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InfoCom spotlights innovative m-health developments in Saudi Arabia.

Advanced and interactive e-health solutions in Saudi Arabia spurred by intense mobile broadband usage — E-health government programme creates opportunities for innovative m-solutions.

Stuttgart, Germany — The popularity of different mobile devices coupled with the improvement of mobile broadband speeds and coverage have accelerated growth in mobile broadband usage in Saudi Arabia. Mobile broadband subscriptions overtook fixed broadband subscriptions for the first time in 2010 and the subscriber gap between the two technologies continues to widen as mobile broadband base reached 14.6m (1Q13) while fixed broadband trails at only 2.7m subscriptions. Thanks to this environment, the Saudi Arabian mobile market presents some very advanced mobile solutions in the sector of e-health and e-government.

The Saudi Arabian healthcare system is among the top 30 in the world (in league with most Western European standards as per the World Health Organisation). Already in 2009, Saudi Telecom Company (STC) launched its Sehhatok application, today one of the most advanced and interactive e-health solutions, enabling real-time communication between the patient and practitioner for consultations, scheduling or follow-ups.

In 2011, the Ministry of Health implemented a multi-year e-health programme to unify the different units of the healthcare system. The push of the government coupled with high mobile penetration spurred even more interest from e-health solutions providers and in the two following years, all local mobile carriers introduced m-health solutions — from diabetes monitoring services that track patients' sugar level to applications able to send ultrasound images during pregnancy. The Ministry of Health itself offers an interactive service that provides health information on medicines and disease prevention. The service provides daily SMS for SAR12 a month (about US\$3.2).

Apart from the e-health initiative, an overall e-government programme — aiming at simplifying residents' interactions with the government — opens a whole slew of potential communications services that can be offered to both residential and business customers. Since late-2012, for instance, an “m-government” portal is being developed, including also features such as m-authentication as well as toolkits to support government agencies to deploy their own mobile apps. Another initiative, slated to start in the first half of 2014, foresees the deployment of e-services through different communication channels as via mobile phones through SMS, via smartphone apps, through public Internet kiosks and via IPTV.

Saudi Arabia is a predominantly prepaid market (about 85% of the total base) though highly saturated as almost all Saudi subscribe to at least two mobile services — to separate private and business mobile lines — translating into a 171% penetration per inhabitant. The multi-SIM ownership is further stirred by the current popularity of smartphones, tablets and laptops.

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About InfoCom: InfoCom is a market research and consultancy company with over 25 years experience providing strategic analyses and planning assistance to stakeholders in the telecommunications, IT and multimedia industries. InfoCom's independent and fact-based analyses highlight trends and opportunities, supporting decision makers to understand market dynamics in order to improve their competitive advantage.

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