



HealthConnect
HEALTH INFORMATION WHEN YOU NEED IT

HealthConnect and the Information Management and Information Communications Technology Industry

What's new

- HealthConnect is a national change management strategy working towards interoperability of electronic health information products and services for health care providers and consumers
- National specifications, standards and infrastructure are being developed for e-health projects by National eHealth Transition Authority (NeHTA)
- Software products used by health care providers must comply with the nationally agreed standards
- HealthConnect will be working in partnership with all states and territories to ensure a national approach
- Purchase decisions will stay with the provider(s) and the industry will remain market driven. Providers will increasingly demand compliance with agreed standards

Increasingly, a multidisciplinary approach is being applied to health care. Care plans for acute care assessment and treatment invariably involve a variety of health care providers. Communications between individual IT service providers and specialist components of the health care sector are typically paper-based with little capacity in the workflow processes and supporting infrastructure for more integrated arrangements.

Not surprisingly in such an environment, vendors of clinical applications have tended to approach the market with a similar focus – stand alone and specialised. As a result, information relating to a consumer's health care resides in a variety of data formats across a range of computer systems and locations.

Moving the health software industry towards a more inclusive and integrated approach involves changing the circumstance around why vendors take this approach to the market – basically a lack of national standards and uncoordinated procurement processes. In the past, each specialised area of health care separately purchased products to meet their specific operational needs.

This situation is not due to the unavailability of the technology. Other industry sectors are well advanced in this regard. The issues here are predominately related to business issues and the lack of an enabling standards framework covering terminology, code sets, systems interoperability, security and, most importantly, privacy.

HealthConnect is a joint initiative of the Australian, state and territory governments to create a health information network that will enable electronic transfer of clinical information between health care providers. The network will encompass enhanced clinical communication through standardised electronic clinical messages and enhanced quality and safety through a shared electronic health record.

HealthConnect will ensure coordinated activity between all areas of the health care sector, underpinned by the mandatory application of specifications, standards and infrastructure developed by the NeHTA. This will drive a more integrated approach to systems design and operational capability with a capacity for compliant products to pursue national opportunities within an industry development framework.

The quality and safety benefits of e-health are well established – timeliness, reduction in double keying and data entry errors, streamlined processes to reduce work loads, reduced costs to both providers and consumers in time and effort and, importantly, the opening and maintaining of a direct communication channel between providers to improve health care outcomes for the consumer.

With its focus on the key features of all e-health-related activity – the consumer and their health information – HealthConnect has the potential to provide much needed leadership and direction. The vision of HealthConnect is to ensure that access to consumers' health history "moves" with the consumer.

To deliver a successful e-health infrastructure, the necessary enablers/building blocks need to be agreed and put in place. This includes issues of privacy and consent, security, patient and provider identifiers, terminology, coding and messaging standards. The work on these building blocks will be of benefit to the health sector generally, not just HealthConnect.

Apart from standards development, the time and effort required from health care providers is a key constraint in progressing e-health. It is here that software vendors are able to add the most value. A seamless, integrated, speedy and low cost arrangement for providers is an imperative, particularly where e-health business benefits are longer term and not immediately realised. The provider will not want to re-key data, run multiple applications or spend time waiting for computer systems to respond.

NeHTA is working on a broad e-health interoperability framework which will provide guiding principles for development, adoption and implementation of standards, including data sets and sample source code, business cases and supporting material. NeHTA will also position the testing and certification processes required to ensure that the necessary level of interoperability is achieved.

Implementation of national e-health standards and a commitment from key health care service providers to use only compliant products provides industry with a coordinated and standards focussed market opportunity at the broadest possible national level.

For further information on HealthConnect and the role of the IM&ICT Industry please contact Helen Briggs, Manager, Key Partnerships on (02) 6289 4147. The HealthConnect Implementation Strategy is available at http://www.healthconnect.gov.au/whats_new.htm