



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Axe the fax: new Agency incentive supports paperless healthcare**

The Australian Digital Health Agency has today announced an incentive to accelerate clinical software provider adoption of standards to deliver enhanced secure messaging functionality into their systems by 2020.

Eliminating paper-based messaging in healthcare is a priority of the National Digital Health Strategy, which was approved in 2017 by all states and territories through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Health Council.

The Agency has been working with the software industry and healthcare providers to develop standards to improve the secure exchange of healthcare information. Following the successful trialling of the co-designed standards in 2018, the Agency is encouraging widespread adoption as part of the program.

Secure messaging systems allow healthcare professionals to quickly and securely send important health information, such as referrals, specialist letters and hospital discharge summaries, to other healthcare professionals providing their patients care.

Consumer, Emily Vuong said, "As a person with type 1 diabetes, I see a large variety of health professionals to stay on top of my health and it is extremely frustrating when I have to explain the same thing to five different people to manage my condition. A system enabling healthcare professionals to share my information quickly and securely would not only be more convenient but also eliminate the risk of me miscommunicating the advice I've received from one healthcare professional to the next."

Many healthcare professionals are already using secure messaging platforms; however, many of these platforms are not compatible with one another, meaning healthcare professionals cannot send information to one another and instead need to use unreliable fax machines or the post.

Consumers Health Forum of Australia Chief Executive Officer, Leanne Wells said, "A modern, connected health system requires modern communication technologies. Manila folders of paper records and fax machines aren't good enough in the 21st century – secure, robust and interoperable messaging is fundamental to creating the patient-centred health system Australia needs and deserves."

Under an agreement, the Agency will provide \$30,000 to software vendors to integrate new standards into their existing clinical information and secure messaging systems, which will enable health professionals using different platforms to securely send information to their patients and other health professionals.

General practitioner and advisor to the Agency, Dr Nathan Pinskiier said, "This is an important next step on the path to mainstream adoption of secure electronic communications in healthcare. Secure communications will provide more efficient, safer and direct transfer of clinical information between healthcare providers. Numerous



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coroners' reports have highlighted the risks of a continued reliance on legacy systems such as fax and post. It's time for healthcare as an industry and profession to adopt 21<sup>st</sup> century communications solutions."

The software industry, the clinical community and the Agency agreed on new interoperability standards for secure messaging in 2018 that will ensure different systems can talk to each other.

Medical Software Industry Association Chief Executive Officer, Emma Hossack said, "The Medical Software Industry supports interoperability and this project is clearly an important component. Our members have put in considerable time and resources and welcome the offer to stimulate the work that needs to be done."

This initiative has been put in place to accelerate the adoption of these new standards by software developers following two successful proof-of-concept projects in 2018.

All private vendors that currently operate a clinical information or secure messaging system with secure messaging capabilities, at two different sites as a minimum, are eligible.

"Providing patient care in collaboration with other clinicians requires the safe and timely sharing of their health information," said Agency Chief Medical Adviser, Clinical Professor Meredith Makeham.

"The inability of healthcare providers to share information quickly can lead to communication breakdowns, which can contribute to poor health outcomes and unnecessary duplication of care."

"This is a significant step toward ensuring healthcare providers can use the tools they already have to send information to their patients and other clinicians providing those patients care, and in turn provide safer and more comprehensive care."

"We are delighted by the way the software industry has collaborated on the development of these standards, and are pleased to be supporting them in accelerating the rollout," said Agency Chief Operating Officer Bettina McMahon.

"We are now moving from a proof of concept and standards development stage to one of national scaling, and this is a step in that direction. We are working closely with governments and the health sector to accelerate take up of software that meets the standards".

Further information on this initiative and vendors can express their interest to be involved is available on the Agency's website.

**ENDS**

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## About the Australian Digital Health Agency

The Agency is tasked with improving health outcomes for all Australians through the delivery of digital healthcare systems, and implementing [Australia's National Digital Health Strategy](#) – *Safe, Seamless, and Secure: evolving health and care to meet the needs of modern Australia* in collaboration with partners across the community. The Agency is the System Operator of [My Health Record](#), and provides leadership, coordination, and delivery of a collaborative and innovative approach to utilising technology to support and enhance a clinically safe and connected national health system. These improvements will give individuals more control of their health and their health information, and support healthcare providers to deliver informed healthcare through access to current clinical and treatment information. Further information: [www.digitalhealth.gov.au](http://www.digitalhealth.gov.au).