

FACT SHEET

A NATIONAL INTEROPERABILITY FRAMEWORK FOR E-HEALTH

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 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.

In order to achieve effective exchange of data across the healthcare sector, systems need to work together. Currently e-health systems and products require significant integration effort to get e-health pieces working together as the building blocks for an interoperability environment are not in place. There is a lack of common concepts and patterns for e-health business, information, and technology issues hence each system is built upon different and incompatible foundations.

Also, when selecting an e-health product or integrating into an existing system, it is increasingly difficult to measure the 'interoperability factor', as purchasers cannot benchmark products against proven standards.

An interoperability framework

To address this issue NEHTA has developed an overarching e-health interoperability framework, agreed to by all Australian governments. Future e-health systems purchased by Australian governments will need to demonstrate their compliance with a local architecture that is in turn compliant with the NEHTA interoperability framework.

The e-health interoperability framework:

- Establishes common e-health concepts, principles and standards to promote and enable interoperability at a technology, health information, organisational and stakeholder level;
- Ensures that in the future e-health systems can be predictably augmented with regard changes in technology, health information, stakeholders or personnel; and
- Addresses compliance of e-health systems with NEHTA's interoperability requirements,

including the approach to testing and certifying health IT systems that claim to be interoperable.

The interoperability framework provides the basis for defining an e-health architecture including identifying e-health requirements; specifying e-health technical approaches through products and technologies; testing conformance to interoperability requirements; value assessment; and change management.

Although primarily targeted at the public sector, the benefits of the interoperability framework are expected to penetrate the private sector.

Relationship to other NEHTA Initiatives

NEHTA currently has several initiatives underway to deliver secure, interoperable e-health systems, many of which are highly relevant to, and strongly dependent upon, the interoperability framework. This work includes:

- Setting standards for how priority health information – e.g. 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 etc;
- Identifying a secure means of electronically transferring health information between authorised healthcare professionals;
- 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;
- Developing unique identifiers for individuals, healthcare providers and medical products, so that the right information is assigned to the right patient;
- Developing a mechanism for involving local/international standards organisations to support the implementation of NEHTA's work; and
- Pursuing opportunities for supply chain reform across the health sector.

For further information go to www.nehta.gov.au

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