Australian Government

Australian Digital Health Agency

Council for Connected Care

Annual Review

2023-2024

Connecting Australian Healthcare
National Healthcare Interoperability Plan

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A message from the

Chair of the Council for Connected Care

The Council for Connected Care (Council) was established in June 2023 to provide strategic advice on matters related to connecting care and to support national implementation of the Interoperability Plan.

Over the last 12 months there has been unprecedented support from key stakeholders to work together to better connect Australia's healthcare system and improve health outcomes for Australians. A coalition of the willing is the best way to describe the 33 members of the Council for Connected Care that represent government, healthcare consumers, healthcare providers, the health technology sector, system operators and researchers.

Implementation of the 44 actions to connect Australia's healthcare system has been swift, with 10 out of the 17 actions originally scheduled to commence in the forward years being fast tracked. The Council has also seen progress in each of the five priority areas of the national Interoperability Plan and the delivery of nine actions in the first year of implementation:

- The National Healthcare Identifiers Roadmap 2023-2028 to increase the adoption and use of healthcare identifiers in health and care settings
- The Digital Health Standards Catalogue, a comprehensive resource that provides a single point of access for relevant standards in digital health
- Guiding principles for those developing or implementing digital health standards
- Development of strong partnerships with standards stakeholders including standards development organisations
- A Conformance Framework to ensure digital health products and systems are operated in a manner that aligns with safety, security, and interoperability standards
- Digital Health Procurement Guidelines to provide guidance to healthcare organisations seeking to purchase digital health solutions and harmonise interoperability requirements in ICT procurement

- An assessment of general practice and aged care facility interoperability to identify issues, requirements and potential solutions
- An assessment of digital health maturity models to inform the development of a global maturity model
- A review of policy tools to support and accelerate interoperability.

While these actions are marked 'complete', we recognise that work will continue and progress reported as the Council moves into a new phase of implementation, review, and improvement, working closely with key stakeholders to adopt change.

In 2024-25, the Council will support the following national activities to connect Australia's healthcare system:

- Implementing the national roadmaps for healthcare identifiers and a national health information exchange
- Enhancing national provider directory capability
- Strengthening governance and stakeholder engagement for adoption and implementation of national digital health standards
- Improving connections and conformance to national digital health products and services for developers and healthcare providers
- Harmonising legislation to support information sharing
- Establishing an online collaborative community forum
- Building interoperability capability
- Continuing to monitor progress and assess maturity through the second national interoperability survey and the development of a global maturity model.

All Australians deserve a connected healthcare system where information is shared safely, securely, and seamlessly with the right people at the right time, and I am very pleased to be part of this important and exciting journey.

Conjoint Professor Anne Duggan
Chair

Section 1

About the Council for Connected Care

The Australian Digital Health Agency (the Agency) has established a Council for Connected Care to support national implementation of the [Connecting Australian Healthcare – National Healthcare Interoperability Plan 2023-2028](#) (Interoperability Plan) and provide strategic advice on matters related to connecting care.

The Council's objectives are to:

- identify opportunities to accelerate interoperability in various parts of the health system and ways to harness these opportunities
- facilitate and support the implementation of the Interoperability Plan
- promote and garner support for digital health initiatives that drive connected healthcare
- identify barriers to achieving interoperability and ways to overcome them.

The Council is responsible for:

- providing strategic advice to the Agency on:
  - implementation of actions in the Interoperability Plan including risks, issues within the health technology sector and dependencies
  - key interoperability topics and promoting the adoption of interoperability standards by the health technology sector
  - key reports and research produced during the implementation of the Interoperability Plan.
- promoting digital health initiatives that connect healthcare and fostering stakeholder participation and engagement in these initiatives
- reviewing the annual workplan for the Interoperability Plan and annual review of progress against the actions prepared by the Agency.

The Council membership comprises of 33 leaders across the health and care continuum and digital health technology sector. The Council's terms of reference and membership can be found on the Agency's [website](#).

Section 2

Year in review

National Interoperability Plan

Australia's first national plan to deliver a connected healthcare system was launched by Ms Amanda Cattermole (Chief Executive Officer, Australian Digital Health Agency) and Mr Daniel McCabe (First Assistant Secretary, Department of Health and Aged Care) on 11 July 2023 at MedINFO23.

