



Joint Communiqué

22 February 2021

Electronic prescriptions a choice for all

The majority of Australians now have the choice of an electronic prescription instead of a paper prescription. Over 3.5 million electronic prescriptions and repeat prescriptions have already been generated by prescribers and dispensers across Australia.

1. Background

Australia's COVID-19 National Health Plan and the fast-track implementation of electronic prescribing to support the telehealth measures were announced in March last year. Since then clinical peak bodies, PHNs, clinical software providers and consumer groups worked with Commonwealth and jurisdictional health departments and the Australian Digital Health Agency, to implement electronic prescribing and dispensing software functionality throughout Australia's general practices and community pharmacies.

The first electronic prescription in primary care was generated on 6 May 2020. Now, nearly 12,000 general practitioners have issued electronic prescriptions (38% of all GPs¹). These numbers continue to rise rapidly and over the past two weeks, more than 1,600 general practitioners have issued their first electronic prescription.

Plus, >95% of all PBS approved community pharmacies are dispensing electronic prescriptions; some have dispensed many thousands of electronic scripts, demonstrating that once workflow changes are managed, electronic prescriptions are scalable.

2. Current status

The Australian Digital Health Agency is now confident that if a patient prefers an electronic prescription from their prescriber over a paper prescription, they will be able to get this dispensed at their local community pharmacy. Nevertheless, consistent with principles promoted since May last year:

- communication between local general practices and community pharmacies is critical to ensure both are ready to write and dispense an electronic prescription.
- if your general practice or community pharmacy is not yet software ready for electronic prescribing, contact your software supplier and ask them to activate your electronic prescribing functionality.

Provided these principles are followed, general practitioners are encouraged to use the electronic prescribing functionality. This will especially help those patients who wish, or need to have virtual care, particularly in response to COVID-19.

February 2021 also sees the first ever pharmacies testing the Active Script List (ASL). The ASL is a list of all active prescriptions and repeats available to be dispensed. For those patients who want to use an ASL, this will in future remove the need for patients to retain their electronic prescription tokens. Availability of ASL across community pharmacy will increase from April, and improved ASL functionality through consumer Apps will progress over 2021. Practitioners, especially pharmacists for whom ASL will provide the most patient benefits, should avail themselves of upcoming eLearning, webinars, podcasts and promotional materials available through the Agency and relevant professional peak bodies.

¹ <https://hwd.health.gov.au/summary.html#part-1>

3. Schedule 8 and other controlled medicines

All medicines, including Schedule 8 medicines, can be prescribed and dispensed through an electronic prescription providing patients with a safe and secure way of obtaining medicines remotely. Unlike a request for a medicine using a digital image of a prescription via fax or email, the prescriber is not required to send an original hard copy of the prescription to the pharmacy - the electronic prescription is the legal order to prescribe and supply. Upcoming webinars offered by the Agency will be addressing specific controlled medicines practice issues raised by health practitioners.

4. Patient Choice

It is important to remember that electronic prescriptions are an alternative to paper. If the patient prefers to have their prescription provided by paper, then their local general practice and community pharmacy will continue to support the patient's preference.

5. For more information about electronic prescribing and electronic prescriptions:

- Department of Health: www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/electronic-prescribing
- Australian Digital Health Agency: www.digitalhealth.gov.au/get-started-with-digital-health/electronic-prescriptions
- Australian Digital Health Agency electronic prescription eLearning: <https://training.digitalhealth.gov.au/>
- Australian Digital Health Agency electronic prescription upcoming webinars: www.digitalhealth.gov.au/news-and-events/events
- Australian Digital Health Agency electronic prescription podcasts: www.digitalhealth.gov.au/newsroom/podcasts
- RACGP: www.racgp.org.au/running-a-practice/technology/clinical-technology/electronic-prescribing
- ACRRM: www.acrrm.org.au/electronic-prescribing
- Pharmaceutical Society of Australia: www.psa.org.au/ep/
- The Pharmacy Guild of Australia (members): www.guild.org.au/resources/automation/digital-health/digitalhealth/etp#latest_news_0



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