

Primary Care Partnerships

Electronic revolution supports better care



Partnerships are the key

“E-referral, and the agreed common practices that underlie it, has supported us to link in more strongly with other services. When we e-refer we know that we will get good quality and quick referral feedback and as a result we feel confident to refer more broadly than before. We love it!”

Ann-Marie Deeker, Emergency Care Co-ordinator, Eastern Health

As populations around Australia grow and age, the pressure on governments to maintain and improve health and human services is becoming sharper and more immediate.

It's not simply an economic imperative. Keeping people healthy and strengthening their communities is critical to improving their quality of life. A more effective primary health

care system is central to achieving these goals.

The Victorian Primary Care Partnership Strategy, initiated in 2000, has demonstrated that these goals are achievable and that when providers work in partnership they can respond to people's needs more effectively. Eight years on, there is strong evidence that this collaborative approach is leading the way in health reform and expanding beyond primary health.

Victoria's partnership strategy is working

The Primary Care Partnership Strategy has developed 31 Primary Care Partnerships among health services and agencies across Victoria. These partnerships typically include hospitals, community health services, local government, aged care assessment services, women's health services, community drug treatment services, local ethnospecific health services, mental health services, disability services and Divisions of General Practice.

The partnerships are growing and engaging with non-health agencies, including police, schools, and community and welfare groups, providing a comprehensive response to local needs.

While driven by the vision of the Victorian Government, the partnerships operate on a local level. Their strength comes, in a large part, from the fact that they are community based—local partnerships meeting local needs.

People with chronic disease or complex care needs often need a number of different services. Life's a lot easier and outcomes are a lot better if those services are coordinated. Primary Care Partnerships bring agencies together to agree on how they will coordinate their services for the benefit of those people who depend upon it.

Central to this collaborative approach is successfully sharing consumer health and care information between agencies. An obvious example of this is in areas where agencies use secure electronic communication to support better care.

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Electronic communication for better care

It's simple, secure and highly effective.

The graph below shows the growth in the sharing of consumer health and care information between Primary Care Partnership member agencies using secure electronic systems.

In 2006–07, more than 34,000 e-referrals were made between 450 services using secure electronic systems, nearly double the previous year. In 2007–08, more than 95,000 e-referrals were made between services.

Improved electronic communication between agencies supports services to be better coordinated, resulting in improved outcomes for consumers.

“E-referral helped us to successfully implement common intake across our 10 sites ... e-feedback has been a great support and has resulted in more effective outcomes for consumers and ultimately, better health care in Gippsland.”

Leonie Coleman, Director Corporate Services, Latrobe Community Health Service Inc.

Putting the building blocks in place—standards based approach

Central to achieving better coordination of services is the use of secure electronic systems to share consumer health and care information. The necessary building blocks have been put in place to enable this.

Practice standards

The Primary Care Partnerships have developed the *Victorian Service Coordination Practice Manual*, giving service providers agreed standard practices for coordinating services and sharing consumer health and care information.

Information standards

To simplify information sharing between service providers, a standard suite of tools (Service Coordination Tool Templates) are used to document consumer information, identify consumer needs, coordinate care planning and make referrals. The Service Coordination Tool Templates have replaced more than 350 different tools that were previously used. There's also a version of the tools specifically for GPs.

Software standards

The Service Coordination Tool Templates are embedded into software, making it easy to generate and share information. This means service providers can use their own client management systems to record and share standard health and care information. This standard information can be shared (with consumer consent) electronically through the use of secure systems and via letter and fax.

Alignment with state and national standards

The technical documents that support the Service Coordination Tool Templates align with state and territory standards.

