



**Allied Health
Professions
Australia**

Digital Inclusion Assessment and Planning Tool for allied health providers

Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA), in conjunction with the Australian Digital Health Agency (ADHA), has developed the following tool to help allied health professionals understand and engage with digital health technology. The tool is intended to help allied health providers to first assess whether particular technology is relevant for their practice and patients, and to then access a range of resources, including training and connection guides, to help them implement these within their practice. The key digital health technologies addressed in this tool include My Health Record, secure messaging and telehealth.

This tool is particularly relevant for allied health providers in the context of the ADHA Communities of Excellence program but can be utilised by any allied health provider to support decision making and learning in relation to digital health.

Background

Australian governments have invested significant resources in digital health technology including My Health Record, secure messaging and other related programs. Many of these technologies have the potential to help allied health providers connect and communicate more effectively with other health professionals, and to support better access to information such as medication overviews, pathology and diagnostic imaging results, discharge summaries, and health histories. This in turn can support better patient outcomes and a more efficient healthcare system.

For allied health providers, access to digital technology still has practical barriers, the most significant of which is access to software that can interact with other digital systems such as My Health Record and secure messaging integration. While there are workarounds that allow allied health providers to use digital health technology, these have time and functionality limitations that providers need to consider.

The recent need to isolate large parts of the community as part of Australia's COVID-19 response has led to a recognition of the potential of digital tools such as telehealth to provide ongoing access to services for consumers who are isolated from their healthcare providers or where it is not safe to provide hands-on services. This has resulted in a significant expansion of telehealth eligibility under government funding programs and is likely to have a positive impact on the affordability of telehealth services for consumers and providers.

For allied health providers to be considered digitally included and able to participate in digital health reforms, a number of indicators need to be met:

1. Access – access to digital health technology including available fit-for-purpose tools such as conformant clinical information systems and access to stable and reliable internet connectivity.
2. Affordability – in addition to being fit-for-purpose, digital health technology must be affordable for allied health providers, both in terms of the cost of purchasing a product and in the cost of implementing and using that product.
3. Digital literacy – allied health providers must understand and be confident with digital platforms if they are to use the tools that are available. That requires access to information and guidance about those tools and access to support and training on the use of new technologies.

Supporting allied health providers to improve digital literacy for themselves and their clients will, in turn, support providers to be prepared for future developments in the allied health software market.

Introducing the digital inclusion tool

This tool consists of several components designed to support self-assessment and planning by allied health providers. The first section is designed to help respondents gain a better understanding of their practice and work profile, and their overall digital literacy. This is followed by sections focusing on secure messaging, My Health Record and telehealth. Each has been kept distinct, despite the interaction between each, to allow providers to make separate implementation decisions about each and to support an incremental approach to use of digital health technology.

Each section includes:

1. An introduction to the specific type of digital health technology.
2. A series of questions to help providers determine whether their practice would benefit from a given type of digital health technology.
3. A series of questions to help determine their level of understanding of the technology.
4. Links and references that can be used to increase digital literacy and to plan for and implement digital health technology.



Self-Assessment Tool – General

The following self-assessment tools (general and digital literacy) are designed to help you develop a profile of your practice, and to help you assess your overall level of digital knowledge and understanding. These questions provide a foundation for the more focused sections that follow, which provide more specific guidance in relation to different types of digital health technology. This tool is designed to be used both independently and in conjunction with a local Primary Health Network (PHN) team supporting allied health providers to access digital health technology.

Practice profile

- » Which allied health profession do you work in?
- » Are you a sole practitioner?
- » Do you employ staff? If so:
 - › How many practitioners do you employ?
 - › Which other health professions do you employ?
- » Do you or your staff provide home-based services?
- » Do you work across multiple businesses?
- » Are you co-located in a general practice?
- » Are you located in a community health service?
- » Which funding sources are used by your patients?
 - › Medicare
 - › Department of Veterans' Affairs
 - › National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
 - › State and territory accident and compensation schemes
 - › Other state and territory funding
 - › Private health insurance
- » Do you use a clinical information system? If so, what system are you using?
- » What do you use your clinical information system for?
 - › Appointment bookings
 - › Online appointment bookings
 - › Patient recalls and reminders
 - › Billing
 - › Patient health records
 - › Referral management
 - › Creating and storing letters and documents
 - › Accessing patient and provider education
 - › Marketing
- » Do you use PRODA to securely access online government services e.g. NDIS?

