## EHFG 2013: EUROPE’S MOBILE HEALTH SECTOR IS BOOMING

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*At this year's European Health Forum Gastein, an important part of the conference programme is devoted to mobile health. The European mHealth sector is booming, with more than 97,000 health and wellbeing apps are already on the market, experts reported.*

**Bad Hofgastein, 4 October 2013** – More than 97,000 mobile apps on health and fitness are already available on the market, experts told the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG). They mostly help users track their health parameters and provide basic information and guidance on how to live a healthier lifestyle. According to a recent market research report by Research2Guidance, the marketplace is expected to grow significantly over the coming years, with the top ten mobile health apps generating up to four million free and 300,000 paid downloads per day. By 2017, around 50 % of mobile users would have downloaded mobile health (mHealth) apps.

“Resilient and Innovative Health Systems for Europe” is the slogan for this year's EHFG. More than 550 participants from some 45 countries are attending Europe's most important health policy conference in Bad Hofgastein to exchange views on key issues affecting European health systems.

The European mHealth market is booming and expected to be worth 5.4 billion euros by 2017, ahead of North America. This was not anticipated in earlier studies, which is partly thanks to the rapid uptake of health and wellbeing apps in Europe.

“mHealth tools can empower citizens and help cut costs to ensure healthcare systems remain sustainable. However, there is a lack of awareness of added value and benefits of mHealth”, DG Connect's Director General Robert Madelin told the EHFG. “Mobile apps are a promising new channel of communication in the area of preventive medicine – an excellent opportunity to convey health messages. But in order for mHealth to reach its full potential, it is necessary to increase trust in these new technologies.”

In its report of May 2012, the EU eHealth Task Force stressed that despite the increasing number of health and wellbeing apps available on the market, nor quality criteria for these applications exist, nor are there standards for both data management and provision of information to consumers. Guidance with respect to the application of regulation in the area of mHealth was needed in order to protect privacy and security, standards and interoperability, experts underlined at the EHFG.

Following the eHealth Task Force Report, the European Commission recognised in its eHealth Action Plan 2012 – 2020 the wide variety of actual and potential functions of health apps, the rapid pace of innovation in this field, and the potential benefits and risks to public health. The Action Plan underlines the importance of tackling clarity on legal and other issues around mobile health and wellbeing applications.

“It is essential to clarify the regulatory framework which applies to mHealth since this may be one of the most important barriers to mHealth deployment in Europe”, said Robert Madelin. “To enhance legal clarity, the European Commission is now considering the legal, policy and knowledge management framework for health and wellbeing apps.”

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