

Department of Veterans' Affairs
Ex-Service Organisation (ESO) Round Table

Lovett Tower
WODEN, ACT

Meeting No. 3

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AGENDA ITEM 15(b)

Unique Healthcare Identification Service

The purpose of this brief is to update the Ex-Service Organisations Round Table on the implementation of the Healthcare Identifiers Service (HI Service).

Background

The Council of the Australian Governments (COAG) has agreed to the development and implementation of unique healthcare identifiers for healthcare consumers, providers and provider organisations to support the development of the national e-health agenda. Healthcare identifiers are an important building block for the eventual introduction of a patient controlled individual electronic health record.

Healthcare identifiers are unique numbers that will be given to all healthcare providers, healthcare centres and healthcare consumers. These unique numbers will provide a new level of confidence when communicating patient information between the myriad of private and government healthcare providers and systems.

To date there has been no single method of accurately and reliably identifying the patient receiving healthcare, the healthcare providers or the organisations managing care. Mismatching of patients with their records and medical results is a documented problem for the health system.

All Australian residents will be allocated an Individual Healthcare Identifier (IHI) to support better communication between healthcare providers involved in patient treatment – but no patient will be denied access to health services if their IHI is unavailable for any reason. The HI Service will hold only enough information to clearly identify the person. No clinical information or medical records will be stored in the HI Service.

The National E-Health Transition Authority (NEHTA) has been tasked by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to develop the national HI Service as part of the overall national e-health work program.

The HI Service will be managed initially by Medicare Australia – a trusted and secure provider of dedicated health related services. This will be separate to its funding and claims functions. The IHI will not replace a patient's Medicare number, or DVA File Number.¹

¹ Background information sourced from the Australian Health Ministers' Conference communiqué of 13 July 2009

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Recent Outcomes and Next Steps

Legislation to establish the HI Service will be introduced to the Federal Parliament in the Autumn 2010 sittings.

On 13 November 2009 Health Ministers agreed to release for further consultation draft legislation for establishing the HI Service.

Health Ministers agreed:

- the legislation will limit the use of healthcare identifiers so that they can only be used as part of delivering a healthcare service;
- healthcare identifiers will be underpinned by effective national privacy arrangements; and
- penalties will apply to the misuse of healthcare identifiers.

A paper, *Building the foundation for an e-health future... update on legislative proposals for healthcare identifiers*, is available at Department of Health and Ageing's website at <http://www.health.gov.au/eHealth/consultation>.

The Department of Health and Ageing is continuing stakeholder consultation on the HI Service.

On 20 November 2009 representatives from DVA and a number of ex-service organisations attended a HI Service stakeholder briefing forum run by the Department of Health and Ageing and NEHTA. Attendees were provided with an overview of the HI Service and its implementation as well as an update on the legislative proposals to establish the HI Service.

DVA is working closely with NEHTA, the Department of Health and Ageing and Medicare Australia to implement the IHI for DVA's treatment population and will continue to update the ESO Round Table and Prime Minister's Advisory Council on Ex-Service Matters on the implementation of the HI Service.

Frequently Asked Questions

Some frequently asked questions about the HI Service are at Attachment A.

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Attachment A

What is an Individual Healthcare Identifier (IHI)?

An IHI is a unique 16 digit number that will be allocated to each Australian resident and others seeking healthcare in Australia.

Will DVA treatment card holders be assigned an Individual Healthcare Identifier (IHI)?

Yes. DVA is working closely with the Department of Health and Ageing and Medicare Australia to ensure that DVA treatment card holders are automatically assigned a IHI by the HI Service.

Will clinical information or medical records be stored in the HI Service?

No. No clinical information or medical records will be required or will be held by the HI Service.

What information is included in the HI Service?

For most individuals, the data will consist only of name, date of birth and the IHI.

Why introduce individual healthcare identifiers?

Communication of health information is a vital part of effective healthcare. The accurate identification of individuals is critical in all health communication.

Using an IHI provides a way for healthcare providers to more accurately match the right records to the person they are treating and improve accuracy when communicating information with other healthcare providers.

This will help to avoid medical mix-ups or your information being recorded on another patient's file.

Why not use the Medicare number?

A Medicare number is not unique. Some people have more than one Medicare number because they are members of more than one family and may be on multiple cards. Also, not everyone who needs healthcare will have a Medicare number.

Are IHIs needed to receive healthcare?

No. An IHI is not a requirement for accessing healthcare in Australia.

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If your health provider is unable to obtain your IHI from the HI Service, or your IHI is not available for any reason, you will not be refused treatment.

How will information held by the HI Service be protected?

The HI Service will protect individual privacy through both legislation and technical means, such as agreed security and access controls.

Legislation is being developed to establish the HI Service, and will set out governance arrangements, privacy and permitted uses of healthcare identifiers. In addition, current privacy laws will continue to apply.

To minimise risks to privacy, the HI Service will only allow access to the minimum amount of personal information required to uniquely identify consumers. For most individuals, the data will consist only of name, date of birth and the IHI.

When will IHIs be available?

It is planned to have the IHIs available from mid 2010. It is important to note that the numbers cannot be allocated and used until necessary supporting legislation is in place.

Where can I find out more about the HI Service?

More detail about the HI Service is available on the Department of Health and Ageing website at <http://www.health.gov.au/ehealth/consultation>