
- ...

The list of use cases will be revised and prioritized at regular times. These use cases should lead to working technical frameworks using existing or new IHE profiles that provide a solution to the interoperability problems described.

Promoting the use of IHE profiles through:

- Local symposium/congress for the different stakeholders (provider CEO's and CIO's)
- Training sessions (IT-staff involved in interoperability)
- Support in selecting and implementing IHE-profiles, including tools and testing.
- IHE connectathon in Belgium

Contributing to make the IHE profiles and their applicability in Belgium widely known:

- Belgian extensions/amendments to existing profiles
- Investigate new interoperability use-cases and (co-) create additional profiles for them

This will in turn also generate international exposure of Belgian projects.