My Health Record: A brief guide for general practice

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Recommended citation


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ABN: 34 000 223 807

ISBN: 978-0-86906-499-3 (print)
ISBN: 978-0-86906-491-7 (web)

Published April 2018, revised June 2018, December 2018, November 2019

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and seas on which we work and live, and pay our respects to Elders, past, present and future.
Contents

The basics 1
What is My Health Record? 1
Potential benefits 1
Limitations and precautions 1

Types of content in My Health Record 2
Added by a consumer and/or their authorised representative 2
Uploaded by an authorised healthcare provider/organisation 2
Supplied by Medicare 3
Added by an authorised parent/guardian of a newborn or young child 3

Access controls for My Health Record 3
Powers of the consumer 3
Powers of the healthcare provider/organisation 4
Access for minors 4
Provider access to My Health Record 4
Consumer access to My Health Record 4

Information about the Shared Health Summary 5
What is a Shared Health Summary? 5
Who can create a Shared Health Summary? 5
When can a Shared Health Summary be created? 5
How is a Shared Health Summary created? 5
How is the information in a Shared Health Summary updated? 6

Information about the Event Summary 6
What is an Event Summary? 6
Who can create an Event Summary? 6
When can an Event Summary be created? 6
How is an Event Summary created? 7
How is an Event Summary updated? 7

Financial matters 7
GP billing 7
The Practice Incentives Program eHealth Incentive 7

Medico-legal information 7
Authorised access 7
Unauthorised access 8
Authority to upload documents 8
Discrimination 8
Quality of the record 8
Indemnity coverage 8

Additional resources 9
RACGP 9
OAIC 9
ADHA 9
The basics

What is My Health Record?

My Health Record is Australia’s national eHealth record system. Launched in 2012 as the Personally Controlled Electronic Health Record (PCEHR), My Health Record is an online repository for documents and data that contains information about an individual’s health and healthcare. It can be accessed online by healthcare consumers and their healthcare providers.

An individual’s My Health Record may contain various types of content from the consumer, their healthcare providers, and Medicare. Consumers have the option to restrict access to some or all of the documents in their My Health Record by different healthcare organisations, such as particular general practices (but not individual healthcare providers, such as general practitioners [GPs]). Healthcare providers who are caring for a consumer in an emergency can override access controls set by the consumer to view that person’s My Health Record.

Every person known to Medicare or the Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA) had a record created for them in early 2019, unless they chose to opt out. Individuals can delete their My Health Record at any time.

Potential benefits

The intention behind My Health Record is that it will eventually help healthcare providers spend more time with patients and less time searching for clinically relevant information. Proponents of My Health Record hope that as it grows, healthcare providers will find they are able to access helpful medical information they do not already have in their local records.

There might be particular benefit in using My Health Record to gather relevant information in the following situations:

- in the event of a medical emergency
- when the consumer is travelling and needs to seek care from a number of healthcare providers who are unknown in advance
- where the consumer has many healthcare providers because they have chronic or multiple conditions.

In all of the above situations, the healthcare providers who are providing care to the consumer should still communicate with each other directly, as they do currently. Where this fails for any reason, viewing information in the consumer’s My Health Record may be useful.

Having access to their My Health Record might also help patients to better track and manage their own health.

Limitations and precautions

My Health Record does not replace local records

My Health Record is not designed to replace clinical information systems. GPs and other healthcare providers will continue to keep patient records at the local level.

My Health Record does not replace usual communication channels

My Health Record is not designed as a substitute for direct communication between healthcare providers about a patient’s care, and should not be used in this manner. Healthcare providers must continue to communicate directly with other healthcare providers involved in the care of a patient through the usual channels, preferably through secure electronic communication.
Information in My Health Record can be inaccurate or incomplete

As with other sources of health data, a My Health Record does not provide a complete picture of a patient’s health status and needs. It is important to note that the information might not be up to date, and that the consumer can choose to remove documents from view, or restrict access, so clinically relevant information might be missing. Wherever possible, GPs should verify the information in a My Health Record using other sources.

Use of My Health Record is not compulsory

There is no requirement for patients or healthcare providers to actively participate in My Health Record. However, GPs should be aware they are passively contributing to patients’ My Health Records (where they exist), regardless of whether they are registered to use My Health Record themselves. GPs might be generating information for a patient’s My Health Record when using Medicare services, generating electronic prescriptions, ordering pathology and diagnostic imaging through participating laboratories or providers, and providing information to government databases.

