



Healthcare Market

Digital healthcare finally needs ***a solid foundation***

14.07.2026

At a glance

- The electronic patient record failed due to a lack of a solid foundation.
- Switzerland needs a national health data repository so that different systems can communicate with one another securely and reliably.
- A shared data infrastructure strengthens patient care, reduces inefficiencies, and ensures Switzerland's ability to innovate and remain competitive as a hub for research and healthcare.

The electronic patient record was intended to drive the digitization of the Swiss healthcare system. It promised greater transparency for patients, easier data exchange between healthcare providers, and less bureaucracy. Nearly ten years later, little remains of these aspirations. Usage has stagnated, the practical benefits are limited, and the project is under additional pressure due to Swiss Post's recently announced withdrawal.

The problem, however, was never a lack of will. From the very beginning, the foundation was missing: clear responsibilities, binding standards, viable funding models, and consistent incentives for use. People tried to build the roof before the foundation was in place. It is precisely this mistake that must now be corrected.

The reason is simple: doctors' offices, hospitals, and other healthcare providers use different IT systems. They store data in different formats and, technically speaking, "speak" different "languages." The patient record is intended to consolidate information from all of these systems. However, this only works effectively if the underlying data adheres to common standards.

Imagine if every bank had its own format for wire transfers, or if every railroad used a different track gauge. Neither would work. Switzerland made exactly this mistake when digitizing its healthcare system: it introduced digital solutions without first establishing common standards.

That is why we need the Swiss Health Data Space, the national health data space. This is not a central database or just another IT project, but rather a digital infrastructure with common standards and secure interfaces. This enables different systems to communicate reliably with one another.

Such infrastructure is not an end in itself. Its value only becomes apparent when all stakeholders in the healthcare system build upon it. Health data must be available where it is needed for treatment, research, and the further development of the healthcare system—of course, only with the consent of patients and in compliance with high data protection standards.

Data only realizes its full potential when it can be used securely, in a structured manner, and in a way that is interoperable. Then everyone involved benefits. Healthcare professionals gain time, duplicate tests can be avoided, drug

interactions are detected earlier, and treatments are made safer. At the same time, patients finally gain an overview of their health data and can make more informed decisions.

There is also a great deal at stake from an economic perspective. Switzerland is one of the world's leading hubs for medical technology, pharmaceuticals, and the life sciences. At the same time, the number of clinical trials has been declining for years. A key reason for this is the difficulty in accessing high-quality, standardized health data. This data forms the foundation for clinical research, personalized medicine, data-driven prevention, and applications of artificial intelligence. Without a robust data infrastructure, Switzerland will lose its innovative strength and international competitiveness.

This is not about a conflict between the government and the private sector. The digitization of the healthcare system requires both a government that creates a reliable regulatory framework and private actors who develop innovations. The government's role is to ensure standards, digital identities, data protection, and interoperability—but not to act as a market player itself. On this basis, companies, software providers, hospitals, and research institutions can compete to develop the best solutions for patients.

Experience with the electronic patient record clearly shows that Switzerland does not need more isolated solutions, but rather a shared digital infrastructure. It is now up to the federal government to lay this foundation in collaboration with private and public stakeholders. Innovative applications can then be developed in a competitive environment. The health data space is therefore not just another digitization project, but rather the prerequisite for ensuring that top-tier medical care can also be provided digitally in the future.

This article was first published on July 12, 2026, in the NZZ am Sonntag.



Fridolin Marty
Head of Health Policy

