



Fact Sheet – National Health Plan A Guide for Prescribers

Interim arrangements for prescriptions for supply of medicines: Supporting telehealth patients and healthcare professionals

8/09/2021

Arrangements for image-based prescribing implemented at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic will now end on 31 December 2021. Electronic prescribing is now widely available in Australia and provides an option for supporting telehealth consultations and enabling supply of medicines.

Medical services for patients confined to their homes

Doctors, nurses and mental health professionals are able to deliver services via telehealth via phone or video conferencing. More information on telehealth is available [here](#).

Prescribing process to support telehealth services

There are two legal forms of prescription in Australia – electronic prescriptions and paper prescriptions.

Electronic prescriptions

As a prescriber, you can create an electronic prescription in your enabled prescriber software during a consultation. You should ask your patient if they are happy to receive an electronic prescribing token (via SMS or email).

When creating an electronic prescription, a unique electronic token (in the form of a QR code) will be created and sent to the patient as an SMS or email. The token is the key that unlocks the electronic prescriptions. Patients can provide the token to the pharmacists to enable dispense and supply of the medicines. Further information can be found [here](#).

Paper prescriptions

Prescribers can still create paper prescriptions during a telehealth consultation. The paper prescription will need to be signed by the prescriber. You may also use a valid digital signature until 31 December 2021.

After 31 December 2021, you may still be able to fax a copy of the paper prescription to the patient's pharmacy of choice in some jurisdictions. You must then arrange for the timely delivery of the original paper prescription to the pharmacy. (Contact details for the pharmacy of the patient's choice is available [here](#)). If your patient prefers to receive the legal paper prescription you will need to mail it to them.

Image-based prescribing

Given electronic prescribing is now widely available, the decision to extend image-based prescribing is to provide an emergency option for exceptional circumstances where electronic prescribing or other mechanisms cannot be used, particularly where communities continue to be affected by state-wide COVID-19 lockdowns.

As a prescriber, you will still create a paper prescription during a telehealth consultation. This prescription will need to be signed by the prescriber as normal or using a valid digital signature.

You can then create a clear copy of the entire prescription to send to the patient's pharmacy of choice via email, text message or fax. The copy can be a digital image such as a photo or pdf including the barcode where applicable.

Send the copy via fax, email, or text directly to the patient's pharmacy of choice. If your patient prefers to receive the legal paper prescription you will need to mail it to them. Contact details for the pharmacy of the patient's choice is available [here](#).

The law requires you to retain the paper prescription for a period of 2 years for audit and compliance purposes.

Please note: Medicines in Schedule 8 and Schedule 4 Appendix D in the Poisons Standard are not part of this interim arrangement. They are to be supplied under the current prescribing arrangements.

Special arrangements in jurisdictions¹

While image-based prescribing arrangements will no longer be legally valid after 31 December 2021, you will continue to have other options such as urgent supply to enable remote medicines support for your patients. While the Commonwealth Department of Health sets out some standards and restrictions on access to medicines, State and Territory Governments regulate medicines and prescriptions. Further information regarding specific legislation and options to assist in each jurisdiction for image-based prescribing can be found [here](#). Please contact your respective jurisdiction authority for more details.

Medicine delivery services

Once the patient's chosen pharmacy has received the electronic or paper prescription, the pharmacy may deliver medicines to the address on the prescription. Prescribers should check that they have the correct address for patients during the telehealth consultation.

Existing prescriptions and repeats

Patients confined to their homes during COVID-19 with paper prescriptions or repeats will need someone to visit the pharmacy on their behalf with the paper prescription. If this is not possible, patients can seek a new prescription and follow the steps above.

¹ A summary of State and Territory arrangements, including links to relevant legislation, is available [here](#).