

# CANADIAN Healthcare Technology

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## Personal health records

### Telus partners with Microsoft to create web-based PHR

TORONTO – Establishing itself as a Canadian leader in the area of personal health records, Telus announced it will provide consumers with a secure means of aggregating and accessing their health information through an online service called Telus Health Space. The portal is to be rolled out within the next 12 months.

To get the system up and running, Telus – the second largest telecom company in Canada – has licenced Microsoft's HealthVault technology, which was launched in 2007 and has been in pilot mode in the United States. Telus's use of HealthVault will be the first implementation of the system outside of the U.S.

The partners did not disclose the amount Telus will pay to license the system for use in Canada. For its part, Telus will charge users of the service, such as hospitals, health regions and insurers who will make it available to patients or clients. Individuals will also be able to create accounts on their own, for a fee.

In recent years, there has been surging interest in personal health records (PHRs) as a means of solving serious problems in healthcare delivery.

For example, patient records are typically scattered among various caregivers – from primary care physicians and pharmacies to hospital X-ray departments and clinics. As such, physicians and other caregivers often work with incomplete and inaccurate information.

That can lead to delays in diagnoses and treatments, as well as to medical mistakes or poor outcomes. But by using new, computerized tools, patients themselves will be able to marshal their data to ensure physicians have the information needed to make quick, accurate diagnoses and care plans.

"We need to bring consumers into this and give them control of their health records," said Francois Côté, president of Telus Health. "It's the only way to curtail the fast-rising cost of healthcare."

As Côté noted, physicians often order duplicate tests for patients because they don't have access to recent lab or x-ray results. This has contributed to exploding

costs for diagnostic exams, as well as longer wait lists for patients. It has also delayed the start of treatments as doctors wait for the test results they need.

Lack of access to information can also result in medical errors – for example, when patients are rushed to hospital and doctors make decisions without knowing what medications the patient has been taking.

Using personal health records and solutions like Health Space, patients and their caregivers will be able to obtain accurate information, wherever they may be. "Patients and their families will be able to access real data, instead of relying on their faulty memories," commented Phil Sorgen, president of Microsoft Canada.

Sorgen noted that since its launch, HealthVault has attracted over 100 partners to develop solutions for the system.



Francois Côté

Phil Sorgen

They include over 50 makers of medical devices – such as glucose meters and blood pressure monitors. Using these applications, consumers could track various vital signs and the data could be automatically uploaded to their personal health records.

There have been more than 13,000 downloads of the HealthVault developer's kit – an indication of interest in creating innovative applications for personal health records. "Any number of these solutions could be used on Telus Health Space in Canada," said Sorgen.

Healthcare is a major focus for Telus, which announced last November that it would invest \$100 million to develop new healthcare IT solutions over the next three years. As its first move in this direction, earlier this year Telus acquired the MyChart

personal health record systems from Sun-nybrook Health Sciences, in Toronto, at a cost of approximately \$3 million.

Côté said MyChart will be part of the Health Space solution, giving consumers a structured record that can be populated with their own data.

Telus is also a major player in electronic health records for hospitals, and the pharmacy information system business, through its 2008 acquisition of Emergis for \$763 million. On the pharmacy side, Côté said it's conceivable that pharmacy chains could offer the Health Space solution to customers so that drug information from different sources could be consolidated.

In the future, it's possible that agreements could be struck not only with pharmacies, but with medical laboratories and X-ray clinics, so that test results are automatically sent to a patient's personal health record.

In the United States, a rivalry has emerged among companies such as Microsoft and Google to provide consumers with secure, personal health records. Google announced Google Health in 2008; so far, it is only available in pilot projects in the United States.

Observers have noted that in order to gain acceptance in Canada, providers of PHRs will have to ensure that the data resides in Canada – so that it is not at the mercy of foreign governments. For its part, Telus operates secure data centres in Canada that make use of backup facilities.

On a related front, the Canadian Medical Association launched [www.mydoctor.ca](http://www.mydoctor.ca) in 2008, which enables Canadian physicians to offer a secure personal health record to their patients. Vital signs can be loaded into the system, and doctors can be alerted when patients need attention – for example, when blood pressure readings are too low.

While the CMA has been making [www.mydoctor.ca](http://www.mydoctor.ca) available to its members, Telus is taking a broader approach, targeting hospitals and health regions, labs, pharmacies and insurance companies. Côté said announcements of partnerships will be made in the near future.