Implementing home-based eHealth: an active role for the government

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The province of North Brabant is ageing and becoming ever less green. As a consequence of the ageing of the population, the demand for care and the number of chronically-ill individuals are rising, and various illnesses are emerging more regularly, in combination. The elderly and people with a chronic illness are constantly calling for improved care geared to their individual needs and wish to remain living at home independently, for longer. Yet while the demand for care is rising and becoming more individual, it must be noted at the same time that fewer and fewer people are working in the care sector. As a consequence, the demand for care is increasingly being placed with informal carers and volunteers.

Developments in the field of ICT offer numerous possibilities for care support, in particular, support for care clients in their home situation. ICT applications can be used for primary care provision, with a view to: a. Increasing the availability and quality of care by providing demand-based care whenever required; b. Reducing the demand for care by aiming for self-reliance amongst clients, and c. Increasing the provision of care through the automation and planning of routine activities.

However, care is more than merely healthcare. Care also deals with wellbeing and a sense of wellness. Quality of life goes beyond your own front door. It also says something about the degree to which people have opportunities to participate in society. Reduced mobility is an important point of focus for the elderly and people with a chronic illness. Here, too, ICT applications can offer answers, above all when it comes to bridging distances, maintaining contacts and obtaining products and services. ICT can contribute to participation, social cohesion and quality of life, and hence a society hallmarked by vitality.

In the period 2008-2011, the Province of North Brabant will be promoting large-scale integrated projects in the field of e-health and e-inclusion according to good practices in its own province and other regions within Europe. The province is not implementing these projects itself, but will act as source of inspiration, director and facilitator. The central focus of the projects is to meet the demands of the elderly and people with a chronic illness to remain living at home longer and in (more) pleasant conditions, while ensuring that their quality of life remains the same or improves. In that connection, a clear differentiation is made between ICT applications for care provision and ICT applications for promoting participation in society. In terms of participation, it can for example make a difference whether the individual receiving assistance lives in a rural village or in a district of a medium-sized or large city. Finally, the Province of North Brabant is investing in knowledge, by involving knowledge institutions in the projects, for the purposes of monitoring, evaluation and dissemination.