



# Prescriptions via Telehealth – State and Territory Rules

07/09/2021

As part of the [COVID-19 National Health Plan](#), some telehealth can be bulk-billed.

## Electronic Prescribing

Electronic Prescribing has been rolled out nationally and the update of clinical software by healthcare providers is well underway (more information is available [here](#)).

Electronic prescriptions are the **preferred option for telehealth consultations**. It is recommended prescribers ask their patients if they are happy to receive an electronic prescription token via SMS or email.

## Interim arrangements for image-based prescriptions

Image-based prescribing, implemented at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, has been extended one final time and will now end on **31 December 2021**.

Image-based prescribing provides an emergency option for exceptional circumstances where electronic prescribing or other prescribing options, such as emergency supply arrangements cannot be used, particularly where communities continue to be affected by state-wide COVID-19 lockdowns arrangements.

Patients are still not required to sign to acknowledge receipt of supply if it is not practical for them to do so. The pharmacist may sign on behalf of the patient unless it is not practical for them to do so. This interim arrangement will continue along with temporary telehealth arrangements until 31 December 2021, to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

While image-based prescribing arrangements will cease after 31 December 2021, healthcare providers will continue to have options that existed before image-based prescribing (in addition to electronic prescribing) to enable remote support to their patients.

*Please note:* Image Based Prescribing is not the same as Electronic Prescribing.

## State and territory arrangements

### Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

ACT legislation enables the use of electronic, digital image, faxed or telephone prescriptions, including faxing of evidence of a prescription, for all Schedule 4 and Schedule 8 medicines. This supports telehealth consultations and prescribing of essential medicines for all vulnerable patients in the community.

With patient consent, 'Evidence of Prescription' in the form of an electronic prescription token may also be printed on paper and sent as a digital image (e.g. fax or email) to the patient's preferred pharmacy.

Further information about Telehealth Prescribing in the ACT is available [here](#).

The [DORA Real Time Prescription Monitoring System](#) is available in the ACT for patient care using a Schedule 8 medicine.

### New South Wales

New South Wales allows sending an image-based prescription as a photograph or scan to the pharmacist by email or fax. For Schedule 8 and Schedule 4 Appendix D medicines, the prescriber must immediately (within 24 hours) dispatch the original paper-based prescription to the pharmacist after sending the email or fax.

New South Wales does not permit a digital signature on a paper-based prescription or sending an image-based prescription in a text message.

For electronic prescriptions, the prescriber may give a paper token or send a digital token (also known as 'Evidence of Prescription') to the patient or his/her authorised agent. The prescriber cannot send it directly to a pharmacy unless the patient or his/her authorised agent has requested this to be done for one or more of his/her prescriptions. The prescriber should document the request in the patient's health care record.

See more on image-based prescriptions in NSW for:

- [Pharmacists](#)
- [Prescribers](#)

### Northern Territory (NT)

Northern Territory legislation allows image-based prescribing and dispensing of all medicines.

This includes NT prescribers providing image-based prescriptions for Schedule 4, Appendix D and Schedule 8 medicines to pharmacies.

The NT medicines and poisons unit information is available [here](#).

## Queensland

Electronic prescriptions are available in Queensland and provide a secure alternative to a written prescription or an oral (telephone) prescription. An electronic prescription token may be sent to the patient or the patient's agent via SMS or email. If preferred by the patient, a prescription token may also be printed on paper and sent as a digital image (e.g. fax or email) to the patient's preferred pharmacy.

Queensland legislation allows prescribers to send a digital image of a paper prescription directly to a dispenser for all medicines, including Schedule 8 medicines, provided the original paper prescription is sent to the dispensing pharmacy after the digital image is sent:

- for Schedule 8 medicines, no later than the next business day;
- for other medicines, no later than seven days.

While the interim imaged-based prescribing arrangements are in effect, there is a temporary exemption to the requirement to send the original paper prescription to the dispensing pharmacy for Schedule 4 medicines other than diversion-risk medicines (including anabolic steroids, growth hormone related products, appetite suppressants, benzodiazepines, gabapentin, pregabalin, tramadol, quetiapine, codeine products, zopiclone and zolpidem).

The original paper prescription must follow digital images of prescriptions for diversion risk medicines sent to a pharmacy.

To create a digital image of a paper prescription:

- The paper prescription must have a handwritten signature before the digital image is created; and
- The prescriber must ensure that details are written on the prescription of the pharmacy the digital image is to be sent to (to reduce fraud and duplicate dispensing).

See more about image-based prescriptions in Queensland [here](#).