Community resources

- » What is the distance (kms) to the nearest general practice?
- » What is the distance (kms) to the nearest tertiary hospital?
- » What is the distance (kms) to the nearest community hospital?
- » Do you work with any medical specialists? If so, which specialties?
- » What is the distance to these specialists? Do they provide local clinics if not based locally?
- » Are there any gaps in your community's health resources/services?
- » How does your practice aim to address these gaps?

Self-Assessment Tool – Digital Literacy

Consider the following statements and respond YES or NO to each. This will help you better understand your overall familiarity with digital tools and comfort in using these.

Personal use of digital tools

- » I have a reliable and affordable internet service at home.
- » I communicate with friends and family through:
 - › social media
 - › email
 - › videoconference (e.g. Facetime, Skype, Zoom)
 - › instant messaging apps (e.g. SMS, iMessage, WhatsApp, etc).
- » I use social media.
- » I use email for general communication.
- » I use digital health tools to monitor my wellness (eg Fitbit, iWatch, etc).

Cybersecurity and privacy

- » I carefully consider what links I follow from emails sent to me.
- » I use virus protection and internet security on my personal computer.
- » I use virus protection and internet security on my mobile phone.
- » I backup my data on a regular basis.
- » I use different, complex passwords to protect my access to IT systems, emails and social media.
- » I change the passwords I use to access IT systems regularly.
- » I apply regular software updates to ensure we are running on the latest versions for most effective security protection to be assured (e.g. web browsers).
- » I have read and comply with my organisation's policies on cybersecurity, ICT use, clinical record system and risk management.
- » I use fax to communicate with other health professionals about my patients.
- » I use email to communicate with health colleagues and networks.
- » I use email to communicate clinical information to and about my patients.
- » I understand the difference between email and secure messaging.
- » I use social media and/or electronic direct marketing tools to market my business.
- » I prescribe apps for my patients.
- » I have a self-check-in kiosk integrated with my clinical information system.
- » I use digital payment solutions for processing payments (e.g. EFTPOS).
- » I use digital claims-processing systems (e.g. HICAPS or integrated Easyclaim).
- » I have an integrated patient app for appointments, education etc.
- » I understand how to ensure that the digital tools I am using comply with Australian cybersecurity and privacy laws.

Secure messaging

- » I use secure messaging to receive referrals and patient information.
- » I use secure messaging to send referrals and patient reports.
- » I understand how secure messaging is used in my local area (e.g. discharge summary from hospital to practice).

My Health Record

- » I have used the My Health Record system.
- » I have a good understanding of the components of the My Health Record system.
- » I feel confident to use the My Health Record system.
- » I use the My Health Record system to validate patient information.
- » I upload patient information to the My Health Record.
- » I can navigate the My Health Record system to find relevant patient information as required
- » I understand the relevance of an event summary to allied health professionals.
- » I can explain the benefits of My Health Record for continuity of care.

Telehealth/remote consultations

- » Our practice uses telephone consultations.
- » Our practice uses video consultations.
- » Our practice uses a web-based telehealth platform.
- » Our practice uses a standards-compliant tool for video consultations (e.g. encryption).
- » Our practice has a telehealth platform with integrated booking system, waiting room and interactive tools for sharing clinical data and documents.
- » Our practice collects patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) (e.g. weight).
- » Our practice collects PROMs via wearable technologies integrated into practice clinical information systems (e.g. heart rate).

Population health and data

- » Our practice uses aggregated data from our clinical records system to analyse patient presentations and trends in patient bookings.
- » Our practice uses data from our clinical records system to analyse population health and chronic disease within our community.
- » Our practice uses data from our clinical records system to analyse Medicare billing to improve profitability.
- » Our practice uses data from our clinical records system to analyse data entry quality and work practices.
- » Our practice has a quality improvement strategy and regularly reviews work practices using digital patient information.
- » Our practice seeks feedback from patients through online surveys/tools to identify service improvements.
- » Our practice seeks feedback from patients through in-practice kiosks.



Self-Assessment Tool – Secure messaging for my practice

Introducing secure messaging

Secure messaging is a way to send confidential information securely between healthcare providers. It is similar to using email but secure messaging systems encrypt the message so that documents cannot be intercepted or read by anyone other than the recipient. This technology is used by general practitioners, pathology providers, specialists, hospitals and allied health providers for the secure exchange of clinical documents. Secure messaging systems can be integrated into clinical software or used as a standalone portal.