The Interoperability Plan outlines a national vision to share consumer information in a safe, secure and seamless manner and identifies 44 actions across five priority areas relating to identity, standards, information sharing, innovation and measuring benefits. There has been widespread support for and interest in the Interoperability Plan – a Pulse+IT poll taken shortly after its release found 97 per cent of respondents were supportive of it[1] and as of 31 July 2024, there had been almost 15,000 views of Interoperability Plan on the Agency's website.

Council meetings

The first Council meeting, chaired by Rob Heferen, former Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, was held virtually on 7 June 2023. Members discussed Australia's digital health directions, including initiatives announced in the 2023–24 Budget, the reasons for connecting Australia's healthcare system, how standards can drive connected care and the Council's 2023-24 workplan.

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1   https://www.pulseit.news/pulseit-blog/health-data-sharing-the-time-has-come-for-the-m-word/.

The Council held four meetings during 2023-24 covering the five priority areas in the Interoperability Plan:

- 10 August 2023 – online meeting on identity
- 11 October 2023 – face-to-face meeting on standards
- 22 February 2024 – face-to-face meeting on information sharing
- 2 May 2024 – online meeting on innovation and benefits.

With the promotion of Mr Rob Heferen to the Australian Taxation Office, the Agency welcomed Conjoint Professor Anne Duggan (Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care) as the new Council Chair and Professor Peter Sprivulis (Chief Clinical Information Office of WA Health) as the Deputy Chair at the February 2024 meeting.

The Council meetings have been well attended by senior representatives from member organisations and there has been interest from other organisations to participate in the Council's work program including the Chief of Data and Digital from Te Whatu Ora, New Zealand. New organisations recently joining the Council membership include Australian Patients Association, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, and the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia.

The Agency publishes all meeting communiqués on its website to provide visibility of the Council's work and promotes the communiqués to our various stakeholder groups. At the May 2024 Council meeting it was agreed that past and future agenda papers would be published on the Agency website to further enhance transparency and promote a culture of openness and collaboration. There have also been numerous presentations on the Council and progress against actions in the Interoperability Plan at various forums, including the 2024 *Digital Health Festival*.

2023

JUNE

7 June – first Council meeting

JULY

11 July – Interoperability Plan published

AUGUST

10 August – second Council meeting on Identity

OCTOBER

11 October – third Council meeting on Standards

24 October – first quarterly progress report published

2024

FEBRUARY

7 February – second quarterly progress report published

22 February – fourth Council meeting on Information Sharing and appointment of new Council Chair (Conjoint Professor Anne Duggan) and Deputy Chair (Professor Peter Sprivulis)

MAY

2 May – fifth Council meeting on Innovation and Benefits

8 May – third quarterly progress report published

Section 3

Delivery against Council responsibilities

Provide strategic advice on connecting care

The Council held four meetings during 2023-24 covering the five priority areas in the Interoperability Plan. A discussion paper was prepared for each meeting that outlined the current and future state of the priority area and discussion questions for members. A summary of the Council's deliberations is provided below for each meeting.

Identity

At the August 2023 meeting members discussed communication and engagement activities relating to the Interoperability Plan, considered draft terms of reference for a national standards working group and undertook a deep dive on identity that included topics relating to digital identity, national healthcare identifiers and health service directories.

There was a strong commitment to using national healthcare identifiers and agreement that these identifiers should be used across all healthcare consumers (not just Australian citizens or permanent residents), across both clinicians and administrative staff in healthcare providers, extended to the disability and aged care sectors as required, and be globally unique and recognised in both Australia and internationally. The inclusion of healthcare identifiers for individual healthcare providers and healthcare organisations in the national healthcare service directory was considered key to enabling connected care.

Standards

The October 2023 meeting provided members with an overview of the newly established Australian Digital Health Standards Advisory Group and the Sparked program – a cooperative between the Agency, CSIRO, HL7 Australia and the Department of Health and Aged Care to support community collaboration and development of an Australian core dataset for interoperability and Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR) implementation. Members discussed the roles and responsibilities of multiple expert organisations involved in standards use, development, and implementation to facilitate coordination and collaboration.

