# Health Information Interoperability Definition

Interoperability has been generically defined as “The ability of software and hardware on different machines from different vendors to share data[[1]](#footnote-1).” In a health environment, a higher degree of interoperability is required and can be measured by the degree to which all health information relevant to an individual is completely, timely, reliably, accurately, securely, and accessibly integrated to support health services provided to the individual. Above all, interoperability means that the intended meaning of the information is interpreted in the same way by the sender and the receiver. Information needs to be understood at the point of care and available to local decision support mechanisms. Achieving interoperability is no easy task due to the complexities of health concepts.

Key characteristics of health information interoperability include:

* Information is computable and understandable, i.e., the ability for information shared by systems to be understood at the level of formally defined concepts;
* Information is in a standardized, coded format whenever possible;
* Information can be used by systems addressing payment, research and clinical uses, including computations to support clinical decision making and performance measurement;
* Display of information from outside sources with that generated internally; and
* Information can be stored in coded form within a data repository other than the repository that generated it.

1. <http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/I/interoperability.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)