



PCEHR FAQs

What is e-health?

E-health is the secure electronic collection and exchange of health information between individuals, health care providers and health care organisations. E-health technologies include:

- health information exchange
- electronic referrals and discharges
- electronic diagnostics (pathology, radiology)
- electronic prescribing
- clinical decision support

What is the aim of the Australian Government's health reform agenda?

The focus of the Government's health reform is to significantly improve and modernise Australia's health system. It will be the largest change to our health, hospitals and aged care system since the introduction of Medicare.

E-health is one of the eight elements in the Government's health reform program. E-health underpins several of these elements, including hospitals, primary health care, aged care, national standards and performance, and the health workforce.

The personally controlled electronic health record (PCEHR) system is an essential component of e-health.

The Australian Government has provided \$466.7 million over the next two years until June 30 2012 to fund the development of the core national infrastructure, governance, standards and tools to enable all Australians who choose to participate, to register online for their PCEHR in July 2012.

What is a PCEHR?

A PCEHR is a personally controlled e-health record.

A PCEHR will include:

- a health summary view showing each patient's medical conditions, medications, allergies, and demographic information; and
- an indexed summary of the patient's health information and medical history. Over time this will include consultations, referrals, procedures, prescriptions and test results, and links to their personal health diaries and care plans. The richness of this information will increase as more services participate in the PCEHR system.

The PCEHR will allow an individual to be more involved in their own health care.

An individual decides if they want an electronic record, and then, who they will allow to access it.

It will allow an individual to check and update their health history online, and include information that is important to a patient's care, including alerts, current conditions, medications, and allergies. This will boost a patient's safety, improve health care delivery and cut waste and duplication.

What is the PCEHR system?

The personally controlled electronic health record system will be a secure, online system that will allow an individual – and their approved health providers – to have access to their health information.

The system will also include:

- a secure online access point (portal) so patients can access their own information and permit health care providers to access it; and
- an indexing and searching mechanism so patients can find their health information, regardless of where their health records are physically located.



The Australian Government's investment will enable the development of the core national infrastructure to harness existing information systems across the health sector – essentially to enable the systems to start talking to each other. It will support ongoing infrastructure, governance and standards development with a focus on delivering early benefits for patients and health care providers.

Will there be a national repository of medical records?

No, the PCEHR will operate in a distributed system.

Individual health records will be stored in national, state, or privately operated databases

Health care providers already store their patient's information in their own systems such as a GP's desktop computer, or a hospital's networked system. The PCEHR will source information from these existing systems.

The value of the PCEHR system is that all records will be linked together over time and will build your individual health care profile.

Why do we need changes to the way medical records are stored and accessed?

Patients currently have limited access to and control over their own health information. Their health information is largely fragmented and held in paper-based record systems across each health care provider they have seen.

Each health care provider usually only has an incomplete record of a patient's medical history and care needs. This means a patient's critical health information may not be available when and where they are being treated, especially in emergencies or when seeing multiple doctors or health care providers.

As well as being frustrating for patients and their health care providers, this can also have damaging effects on patients' health and the quality of care they receive. Many adverse drug events and poor transitions from one health care setting to another could be avoided with better access to patients' health information across care settings.

- Approximately two to three per cent of hospital admissions in Australia are related to medication errors. This represents an estimated 190,000 admissions each year, at an estimated annual cost of \$660 million.
- In 2008-09, eight per cent of the most serious medical errors reported in Victoria were caused by problems relating to patients' health information quality and availability.

Who will benefit from the introduction of the PCEHR?

All Australians will enjoy the health system benefits that arise from the implementation of a national personally controlled electronic health record system.

The system will enable improved sharing of information and better integration of patients' care across multiple providers. Patients will no longer need to recall and repeat their health information to different health care providers, or carry their medication lists with them when they travel or see new providers. They will not need to rely on their memory of test results and procedures.

Information will be linked to patients, rather than the places where they receive health care, allowing a more comprehensive picture of a patient's medical history.

This will be particularly valuable in helping the growing number of people with chronic and complex conditions manage their conditions more effectively, as this often involves patients seeing several care providers and taking several types of medication.

Parents who register their children for a personally controlled electronic health record will not have to remember what vaccinations each child has had, be concerned that allergies will be forgotten when emergencies occur away from home, or need to recall the last GP visit and what was diagnosed or prescribed. Discharge information from hospital stays, test results and prescribed medications will be available to inform clinical decisions.



Health care providers will not need to order unnecessary tests or spend time recreating records, chasing information from other providers, or requiring patients to repeat their medical history.

Over time, the personally controlled electronic health record system will also increase the value of telehealth and other online consultation services, helping to improve health care for Australians living in rural and remote areas.

What are the benefits of a PCEHR system for patients?

The PCEHR system will enable improved sharing of information and better integration of patients' care across multiple providers.

Information will be linked to patients, rather than the places where they receive health care, allowing a more comprehensive picture of a patient's medical history.

