

## FACT SHEET

### A NATIONAL APPROACH TO SHARING HEALTH INFORMATION

#### Background

NEHTA Limited is a not-for-profit company established by the Australian Federal, State and Territory governments in July 2005 to develop better ways of electronically collecting and securely exchanging health information.

Electronic health information (or e-health) systems that can securely and effectively exchange data can significantly improve how healthcare providers communicate important clinical information about patients. As a result, e-health systems have the potential to unlock substantial healthcare quality, safety and efficiency benefits.

People require health care throughout the course of their lives, regardless of where they are. However, the ability of healthcare professionals to access up-to-date health information about an individual whenever and wherever necessary, is limited and fragmented. This is due to the shortcomings of paper-based records, or, where computerised clinical records are available, the inability of these records to be shared across different computer software systems. This results in individual points of care becoming 'islands of information'.

Lack of timely access to relevant information increases the risk of individuals not receiving appropriate care. For example, the 1994 Quality in Health Care study concluded that there was a clear link between avoidable deaths in hospital and communication problems and poor record keeping. It also results in an accumulation of inefficiencies in the health care system, such as the unnecessary repetition of diagnostic tests.

#### Establishing national foundations

The sharing of health information is best addressed through a national approach.

NEHTA is therefore establishing the national foundations to Shared Electronic Health Records (SEHRs) – records which will contain selected health information about an individual, which can be shared between multiple points of care while maintaining high standards of privacy and security.

The primary purpose of the SEHR will be to improve the quality and safety of healthcare experiences. Secondary purposes of the SEHR include public health and policy planning, and supporting safety initiatives, disease detection, research and education.

The national SEHR approach will involve the creation of one (or more) SEHR Service(s), which will maintain, and provide access to, the SEHR of those individuals who choose to participate in that Service.

Healthcare providers and organisations will be able to contribute information to an individual's SEHR by keeping electronic records of patient interactions, and using software which is compatible with the SEHR Service(s). This software will allow healthcare providers to maintain their own detailed records, while ensuring that the most critical information can be easily included in the individual's SEHR, without the need for double data entry. Providers will also be able to see summarised views from the individual's SEHR.

The national approach to SEHRs provides an opportunity for vendors to create solutions that are capable of bridging the gap between the needs of particular clinical groups/specialities and the broader care continuum supported by the SEHR Service(s).

#### NEHTA's SEHR Contribution

NEHTA's work program is currently centred on producing specifications and standards for the SEHR, including:

- Recommending SEHR standards for adoption in the Australian health sector. NEHTA has retained an independent e-health consultant to review the standards being developed around the world. From this NEHTA will define the structure and content of SEHRs; assess their use and potential impact on future Australian developments; and recommend the most appropriate SEHR specifications for adoption.
- Defining requirements for a national approach to SEHRs. NEHTA is developing, for consultation, operating concepts for a national approach to SEHRs. Based on these operating concepts, the requirements for a national approach to SEHRs will be defined and a privacy impact assessment process will be undertaken.

### Relationship to other NEHTA Initiatives

NEHTA currently has a number of initiatives underway to deliver secure, interoperable e-health systems, many of which are highly relevant to NEHTA's SEHR work. This includes:

- Establishing standard clinical terms for diagnoses, medicines, treatments and therapies so that one e-health system can understand the information produced by another system;
- Setting standards for the types of priority clinical information – for example, discharge summaries, referrals, etc - to be communicated by e-health systems;
- Identifying a secure means of electronically transferring clinical information - such as prescriptions for example - between authorised healthcare professionals in a way that maintain privacy;
- Establishing an overall framework for how the various e-health systems interoperate;
- Developing unique identifiers for individuals and healthcare providers to ensure that the information is attributed to the right patient and the right provider;
- Developing a framework for involving local and international standards organisations, to support implementation; and
- Pursuing opportunities for supply chain reform across the health sector – supporting the purchasing of medications and medical devices in particular.

For further information go to [www.nehta.gov.au](http://www.nehta.gov.au).

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