

Setting foundations for e-health with healthcare identifiers

FAQs for Individuals

nehta

National E-Health Transition Authority
www.nehta.gov.au

A better healthcare experience for you and your family

In Australia we enjoy a health system that up to now has ensured we have access to quality healthcare when we need it. However, maintaining or improving the health outcomes for all Australians requires a fundamental change to the way healthcare is delivered.

We have to move away from a reliance on tools such as pen, paper and human memory to an environment where you and your care providers can reliably and securely access and share health information in real time, from anywhere to anywhere. The only way we can achieve this is through a world-class e-health capability.

One of the first 'e-health things' we are doing is introducing a standard process across the health sector to accurately identify you when you seek healthcare. This is a small step in e-health but it will go a long way to reducing medical mix-ups or your information being assigned to another patient or sent to the wrong place.

E-health will deliver to all Australians a secure person-controlled individual electronic health record.



To realise the benefits of e-health we need a way to identify individuals seeking healthcare, and the professionals and organisations providing care

In mid 2010, Individual Healthcare Identifiers (IHIs) will be given to all Australian residents and others seeking healthcare in Australia. Strong privacy and robust security protections and policies will underpin how your health information is handled. The way in which this information is collected, used or disclosed is regulated by privacy laws that are set out in legislation, including health records legislation and other obligations, such as confidentiality.

Q: What is an IHI?

A: An IHI is a unique 16 digit number that will be allocated to each Australian resident and others seeking healthcare in Australia. Your IHI will be unique and only apply to you for use in health information records alongside your name and date of birth. No clinical information will be linked to your identifier. Healthcare providers and healthcare organisations will also have their own unique identifiers.

Q: Why introduce IHIs?

A: Communication of health information is a vital part of effective healthcare. The accurate identification of individuals is critical in all health communication.

Using an IHI provides a way for healthcare providers to more consistently match the right records to the person they are treating and improve accuracy when communicating information with other healthcare providers. This will help to avoid medical mix-ups or your information being recorded on another patient's file.

Q: Why not use the Medicare number?

A: A Medicare number is not unique. Some people have more than one Medicare number because they are members of more than one family and may be on multiple cards. Also, not everyone who needs healthcare will have a Medicare number.

Healthcare Identifiers

Q: How will it work?

A: When you visit a doctor or go to a hospital or clinic for treatment, the healthcare provider can obtain your IHI from the Health Identifier Service (HI Service) via phone or an online service. The IHI will then be added to your healthcare records along with your name and other identifying information.

Only authorised healthcare providers can use the HI service to access your IHI. Strong privacy and security protections and policies will continue to underpin how your health information is handled. If your health information needs to be provided to another healthcare provider, such as in a referral or hospital discharge summary, your IHI can be included with the information to allow more accurate communication.

On a practical level, use of the IHI is similar to using your name and date of birth to reference information. A number is however a more reliable way of referencing information, particularly in electronic systems.

Q: What do I need to do to get an IHI?

A: If you are enrolled with Medicare or the Department of Veterans' Affairs, you will automatically be allocated an IHI. When you seek healthcare, your healthcare provider will contact the HI Service Operator (initially Medicare) to get your number.

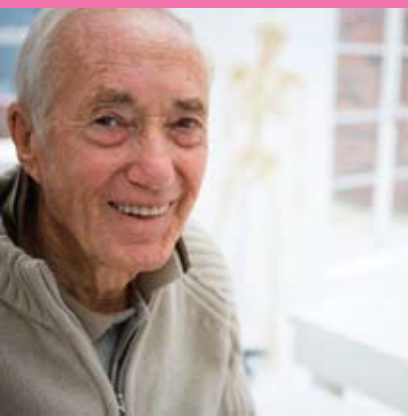
If you are not enrolled in Medicare or the Department of Veterans' Affairs, you may be provided with a temporary IHI number when you next seek healthcare. This temporary number can be validated through the HI Service Operator and will become your unique IHI. The HI Service will authenticate the process to ensure your IHI relates only to you.

Q: Are IHIs needed to receive healthcare?

A: An IHI is not a requirement for healthcare in Australia. If your health provider is unable to obtain your IHI from the HI Service, or your IHI is not available for any reason, you will not be refused treatment.

One of the most important reasons for introducing a healthcare identifier is that it is unconditionally tied to improving the delivery of safe, quality care.

Healthcare Identifiers



Q: When will IHIs be available?

A: It is planned to have the IHIs available from mid 2010. It is important to note that the numbers cannot be allocated and used until necessary legislation is in place.

Q: How will the IHI improve healthcare communication?

A: There are four key areas where the use of IHIs to support the safe and secure electronic exchange of information will deliver immediate benefits for you and your family:

Discharge summaries – When a patient leaves hospital, and information about ongoing care is communicated to their healthcare provider/s, the provider will be able to more accurately match the information to the correct patient.

Pathology Tests – When a patient's tests results are sent to their healthcare provider/s, the provider will be able to more accurately match the test results to the correct patient record.

Prescriptions – Pharmacists can be more confident when receiving electronically lodged scripts that the script is matched to the correct patient, resulting in safer dispensing of medications.