## South Australia

### Digital image authorisation

The extension of the *National Health (COVID-19 Supply of Pharmaceutical Benefits) Special Arrangement 2020* applies in South Australia until **31 December 2021**.

Under this arrangement and in accordance with a temporary extension to the authorisation made under *Controlled Substances (Poisons) Regulations 2011*, a prescriber may give a pharmacist a prescription for a Schedule 4 (S4) medicine (excluding S4 Appendix D medicines) as a digital image of the original prescription.

Schedule 8 (S8) prescriptions must not be prescribed or supplied using a digital image of the original prescription but the prescription may be sent to the pharmacy by fax, endorsed with the name and address of the single pharmacy to dispense the drug.

For more information about requirements for prescribers who wish to give a prescription to a pharmacist for dispensing using a digital image, see the factsheet [Medicine supply on a digital image of a prescription](#) published on the South Australia Health [website](#).

### **Electronic prescriptions**

Electronic prescriptions are now widely used in South Australia and provide an alternative, secure and convenient option for patients to paper/written prescriptions.

An electronic prescription is a prescription that is electronically generated by a prescriber using conformant prescribing software and is used in the same way as a paper prescription, to get prescribed medicines from a pharmacy.

A unique QR barcode known as a 'token' is sent to the person as a text or email, which can then be presented to the pharmacist to enable access to the electronic prescription for dispensing.

There are many advantages to using electronic prescriptions including ease of use, reduced errors through improved legibility, privacy and security of personal information and improved prescription management.

For more information about electronic prescribing in South Australia go to the factsheets published on the [SA Health website](#).

### **Tasmania**

Electronic prescriptions are available in systems approved for use in Tasmania and provide a secure alternative to a paper prescription or a verbal (telephone) authorisation to supply. An electronic prescription token may be sent to the patient or the patient's agent via SMS or email. If preferred by the patient, a prescription token may also be printed on paper and sent as a digital copy (e.g. fax or email) to the patient's preferred pharmacy. The electronic prescription token must then be used to download the legally issued electronic prescription.

If an electronic prescription token is faxed or presented by the patient, is not a legally issued prescription or an instruction from the prescriber to supply a scheduled substance.

Tasmanian legislation allows a prescriber to send a copy of a paper prescription directly to a dispenser as an instruction to supply for all medicines, including Schedule 8, provided the original paper prescription is sent to the dispensing pharmacy within five (5) days of sending the copy.

Tasmanian interim imaged-based prescribing arrangements allow image-based prescribing of most Schedule 4 medicines up until **31 December 2021**. This excludes

Schedule 8 narcotic substances (S8) and Schedule 4 declared restricted substances (S4D).

From 1 January 2022, image-based prescriptions can no longer be legally issued in Tasmania. Image-based prescriptions issued by a prescriber prior to 1 January 2022 for Schedule 4 medicines will remain valid for 12 months from the date of issue for dispensing at the pharmacy sent the image-based prescription.

See more on image-based prescriptions in Tasmania for:

- [Pharmacists](#)
- [Prescribers](#)

## Victoria

In Victoria, a [public health emergency order](#) allows dispensing of medicines from the image of a paper prescription. The order is due to expire on 27 September 2021 and is proposed to be extended until 31 December 2021. The order excludes Schedule 8 and Schedule 4 drugs of dependence (Schedule 11 of the Victorian [Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981](#)).

Victoria does not adopt Appendix D of the Commonwealth Poisons Standard. The list of substances in Schedule 11 of VIC DPCS Act is less restrictive than Appendix D.

Key Schedule 4 restricted substances for community pharmacy are:

- benzodiazepines
- anabolic steroids
- pseudoephedrine
- phentermine

It does not include tramadol, pregabalin, gabapentin, z-drugs, retinoids, reproductive medicines or Schedule 4 codeine preparations.

A prescriber who is of the opinion that an emergency exists, may give an authorisation verbally to a pharmacist to supply a Schedule 4 or Schedule 8 poison – provided written confirmation (usually in the form of a prescription) of the verbal authorisation is provided to the pharmacist, as soon as practicable.

A prescriber can print off a copy of an electronic prescription token and send that to a pharmacy (either via fax, email or SMS) for supply. The paper copy is not required to be sent to the pharmacy because the legal prescription is in electronic form.

## Western Australia

In Western Australia, all prescription medicines including Schedule 4 and Schedule 8 medicines are available from the [image of a prescription](#). The instrument that enables the use of imaged based prescriptions will expire on 30 September 2021.