Secure messaging is regarded as more secure than fax and regular email systems which are not considered a confidential means of for exchanging clinical information or transferring patient documents such as reports, scans, referrals and care plans. Messages sent via secure messaging are delivered to a single, confirmed identity and documents are saved directly to the clinical information system so there is no need to print a hard copy at either end.

How will secure messaging help my practice?

The following questions will help you determine how your practice would benefit from secure messaging.

- » Do you know how many referrals you receive each week?
- » Do you know how many patient documents/reports your practice shares with other providers each week?
- » Do you receive patient documentation in a timely manner so it is available when needed at the point of care?
- » Do you or your practice staff spend significant time chasing paperwork, scanning, printing, faxing and mailing hard copy documents?
- » Do you or your staff often have to search for patient documentation?
- » Do you have a documented audit trail of sent and received documentation so that you can be assured of its successful transmission?
- » Does your practice have confidential clinical paper-based information visible to non-clinicians?
- » Have you assessed the costs and potential cost savings (benefits) associated with the use of secure messaging systems?

The following questions will help you determine your level of understanding about secure messaging use.

- » Does your clinical information system have an inbuilt secure messaging system?
- » Do you know which secure messaging program (e.g. HealthLink, Argus etc.) is primarily used by providers in your local area (e.g. hospitals, primary care providers)?
- » Do you expect to improve security of patient information by using secure messaging?
- » Do you expect your patients will benefit from your practice's use of secure messaging?
- » Do you expect to reduce cost by using secure messaging technology?
- » Do you understand how to promote the use of secure messaging to your healthcare contacts?
- » Do you foresee many barriers to the use of secure messaging?
- » Do you have a plan to train, implement secure messaging in your practice?
- » Do you know how to address the change management aspects (e.g. workflow changes) that come with implementation of new technologies into healthcare services?

This self-assessment tool is designed to be read and considered in conjunction with other AHPA resources on digital health for allied health professionals. Resources from AHPA and other publications focusing on secure messaging can be found below.

Resources

AHPA resources

AHPA resources for allied health professionals are available on the AHPA website at <https://ahpa.com.au/resources/>

- » [Connection guide for secure messaging](#)
- » 'Secure messaging fact sheet for dietitians' in [Digital Health Toolkit – Dietetics](#)
- » 'Secure messaging fact sheet for physiotherapists' in [Digital Health Toolkit – Physiotherapy](#)
- » 'Secure messaging fact sheet for psychologists' in [Digital Health Toolkit – Psychology](#)

Additional resources – learning about secure messaging

The following resources provide more information about the benefits of secure messaging and how it works.

- » [Overview of secure messaging in Australia](#) | ADHA
- » [Future of secure messaging in Australia](#) | Health Intersections

The following resources provide information about campaigns and projects to increase the use and interoperability (i.e. compatibility) of secure messaging systems.

- » [National digital health strategy: secure messaging](#) | ADHA
- » [Axe the fax campaign](#) | HealthcareIT
- » [Axe the fax campaign](#) | PulseIT Magazine
- » [ADHA expansion of secure messaging](#) | HealthcareIT

Additional resources – planning for secure messaging

The following resources provide more information about setting up secure messaging in your practice, including choosing and using software platforms.

- » [4 steps to secure messaging success](#) | Train IT Medical
- » [Secure messaging and electronic clinical referrals](#) | HealthvitalIT

Information about setting up specific secure messaging systems is available from software vendors.



Self-Assessment Tool – My Health Record for my practice

Introducing My Health Record

My Health Record is a secure online repository of an individual's key medical and health information, including documents and data. Healthcare providers can access a patient's My Health Record to view and add patient health information that might not otherwise be available to inform treatment. The system provides a summary of key health information and is not a copy of detailed clinical notes held by healthcare providers.

Through the My Health Record system healthcare providers can access timely information about their patients such as shared health summaries, discharge summaries, prescription and dispense records, pathology reports and diagnostic imaging reports.

The following questions will help you determine how your practice would benefit from using My Health Record.