Secure communication and messaging at a national level was identified as a key priority area and members agreed national healthcare identifiers were critical for the secure transfer of information for high-quality and safe care transitions.

Information sharing

The February 2024 meeting provided members with an overview of the information sharing landscape across different parts of the health system and the policy and legislation work being led by the Department of Health and Aged Care. Members discussed the Agency's progress in developing a National Health Information Exchange roadmap and architecture to enable real-time data sharing between primary, acute and aged care settings. It was agreed that a truly interoperable healthcare system starts with ensuring Individual Healthcare Identifiers (IHIs) and Healthcare Provider Identifier – Individuals (HPI-Is) are included in all administrative and clinical documentation at the point of care and at any transitions of care.

A powerful centrepiece of the February 2024 meeting was the panel of healthcare consumers who spoke about the significance of person-centred approaches, the need for co-design, the centrality of health equity, and the criticality of having clear and accessible information. The panel advised that success will be when consumers trust the system, are able to access their information at all times, don't have to repeat their medical history every time they see a clinician and when medical tests are reduced and results rapidly available.

Innovation and benefits

The May 2024 meeting focused on two priority areas of the Interoperability Plan – innovation and benefits. Members discussed the government's role in supporting and enabling innovation in the healthcare sector, potential safety issues with new and emerging technology, the need to uplift digital literacy among consumers and the workforce, and the importance of considering the care provider and patient relationship when seeking productivity gains from new technology. Members noted that more research and evidence on the impact of new technologies is important to build trust and understand evolving systems and user maturity.

Members were provided an opportunity to comment on the draft evaluation plan for the National Digital Health Strategy.

Promote and foster stakeholder participation and engagement in initiatives that drive connecting care

Council members promote and foster participation and engagement in initiatives that drive connecting care among their stakeholder networks by distributing meeting communiqués, embedding priorities and activities in key documents, policies and programs, promoting the work at forums, through newsletters, and social media, attending workshops such as the Sparked program, participating in rollouts of digital health initiatives, and restructuring teams to facilitate collaboration.

Monitor progress against actions in the Interoperability Plan

Reports on progress against the actions in the Interoperability Plan are published quarterly, commencing in October 2023. Updates on progress are provided by Council members, including the Agency, Department of Health and Aged Care, state and territory health departments, Services Australia, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Healthdirect and the Australasian Institute of Digital Health. At each Council meeting members receive a draft progress report for review and comment.

The annual progress report was published on 1 August 2024. Of the 44 actions in the Interoperability Plan:

- 9 are complete:
  - Action 1.3 Healthcare Identifiers Roadmap
  - Action 2.5 Standards catalogue
  - Action 2.7 Digital health standards guiding principles
  - Action 2.9 Engage standards stakeholders
  - Action 2.13 Develop a conformance framework
  - Action 3.3 Procurement guidance
  - Action 3.5 GP and aged care facility interoperability
  - Action 5.3 Assess digital health maturity models
  - Action 6.1 Review policy tools.
  - Action 2.7 Digital health standards guiding principles
  - Action 6.1 Review policy tools
- 28 are on track – 18 as per schedule (immediate or ongoing actions) and 10 ahead of schedule (short or medium-term actions)
- 6 short or medium-term actions will commence in 2024-25 or 2025-26 as per schedule
- 1 action is behind schedule (Action 2.1 Terminology in digital health systems) but is expected to be on track next quarter.

