



Media Release

10 June 2020

## **Better connected healthcare system already showing improved secure transfer of patient information**

Australia has a world class health system, and the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how important technology is to allow healthcare providers to communicate with each other securely and immediately.

Out of date contact details that healthcare providers have about healthcare services and other practitioners can mean that patients' medical documents and information is not able to be sent from one healthcare provider to another. In a world where consumers can no longer be a conduit for delivering a referral letter or test result to another provider, and where our postal services are over capacity, an up to date electronic registry is more important than ever.

The Australian Digital Health Agency has built a Service Registration Assistant (SRA) to solve this problem. The SRA keeps healthcare service and practitioner information up to date with changes to contact details available immediately to authorised users.

Healthcare organisations can update their details in the SRA once, and this will automatically send these new details to all organisations they have authorised to receive their information. This might include hospitals, pathology and radiology services, public service directories, secure messaging providers and more. The SRA avoids the need for an organisation to update their information in multiple places and eliminates the need for hundreds of other directories around the country to manually keep their directories up to date.

Dr Steve Hambleton, a General Practitioner and Agency Clinical Reference Lead, noted that "not only will this innovation bring about efficiencies for practice support staff who will only have to update changes in practice information once, it will increase confidence at the point of care that all of the incoming information about our patients will be there, and that our outgoing address book is complete and up to date".


Initial results from a trial of the SRA in Northern NSW has shown significant improvements in communications between healthcare providers. To date, of 187 practitioners who participated in the trial and shared their details with the Northern NSW Local Health District (NNSWLHD), 186 had to change or update their details during the trial period.

For the NNSWLHD, having the most up-to-date contact information is essential to ensuring hospital discharge summaries get to the right person as quickly as possible.

Discharge summaries can include information about a patient's assessment, treatment plan and progress notes from their hospital clinician, and a digital copy is sent via a secure service to the patient's nominated GP. This helps the GP to continue post hospital care through follow up appointments.

Interim CEO of the Australian Digital Health Agency, Bettina McMahon said maintaining accurate provider address details was a longstanding challenge across the Australian healthcare sector.

"What is great to see is that the necessary, reliable and timely sharing of patients' healthcare information between their healthcare providers is being improved by this latest feature of Australia's digital health system," she said.



“Healthcare providers all over Australia are enthusiastically using digital health so we want to make things as easy and efficient for them as possible. This tool will bring the benefits of digital health to more Australians.”

The trial is a partnership between the Agency, the NNSWLHD and the North Coast Primary Health Network (NCPHN).

CEO of NCPHN Julie Sturgess said “The opportunity to trial the SRA means local healthcare providers are able to be at the forefront of innovation in digital health to drive better patient outcomes. The results from the trial are really positive and we are keen to continue to work with the Agency on the next phase of the trial.”

Chief Executive of the NNSWLHD Wayne Jones said “We’re always looking at ways to improve the experience of patients in our care, and this system will help support the safe transfer of care of our patients from hospital to their GP.”

Australian Association of Practice Managers’ CEO Nicholas Voudouris said “Practice managers play a key role in ensuring a patient’s healthcare providers – wherever they work and whoever they work for – have accurate and timely clinical information. That is why we welcomed this trial of new technology.”

After the completion of the trial, the SRA will be expanded to provide a better-connected healthcare system, improve the transfer of care between healthcare providers and give healthcare providers more timely and complete information to support the care of their patients.

### **Background**

Discharge summaries and other healthcare documents are transmitted using special-purpose secure messaging services. Unlike regular email, the messages are encrypted to ensure the confidentiality of the message and must be sent to a special ‘secure message’ address. To successfully send a discharge summary, both the Northern NSW Local Health District and the secure messaging service providers need accurate and up to date information about the general practitioner, so they know where to deliver the secure message. However, when a general practitioner joins or leaves a practice, there are many government and non-government services that need to be advised through a myriad of paper and online registration processes. In turn, all those organisations need to update their internal address lists. The SRA solves this problem.

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### **About the Australian Digital Health Agency**

The Agency is tasked with improving health outcomes for all Australians through the delivery of digital healthcare systems, and implementing [Australia’s National Digital Health Strategy – Safe, Seamless, and Secure: evolving health and care to meet the needs of modern Australia](#) in collaboration with partners across the community. The Agency is the System Operator of [My Health Record](#), and provides leadership, coordination, and delivery of a collaborative and innovative approach to utilising technology to support and enhance a clinically safe and connected national health system. These improvements will give individuals more control of their health and their health information, and support healthcare providers to deliver informed healthcare through access to current clinical and treatment information. Further information: [www.digitalhealth.gov.au](http://www.digitalhealth.gov.au).