



14 September 2018

Australian Digital Health Agency submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Inquiry into the My Health Record system

The Australian Digital Health Agency (the Agency) welcomes the opportunity to provide information to the Senate Community Affairs Committee inquiry into the My Health Record system.

Key points we make are:

The program to create a My Health Record for all Australians by the end of 2018, unless they tell us they do not want one, is the culmination of ten years of planning, design and development carried out under several Health Ministers, current and former federal governments;

The benefits of a national digital health record have been discussed at length and are supported by key healthcare provider, consumer and industry representative bodies;

The legislation and program have been scrutinised by several independent enquiries, and shaped by national and international experience on the most appropriate national system for Australia with regard to our federated health system, mix of public and private healthcare, and sentiment of the Australian community;

The system itself has been in operation for six years and is in a mature state of operation with over 6 million records under management, with all security, privacy, clinical safety and consumer services in operation;

The transition to opt-out was trialled in two areas in 2016 that involved over 1 million consumers, and experience from those trials has shaped every element of the national expansion; and

Raising awareness amongst consumers about the My Health Record is an important first step in developing deeper 'digital health literacy' across the population. The transition to opt-out will not be the end of the journey, but the beginning of a new phase of consumer engagement that will empower consumers to play a stronger role in managing their own health information and making better health decisions – supporting Australians to live happier, healthier lives.

Background

The concept of a national digital health record accessible to consumers was formally agreed by Australian governments in the 2008 *National eHealth Strategy*, which called for an Integrated eHealth Record “to provide a consolidated record of an individual’s health information for consumers to access and as a mechanism for improving care co-ordination between care provider teams”¹.

This priority considered international experience of the benefits from a whole of health system record where relevant health information followed the consumer. For example, Kaiser Permanente in the US believe that their \$US4B investments in digital health have improved health outcomes of those in their care; reducing death rates due to sepsis by 66%, death rates from stroke by 40% and heart attack by 50%².

It was also informed by experience of an electronic health record in the Northern Territory that was implemented in 2004 – *My eHealth Record* – which was designed to overcome fragmentation of clinical information. Although it was early days in implementation, this system was recognised as a frontrunner for a future national system to support healthcare providers to make informed clinical decisions and improve patient outcomes, which the system ultimately achieved when assessed in an [evaluation study](#).³