Types of content in My Health Record

Added by a consumer and/or their authorised representative

Consumers and/or their authorised representatives can add the following types of content to a My Health Record:

- personal details, including
  - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status
  - veteran/Australian Defence Force (ADF) status
- emergency contact details
- advance care planning documents
- a Personal Health Summary, comprising information about medications, allergies and adverse reactions (accessible by healthcare providers)
- personal health notes, which are private diary entries (not accessible by healthcare providers).

Uploaded by an authorised healthcare provider/organisation

Authorised healthcare providers/organisations can add the following types of content:

- a Shared Health Summary, which is a document that can include information about the consumer’s medical history, medicines, allergies, adverse reactions, and immunisations
- Event Summaries, which are clinical documents detailing one or more episodes of care
- hospital discharge summaries
- pathology reports
- diagnostic test results
- referrals to medical specialists and other health professionals that have been uploaded to provide information to others
- prescribing and dispensing information.
Supplied by Medicare

Government data might be displayed, including:

- Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) claims information
- Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and Repatriation PBS (RPBS) claims information
- Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) records
- organ donor status from the Australian Organ Donor Register (AODR).

Added by an authorised parent/guardian of a newborn or young child

Authorised parents/guardians of newborns and young children can keep records on child development, including the following information:

- personal measurements for head circumference, height and weight
- information and reminders about immunisation
- information and reminders about child health checks
- observations about personal growth and developmental achievements
- growth and development questionnaires for completion prior to appointments with a healthcare provider.

Access controls for My Health Record

Powers of the consumer

My Health Record is predominantly a consumer-controlled tool.

Consumers can:

- choose not to have a My Health Record created
- delete an existing My Health Record
- ask healthcare providers not to add particular information to their My Health Record
- remove particular documents from view so they are not visible to healthcare providers (but can be made visible again at any time)
- restrict healthcare organisations’ access to particular documents within their record
- restrict healthcare organisations’ access to their whole record
- track how others have accessed and edited their My Health Record through an audit log.

However, consumers cannot:

- alter the content of clinical documents created by healthcare providers
- restrict access by particular healthcare providers within a particular healthcare organisation (they can only restrict access to all providers within a particular healthcare organisation).
Powers of the healthcare provider/organisation

If a consumer has not set access controls for their My Health Record, all authorised healthcare providers linked to an authorised healthcare organisation involved in that person's care have ‘authority under the law’ to collect, use and disclose health information in that record, or upload information to that record, for the purpose of providing healthcare to that person (formerly known as ‘standing consent model’).

There are provisions in the system to override an individual’s access controls for a time-limited period to view a My Health Record in certain emergency situations. A registered healthcare organisation can access a consumer’s My Health Record in order to lessen or prevent a serious threat to a person’s life, health, or safety (or public health or public safety) and where it is unreasonable or impractical to obtain the individual’s consent. This triggers a notification in the audit log for the record. The consumer can opt to be notified by email or SMS in the event of emergency access.

Access for minors

Following the birth of a child, parents are asked whether they would like to register them for a My Health Record. If a record is created, the parent/guardian becomes the ‘authorised representative’ for the child, which allows them to view and control the record on the child’s behalf.

A child will already have a My Health Record if they are known to Medicare, were born prior to the end of the opt-out period, and their parent/guardian did not notify the Australian Government they did not want a record created for their child during the opt-out period.

When a child turns 14, the parent/guardian automatically loses their authorised representative status and they can no longer access the child’s record. A parent/guardian who believes the child does not have capacity to manage their own record can apply to the System Operator (the ADHA) to continue to act as the child’s authorised representative.

Provider access to My Health Record

Access via a clinical information software system

Authorised healthcare providers can access My Health Record via a clinical information software system that conforms to the requirements of the Australian Digital Health Agency (ADHA).

A full list of conformant software products is available on the ADHA website (www.digitalhealth.gov.au).

Using a conformant clinical information software system to access a patient’s My Health Record allows an authorised healthcare provider to both view the record and upload documents to it.

Access via the Provider Portal

Authorised healthcare providers can view a patient’s My Health Record without a conformant clinical information software system by using the Provider Portal, available at https://portal.ehealth.gov.au. Healthcare providers cannot upload new documents to a My Health Record using the Provider Portal.