- » Are you aware that over 90% of Australians now have an individual My Health Record that you are able to access when providing treatment?
- » Do you support patients that have been recently discharged from hospital?
- » Would it be beneficial to be able to access hospital discharge summaries for your patients?
- » Do you always know about the other healthcare providers in your patients' healthcare teams?
- » Do patients forget to bring their referrals when visiting your practice?
- » Do you feel you have all the information to inform treatment and manage patients safely?
- » Do you ever need to follow up healthcare providers for missing referrals to your service?
- » Do you ever need to chase information about the medications the patient is using?
- » Do your patients forget which medications they are currently taking?
- » Are you able to access relevant test results that may have been ordered by other providers?
- » Would it be helpful for other healthcare providers to access reports or treatment plans you have written when providing care for a patient?
- » Do you have up-to-date information about patient medical histories (allergies, medications, history and immunisations) to inform treatment options and decision making?
- » Are you aware you can upload an event summary to My Health Record to share information about a patient (e.g. a consultation summary)?
- » Do you treat patients who are travelling/transient and who may not have access to their health information?

The following questions will help you determine your level of understanding of the technology and privacy controls for My Health Record.

- » Are you aware that in order to access My Health Record you need to be registered as a provider with the Healthcare Identifiers Service?
- » Do you know you can access a patient's My Health Record from wherever you are practising as long as you have an internet connection?
- » Do you know you can connect to the My Health Record using the National Provider Portal rather than gaining access via clinical information software?
- » Are you aware your patients can access their own My Health Record to see reports and results such as x-rays, clinical reports and treatment plans uploaded by their healthcare providers?
- » Did you know patients can control which practices can access their My Health Record?
- » Are you aware that medication records and test results (pathology and imaging) are automatically sent to My Health Record (for registered patients)?
- » Are you familiar with the Australian Privacy Principles and the need to comply with these in relation to accessing patient information in the My Health Record system?

- » Are you aware that a National Authentication Service for Health (NASH) certificate is used to authenticate users wanting to connect to My Health Record to maintain the privacy and security of the system?
- » Are you aware bank-strength security is used to assure the security of the information held in the My Health Record system?
- » Do you keep your electronic patient records up-to-date and make use of clinical coding (select data from drop-down lists) where possible to standardise the recording of information?

This self-assessment tool is designed to be read and considered in conjunction with other AHPA resources on digital health for allied health professionals. Resources from AHPA and other publications focusing on My Health Record can be found below.

Resources

AHPA resources

AHPA resources for allied health professionals are available on the AHPA website at <https://ahpa.com.au/resources/>

- » [My Health Record connection guide for AHPRA-registered professions](#)
- » [My Health Record connection guide for self-regulated professions](#)

The following resources were developed by AHPA for specific professions but they contain general information that will also be relevant to other allied health providers.

- » **Dietetics**
 - › [Dietitians and digital health](#) [webinar]
 - › [Digital health toolkit – dietetics](#)
 - › [Digital health policy templates – dietetics](#)
- » **Physiotherapy**
 - › [Physiotherapists and digital health](#) [webinar]
 - › [Digital health toolkit – physiotherapy](#)
 - › [Digital health policy templates – physiotherapy](#)
- » **Psychology**
 - › [Psychologists and digital health](#) [webinar]
 - › [Digital health toolkit – psychology](#)
 - › [Digital health policy templates – psychology](#)

Additional resources – learning about My Health Record

The following resources provide information on the benefits of My Health Record and how it can be used.

- » [My Health Record in allied health](#) | My Health Record
- » [My Health Record training resources](#) | Australian Digital Health Agency
- » [New My Health Record online training for allied health professionals](#) | My Health Record

The following resources provide information about compliance requirements for using My Health Record

- » [Understanding privacy, security and consent](#) | My Health Record
- » [Privacy and the My Health Record system](#) | Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

The following resource provide practical information about the steps involved in connecting with the My Health Record system.

- » [Register and connect with My Health Record](#) | My Health Record
- » [Overview of NASH](#) | HealthvitalIT
- » [Set up NASK PKI certificates in your organisation](#) | Australia Digital Health Agency
- » [Set up healthcare identifiers](#) | My Health Record
- » [Access My Health Record using the provider portal](#) | My Health Record



Self-Assessment Tool – Telehealth for my practice

Introducing telehealth

Telehealth is the use of communications technology to deliver healthcare. A telehealth consultation is one where the patient and healthcare professional are connected from two different locations via real time audio-visual or phone-based communication.

Telehealth also includes case conferencing scenarios where the patient may be supported by other allied health professionals, their GP or medical specialist/s. Telehealth consultations may also include other family members, carers, educators etc. where appropriate.

A variety of conditions and injuries can be diagnosed and managed via video or telephone conference. However, telehealth platforms must comply with security and privacy laws to protect patients' privacy and confidentiality.

The following questions will help you determine how your practice and patients may benefit from telehealth.