While the 9 actions have been marked 'complete', we recognise that work will continue and progress reported as we move into a new phase of implementation, review, and improvement, working closely with key stakeholders for change adoption

In summary, the key 2023-24 achievements towards a better-connected healthcare system for all Australians includes:

- Establishing strong governance – the Council for Connected Care and the Australian Digital Health Standards Advisory Group – and developing a communication and engagement plan for collaboration and transparency.
- Sharing resources in central locations – the Agency's Online Interoperability Toolkit and Digital Health Developer Portal – for collaboration and to build the knowledge base.
- Publishing roadmaps and resources for national coordination and collaboration:
  - National Healthcare Identifiers Roadmap 2023-2028 to increase the adoption and use of healthcare identifiers in health and care settings
  - Guiding principles for those developing or implementing digital health standards
  - Sparked Accelerator program roadmap to deliver Australian core and eRequesting data sets and Fast Health Interoperability Resources (FHIR) implementation guides
  - Digital Health Standards Catalogue, a comprehensive resource that provides a single point of access for relevant standards in digital health
  - Conformance framework to ensure digital health products and systems are operated in a manner that aligns with safety, security, and interoperability standards
  - Draft procurement guidelines to provide guidance to healthcare organisations seeking to purchase digital health solutions and harmonise interoperability requirements in ICT procurement.
- Drafting a National Health Information Exchange architecture and roadmap in consultation with jurisdictions and key stakeholders and consulting with jurisdictions on a legal and policy framework to support information sharing across care settings and state and territory borders.
- Building the digital health capability of the workforce through assessment tools, FHIR training and a library of interoperability education resources.
- Measuring maturity through the 2022 Interoperability Benchmark Survey, identifying appropriate maturity models and monitoring progress against the actions in the Interoperability Plan.
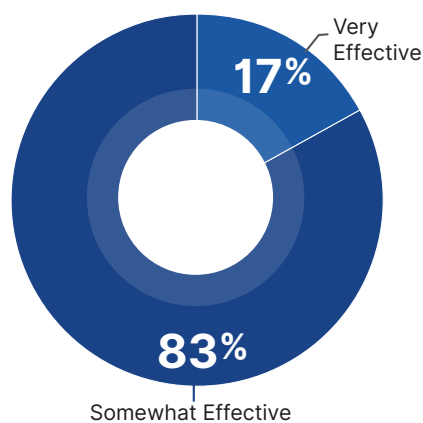
Section 4

Annual review by members

'Over the last 12 months there has been unprecedented support from key stakeholders to work together to better connect Australia's healthcare system and improve health outcomes for Australians. A coalition of the willing is the best way to describe the 33 members of the Council for Connected Care that represent government, healthcare consumers, healthcare providers, the health technology sector, system operators and researchers.'

– Council Chair (Conjoint Professor Anne Duggan)

Effectiveness of meetings

A survey was sent on 25 June 2024 to Council members seeking feedback on the performance of the Council. There were 17 responses to the survey, giving a response rate of 55% (from a total of 31 members external to the Agency). All responses (100%) rated the Council as somewhat or very effective. Responses to the specific Terms of Reference questions are outlined below.

Figure 1: How would you rate the overall effectiveness of the Council meetings?
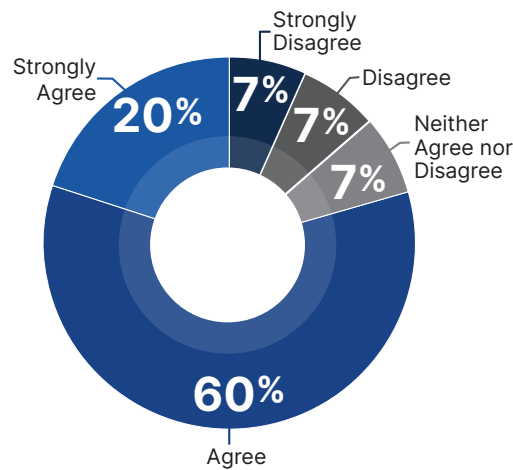

Very Effective
17%

83%
Somewhat Effective

'The inclusive engagement and enthusiasm of the standards development is going very well. For the first time in my career, we have government, software developers, clinicians and appropriate agencies (Australian Digital Health Agency and CSIRO) all working towards a common goal.'