Referrals – When patient records and case histories are communicated between the referring healthcare provider and a specialist, the specialist can more efficiently check they have the correct information for the correct patient.

If a healthcare provider such as your GP needs to provide information to another healthcare provider in the course of providing treatment, your IHI will clearly identify that the information is about you.

Q: Can I have more than one IHI?

A: It is intended that you will only have one IHI, and that there will be no need to change or renew this number at any stage.

There are circumstances where you may have more than one IHI. This could include, for example, in an emergency situation where a provider may not be able to determine who you are. In this case, a temporary IHI may be issued. If you already have an IHI, then your temporary IHI will be merged with this once you or a family member is able to provide information about who you are.

If your healthcare provider needs to provide information to another provider, such as a specialist, your IHI will clearly identify you to the provider or organisation receiving your information.

Healthcare Identifiers

Q: Will healthcare providers and organisations also be issued with identifiers?

A: Yes, healthcare providers and organisations will also be issued with unique healthcare identifiers. These unique identifiers will be known as:

Healthcare Provider Identifiers – Individual (HPI-I) for healthcare professionals and other health personnel involved in patient care, and

Healthcare Provider Identifiers – Organisation (HPI-O) that will identify the organisation (such as the hospital or health clinic) where care is provided.

Identifiers for healthcare providers give an additional layer of certainty to ensure that health information can be communicated accurately and efficiently. They reduce the chance that health information may be inadvertently sent to the wrong provider and they improve the flow of health information when this is needed to support timely decision making as part of healthcare. The HI Service will also be responsible for assigning identifiers for providers and organisations.

Q: What processes will be in place for people who need to access the service on another's behalf?

A: Healthcare consumers are often supported by other people when accessing healthcare services. Work is underway with stakeholders to ensure that the HI Service has provisions in place that are flexible enough to support the types of arrangements regularly encountered in the healthcare sector, such as a carer or advocate acting for a person with impaired decision-making abilities. The HI Service will have clearly set out arrangements to provide for situations where a person may need to access the Service on another's behalf.

Q: How will information held by the HI Service be protected?

A: The HI Service will protect individual privacy through both legislation and technical means, such as agreed security and access controls. Legislation is being developed to establish the HI Service, and will set out governance arrangements, privacy and permitted uses of healthcare identifiers. In addition, current privacy laws will continue to apply.

To minimise risks to privacy, the HI Service will only store the minimum amount of personal information required to uniquely identify individuals. No clinical information is required or will be held by the HI Service.

Q: Can I access the information that the HI Service holds about me?

A: Yes. Current laws that provide you with the right to access your personal information will continue to apply.

Today, when privacy and security are more important than ever NEHTA has been proactive in complying with strict statutory requirements. Visit the NEHTA website for more information on Privacy Protection: www.nehta.gov.au

Healthcare Identifiers

Q: Who will be responsible for assigning IHIs?

A: A national Healthcare Identifiers Service (HI Service) is being established to assign and maintain healthcare identifiers. Medicare Australia will be the initial operator of the HI Service. As a trusted government authority, Medicare has the national infrastructure, as well as the industry and community relationships needed to securely deliver and maintain the healthcare identifiers.

The HI Service will be a separate and new Medicare Australia function, not linked to its funding or claims for payment functions. As a statutory agency, Medicare Australia is governed by national legislation that sets out the scope of the functions it can perform and the privacy and security it must maintain for the personal information it holds.

Public Consultations

Q: What consultation has been undertaken to date?

A: On 13 July 2009 a discussion paper was released seeking comments on legislative proposals to support the establishment and implementation of unique identifiers for healthcare purposes and the privacy of health information. Consultation closed on 14 August 2009, and 90 submissions were received from stakeholders. In addition consultation forums were conducted for consumer, provider, industry organisations to have input.

Q: Where can I find out more about IHIs and the national e-health agenda?

A: More detail on the strategic direction for e-health in Australia is provided in the National E-Health Strategy – visit: www.health.gov.au. Information is also available from NEHTA's website visit – www.nehta.gov.au. Additional information for consumers and healthcare providers will be made available on the Department of Health and Ageing eHealth website over the coming months – visit: www.health.gov.au.

Q: How can I contribute?

A: There will be opportunity to provide feedback on the legislative proposals for healthcare identifiers during the development of the legislation. Details will be posted on the Department of Health and Ageing eHealth website as they are available – visit: www.health.gov.au. You can also provide your views on e-health as part of the national health reform agenda set up in response to a report from the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission – visit: www.yourhealth.gov.au

Q: What role does the National E-Health Transition Authority (NEHTA) play in this work?

A: NEHTA is Australia's peak body in the design and development of government e-health initiatives. NEHTA is a joint initiative of the national, state and territory governments tasked with leading the design of e-health initiatives, including identifiers for individuals and healthcare providers.

The health identifier system will improve the security and quality of health information by reducing errors and clearly identifying everyone involved in healthcare transactions.



nehta

National E-Health Transition Authority
www.nehta.gov.au