Patients will be able to be more involved in managing their health care. They will:

- allow access by health care providers of their own choice
- be able to be more involved in managing their health care
- not need to undergo unnecessary tests or repeat their medical history to different health care providers
- have a ready reference of their medical conditions, medications, allergies and an indexed summary of their health information and medical history
- be able to view this information over the internet, via a secure website, when and where they need it

Where does the IHI fit in?

IHI stands for Individual Healthcare Identifier and it is a unique number assigned to individuals and health care providers. It is your 16-digit key to secure your e-health information.

Using an IHI provides a way for health care providers to more accurately match the right records to the person they are treating and improve accuracy when communicating information with other health care providers. This will help to avoid medical mix-ups or one person's information being recorded on another patient's file.

Legislation underpinning IHIs has been passed by Federal Parliament (24 June, 2010). IHIs will provide individuals and providers with confidence that the right health information is associated with the correct individual at the point of care.





PCEHR Program Information – FAQs

What will be delivered on July 2012?

From 1 July 2012, Australians who choose to will be able to register online for an electronic health record.

They will be able to view their own information over the internet through a secure website. Health care providers, with their patient's permission, will be able to access this electronic health record information through their clinical information systems.

With the national infrastructure, robust governance and standards in place, other health information systems can integrate when ready. It is expected that primary health care systems, including those in GPs and community pharmacies, will be among the first to be ready to provide information.

The rollout of the personally controlled electronic health record system will provide increasing benefits to patients by providing greater access to information as it becomes available. The system will have the flexibility to respond to local needs and changes over time.

What role will the e-health sites have in the PCEHR system's implementation?

A key step in the establishment of the PCEHR system will be the participation of a number of lead implementation sites, also known as e-health sites. This will allow a staged approach to the rollout and careful evaluation of the system. International evidence indicates that a staged approach to the establishment of electronic health records, as is proposed for the PCEHR system, mitigates risk and leads to a strong sustainable benefit for patients.

- The purpose of these implementation projects will be to:
- deploy and test national e-health infrastructure and standards in real world health care settings
- demonstrate tangible outcomes and benefits from funded e-health projects
- build stakeholder support and momentum behind the national PCEHR system work program
- provide a meaningful foundation for further enhancement and rollout of the national PCEHR system

Consumer benefits

Why should I register for a PCEHR?

The national PCEHR system will provide significant benefits where a patient is seeing more than one doctor. This is because it will allow, with a patient's permission, health information to be available as a patient moves from one health care provider to another. This will be of particular benefit for people with chronic and complex health conditions, newborns, older Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Will I be denied access to health care if I choose not to sign up for a PCEHR?

No. A patient will not be denied access to health care if they decide not to register for a PCEHR. Participating in the national PCEHR system is not mandatory.

Starting 2012-13, Australians who choose to have a PCEHR will be able to register online and access their health information when and where they need it.

Will it replace my Medicare/DVA card – what will it give me?

No, the personally controlled electronic health record will not replace a patient's Medicare/DVA card. A key benefit of the national system is that it will be built upon existing health information systems.



Privacy

Who will have access to my records?

If you choose to have a personally PCEHR, you will be able to control what information is stored in the record and who can view that information.

What control will I have over who sees it? Will my family be able to see my health record?

You have control over what information is stored in the record and who can view that information. Members of your family and your health care provider(s) will only be able to access information in your record, if you give your consent for them to do so.

What about in an emergency – who can see my PCEHR information then?

The protections that exist now, which control who has access to your paper-based health records, would also apply to information in your record.

In addition to which, emergency medical services staff would be able to access information in your record to which you have provided consent for any health care provider to access.

How can I be sure my information won't be given to someone who could use it against me?

In addition to the control that you have over the information stored in your record and who can view that information, the Government will ensure the national PCEHR system is protected by the same laws that are in place for paper-based health records.

Plus, the Government will establish additional (to those that exist for paper-based health records) safeguards through the introduction of new laws and robust governance arrangements for the national system.

The national system will include audit trails, technology and data management controls, and appropriate security measures to minimise the likelihood of unauthorised access to information in your record.

Clinician – information and safety

How can I be sure that the information in my PCEHR is accurate?

All Australians will be allocated an Individual Healthcare Identifier – a 16-digit number which is unique for each person. The Healthcare Identifier Service is separate from the PCEHR system.

In November 2008, COAG agreed that the Individual Healthcare Identifiers should be allocated universally, rather than using an opt-in or out model. This was based on consultation with health care providers that indicated that a voluntary model would require health care providers to maintain duplicate systems. It was considered that this unnecessary burden would impact negatively on the uptake of the Individual Healthcare Identifiers.

Individual Healthcare Identifiers will enable reliable identification of individuals' health information across different care settings. Allocating an Individual Healthcare Identifier reduces the risk of mismatched information, resulting in safer electronic health records system.

What if I notice information in my PCEHR that is inaccurate? Can I delete it?

It is expected that the same conventions would apply to e-health records as currently do for paper-based health care records. To ensure patient safety, this is one of the issues that will be considered as part of the implementation planning with jurisdictions, health care providers and consumers, to ensure public safety is addressed.