– Council member

Purpose, objectives and responsibilities

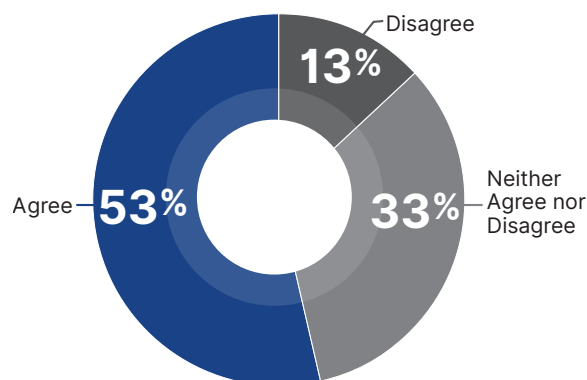Eighty per cent of responses agreed or strongly agreed that the Council's purpose, objectives and responsibilities in the Terms of Reference are clear and appropriate.

Figure 2: The Council's purpose, objectives and responsibilities in the Terms of Reference are clear and appropriate

Governance pathways

Fifty-three per cent of responses agreed or strongly agreed that the current structure, with only the Standards Advisory Group reporting to the Council, was appropriate for effectively fulfilling the Council's responsibilities.

Figure 3: Is the current structure, with only the Standards Advisory Group reporting to the Council, appropriate for effectively fulfilling the Council's responsibilities?

Membership

Sixty per cent of responses agreed that the Council had the right number of members and 93% of responses agreed or strongly agreed that members had the right skills and experience.

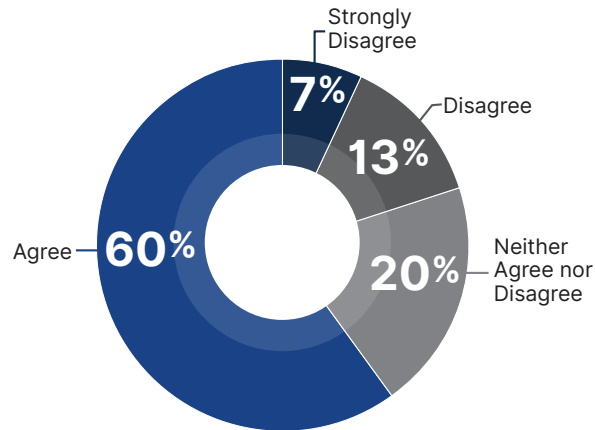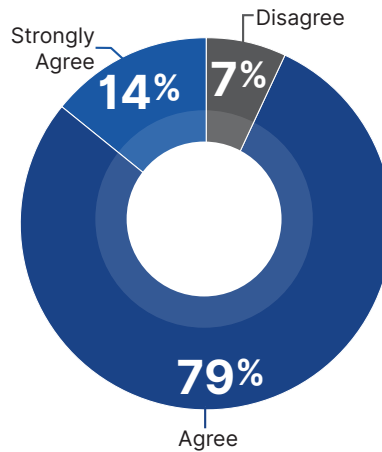*Figure 4: The Council has the right number of members*

Figure 5: The Council has members with the right skills and experience

Meetings frequency

All responses (100%) agreed the quarterly meeting cadence was appropriate and 86% agreed that the time allocated to meetings and the format was appropriate.

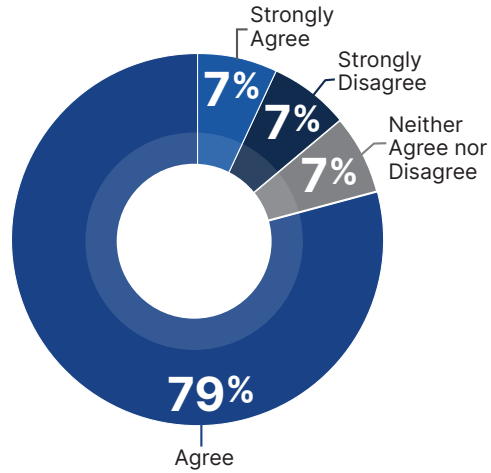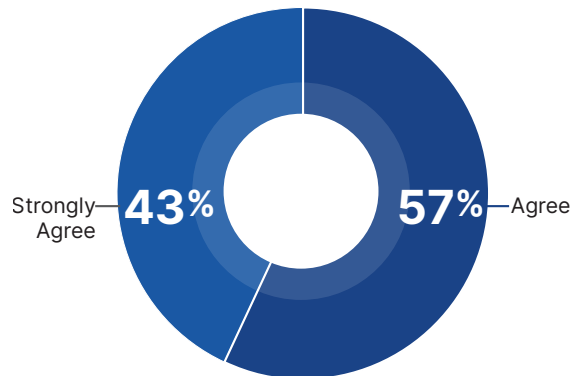*Figure 6: The quarterly meeting cadence is appropriate*

