



POSITION STATEMENT

Digital Health

Position

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia supports the ongoing development and implementation of nationally consistent advances in digital health as an enabler to enhance the accessibility, timeliness and quality of health care, patient information and quality use of medicines in the community irrespective of location.

Digital health represents one of the key areas of ongoing change in community pharmacy and one that is having a profound impact on pharmacy clinical and business practice, and health outcomes. It is fast becoming a consistent transformer of a modern, accessible healthcare system in Australia.

Community pharmacies continue to develop a significant digital health capability, leading the health sector in a range of transformational areas including electronic prescriptions, real-time prescription monitoring, vaccination and health service provision and recording. Adept at utilising these digital health-enabled platforms, community pharmacies, with appropriate support of Commonwealth and State and Territory governments, are well-positioned to deliver enhanced health and business outcomes in an increasing digital health-influenced environment.

National Digital Health Strategy

Community pharmacies are key stakeholders to the [National Digital Health Strategy](#) which was established by the governments of Australia with a remit to evolve digital health capability in the health system through innovation, collaboration and leadership. The Strategy's [Framework for Action](#) supports the vision and the outcomes of the seven strategic priority areas by articulating the actions and initiatives that are necessary to deliver the benefits of digitally enabled healthcare.

The Guild supports the Strategy and its Framework for Action through its commitment in working with the custodian of the Strategy, the [Australian Digital Health Agency](#), on ensuring community pharmacies are supported in their adoption and benefits realisation of digital health.

Health Identifiers

The Healthcare Identifiers (HI) Service is a system for uniquely identifying individuals, healthcare provider individuals and healthcare provider organisations and is required for many aspects of Digital Health including Electronic Prescribing, Secure Messaging or My Health Record.

The Guild supports the use of the HI Service as a national system to correctly associate healthcare recipients with the correct health information, identify the relationship between healthcare providers and healthcare organisations, and supporting authenticated access to national digital healthcare services.

National Secretariat



Electronic prescribing

The Guild recognises the development and incremental growth of the Electronic Prescribing Ecosystem (EPE) with well over 90% of prescriptions now being digitally supported through either the electronic transfer of paper prescriptions (ETP) or electronic prescriptions (via tokens and the Active Script List).

The Guild recognises the EPE's role to improve efficiency, compliance, medicine safety and data collection relating to the use of pharmaceuticals in Australia. As electronic prescribing continues to grow, there is an opportunity to:

- improve the user experience for prescribers, patients and pharmacies
- improve health and safety outcomes for patients
- enhance and maintain cybersecurity and patient privacy
- optimise the EPE to support further scale
- support further innovation, and
- ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the operating and funding model.

The Guild believes the EPE must provide universal access for all - consumers, all approved prescribers, and community pharmacies. Furthermore, the Guild believes the EPE must ensure that patient choice, of how the electronic prescription is received (via token or ASL) and the patient's choice of dispensing pharmacy, is supported and maintained. The Guild also recognises that 'digital health best practice' in relation to the EPE means firstly, adhering to the [principles and goals of electronic prescribing](#) as set out by the Australian Government Department of Health, and then ensuring any innovations applied to the EPE adhere to these principles.

The Guild recognises the EPE as essential digital health infrastructure, and as such, community pharmacies, prescribers and consumers must have equitable and transparent access to this infrastructure at no cost. Additionally, any future change program in relation to the EPE must be thoroughly assessed as to its impact upon all users of the EPE, including community pharmacies. A 'program impact assessment' should always be conducted prior to any major change to a government digital health policy and/or program.

Electronic recording, monitoring and reporting

The Guild supports the national implementation of the [Real Time Prescription Monitoring \(RTPM\)](#) system, designed to monitor the prescribing, and dispensing of controlled medicines with the aim of reducing their misuse in Australia. With the growing issue of abuse and misuse of medicines occasioning morbidity and fatalities, the Guild recognises the need for a fully implemented national RTPM system that provides for the collection and reporting of all dispensing events related to Controlled Drugs consistent with state and territory legislation.

An RTPM system is only a part of the solution to help reduce the harms from prescription medicine misuse. Adequate treatment programs and general consumer awareness are other important measures. The value of RTPM is to equip pharmacists and other health professionals with accurate and timely information so that they can provide better care for their patients. The Guild supports the extension of medicines that are monitored on RTPM when supported by evidence of overdose harm and mortality.

My Health Record

The Guild recognises the [My Health Record](#) (MHR) as the Australian Government's secure online summary of an individual's health information and is available to all Australians. Healthcare providers authorised by their healthcare organisation can access the My Health Record system to view and add to a patient's health information. The MHR contains an individual's key health information including immunisations, pathology and diagnostic imaging reports, prescription and dispensing medicine information, and hospital discharge summaries.

The Guild supports and recognises the value of a community pharmacy's connection and use of the MHR system to allow the appropriate viewing and use of a patient's relevant health information, which can better inform and lead to improved clinical care and health outcomes. Recognising the increasing health services being provided by pharmacists, it is essential that pharmacists are also able to write to a person's MHR for completeness of the record. The Guild encourages the pursuit of the benefits realisation of the MHR across the healthcare system to create efficiencies and support greater effectiveness in healthcare management.

Telehealth

Noting that telehealth should not be a standard substitute for face-to-face health services, the Guild supports the use of telehealth as a tool to address the barriers of patient access to health services. The Guild believes the community pharmacy network, as the most accessible health service in Australia, is an integral part of Australia's health infrastructure, with many community pharmacies located in areas with limited health service providers. As such, this unique position should be utilised to optimise equity of access to telehealth, particularly in regional and remote Australia where the local community pharmacy may be the only available or most appropriate health service for conducting and/or facilitating telehealth consultations.

A community pharmacy-based telehealth service is not about pharmacy competing with local GP services but about complementing those of local GP services by facilitating access to a quality telehealth service at times and in areas where access to these primary healthcare services are limited or not available. Community pharmacies always endeavour to work with local GP services, especially when supporting patient access to the most appropriate primary healthcare when needed.

Secure messaging

The Guild supports the concept of healthcare providers, across primary, community, secondary care, aged care, and ancillary services to easily find each other online and securely exchange clinical information. The Guild recognises the need for a secure messaging solution as a foundational digital health capability, enabling the safe, seamless and secure sharing of clinical health information between a patient's healthcare providers.

Related Statements

- In-person supply of medicines

Authority

Endorsed

National Council – December 2023

Reviewed

Practice, Policy & Regulatory Committee – 26 July 2023