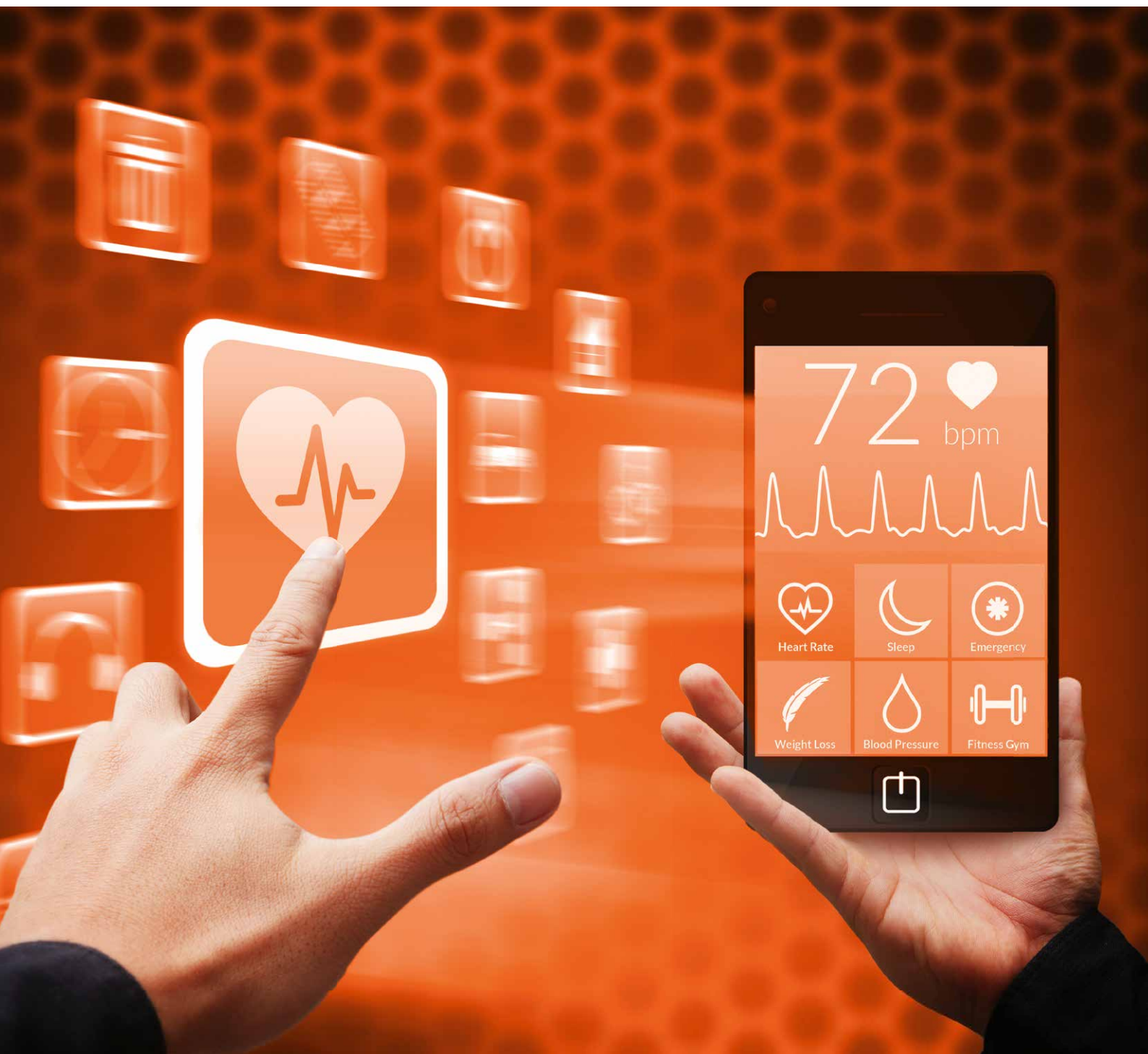


# *Views and attitudes towards technological innovation in general practice*

**Survey report 2017**



## Views and attitudes towards technological innovation in general practice: Survey report 2017

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The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Ltd  
100 Wellington Parade  
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002

Tel 03 8699 0414  
Fax 03 8699 0400  
[www.racgp.org.au](http://www.racgp.org.au)

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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.*

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# About the RACGP Expert Committee

## eHealth and Practice Systems

The RACGP Expert Committee – eHealth and Practice Systems (REC–eHPS) supports the provision of healthcare through technology by providing general practice with guidance and resources that improve practice and communication efficiencies. The committee's advocacy work has ensured that elements of eHealth are reasonable, workable and useful for general practice.