Consumer access to My Health Record

Access via the myGov platform

Consumers can access their My Health Record through their myGov account (https://my.gov.au), which is associated with a username and password.
Access via a mobile app

There are several mobile apps consumers can use to access their My Health Record. A list of approved apps is available on the ADHA website.

Information about the Shared Health Summary

What is a Shared Health Summary?

A Shared Health Summary is a clinical document within a My Health Record that provides an overview of specific health information about a person at a particular point in time. It includes information on:

- current medicines
- medical history
- allergies and adverse reactions
- immunisations/vaccines.

Who can create a Shared Health Summary?

Under the My Health Records Act 2012 (Cwlth), a Shared Health Summary should be created and uploaded by a consumer’s Nominated Healthcare Provider. This person is usually the consumer’s usual GP or another health provider who usually provides care to the patient. A Nominated Healthcare Provider must be a medical practitioner (not necessarily a GP), a registered nurse, or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander health practitioner who has a Certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care (Practice). The decision about whether this person is the consumer’s Nominated Healthcare Provider is decided by mutual agreement between the consumer and the healthcare provider. Only one person can serve as the Nominated Healthcare Provider at any given time.

It is important to note, however, that there are no technical constraints built into My Health Record to restrict any authorised healthcare provider from creating and uploading a Shared Health Summary.

When can a Shared Health Summary be created?

A Shared Health Summary can be created in the context of any consultation. A Nominated Healthcare Provider might feel it is useful to create and upload a new Shared Health Summary in the following situations:

- where a Shared Health Summary does not already exist, perhaps at the request of the patient
- when completing a patient health assessment – for example, a GP management plan or child health check
- when there have been significant changes to a patient’s medical conditions, medicines, allergies, adverse reactions or immunisations.

How is a Shared Health Summary created?

The information in a Shared Health Summary is similar to the information found in a GP health summary, so the time taken to create a Shared Health Summary will depend in part upon the quality and currency of the information already available in the patient’s local record. It will also depend on the complexity of the patient’s health conditions and management.

If a patient explicitly asks a healthcare provider not to upload information to their My Health Record, the healthcare provider must comply with that directive. Therefore, a patient can request that sensitive information be left out of
a Shared Health Summary. However, if the Nominated Healthcare Provider believes that omitting the information might mislead other healthcare providers, they may decline to upload the Shared Health Summary that omits the information. There is no legal requirement for a healthcare provider to give a patient the opportunity to review the Shared Health Summary prior to upload.

Once the Shared Health Summary has been created, the Nominated Healthcare Provider uploads the document to My Health Record from their clinical information system.

How is the information in a Shared Health Summary updated?

Documents in a person’s My Health Record cannot be edited. The only way to update the Shared Health Summary is by creating and uploading a new Shared Health Summary.

There is no legal requirement to regularly update a Shared Health Summary. In order to receive payments under the Practice Incentives Program eHealth Incentive (ePIP), practices must upload Shared Health Summaries for a specified minimum proportion of their patients.

Information about the Event Summary

What is an Event Summary?

An Event Summary is a standalone document within a My Health Record providing information about a healthcare event relevant to the patient’s ongoing care, for example, a clinical intervention, treatment commencement or cessation, or a change in clinical status. There is a free text field to provide a clinical synopsis. An Event Summary might contain information about:

- allergies and adverse reactions
- medicines
- diagnoses
- interventions
- immunisations/vaccines.

The purpose of an Event Summary is to provide information that might be useful to as-yet-unknown healthcare providers at as-yet-unknown times in the future. Creating and uploading an Event Summary does not replace the need to communicate directly with the consumer’s usual GP or general practice.

Who can create an Event Summary?

Any authorised healthcare provider who is working under the auspices of an authorised healthcare organisation can create and upload an Event Summary.

When can an Event Summary be created?

An Event Summary might be created for a patient who is receiving care from an after-hours GP service, a transient/holidaying patient, or a patient who is receiving an immunisation/vaccine from someone other than their regular GP. In all of these cases, the same information should be sent directly to the patient’s usual GP or general practice as well.

An Event Summary can be used in a situation when a significant healthcare event has occurred or there has been a change in a person’s health status, but it is not appropriate to create a Shared Health Summary, discharge summary or specialist letter.
How is an Event Summary created?

An Event Summary should contain enough information to appropriately communicate the change or action taken. The information should be presented in such a way that it can be easily understood by another healthcare provider.