Figure 7: The time allocated to meetings and the format is appropriate

Meeting papers and communiqués

Ninety-two per cent of responses agreed or strongly agreed that the Council agendas and meeting packs were relevant and clear with an appropriate level of detail to prepare for meetings and 91% of responses agreed or strongly agreed that Council communiqués were relevant and clear with an appropriate level of detail.

Figure 8: Council agendas and meeting packs were relevant and clear with an appropriate level of detail to prepare for meetings
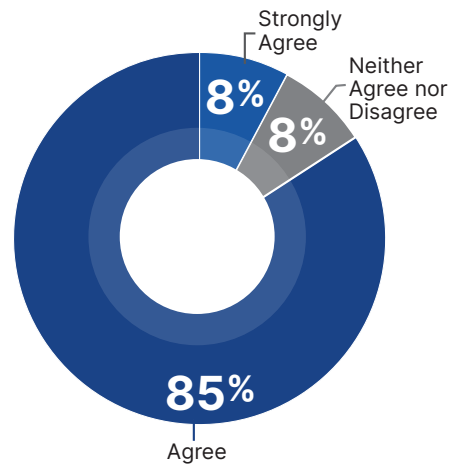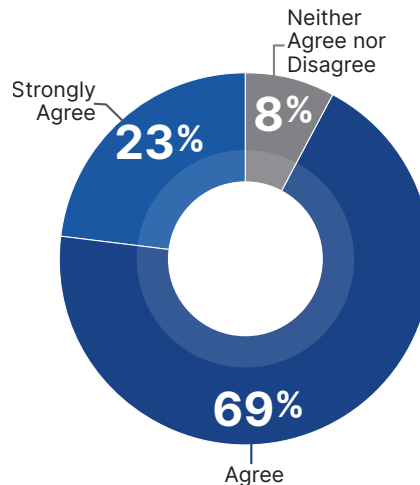

Figure 9: Council communiqués are relevant and clear with an appropriate level of detail

Meeting attendance

Since the commencement of the Council in June 2023, there has been a consistent growth in membership as additional key stakeholders have been added to the membership, increasing from 25 to 33 members in June 2024.

The table below shows member and proxy attendance for each Council meeting. The meetings have been well attended with a range from 83% to 100% of all member organisations in attendance.

	Meeting 1 - June 2023	Meeting 2 - August 2023	Meeting 3 - October 2023	Meeting 4 - February 2024	Meeting 5 - May 2024
Member attendees	20	21	19	24	25
Member apologies	5	7	10	7	8
Proxies	4	3	5	7	5
Total attendees (No.)	**24**	**24**	**24**	**31**	**30**
Total Membership	**25**	**28**	**29**	**31**	**33**
Total attendees (% of membership)	96%	86%	83%	100%	91%

Section 5

Looking forward – 2024-25 Priorities

Looking forward to 2024-25 the Council will support the following national activities to connect Australia's healthcare system:

- Implementing the national roadmaps for healthcare identifiers and a national health information exchange
- Enhancing national provider directory capability
- Strengthening governance for enduring adoption and implementation of national digital health standards
- Improving connections and conformance to national digital health products and services for developers and healthcare providers
- Harmonising legislation to support information sharing
- Establishing an online community forum to facilitate collaboration
- Building interoperability capability
- Monitoring progress and assessing maturity through the second national interoperability survey and the development of a global maturity model.

In 2024-25 the focus of the Council meetings will shift from the high-level overview of the five priority areas in the Interoperability Plan, to more specific topics under each of the five priority areas with discussions focusing on how members and the organisations and stakeholders they represent can work together to bring about real, meaningful change.

Thank you to partners and contributors

This plan is the result of extensive consultation.

Thank you to all the governments, agencies, organisations and individuals who provided their time, expertise and advice during its development.