Additional PDF copies of this report can be downloaded from  
[www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/ehealth](http://www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/ehealth)

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# About this survey

Technology offers promising opportunities for connecting, synthesising and sharing information critical to the delivery of healthcare while reducing costs and promoting community health. Over the last two decades, the Australian health system has experienced a surge in health technology innovations. General practice is well placed to benefit from technology innovations to improve patient and population health, and to lead the development, testing and implementation of new technologies connecting patients and healthcare providers.

As the peak professional body for general practitioners (GPs), The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is committed to supporting the provision of high-quality clinical care. This annual survey provides an insight about the issues that matter most to you and your practice.

In October 2017, the RACGP released its annual survey to explore the views and attitudes on the use of technology in general practice. A 10-minute online survey was distributed to GPs across Australia. In total, 1014 GPs participated in the survey, and 749 responses were considered for analysis.

Our survey indicates that GPs remain optimistic about the use of eHealth technology and its ability to improve productivity and care coordination. We know more GPs are recommending health apps to their patients, but uncertainty about medico-legal issues means that almost 50% have not adopted the use of apps to support patient care. Participants indicated they would like to engage in professional development opportunities in the use of technology and in how to incorporate eHealth technologies and solutions into patient-related work, including education on the use of My Health Record.

To increase the uptake of mobile technologies, GPs need to be supported to address the barriers related to systems integration and to understand the relevance of mobile technologies in clinical practice and workflow.

We thank all participants for taking part in the survey and welcome further feedback and comments to [ehealth@racgp.org.au](mailto:ehealth@racgp.org.au). The RACGP hopes the results provide a stimulus to discuss increased adoption of digital technologies in general practice while achieving the best health outcomes for patients.



Dr Nathan Pinski,  
Chair RACGP Expert Committee –  
eHealth and Practice Systems

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# Survey design

This exploratory survey aimed to understand the use of eHealth technologies by GPs. Specifically, the survey explored:

- knowledge of eHealth technologies
- experience using eHealth technologies in patient-related work
- barriers and facilitators for the adoption of eHealth technologies
- education and training needs.

## Methods

This survey used a descriptive, quantitative design. A 10-minute online survey was developed based on existing literature and refined by pilot testing with members of the REC–eHPS to verify content validity. For the purpose of the survey, the following areas were investigated:

- types of eHealth technologies currently being used and of future interest
- perceived barriers and facilitators
- learning and development opportunities.

The survey was launched at the RACGP's 2017 conference for general practice (GP17) in Sydney, and was supported by a communications strategy including:

- a social media campaign
- promotion via RACGP's member newsletters
- engagement with other peak professional bodies such as primary health networks and universities.

Quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel, and themes from open-ended questions were described.

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# Summary of findings

- 80% of GPs are satisfied with the way they use technology in their patient-oriented work, with the highest rate of satisfaction among GPs with 10+ years of practice.
- GPs believe eHealth technology has the opportunity to improve practice efficiency, collaboration with other healthcare providers and continuity of care.
- GPs acknowledge there are a number of opportunities for greater use of technology, such as generating more electronic referrals, using patient data in real-time clinical decisions and communicating more effectively with other healthcare providers.
- Only a small number of practices (15%) maintain and add data to a paper-based record system in addition to their clinical information system.
- GPs use technology for communicating with patients mostly by sending text reminders for appointments, providing forms on the practice website, via email and social media.
- 73% of GPs do not use social media for work purposes mainly due to security concerns and confidentiality breaches. GPs also find that monitoring social media and maintaining an online presence is time-consuming and impacts on patient–doctor boundaries.
- 48% of GPs send and receive information via secure message delivery.
- Half of the GPs surveyed use mobile devices (ie smartphone and/or tablet) for patient-related work. The devices are used for communicating with the clinic when offsite, taking clinical images, accessing medical apps (calculators, guidelines, drug references) and engaging patients in education. The most commonly reported reasons for not using mobile devices for patient-related work were lack of perceived need, lack of access to a work mobile device and lack of understanding how it can benefit clinical practice.
- Just over a quarter of the GPs recommend apps on a regular basis to their patients. Mental health, fitness, nutrition and women's reproductive health are the most recommended app categories. Lack of knowledge about effective apps and being unsure about the benefits to patient outcomes are the main reasons for not recommending them. GPs also mentioned that patient technology literacy can be a barrier.
- In a year's time, GPs would like to access clinical test results, electronic medical records and drug references from their work mobile devices. Yet, nearly 21% would prefer not to access work information on their devices as it has the potential to increase workload outside normal hours.
- Approximately 27% of GPs use telehealth services, mostly for providing support to patients during a video consultation, and undertaking training. If funding was available, 45% would be likely or extremely likely to use telehealth services in the next three years.
- The main enablers for technology adoption by GPs revolve around learning and development, role modelling from the practice manager, colleagues sharing examples of how they use technology, as well as the availability of technology devices in the practice.
- The perceived barriers for technology adoption include lack of integration with IT systems, issues related to patient confidentiality and privacy, lack of funding, implementation costs and lack of integration with current processes/procedures.