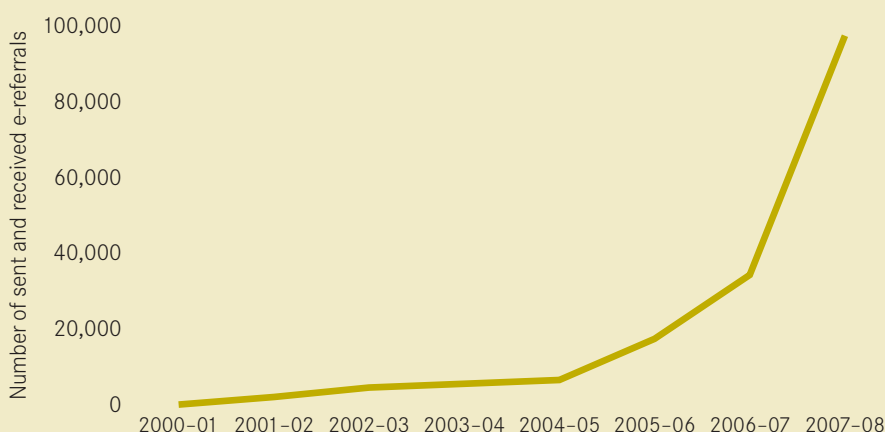
Access to information about services

Agencies are now able to access information about other services quickly and effectively using electronic service directories. The *Human Services Directory* is being developed to be the core source of service contact information, which means human services providers will only have to update information in one directory.

Access to electronic referral systems

Electronic referral means that, with consent, consumer health and care information can be shared between providers quickly and securely. Primary Care Partnerships have engaged a range of sectors, including acute, mental health, disability, local government and community health, in the effective use of electronic referral systems.

Sent and received e-referrals by financial year



Timely access to the right information

Service providers have reported significant efficiency and effectiveness gains. Use of electronic referral can reduce the time taken for registration and needs identification and improve the experience for consumers as they don't need to repeat their information to each new provider. Further efficiency is made through reduced time to make multiple referrals—an increasingly common requirement for consumers with multiple and complex needs.

Using this statewide standards-based approach, together with secure electronic systems to share information, agencies can confidently access information, knowing it's reliable and that stringent privacy safeguards are in place.

This has led to improved coordination of services, greater quality, safety and efficiency, which means better outcomes, particularly for people with chronic conditions or complex care requirements.

Electronic systems are revolutionising information use in the Victorian primary health care sector. Increasingly, others beyond primary health are seeing the benefits and getting on board.

The benefits

There is growing evidence of benefits achieved through the Victorian partnerships, including:

- reduced administrative duplication
- reduced duplication of collecting consumer registration information
- reduced duplication of assessment
- improved waiting list management
- earlier identification of consumer health and care needs
- more timely and relevant information for service providers
- freeing up resources for practitioners to dedicate more time to meet the needs of consumers
- stronger partnerships between agencies.



“Recently I referred one client for district nursing, personal care, Occupational Therapy, Rehabilitation in the Home, Linkages, Aged Care Access Services and disability services. The client is now managing, with the support of a case manager and appropriately funded services, adequately in her own home. E-referral allowed me to share detailed information with the other services without compromising confidentiality. It was timely, expedient, and my referrals were acknowledged almost immediately.”

Fiona Torpy, Manager,
Wannon Post Acute Care

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A critical success

“E-referral gives us confidence that client information will be securely and reliably transmitted ... it has helped reduce duplication and increased our awareness of other agencies involved in client care ... from a management perspective, e-referral has enhanced staff confidence and inter-agency relationships.”

Lana Harris, Service Coordination Officer, Banyule City Council

Primary Care Partnerships are working, and their success is increasingly due to the widespread adoption of the collaborative approach to sharing information electronically.

This standards-based approach is helping people who depend on the system as well as those working in it.

The increased use of electronic systems has enabled health and human services professionals to locate up-to-date service information using an electronic service directory. Information on eligibility criteria, fees, and contact details has boosted the confidence of service providers in identifying the best options

for consumer care. Service referrals can be tracked and followed up.

In addition, sharing consumer health and care information this way assists with demand management service planning through increased awareness of localised and statewide health needs. This has led to greater accountability across the health and human services sector.

Primary Care Partnerships have provided the ideal platform for health and human services to work together and achieve statewide and local health and human services reform.



Other brochures on Primary Care Partnerships are available at www.health.vic.gov.au/pcps and include:

- *Better health—stronger communities*
- *Better access to services*
- *Chronic disease prevention and management*
- *Promoting healthy communities*