



Executive Summary

Electronic Referrals Release 1.0

Introduction

As a strategic part of the emerging e-health infrastructure currently taking shape across Australia, this package release was based upon several key design requirements.

Shaped by stakeholder consultation, this release gathers up-to-date intelligence and expertise from participating clinical, administrative and analytical communities, and offers leadership towards a truly national referrals solution.

As the first step, it provides infrastructure partners with testable specifications and methods, offering immediate clinical advantages for patients and healthcare professionals, while providing a basis for improved coverage and sophistication into the future.

This release recognises the need for detailed consultation with the wider national healthcare community in order to develop solutions that deliver both immediate and longer-term benefits to health care providers and their patients. Security and privacy requirements are also acknowledged, as is the need to ensure that the technical coding and exchange of patient information is conducted appropriately.

The e-Referrals package contains the foundation for a national referrals framework, validated through stakeholder participation, and balancing specific interests with the need for a national consensus towards a sustainable healthcare future.

Purpose

This package is intended to initiate and foster the ongoing development of a series of national specifications and methods to support the structured exchange of patient referral information between clinicians.

Approach & Consultation

As several jurisdictions and health care providers are currently working toward state-based referral systems, a repeatable implementation strategy has been adopted to allow for the iterative uptake of NEHTA specifications over time, and the development of national, interoperable referral solutions.

Accordingly, the approach adopted in this release is both consultative and incremental; in this way, participating stakeholders are able to shape the development of the national referral standard and its implementation within their specific clinical context. Consequently, participants will be better able to ensure that referral-related change is enabling and meaningful.

The first stage of the development process focused on defining the clinical content of the referral message, using NEHTA's 'GP and Specialist Care Referral – Data Content Specification' (2007) as its reference point. During this stage the following stakeholders were invited to provide input into the drafting of the e-Referrals Core Information Components document: ACT Division of General Practice, Australian Capital Territory Department of Health, Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in

Health Care, Australian General Practice Network, Australian Healthcare & Hospitals Association, Department of Defence (Australian Government), Department of Health and Families (Northern Territory Government), Department of Health and Human Services (Tasmania), Department of Health (Government of Western Australia), Department of Human Services (State Government of Victoria), Department of Veterans' Affairs, General Practice Network NT, General Practice NSW, General Practice Queensland, General Practice SA, General Practice Tasmania, General Practice Victoria, GP Workforce Tasmania, Health Workforce Queensland, Mater Health Services, NSW Department of Health (New South Wales Government), NSW Rural Doctors Network, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Rural Doctors Workforce Agency, Rural Health West, Rural Workforce Agency (Victoria), SA Health, The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association Ltd, The Royal Australasian College of Physicians, The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Western Australian General Practice Network.

The second stage focused on the business and technical requirements needed to enable the sending of an electronic referral message from general practitioners to specialists. Major inputs included a workshop conducted with a representative group of clinicians to define the business processes associated with the transmission of referral messages, and a review of an initial draft of the Business Requirements and Solution Design documents by a nationally-representative group including the vendor community. The following stakeholders were then invited to contribute to and review these two documents: Department of Health and Ageing, Department of Human Services (Victoria), Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), Medicare Australia, and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP).

Thirdly, a clinical safety assessment is currently underway on the draft referrals package. An initial assessment has been undertaken and the recommendations reviewed and addressed to the satisfaction of the NEHTA Clinical Safety Team. The package documents are deemed suitable for public release. Clinical safety assessment will continue during the external review process to 30 April 2010 and the Clinical Safety Team will be required to approve the package prior to finalisation and public release.

Benefits

The referral package is designed to provide safety and quality benefits, each intended to scale with adoption rates. These are achieved through improved:

- accuracy of demographic information via healthcare identifiers, promoting the rapid identification of patients, providers and services, minimising duplicate records and accelerating decisive information exchanges
- accuracy of clinical information via secure and structured communications between referrers (general practitioners) and referees (specialists), promoting safety, error reduction and reduced duplication of clinical and administrative effort
- cost-efficiencies via increasing interoperability of practices and systems, with a corresponding decrease in miscommunication and associated risks
- coordination of services and treatments, from diagnosis to interventions, leading to increasingly-integrated care potentials, nationwide.

Structure

The e-Referral Release 1.0 package is built upon a series of interlocking national infrastructure services, developed by NEHTA's e-Health Foundations program, specifically designed to support the appropriate exchange of clinical and administrative information between participating healthcare providers.

The relevant e-Health Foundations include the Individual Healthcare Identifier (IHI), the Healthcare Provider Identifier (HPI), the National Authentication Service for Health (NASH) and Secure Messaging (SM). These foundation services are at varying stages of readiness, and it is therefore acknowledged that local or interim infrastructure services will need to be commissioned in order to support the initial transfer of information. NEHTA's e-Referrals are part of 'e-Communications in Practice', also including e-Discharge Summaries, e-Medication Management and e-Pathology.

Content

The release is composed of two introductory and three key documents:



Figure 1 Referral Package Document Map

The Business Requirements Specification describes the high level requirements for the creation, delivery and receipt of referrals for patients, typically between general practitioners and specialists.

The Solution Design defines national guidelines and specifications that implementers should adopt when developing referral solutions in order to allow future interoperability.

Finally, the Core Information Components document defines the information components being recommended for use when exchanging referrals within Australia.

Feedback

The NEHTA Referrals Team is seeking feedback from national stakeholders on the content of the package documents. Workshops to discuss areas of concern will be conducted during the course of the external review period.

Feedback is requested before 30th April 2010 and can be emailed to referrals@nehta.gov.au as can any questions relating to this package.