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# Implications for policy and practice

GPs continue to remain optimistic about the use of eHealth technologies and about their ability to improve productivity and care coordination.

The RACGP will continue to engage in an ongoing dialogue with GPs to explore their knowledge and attitudes in relation to eHealth technologies, so that guidelines and policies can be developed to support GPs to integrate technology into their practice.

## **RACGP eHealth resources**

*Information security in general practice* – This resource details and recommends essential business practice, policies and procedures to help protect general practice information systems.

*Digital Business Kit (DBK)* – The DBK provides a suite of resources and general guidance to promote

the adoption and meaningful use of technologies in general practice.

*mHealth in general practice: A toolkit for effective and secure use of mobile technology* – This guide provides information and instructions for anyone considering incorporating mobile technology into general practice.

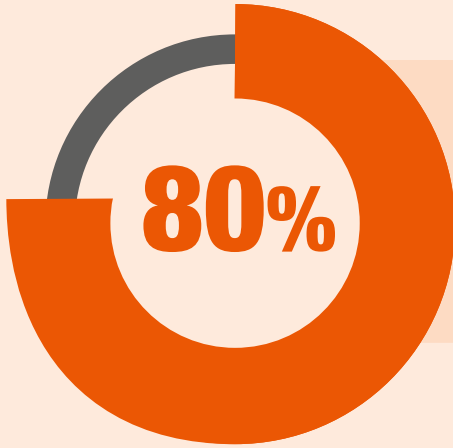
*Guide for the use of social media in general practice* – This guide provides information on social media advantages and disadvantages, risks and benefits, online conduct, security, privacy requirements, advertising and testimonials and the use of disclaimers.

*A guide for hardware and software requirements in general practice* – This guide assists general practices in choosing what type of IT requirements they need for their business.

# Summary of findings

## GPs see many opportunities with advances in eHealth

### GPs believe eHealth helps to improve:



of GPs were satisfied with the way they use technology in their practice, compared to 71% in 2016



### Highest rates of satisfaction



**62%**  
GPs with 10 or more years of practise

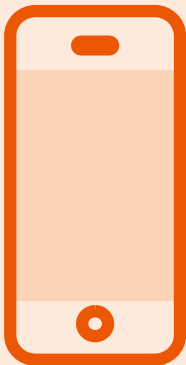


I want to embrace technologies that assist me with access to my patient's clinical information, and decision-support tools



I'd like to get rid of the paper but I have to print scripts, certificates and letters to other clinicians who won't use electronic communication

## Use of mobile devices and apps



The biggest number of mobile device users are among GPs with 20 or more years of practise



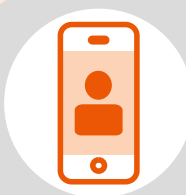
of GPs use mobile devices (smartphones/tablets) in patient-related work

### GPs not using mobile devices report a lack of understanding about their benefits in day-to-day practice



I can do most of the same functions on my computer, and I don't feel comfortable using my phone in front of my patients

