

## FACT SHEET TRUSTED E-HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS

### Background

NEHTA Limited is a not-for-profit company established by the Australian, State and Territory governments 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 and use each other's data (i.e. be interoperable) can significantly improve how clinical and administrative information is communicated between healthcare providers. As a result, e-health systems have the potential to unlock substantially greater safety, quality and efficiency benefits in healthcare.

It is vital, however, that the exchange of health information is conducted in an appropriately secure manner.

There are a number of current examples of information being transferred securely in the health sector. However, the current situation cannot meet the diverse and increasing demands of e-health. The reasons for this are outlined below.

#### *Compatibility*

Currently, the e-health systems in use in different public health institutions are generally incompatible and unable to exchange health information safely. Setting standards for secure electronic messaging is important to ensure safe information exchange across all systems.

#### *Coherency*

A plethora of different approaches to secure messaging currently exists across the health sector, as each e-health vendor is able to choose or develop their own approach. This creates significant costs as a complex range of skills must be employed to maintain them.

#### *Scale*

The simple point-to-point messaging that occurs today is not capable of efficiently handling the future demands of e-health for large scale and complex information interactions.

#### *Sustainability*

E-health technologies, like all technologies, must adapt to the emerging needs of e-health and the inevitable demands for existing services to be put to new uses, with minimal impact on users. Current information transfer approaches are generally designed for a specific purpose and therefore not all are readily adaptable to this complex set of ever-changing requirements.

### NEHTA's Contribution

NEHTA's secure messaging initiative will provide the foundation for secure electronic communications amongst healthcare providers, by defining a set of secure messaging standards to be used in e-health.

These standards will allow for a flexible and dynamic approach to e-health interoperability and can help ensure the evolution of an e-health environment that is sustainable and affordable.

Creating secure messaging standards does not mean that everything achieved to date needs to be turned off. A transition strategy has been released by NEHTA which defines a common environment for secure information transfer. It also outlines a means by which the healthcare sector can move to such an environment, and how this transition will be supported by NEHTA.

### 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, or strongly dependent upon the secure transmission of messages. NEHTA's work includes:

- Developing unique identifiers for individual patients and healthcare providers to verify that information relates to the right patient and is being accessed by the right clinician;
- Providing mechanisms to ensure that the identity of those seeking to access health information is properly authenticated;
- Establishing an overall framework for interoperable e-health systems;
- Setting standards for how priority health information – eg referrals, hospital discharge records - is captured by e-health systems;
- Establishing standard clinical terms for use by e-health systems, so that systems use consistent terms to describe the same disease, therapy, medicine; and
- Designing specifications for secure electronic health records, to enable authorised healthcare professionals to view the collated health history of an individual while maintaining high standards of privacy.

NEHTA is also involving local/international standards organisations to support the implementation of NEHTA's work.

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

### Secure Messaging Contact

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