

# National Digital Health Consultation

## Submission

JAN  
2017

## Purpose

The purpose of this submission is to provide the views of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) on the future of digital health in Australia.

## About PSA

The Federal Government has granted the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia with national peak health body status. The Government rewarded PSA's advisory, policy formulation, education and representation of pharmacists as part of the Health Peak and Advisory Bodies (HPAB) Program.

PSA proudly represents Australia's 29,000 pharmacists working in all sectors and locations.

PSA's core functions include: providing high quality continuing professional development, education and practice support to pharmacists; developing and advocating standards and guidelines to inform and enhance pharmacists' practice; and representing pharmacists' role as frontline health professionals.

## Background to Submission

Both domestic and international evidence suggests that pharmacist intervention for patients with chronic diseases and/or complex medication regimens is beneficial.<sup>1</sup> These pharmacist interventions improve health outcomes, decrease the possibility of medication misadventure and decrease health expenditure by reducing the likelihood of hospital admissions and readmissions.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst the vital service that pharmacists play in dispensing and supplying essential medicines for the community - particularly consumers with chronic diseases, is well-established, the full scope of pharmacists' skills, knowledge and expertise is often under-recognised and under-utilised.<sup>3</sup>

The pharmacy workforce is highly trained and has a much younger age-profile than most other health professions, thus there is great potential for the workforce to participate in emerging and innovative models of care – including digital health.

Furthermore, as modelled by Deloitte, the net benefits from digital health records are expected to be approximately \$11.5 billion over the 2010 to 2025 period, with close to 90% (\$10.24 billion) of the expected savings to result from reduced avoidable hospital admissions and GP visits due to more effective medication management<sup>4</sup> – a fundamental role for pharmacists.

## Recommendations

PSA, as the peak pharmacy body in Australia, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the future of digital health in Australia. PSA's recommendations have been made in the context of the Government's existing reform agenda, with a view to facilitating sound policy implementation and making best use of pharmacists' skills.

As the health system's medication experts, pharmacists will need to have a prominent and ongoing role in the Government's digital health initiatives in order to maximise the expected benefits.<sup>5</sup>

### Ensuring Safe and Effective Medication Management

Whilst pharmacists' unique skills and expertise have been historically underutilised, there is a significant opportunity within the current health reform environment to ensure that pharmacists' skills are better utilised to contribute to improved health outcomes for all Australians

PSA believes that it is important to note that the value of utilising pharmacists in digital health initiatives comes not only from the provision of dispensing histories, but mainly from pharmacists using their unique skills and medicines expertise to meaningfully engage with the information contained in digital health records to optimise medication regimens and ensure the safe, effective and judicious use of medicines.

Indeed, as noted in Deloitte's analysis, close to 90% of the expected savings from the implementation of a digital health record result from effective medication management – a fundamental role for pharmacists.<sup>6</sup>

Technology on its own, however, no matter how effective the platform, will not bring about changes in the behaviours of clinicians. An implementation strategy which addresses the barriers to effective adoption of these technologies will be critical to their success. Importantly, there is a need for equitable incentives for all health professionals to participate. Consideration will need to be given to how to best support pharmacists in particular, through both training and remuneration, to enable the required practice change to engage fully with consumers on digital health records.

### Improving Transitions of Care

Currently consumers access primary care services from a range of sources in a fragmented and uncoordinated manner, leading to lack of continuity, lack of consistency, duplication of services, lack of referral pathways, increased costs, poor exchange of information between health care providers and subsequently poorer patient outcomes.

There is significant potential for pharmacists to use digital health records as a tool to communicate with other health professionals, particularly during transitions of care. This is important, as it is well-recognised that many adverse health events occur during these transition periods. Moreover, it is those relating to medicines, such as medication misadventure leading to avoidable hospital admissions, which cost the health system more than \$1.2 billion annually.<sup>7</sup>

Pharmacists can have a significant impact during critical transition periods and their involvement has been shown to decrease readmissions and future episodes of care.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, there are currently no mechanisms or incentives analogous to those available to general practitioners (GPs), to support pharmacists to contribute to digital health records and facilitate consumer uptake and engagement.

Furthermore, recommendations from the multi-stakeholder roundtable report, *Patient-centred Healthcare Homes in Australia – Towards Successful Implementation*, note that robust and appropriate IT infrastructure will be a key facilitator in supporting shared care planning and delivery and the successful implementation of the Health Care Home model in Australia.<sup>9</sup>

### **Utilising Pharmacists to Facilitate Consumer Engagement and Empowerment**

Pharmacists in Australia are one of the largest, most trusted and most accessible groups of health professionals. As such, they are well placed to encourage consumer uptake of digital health records by educating, empowering and supporting consumers to meaningfully engage with their records, maximising the benefits and potential impact of digital health records. Indeed, registration data indicate that community pharmacies are eager to participate in the *MyHealthRecord* initiative.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to championing Digital Health Records to consumers, pharmacists are also well placed to improve consumer health outcomes through effective use of digital health records – not only by adding dispensing histories, but by using the information contained in the record to optimise medication regimens, address medication problems and improve overall medication management.

### **Formalising Pharmacists' Role as Care-Coordinators**

60% of consumer respondents to this consultation thus far have stated that they find the health system difficult to navigate.<sup>11</sup>

Pharmacists across the care continuum often act, unofficially, as care coordinators who work with both consumers and carers at different stages of the care journey. Traditionally, pharmacists have taken on this role on an ad hoc basis without incentive or support. However, to maximise the opportunities presented by the Government's Digital Health Strategy, there is an urgent need to provide appropriate support to enable pharmacists to act as digital health champions in a predictable and consistent manner.

As the peak pharmacy body in Australia, PSA represents pharmacists working across all care settings, including many who support consumers during transitions of care. As such, PSA can support a responsive pharmacy workforce to champion digital health records in order to more effectively support consumers as they navigate the health system.

## **Concluding Comments**

There is significant opportunity for the Government to further optimise the contribution of pharmacists to the Australian health system.

Pharmacists are best placed to provide medication management, high quality medicines advice and education to consumers, particularly those with chronic and complex conditions, and PSA is ideally positioned to support them in this role. There is great potential to positively impact the health outcomes of all Australians, while reducing unnecessary health system expenditure through effective utilisation of digital health. Pharmacists and the community pharmacy sector are critical to the Government's efforts to achieve sustainable, efficient and quality healthcare.

PSA believes that the recommendations in this submission have the potential to not only benefit consumers, but also the broader health system. PSA, as the peak pharmacy body in Australia,

would welcome the opportunity to work with the Australian Digital Health Agency to improve our nation's health through excellence in digital health and pharmacist care.

## Submitted by

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## References

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