



# Blazing the Trail: Year One of the Infoway Standards Collaborative

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Common standards are the key to establishing the interoperability required by Electronic Health Records (EHRs) and the drive to establish these standards and facilitate their adoption in Canada is being supported by the work of the *Infoway* Standards Collaborative.

The *Infoway* Standards Collaborative was formed one year ago in April 2006. Canada Health Infoway Inc. (*Infoway*) and the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) agreed to establish a new pan-Canadian collaboration and coordination function to support and sustain health informatics standards on a national scale. This agreement was reached after extensive consultation with the domestic and international health information standards communities and was unanimously approved by the Board of Directors of both *Infoway* and CIHI, as well as the federal/provincial/territorial Conference of Deputy Ministers of Health. The location of the organization at *Infoway* is on an interim basis and will be reviewed in early 2008.

Establishment of the Standards Collaborative creates a single point of domestic contact for collaboration, co-ordination, development, maintenance and on-going support of EHR and other health information standards for Canadian stakeholders.

At the time of its formation, the *Infoway* Standards Collaborative encompassed standards developed or funded by *Infoway* as well as the Standards Development Organization (SDO) mandates formerly hosted by CIHI, including the Partnership for Health Information Standards, the Canadian affiliate for Health Level Seven (HL7) and Digital Imaging and Communications in Medicine (DICOM). *Infoway* also concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) which gives the Standards Collaborative a substantial role in supporting the domestic and international activity of the Canadian Advisory Committee to the International Standards Organization's health informatics Technical Committee (ISO/TC215).

*Infoway* continues to evaluate additional standards organizations with which it should have either formal or informal relationships. Where possible we prefer to adopt those standards that have pan-Canadian or international acceptance. If necessary we take those and adapt them so that

they support Canadian business and clinical requirements. When no standard suits our needs, we do invest in development. In these cases, development is done within existing standards development frameworks, such as HL7 and Integrating the Healthcare Enterprise (IHE).

Overall, it has been a busy "Year One" for the Standards Collaborative team as its staff worked with stakeholders and volunteers from across Canada to bring together all these standards under one roof, namely the design and launch of a new governance model and new standards life cycle services for the Canadian health informatics community.

Transitioning the Partnership, HL7 Canada, ISO/TC 215 and DICOM standards work to the Standards Collaborative was a large and complex undertaking involving the transfer of intellectual property, staff and a significant website presence to *Infoway*. This task was completed in the fall of 2006.

While the transition was going on, the Client Services team of the Standards Collaborative team hosted its first totally *Infoway*-hosted Partnership/HL7 Canada Conference in November which posted a record attendance. The spring Partnership Conference, aptly named "Blazing the Trail," will take place in Calgary May 16-18. It will play host to the inaugural meetings for the new Standards Collaborative Working Groups (SCWGs). The purpose of these groups is to ensure standards meet the business requirements of the healthcare business domains throughout the standards life cycle. The SCWGs, together with the ballot process, are the primary vehicles for member engagement in the standards life cycle. In addition, the conference will feature pan-Canadian presentations and standards education opportunities

Also through the fall, the Standards Collaborative staff worked very hard on streamlining standards governance and working groups. Their efforts were greatly aided by the Standards Collaborative Transition – Change Management Advisory Group. The resulting Standards Collaborative governance model integrates and enhances the previous mandate-specific governance models to better support the new service priorities: development, education and training, implementation support, conformance support and standards maintenance.

This new governance was a key commitment to our stakeholders to reduce cost, improve leverage of precious human resources – especially those of volunteers, optimize work processes, optimize governance and accelerate timelines. Development of the Standards Collaborative’s governance model has led to the establishment of a Standards Collaborative Strategic Committee whose purpose is to:

- Provide strategic direction to the development, maintenance, conformance and support of pan-Canadian standards;
- Make decisions regarding recommendations on key items in the standards life cycle for pan-Canadian standards, such as “Stable for Use” and “Formal Approval”;
- Provide strategic leadership to the Standards Collaborative (i.e., setting business domain priorities); and
- Provide strategic guidance on the long-term structure and sustainability of the Standards Collaborative and the sustainability of the collaborative approach.

The Standards Collaborative Coordinating Committee currently being formed as are the new Working Groups mentioned above. In addition, the HL7 Canada Board of Directors’ roles and responsibilities and other committees are being integrated into the Standards Collaborative governance model, following approval of this integration in March 2007 by the HL7 Canada membership. HL7 work will now be integrated into the Strategic Committee, Coordinating Committee and Working Groups, further to our mandate to provide coordination, collaboration and streamlining of activities.

Since October 2006, much work has also taken place to make the Standards Collaborative Implementation Support (IS) Service operational. Key subject matter experts have been engaged to provide front-line support and assistance to implementations for “Stable for Use” pan-Canadian Standards. Working closely with early adopters of pan-Canadian standards, the IS Team continues to update and refine the implementation support materials including the development of enhanced message examples.

IS has now launched a “48-Hour Response Challenge” for all implementation support requests. A key objective is to respond rapidly to queries and requests through the Standards Collaborative Information Desk [standards@infoway-inforoute.ca](mailto:standards@infoway-inforoute.ca) or the pan-Canadian Standards Group (pCSG) Forums <http://knowledge.infoway-inforoute.ca/en/forums/overview.aspx>.

Since pan-Canadian Standards must evolve to remain up to-date clinically, technically and business-wise, the Standards Collaborative is also launching its first Scheduled Maintenance Process this spring with the goal of ensuring selected pan-Canadian Standards remain relevant and continue to meet jurisdictional and stakeholder needs. Other standards will be added to the maintenance process in the future.

Scheduled maintenance will provide an opportunity to make updates and changes to the pan-Canadian standards, according to a planned schedule and a well-defined process, incorporating the involvement of various governance committees and other Standards Collaborative participants. It will ensure the evolution and sustainability of the standards managed by the Collaborative.

More information on this Scheduled Maintenance Release Process will be made available shortly through the Infoway website [www.infoway-inforoute.ca](http://www.infoway-inforoute.ca). In addition, a series of webcasts is planned. The May Partnership Conference, mentioned above, will also provide a forum for discussion surrounding proposed updates and changes to the various standards.

One of the main areas which the Standards Collaborative has had the opportunity to integrate and improve over the past few months is the new membership model. Previously, membership in Partnership or HL7 Canada, for example, was separate. This spring, the Collaborative has launched an integrated membership which offers members access to all the standards and services under its umbrella.

The Standards Collaborative will be launching enhanced education and training for health information standards later this year. In addition to the current educational offerings for HL7 versions 2 and 3 and ISO/TC 215 standards, the Collaborative will expand to include training for the Systemized Nomenclature of MEDicine Clinical Terms (SNOMED CT) and the Logical Observation Identifiers Names and Codes (LOINC). While planning for other education and training offerings is in the works, expert-led sessions will be offered at the May Partnership conference.

The Standards Collaborative will also be undertaking engagement and partnership with its standards stakeholders. Activities to be coordinated through its Standards Collaborative Engagement and Process Services will include a stakeholder engagement strategy and framework, clinical alignment and support, communications and marketing, evaluation services, knowledge management, uptake strategies and continued work in the area of governance and transition.

“Year Two” will be another busy twelve months of trail-blazing as the Standards Collaborative moves forward with its mandate to develop, maintain, support and evolve the standards under its care. As the common standards are aligned to promote interoperability, the Standard Collaborative’s stewardship will support the establishment of a pan-Canadian EHR for all Canadians. ●