Securing eHealth information

A guide for consumers

Governments across Australia have committed to a national approach to electronic health (eHealth) that will enable a safer, higher quality, more equitable and sustainable health system for all Australians.

eHealth is set to improve the healthcare system by transforming the way information is used to plan, manage and deliver health services. It will achieve this by using technology to improve access, transmission and recording of health information. This includes the ability to securely transfer information such as referrals, discharge summaries, test orders and results and prescriptions quickly and safely between healthcare providers. In addition, the Australian Government's personally controlled electronic health (eHealth) record system will allow you to securely access your important health information online.

All eHealth systems, including the Australian Government's eHealth record system, have many built-in security safeguards. This factsheet explains how you and your healthcare providers can protect your health information.

What is the NESAF?

As part of eHealth reform, health organisations are applying the National eHealth Security and Access Framework (NESAF), a standardised security framework developed to help protect your health information.

Healthcare organisations apply the NESAF to assess their security practices and identify any opportunities to improve them.

Central to the NESAF is trust. The NESAF assists in ensuring that the trusting relationship you currently have with your healthcare provider, and the information they have about you, continues into the eHealth environment.

Specifically, this means you can have confidence that your personal health information is secure, your confidentiality and privacy are maintained when interacting with eHealth, and that only those involved in your care can access and share your information.

How is my health information protected?

Health information is protected by specific privacy laws in Australia, including Commonwealth (Cth), State and Territory legislation

- The Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) is the key piece of legislation in Australia and regulates how organisations collect, use, disclose and secure personal information and provides individuals with rights of access and correction. All health service providers are expected to comply with the Privacy Act
- The Personally Controlled Electronic Health Records Act 2012 provides further assurance by setting out civil penalties for unauthorised use, collection and disclosure of information held in your eHealth record
- In addition to legal obligations, professional and ethical codes and standards also apply to healthcare providers to protect your health information

What can I do to help protect my health information?

Types of security safeguards that the NESAF recommends for healthcare organisations include:

- Controlled access – ensuring only authorised persons have access to your health information
- Secure communication – making sure that your health information is protected as it travels between organisations to prevent viewing or tampering by unauthorised persons
- Audit trails – to assist in understanding who may have accessed your health information
- Back-ups – so your health information can be restored if required.

In addition to the security safeguards employed by healthcare providers, and their respective organisations, there are a number of things that you can do to help keep your health information secure. Some of these include:

- Set a strong password
  If a password is required to access your health information, set a strong password in accordance with recommended system requirements. Do not share your password with anyone. If you are asked to set up 'secret questions and answers' make sure these would not be easily guessed by someone else
- Be aware of what you share
  Be mindful of what you share on the internet through social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn blogs.

Do not disclose identity information such as your date of birth, drivers licence or Medicare number unless you have initiated the contact and you know the other person involved.

- Be aware of the possibility of viruses or malicious software
  Is your computer protected against malicious software? Be wary of malicious software such as viruses, worms or trojans which could compromise your online safety. Install security software, update it regularly and renew your security subscription as required.

These are just some ideas to help secure online information. More information can be found at http://www.staysmartonline.gov.au/

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For more information on eHealth or the NESAF visit: **www.nehta.gov.au**

You can now register for a personally controlled electronic health record. Visit **www.eHealth.gov.au** to apply.