



Media release

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Nation empowered through improved digital health services

Digital information is the bedrock of high quality healthcare. Harnessing the power of the modern information revolution is one of the first priorities for governments to improve the safety and efficiency of healthcare through better use of data and technology.

Australian Digital Health Agency CEO Tim Kelsey delivered his *Your Health in Your Hands – the Digital Evolution of Health and Care in Australia* speech at the National Press Club today and outlined the collaboration needed between governments, consumers, clinicians, and entrepreneurs to make data and technology work better for modern health.

“Australia has one of the best systems in the world – by any measure. We are at the forefront of medical research, we have world-class facilities, and the people that provide care are among the most highly skilled and committed professionals anywhere.

“But the hum and whirr of the fax machine in the background of our care services reminds us that there is more to do: paper based healthcare means that clinicians do not always have the right information at the right time to make the best decision,” Mr Kelsey said.

Mr Kelsey said that *Australia’s National Digital Health Strategy – Safe, Seamless, and Secure* underpins the country’s vision for digital health. My Healthy Record is the strategy’s top priority because it puts consumers at the centre of their health care and provides choice, control, and transparency.

More than 5.7 million Australians currently have a My Health Record. By the end of 2018 Australia will be the first country of its size in the world to provide mobile records to every person, unless they choose to opt out. By 2019, every registered clinician will have a secure means of communicating digitally, without resort to paper or a fax machine.

Damien Taylor is one of many parents who has experienced firsthand the benefits of My Health Record. His young daughter Maggie underwent open-heart surgery for a congenital heart defect at seven months old.

“Maggie’s medicines, conditions, and hospital stay information were captured in My Health Record so we won’t need to keep hard copy records and try and remember everything at each medical appointment in the future,” Mr Taylor said.

Dr Elizabeth Jackson also believes digital health is the way forward for Australia’s healthcare system. The Cairns-based obstetrician and gynaecologist uses My Health Record to provide her expectant patients with peace of mind throughout their pregnancies.

“My Health Record is an incredibly valuable tool. It allows 24/7 access to patient records and allows us to work together as a team to deliver high-quality and cost-effective medical outcomes,” Dr Jackson said

A national communications strategy will be implemented to inform all Australians of the benefits of digital health, and to explain the opt out process. During the opt out period individuals who do not want a record will be able to opt out by visiting the My Health Record website or by calling 1800 723 471 for phone based assistance.

Engagement at a local level in community and in trusted healthcare provider settings is a central pillar of the communication strategy with research confirming that 89% of people will expect to receive information about My Health Record from their health care provider.



“The benefits of My Health Record must be accessible to all Australians. There has been a particular focus in our communications research on developing appropriate support for people with limited digital literacy or access, and other groups including people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and people living in rural and remote communities,” Mr Kelsey said.

The Agency is also working with more than 100 partner organisations, including the Primary Health Networks, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, and Australia Post to inform the Australian public about My Health Record, its security controls, benefits, and their rights to opt out.

Information will also be made available in over 15,000 health care locations including general practices, pharmacies, public and private hospitals, and via Aboriginal Medical Services and National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations.

Australia Post Chief Executive Christine Holgate said the company is pleased to announce that it will be working closely with the Agency to support the national expansion of My Health Record with 3600 Australia Post outlets reaching up to two million Australians over the three month opt out period.

“Australia Post recognises the critical benefits of My Health Record for improved health sector outcomes. We will support the expansion program through traditional postal and parcel services, and promotion through our extensive post office network,” Ms Holgate said.

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Further information

For further information visit www.myhealthrecord.gov.au or call 1800 723 471.

Peak health bodies support My Health Record

There is widespread peak health body support my Health Record.

Consumers Health Forum (CHF) CEO Leanne Wells said healthcare has lagged behind in exploiting the clear benefits of information technology to provide prompt, secure, and precise patient information.

“For these benefits to be realised and a consumer-centred and digitally enabled health care system to become a reality, consumers will need to be involved in using and improving innovations such as My Health Record,” Ms Wells said.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) President Dr Michael Gannon said the current system of medical records means that we may have incomplete information on a patient – especially if the patient has recently seen another specialist, or has been discharged from a hospital.

“My Health Record will result is doctors having access to better information, in a more timely fashion, via secure means. Less time chasing up paperwork means more time can be spent treating our patients,” Dr Gannon said.

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) President Dr Bastian Seidel said most Australians are digitally connected so it makes sense that both healthcare providers and their patients have access to digital health services.

“The RACGP is supporting GPs to prepare for the My Health Record opt out process and to make informed decisions about the use of the system in their practice,” Dr Seidel said.



Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) National President Dr Shane Jackson said that My Health Record is a game changer for pharmacists' contribution to enhancing medication safety and ensuring quality use of medicines.

"By integrating the My Health Record system into their practice, pharmacists will be able to optimise the outcomes associated with medicines. The information available in the My Health Record system will allow pharmacists to deliver more effective and efficient care," Dr Jackson said.

Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President George Tambassis said that the national expansion of My Health Record will support increased use of the system by pharmacists and sustainable healthcare delivery.

"The Guild is committed to helping build the digital health capabilities of community pharmacies and advance the efficiency, quality, and delivery of healthcare to improve health outcomes for all Australians.

"We are working with the Australian Digital Health Agency to ensure that community pharmacy dispensing and medicine-related services are fully integrated into the My Health Record," Mr Tambassis said.

Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) CEO Alison Verhoeven said that opt out provides a suitable and appropriate balance between the clinician's need for information and the patient's right to privacy.

"While further work is required to fully integrate with hospital clinical information systems, My Health Record now offers a 'medicines view' showing patient medications and related information, and an increasing number of clinical documents such as referrals, shared health summaries and pathology and diagnostic imaging reports. This information will empowering clinicians to make timely decisions in consultation with their patients," Ms Verhoeven said.

Partner organisations support My Health Record

AHPA Chair and Australian Physiotherapy Association CEO Cris Massis said My Health Record will help the organisation's 100,000 allied health professionals to improve delivery of healthcare across Australia.

"Allied health professions provide crucial support for people experiencing disability, chronic illness and a wide range of other health issues. Use of My Health Record will allow allied health services to be fully integrated into our health system and to ensure delivery of quality health care for every Australian," Mr Massis said.

Arthritis Australia CEO Ms Ainslie Cahill said My Health Record is of great benefit both to people with arthritis and to their healthcare team by providing access to all of an individual's health related information in the one place.

"If you have arthritis you often have to see many health professionals to help you manage your condition, and it can be difficult to remember information about tests or treatments they have prescribed.

"Communication between providers can also break down sometimes, leading to fragmented care. With a My Health Record, you and your health care team can access all your up-to-date health care information whenever it is needed, so your care is safer, more effective, and better integrated," Ms Cahill said.

Australian Association of Practice Management (AAPM) President Cathy Baynie said that the organisation supports digital health technologies such as My Health Record that help reduce the administrative burden on practice managers.



“Practice managers have an important role to ensure their organisations operate efficiently to maximise productivity while providing a safe service to the satisfaction of patients. The national expansion of My Health Record will improve our member’s efficiency, increase clinical utility, and help deliver improved patient healthcare,” Ms Baynie said.

Australian College of Nursing (ACN) CEO Kylie Ward said that the organisation strongly supports the opt out approach to My Health Record which will ensure Australians are provided with improved health care delivery.

“It is an exciting time for patients in Australia to be empowered by having their health records accessible on a digital platform. A shared electronic health record will allow health professionals looking after patients to have access to their medical history, regardless of where they are in Australia.

“My Health Record will improve patient safety by making a patient’s medical history accessible to all members of the health care team. An opt-out approach makes it quick and hassle-free for Australians to participate, while still enabling people to opt-out if they so choose.”

“Nurses will have a key role in educating patients on the use of electronic health records and their options,” Adjunct Professor Ward said.

Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) President Dr Simon Judkins said providing quality care in a modern health system relies on accessible and accurate clinical and patient information.

“The continued support of the My Health Record, with centralised clinical information and appropriate protections in place, ensures that health practitioners and patients can work together to allow for safe, effective and inclusive care.

“The ability for hospital emergency departments to coordinate with primary health care providers through using a digital health record is valuable. This offers the potential to improve the interaction of patients and emergency physicians, the quality of patient care as well as improving efficiency of health care delivery,” Mr Judkins said

Australian Men's Shed Association Executive Officer David Helmers said that the organisation is partnering with the Australian Digital Health Agency to distribute My Health Record toolkits to members around Australia.

“This is an important step and opportunity for men to take more control over their health. The Men's Shed movement aims to advance the wellbeing of Australian men and My Health Record is another step towards achieving this goal,” Mr Helmers said.

Carers Australia CEO Ara Cresswell said My Health Record can also assist with carers or loved ones who want to assist the patient going through palliative care.

“My Health Record can lessen the stress of having to remember details of the diagnoses and treatments of others, and help prevent adverse medication events. The ability to upload the patient’s end-of-life preferences can also lessen the distress of those forced into making very difficult decisions on behalf of a family member not able to communicate their own wishes.”



Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA) Chair Mary Patetsos said the organisation is pleased to work with the Agency to ensure that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Australians are empowered to make an informed decision about the My Health Record.”

“My Health Record has many benefits for CALD consumers, particularly those who are older or who have lower levels of English proficiency. The My Health Record will support communication between CALD consumers and their health provider leading to better outcomes.

“It is also important that CALD consumers are comfortable engaging with the tool – and know how to opt out if they wish,” Ms Patetsos said.

Leading Aged Services Australia (LASA) CEO Sean Rooney said it is well accepted that providing integrated care for patients as they transition across the primary care, acute care, mental health, and aged care sectors is of benefit.

“By enabling information sharing between the various parts of the Australian health system, including aged care, digital health has the potential to enable programs and initiatives that integrate care, wrapping it around the needs of patients.

“LASA, Australia’s voice of aged care, is pleased to undertake this collaborative communication work with the Agency around the My Health Record expansion program, both prior to and during the opt-out period,” Mr Rooney said.

Mental Health Australia CEO Frank Quinlan said the organisation is looking forward to working with the Agency to spread the word about My Health Record.

“Consumers and carers are at the heart of our advocacy at Mental Health Australia, and any system to improve their experience, and ultimately benefit the care they receive, is a health benefit to all,” Mr Quinlan said.

National Farmers’ Federation (NFF) President Fiona Simson said the federation was well placed to reach rural and remote Australians.

“The NFF is the peak body representing all Australian farmers. The farm sector is the bedrock of our regional communities. The health of our farmers and those in our communities is a number one priority.

“The opportunity to improve the health services offered to regional Australians is always welcomed. To this end, the NFF supports the My Health Record initiative.

“We are pleased to be working with the Digital Health Agency to communicate to regional Australians the benefits of My Health Record,” Mr Simson said.

National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) Board Chairperson Tanya Lehmann said the organisation has worked for decades to improve the health of people in rural and remote areas, and she strongly supports the benefits of a digital health record.

“My Health Record will give country people and their healthcare providers a summary of their medical condition, past treatments, and prescribed medicines. It will be a one-stop shop of someone’s health history.

“This is critical for people in rural and remote areas who need to travel long distances for treatment, and often don’t see the same GP or health provider.



“The Alliance is well placed to reach rural and remote Australians because of the diversity of its membership including consumer groups such as the Country Women’s Association of Australia, key organisations in the Aboriginal and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector, health professional organisations, and service providers such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service,” Ms Lehmann said.

Palliative Care Australia CEO Liz Callaghan said that palliative care is not just care provided in the final stages of life, but helps those affected to live well with a terminal illness.

“People accessing palliative care services often have complex needs and their care team includes many health professionals including pharmacists, doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals. My Health Record makes it easier for those professionals to share information about medications, test results, and care plans.

Playgroup Australia Chair Taylor Tran said playgroups are a unique social forum where parents and carers can discuss and learn about the best options for their family. The My Health Record Expansion Program is an initiative designed to better use health data to achieve for effective outcomes for Australian families.

“Playgroup Australia is pleased to have the opportunity to present information to families so that they are well placed to make an informed choice regarding their participation on the My Health Record Expansion Program,” Mr Tran said.

Public Health Association of Australia President David Templeman said that beyond the initial benefits of helping doctors and patients keep more accurate and detailed medical histories in electronic form, My Health Record also holds great potential for preventive health.

“The PHAA advocates strongly for better management of chronic disease in Australia through preventive health measures, and the My Health Record program will allow for significant data collection which will help us to map out hotspots of chronic disease. The identification of high-risk areas will demonstrate further the importance of the social determinants of health and health equity for which PHAA strongly advocates,” Mr Templeman said.

Research Australia CEO Nadia Levin said My Health Record system and similar digital platforms around the world can support researchers, policy makers, and the community in understanding the way personal health records can support better health outcomes and health system improvement.

UniSport Australia Chair, Deirdre Anderson said the organisation is thrilled to be partnering with the Australian Digital Health Agency.

“UniSport Australia is always proud to advocate evidence aimed at improving the wellbeing of students, athletes, and young Australians. We believe My Health Record will be invaluable to student-athletes and all young adults, offering streamlined record keeping.

“We trust this development in digital health will allow us to continue working towards our vision of cultivating healthy, active, engaged, and well-rounded university students through a higher standard of medical attention,” Ms Anderson said.

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About the Australian Digital Health Agency

The Agency is tasked with improving health outcomes for all Australians through the delivery of digital healthcare systems, and implementing *Australia's National Digital Health Strategy – Safe, Seamless, and Secure: evolving health and care to meet the needs of modern Australia* in collaboration with partners across the community. The Agency is the System Operator of My Health Record, and provides leadership, coordination, and delivery of a collaborative and innovative approach to utilising technology to support and enhance a clinically safe and connected national health system. These improvements will give individuals more control of their health and their health information, and support healthcare providers to deliver informed healthcare through access to current clinical and treatment information. Further information: www.digitalhealth.gov.au.