- » Do any of your patients have difficulty accessing your services due to time or mobility constraints?
- » Do any of your patients have difficulty accessing your services due to their remote location?
- » Are you located in a geographical area that is remote or difficult for your patients to access?
- » Could you provide ongoing support or rehabilitation services for any of your long-term patients using remote consultation services?
- » Would any of your patients find a telehealth consultation more convenient?
- » Would any of your paediatric patients feel more relaxed consulting with you via telehealth technology in their own environment?
- » Do you need to physically examine patients to be able to diagnose and treat their conditions at each visit?
- » Do you feel that face-to-face is the only effective option for consultations in your area of practice?
- » Are there any aspects of your consultations that could be performed online (e.g. written assessments)?
- » Are there some consultations that could be more efficiently and effectively be dealt with by phone or video consultation with effective triage protocols in place?
- » Would it be beneficial to include other healthcare providers or members of your patient's family in the consultation?
- » Do you ever travel long distances to visit patients?
- » Is there an opportunity for you to work remotely and minimise travel time/maximise productive time on certain days of the week?
- » Are you familiar with the COVID-19 telehealth Medicare item numbers and rules for allied health providers?
- » Do you feel that your patients are technologically ready to use telehealth?
- » Do you have reliable, fast broadband internet services available at your home or practice location?
- » Do you think telehealth represents a patient-centred approach to care?
- » Do you think that offering telehealth may improve access to care for patients?
- » Would you like to expand your service offerings?
- » Are you aware of the costs and potential cost savings/benefits associated with the use of telehealth platforms?

The following questions will help you determine your level of understanding about technology used for telehealth.

- » Have you previously participated in a telehealth consultation as a patient or support person for a patient?
- » Are you aware of the large number of both free and paid telehealth platforms available to healthcare providers to conduct consultations?

- » Does your patient management system already integrate with one or more telehealth platforms?
- » Are you aware of the key factors to consider when choosing a suitable telehealth platform for remote consultations?
- » Do you have a web camera that is suitable for videoconferencing (either built into your device or standalone)?
- » Do you know the difference between the audio and video components of a video conference and whether your current computer hardware supports both?
- » Do you regularly update your software so that you are using the latest versions of web browsers?
- » Are you aware that telehealth platforms can connect multiple parties into a single session so you can include multiple patients/providers or conduct group sessions via telehealth?
- » Do you have a backup plan in case the technology fails during a telehealth consultation?
- » Do you have up-to-date contact information for patients (i.e. phone number and email address) to enable you to send video conferencing details?
- » Do you understand the requirements for obtaining and recording patient consent in relation to telehealth consultations?

This self-assessment tool is designed to be read and considered in conjunction with other AHPA resources on digital health for allied health professionals. Resources from AHPA and other publications focusing on telehealth can be found below.

Resources

AHPA resources

AHPA is developing telehealth guidelines for allied health professionals. When this document is finalised it will be published on the AHPA website at <https://ahpa.com.au/resources/>

The following guidelines are available from AHPA member organisations. These documents contain general advice as well as specific guidance for members of those professions. More information about telehealth for allied health can be found on our member organisations' websites. Please note, some information may be member-access only.

- » [Telehealth guidelines 2020](#) | Occupational Therapy Australia
- » [Telehealth guidelines](#) | Australian Physiotherapy Association

These and some of the other telehealth resources listed were produced in response to the expansion of telehealth during COVID-19. However, they also provide information that is relevant in a broader sense.

Additional resources – learning about telehealth

The following resource provides practical information on how to go about telehealth in your practice.

- » [Telehealth in allied health – 'How to'](#) [webinar] | Allied Health Support

Additional resources – planning for telehealth

The following resources provide more information about setting up and managing a telehealth service in your practice, including software platforms and governance.

- » [Telehealth for allied health](#) | Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health
- » [COVID-19 resources: specialties and allied health](#) | Pulse+IT
- » [Finding the right tools to integrate and expand your services through telehealth](#) | Digital Health CRC
- » [Risk management when using video conferencing software for clinical video consultations](#) | Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine

- » [Web conferencing security](#) | Australian Cyber Security Centre
- » [Quick guides for telehealth](#) | University of Queensland, Centre for Online Health

Additional resources – telehealth consultations

The following resources provide information that may be useful for conducting telehealth clinical consultations.

- » [Telehealth video consultations guide](#) | Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- » [Telehealth guidelines and practical tips](#) | Royal Australasian College of Physicians
- » [How to do a high quality remote consultation](#) | Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine

