Priority setting methods in health information

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Background
Priority setting is a challenge at all levels and contexts in health systems because demand for health care usually exceeds available resources. The development of health goals is used in many countries to address emerging health needs. But there is virtually no consensus regarding which, or whose, values should guide decisions and how these values should inform priority setting. While key health system goals like access, efficiency and quality are broadly shared across countries they involve complex decision making. Priority setting differs across countries and within service areas. This paper aims to identify methods to inform the gradual development and focused expansion of European Health Information.

Methods
A questionnaire was sent to BRIDGE Health partners to survey current practice. In addition, a systematic literature review is in progress to collect relevant information on priority setting methods. Grey literature will be looked at by a targeted search of websites from international organizations and a selection of countries. Results from the EU health system indicator survey will be used to showcase expert assessment in defining levels of indicators and in identifying data gaps in relevant areas.

Results
Questionnaire results indicate that 40% of BRIDGE partners have been involved in priority setting methods. While more than 50% indicate that they are aware of best practice, priority setting is said to be often opportunistic and driven by the availability of relevant data. Structured development of country level health goals as a priority setting methods appears rare.

Conclusions
While questionnaire results indicate rather erratic approaches to priority setting, findings from the systematic literature review and the euHS_I survey are expected to shed better light on useful methods in this area. Priority setting is key in framing a health information infrastructure.