## GPs are using their mobile devices to:



take clinical photos, in particular of skin lesions



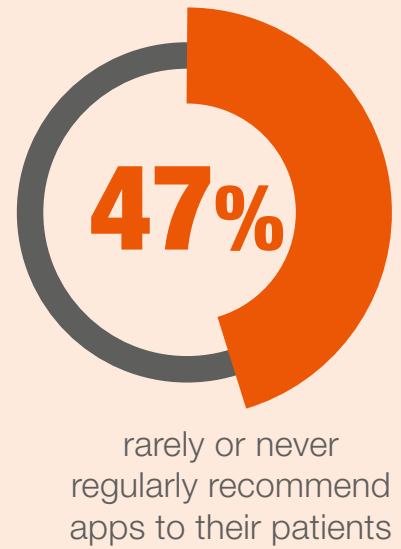
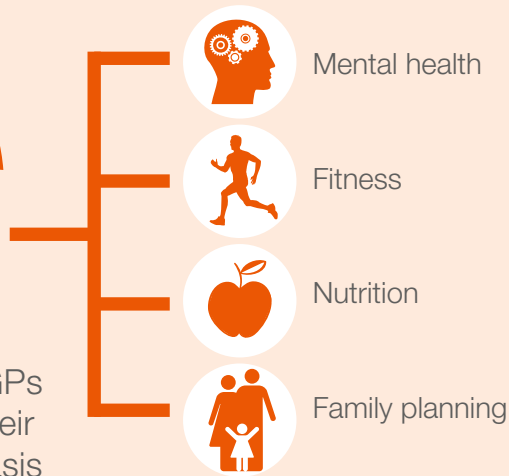
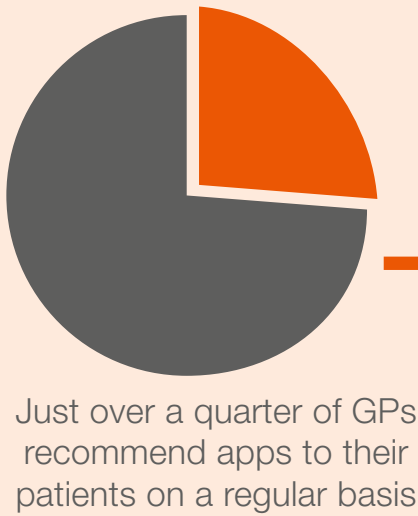
remotely connect and manage patient notes during nursing home visits



access medical apps (calculators, therapeutic guidelines, electronic medical records)



## Categories of apps recommended



### Types of health apps GPs use

- Calculators
- Therapeutic guidelines
- Medicines information

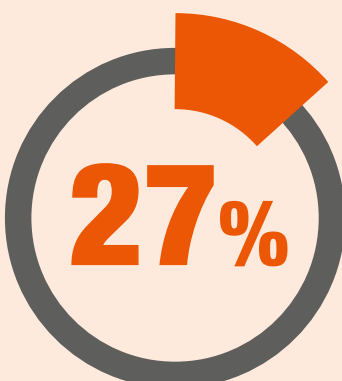
### Reasons for not recommending apps

- Lack of knowledge about effective apps
- Lack of a trustworthy source to access effective apps
- Lack of patient digital literacy

### GPs would recommend health apps more often if:

- there was a trusted source of app advice
- apps were endorsed by professional colleges
- there was more education on how to integrate them into clinical practice

## Communication



**Telehealth**  
of GPs use telehealth services to:

provide support to patients during a video consultation

undertake training

conduct video consultations with other healthcare practitioners

## GPs use technology to communicate with their patients by:



providing registration forms on practice website

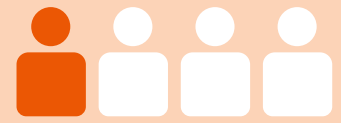


sending text message reminders of appointments



using standard email

## GP use of social media



1 in 4

GPs use social media for work purpose



I'm concerned about risks related to a breach of privacy



It is easy for patients to search for their GP on social media platforms, and I want to keep that part of my life separate to my work life



I don't have the time to monitor my professional social media properly



## Barriers and enablers to technology

of GPs participated in eHealth professional development within the last 12 months

## GPs using social media



Facebook



Twitter



LinkedIn

### ENABLERS

### BARRIERS



Availability of technical resources	Lack of integration with IT systems
Role modelling and knowledge sharing from clinicians and practice managers	Issues related to patient confidentiality and privacy
Professional development opportunities	Lack of funding
Adequate funding	Implementation costs



RACGP

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Healthy Australia.