

Health information sharing reform

Secure sharing of health information between Victorian public health services.

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- 1. The department is implementing a secure health information sharing platform so clinicians can access critical patient health information at the point of care**
- 2. The platform will be progressively implemented across Victorian public health services from February 2024**
- 3. The secure platform is subject to strict privacy and confidentiality controls and oversight arrangements**

Better health care by improving the way health information is shared in Victoria

The Victorian Government is improving the safety and continuity of health care through the sharing of health information across Victoria's public health system.

Complete and accurate information at the point of care is essential to providing patients the best medical care possible. The Department of Health is implementing a new secure health information sharing platform. This will enable clinicians to access critical patient health information at the point of care.

The system will reduce the need for patients to re-tell their medical story to multiple public health service providers and treating clinicians.

Through this secure system, a patient's treating clinician will be able to access the following clinical information:

- Patient details, including demographics, emergency contacts and next of kin.
- Patient hospital visits as an inpatient, emergency, and outpatient.
- Clinical documents including diagnostic test reports, hospital discharge summaries and letters associated with each hospital visit.
- Information about the patient's diagnosis such as onset date and description.

The system will support a more seamless patient experience. It will reduce unnecessary and duplicated tests and build a more integrated public healthcare system focused on improving patient safety and outcomes.

This new platform is being established under Health Legislation Amendment (Information Sharing) Act 2023. The legislation will come into effect on 7 February 2024, followed by a staged roll out of the system in public health services across Victoria.

Current information sharing practices across the Victorian health network

Improving health information sharing practices across Victoria delivers on recommendations made in critical reports into Victoria's healthcare system - *Targeting Zero* and the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

In our public health services, treating clinicians rely on patients and their families and carers to remember which health services they have attended. Clinicians then try to source health information from other services, often via phone calls or fax.

This can lead to duplication and fragmentation in the way the information is shared. Because patients attend different health services, there can be unintended consequences in their healthcare journeys. Patient safety is at risk where clinical information on allergies, high risk medications, implants and medical histories are not accessible.

By introducing secure health information sharing, complete and accurate health information can be accessed by clinicians at the point of care. This will ensure the best care and treatment for patients across Victoria, no matter where they are or which public health service they visit.

Safer and more secure health information sharing

The confidentiality and security of patient data is the government's highest priority. The Department of Health will be responsible for ensuring health information in the system is kept safe, secure, and protected from unauthorised access.

A robust Privacy Management Framework will govern operation of health information sharing. The Framework will address privacy obligations, detail the conditions required to access information about sensitive health conditions and details additional protections for vulnerable groups in circumstances like family violence. Clinicians, health services and the department will be legally required to comply with the Framework.

The system will comply with the [Victorian Protective Data Security Standards \(VPDSS\)](https://ovic.vic.gov.au/information-security/standards), <<https://ovic.vic.gov.au/information-security/standards>> established by Victoria's privacy regulator, the [Office of the Information Commissioner \(OVIC\)](https://ovic.vic.gov.au/). <<https://ovic.vic.gov.au/>>.

To ensure transparency and oversight, the Health Information Sharing Management Committee is being established to oversee the operation of the system and the Privacy Management Framework. This will include publishing reports on use of the system.

Project status

Following a competitive open tender, the Department of Health is partnering with Altera Digital Health (Allscripts) to implement a health information sharing system. Altera Digital Health is a global provider of health IT solutions. The system being implemented in Victoria is widely used in the United States, Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, and Israel.

The project team are currently working to set up the base platform of the health information sharing system in anticipation of the staged rollout.

Improving outcomes for patients

Operating a health information sharing platform will improve the way health information is connected across Victoria, reducing the burden on patients having to recall their medical history and re-tell their health story.

This will allow treating clinicians to better manage treatment, including treatment of chronic and complex conditions. With the right clinical information, treatment can be started sooner, allergies and allergic drug

reactions can be identified, unnecessary tests for patients be reduced, along with the risk of medication errors.

Changes for clinicians and health staff

Secure health information sharing will enhance clinicians' ability to communicate and coordinate care. This improves clinical handover and transfer, and reduces reliance on paper-based systems, phone calls and faxes. It will improve patient safety and reduce patient risk.

Clinicians will be provided training to access the securely shared records as part of the rollout to health service.

Sharing information only for the purpose of care and treatment

Health information in the health information sharing system will only be used by treating clinicians for the purpose of providing medical treatment and care. Patient health information will not be shared with anyone else, and will not be used for research, policy planning or for any other purpose.

Patient access to their health information

Patients currently have rights to access their medical records from their public health service provider under Freedom of Information and privacy legislation.

Public health services are required to provide timely access to a patient's medical records upon request.

The information to be held in the new system will be a subset of the full medical records held by health services. The health service (or health services) at which a patient has received treatment will continue to hold the entire medical record associated with their treatment at the respective facilities.

Treating health services will continue to be best placed to respond to applications by patients for access to their medical records.

Access to securely shared health information

Only clinicians working in Victorian public health services, like hospitals and publicly operated community health organisations, will have access to the system. The full list of public health services that will be using the system is contained in the Health Legislation Amendment (Information Sharing) Act 2023:

www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/acts/health-legislation-amendment-information-sharing-act-2023

Clinicians in private health services and general practitioners will not have access to the system.

IT and technical support staff in health services and the Department of Health will access the system to maintain the system including undertaking security and system management tasks. They will not access individual patient records.

Complementing My Health Record

The health information sharing platform complements [My Health Record](https://www.digitalhealth.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/my-health-record)

<<https://www.digitalhealth.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/my-health-record>>, which is operated by the Australian Digital Health Agency.

My Health Record is a repository for a patient's key health information. This may include clinical documents from local and cross-border public and private hospitals, general practitioners, community pharmacists. Private pathology and medical imaging reports can be included in My Health Record.

My Health Record is patient controlled. Patients can choose which information is uploaded and shared.