

# Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

## The Healthcare Identifiers Bill

**Topic:** Enquiry into the Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010

**Submission Author:** GPpartners and Brisbane South Division of General Practice

**Based on significant experience with nationally recognised e-Health projects, GPpartners and Brisbane South Division support the introduction of the Health Identifier. It is an important first step in a national eHealth journey. It is time to take such steps with a view that there will be learnings and experiences along the way that can be fed back into the systems, over time, to enhance health services and health outcomes for all Australians.**

### **General Points on the Bills:**

Divisions of General Practice provide support services to GPs across the community facilitating health efficiencies and quality improvements across primary health care providers.

*GPpartners* and *Brisbane South* Division operate in urban and outer metropolitan areas on the North and South of Brisbane and together service an area of approximately 1 million citizens and administer support programs for over 1,000 GPs. Both Divisions have had a strong commitment to improved work practices and efficiencies in health services delivery across the community. A key component of both Divisions has been leadership in the development of **community based eHealth services** using information technology to create interoperability, and field tested change management skills to encourage uptake.

Successful eHealth projects to date by GPpartners are widely referenced in national reform documents advocating eHealth benefits. The combination of patient consent, shared health records and data sharing agreements have been implemented using secure IT methods to provide community based coordinated care services for over 4 years. Our projects are scalable to work collaboratively with community based organisations seeking to use health information exchange to introduce new services and improve efficiencies. Key clinical programs that are already well progressed and are able to benefit immediately from Health Identifiers include:

- Co-ordination of community based patients through *Team Care Coordination* program avoiding unnecessary hospital stays
- Primary Care collaborative (APCC) supporting improved health outcomes for patients with chronic diseases and aligning practices towards population health outcomes
- Indigenous support through programs assisting self identification in primary care and aligning new services around Closing the Gap program
- Medications management supporting ePrescribing in the community using patient identifiers linking records for aged care patients and enabling medications compliance

We view the introduction of the Health Identifier legislation as a **key first step** as a nation to a broad community aligned approach to health information exchange. The national Health Identifier is a foundational element of patient identification that will unleash many innovations across the

community. With healthcare providers using a common number, underpinned by a verified set of demographic data, increases in data quality and trust can be achieved and the potential for more efficient patient service delivery enabled.

The Health Identifier is the key building block for an eHealth future and a healthier Australia. Without it we are not able to efficiently and safely align data collated at different care settings into a whole patient view. The current lack of a unique and universal Identifier is holding back patient safety and quality projects that are ready to proceed.

Our goal is to improve the quality of clinical decision making, through improved quality of data collected and used in General Practice. The Health Identifier legislation will, for the first time, enable systems to capture reliable patient demographic data and link to patient records in a consistent way that can be used by both clinicians and computer systems to better inform service delivery. The process commences with the most basic of data i.e. having the patient correctly identified in a consistent way such that information can be exchanged for use in a range of care settings.

We are keen to ensure the significant change management required to support the adoption of the Health Identifier is integral to the national program. There are many projects that can fail at the point of implementation due to human and social factors. We recommend that **early demonstration projects** be suitably funded to showcase the potential for eHealth and pass on learnings and insights necessary for national rollout.

Some discussions in the media over privacy aspects of an eHealth future have called for delays while further consideration takes place. We support the importance of patient confidence in the systems deployed. Patient privacy interests can be provided for, however there is potential for privacy issues obsession to overwhelm and slow progress if not kept in context of limitations of privacy in current work practices and the many safety and quality issues with current paper based systems. The move to an eHealth based system will allow for the introduction of standards and standardised ways of exchanging patient information which will facilitate **increased privacy** and **better privacy transparency**. Technology currently in use in our projects has appropriate privacy capabilities supported by normal professional processes to ensure patients' interests are provided for. While there will be some aspects that are not yet fully specified or require further work, we nevertheless believe that adoption of Health Identifiers should proceed at a pace with scope for adjustments and improvements on the way.

We have a long journey ahead in adopting eHealth and driving the benefits for both patients and providers. A key objective is to have electronic records for patient encounters being able to be exchanged in a free flowing and secure way. The creation and exchange of electronic health records will fundamentally rely on Health identifiers for both patients and clinicians for there to be trust in the overall systems.