How is an Event Summary updated?

An Event Summary cannot be edited. A new Event Summary can be created and uploaded to supplant the original. The healthcare provider who created and uploaded the Event Summary can delete it if it contains a mistake or was uploaded in error.

Creating and uploading an Event Summary does not replace communicating directly with the patient’s usual GP or general practice to inform them about the contact with the patient.

Financial matters

GP billing

GPs can account for the time taken to create and upload a Shared Health Summary or Event Summary if that activity occurs within the context of providing clinical services and the patient is present at the time. For the purposes of the MBS, those activities count towards the calculation of consultation time for billing purposes. There are no specific MBS item numbers for the creation/upload of documents to a My Health Record.

The Practice Incentives Program eHealth Incentive

The ePIP is an Australian Government initiative that aims to encourage general practices to use My Health Record. There are a number of requirements general practices must meet in order to receive ePIP payments. For more information about the ePIP and eligibility criteria, refer to the RACGP’s resources at www.racgp.org.au/MyHealthRecord

Medico-legal information

Authorised access

A consumer can choose whether to grant or deny access to their My Health Record to a healthcare organisation. The default setting allows all authorised healthcare organisations involved in an individual’s care to access that person’s My Health Record.

There is no provision in My Health Record for consumers to grant or deny access to individual healthcare providers, only to healthcare organisations.

This allows all healthcare providers who are authorised to access My Health Record in a particular organisation to access a patient’s My Health Record for the following authorised purposes:

- providing healthcare to the patient
- disclosing the health information to the patient or their authorised representative
- collecting, using or disclosing the health information for any purpose with the patient’s consent
• collecting, using or disclosing the health information for purposes related to the provision of indemnity cover.
  Under the My Health Records Act, healthcare organisations can access information in an individual’s My Health Record for the purpose of defending medical negligence claims. This provision does not apply to the consumer’s personal health insurance company, and it does not allow the healthcare organisation to access any personal health notes the consumer has made within their My Health Record.

A patient does not have to be physically present in order for an authorised healthcare provider to access their My Health Record for one of the legitimate purposes described above.

There are emergency provisions to override the access controls of a person’s My Health Record to collect, use and disclose information in specific circumstances. Refer to ‘Powers of the healthcare provider/organisation’.

Unauthorised access

Under the My Health Records Act, it is an offence for a person to collect, use, or disclose health information contained in a My Health Record if that activity is not authorised under the Act and the person knows the activity is not authorised, or is reckless as to whether it is authorised. Penalties apply under the Act, including up to 1500 penalty units ($315,000), or up to five years’ imprisonment.

Accessing a My Health Record by mistake is not associated with a penalty under the My Health Records Act, but might constitute a privacy breach under the Privacy Act 1988 (Cwlth). Failure to notify the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) might incur a civil penalty of up to 100 penalty units ($18,000 for an individual and $90,000 for a body corporate).

The RACGP supports the OAIC’s preferred regulatory approach to facilitate voluntary compliance with privacy obligations and to work with entities to ensure best privacy practice and prevent privacy breaches.

Authority to upload documents

Healthcare organisations have ‘authority under the law’ to upload information to a consumer’s My Health Record for the purpose of providing healthcare to that person (formerly known as ‘standing consent model’). There is no legal requirement for a healthcare provider to obtain consent from a patient on each occasion prior to uploading clinical information, or to provide an opportunity for a patient to review clinical information prior to upload. However, where a patient explicitly requests that specific information is not uploaded to My Health Record, the healthcare provider must comply with that directive.

GPs should act in accordance with state and territory laws with regard to consent and the disclosure of sensitive information.

Discrimination

Healthcare providers must not discriminate against a patient who does, or does not, have a My Health Record or because of their access control settings.

Quality of the record

Healthcare providers must not upload a record that contains defamatory material. Providers may only upload a document if it does not infringe upon another person’s intellectual property rights or moral rights. Providers must take reasonable steps to ensure the accuracy of the content before uploading it to the record.

Indemnity coverage

Every medical defence organisation (MDO) will have their own policies related to My Health Record. Contact your MDO for more information.
Additional resources

RACGP

My Health Record resources, www.racgp.org.au/MyHealthRecord

OAIC


ADHA

‘My Health Record’, www.myhealthrecord.gov.au
Healthy Profession.
Healthy Australia.