

## Northern Queensland Primary Health Network submission - Australian Digital Health Agency | Your Health Your Say

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### What aspects of healthcare currently work well from your perspective?

We are fortunate that the Australian healthcare system, as assessed by the World Health Organisation, is one of the best performing in the western world.

This supports Northern Queensland Primary Health Network's (NQPHN) vision to ensure that north Queenslanders live happier, healthier, and longer lives. From NQPHN's perspective, there are several ways that the current healthcare system works well, including:

- patients having relatively good access to the healthcare system and the opportunity to have one-on-one consultations
- well-trained clinicians who have purpose-built systems that work well for the immediate needs of the clinicians and their businesses
- a policy driven move to patient-centred service design, development and delivery
- an emerging reorientation of consultative services to a telehealth platform
- the potential of Primary Health Networks to coordinate the primary healthcare sector
- enhanced (mandated) integration priorities for acute and primary care sectors
- Health Pathways adoption and utilisation – overall the journey is still early in its evolution, and it is expected to take 3 – 5 years to achieve significant outcomes
- the care coordination approach, which is fundamental to improving the quality of care for individual clients and communities.

### What aspects of healthcare need improvement?

NQPHN consists of a team of healthcare professionals, who engage with a variety of healthcare providers on a daily basis.

The feedback that we hear and offer from our collective experiences is that the current healthcare system is complex and inefficient, difficult to navigate (even for those working in the system), has too many complex ownership structures, often works in isolation, and is centered on the provider.

NQPHN believes there needs to be more of a shift towards consumer-centred care and a focus to empower consumers to take a greater responsibility for their health. For consumers to do this, there needs to be more consumer navigation support and services, consumer health literacy support, and consumer information transfer at clinical handover – for example emergency departments, special outpatient departments, and health provider to health provider.

With a rising chronic disease rate, the integration of care for people with complex care needs will need to continue to be a major focus, as better integrated care means a better experience for consumers and a more cost-efficient health spend.

There is also a structural imbalance in healthcare financing, with more of the available dollars needing to be directed to general practice, pharmacy, allied health and other primary care, and prevention (primary and secondary prevention).

Over 83,000 Indigenous people live in the NQPHN footprint and currently the records show that an Indigenous Australian will live 17 years less than non-Indigenous Australians, and that Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander babies will die at almost three times the rate of non-Indigenous babies. This is an area that needs vast improvement and digital health technologies can support this, but only with appropriate infrastructure.

**For the aspects of healthcare that you consider need improvement, what do you think are the barriers to improving performance in this area?**

There needs to be a significant cultural shift for the above-mentioned improvements to occur.

Collectively, we have been tinkering with the healthcare system for decades and it still remains quite siloed, inefficient, provider focused, and the constant change has the industry wary.

For there to be a shift towards patient centred care, information needs to be made more accessible to the consumer so they can navigate the health system. This would require an overhaul of many current systems, and a review of the current legal framework to address concerns of information sharing and liability.

There are cultural expectations from providers around information sharing that would need to be addressed. For many providers, the current thinking is 'my information on my patient'.

The challenges and barriers to resolving this include:

- the level of transparency, responsibility, and accountability that a digital health system asks would challenge many providers
- there is a lack of consistency in the quality of data management by providers, and often there is a gap between the perceived quality of the data kept by providers and the reality of that quality
- interoperability of technological systems/platforms – a complex historical issue
- the focus is often on the individual patient and the individual provider, but for digital health strategies to be successfully integrated and supported, there needs to be a broader focus of healthcare providers and the community – i.e. to take more responsibility for the greater whole
- resources would be needed to support patients' understanding, awareness, and context of records available to them
- improved granularity of data at the local government level would better inform health needs assessments at the local level and assist with improved health provision that is better targeted to community need.

There are vested interests in maintaining some of the health system efficiencies – i.e. pathology re-testing, and the system is lacking the clarity of what a 'better, more sustainable health system' would actually look like.

**We know that the Australian healthcare system is made up of multiple healthcare providers, different funding streams, and multiple programs. This complexity can be challenging for the patients and healthcare professionals trying to navigate through the system. Please complete the following:**

**To me, the health system is**

- a. Very difficult to navigate
- b. Somewhat difficulty to navigate**
- c. Neither difficult nor easy to navigate
- d. Somewhat easy to navigate
- e. Very easy to navigate

**One of the Australian Government's key aims is to empower people to be in control of their own care. What does 'being in control of your healthcare' mean to you?**

'Being in control of your own healthcare' means individuals having access to relevant and accessible information in a timely manner to support the management of their own health care.

People need more support to educate them to better navigate the health system, particularly with a dedicated focus on patient centred care. Intelligent, considered digital technologies could help patients navigate the system and their own treatment.

For people to be empowered, they need to be able to make a choice regarding their care. They need options regarding their treatment and the time and resources to explore those options, with considered pathways for them to follow in both the private and public system.

**Digital technology will transform and improve healthcare outcomes for Australia**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree**
- c. Indifferent
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**How would you like to see digital technologies change peoples' experiences of managing their health, and the way they interact with the healthcare system?**

Digital technologies have the ability to transform a person's experience of managing their health and the way they interact with the system. They have the potential to:

- present medical information in a manner that is easy for the patient to understand so they can make informed decisions regarding their care
- allow a patient to access relevant information on their medical history that is currently held by their clinicians
- support patients to be more active participants in their healthcare particularly with the use of apps
- build confidence for patients to self-manage their care.

**What would you like the system to be able to do to make the My Health Record more useful for you?**

NQPHN was one of two PHN's in Australia chosen to implement the My Health Record opt-out trial.

During this time, the overwhelming feedback we have heard from consumers is that the system could benefit by being easier to access for the individual. NQPHN recognises the privacy and security controls that are gained by accessing records via myGov, but if there was a way to maintain those security standards and have the record accessible via an app on your phone or tablet, then more people would use the system.

We also received feedback that the system could benefit from the ability to upload and house key patient documents such as Advance Care Directives, Statement of Choices and Care Plans, upload and house images and not just reports, and host a provider-to-provider communication platform.

**Describe a time when you had a positive experience with the health system. Did digital technology play a role in making that experience positive for you? If so, how?**

On speaking to members of the NQPHN team, digital technology has yet to play a role in making their experience a positive one with the healthcare system.

When asked more broadly about a positive experience, it was when the individual received care that was flexible and considerate, when the provider was approachable and took the time to explain what was happening, and when the patient received positive after care, with both the provider and their staff accessible.

**Describe a time when you were frustrated with the health system. How do you think digital technology could have made that experience better?**

One particular situation was shared by a NQPHN employee that highlights where digital technology has the ability to save lives. The employee's father died during surgery, and a root-cause analysis and a review of mortality rates in that hospital revealed that the cardiac unit had a higher rate of mortality than acceptable.

Digital technology has the potential to support hospital administration to collate and analyse data, and present it in a way that anomalies such as the above can be potentially easily identified.