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To whom it may concern

**DIGITAL HEALTH STRATEGY CONSULTATION**

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is pleased to provide feedback to the Australian Digital Health Agency to help inform the new National Digital Health Strategy. ACN supports digital innovation that will empower health professionals to provide best practice care, as well as giving people more control of their health and health care options.

Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is the national professional organisation for all nurse leaders and its aim is to ensure that the Australian community receives high quality nursing care now and into the future. ACN is a membership organisation with members in all states and territories, health care settings and nursing specialties. ACN is also the Australian member of the International Council of Nurses headquartered in Geneva.

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is committed to working with Australian governments to increase engagement with the nursing profession, enhance nursing leadership in reform and maximise nursing potential.

Yours sincerely

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# National Digital Health Strategy

# Producing a new National Digital Health Strategy

## Overview

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) congratulates the Australian Government for taking a proactive approach to health care by inviting feedback on what the new National Digital Health Strategy (the Strategy) should look like and what it should include.  ACN endorses the Government's decision to improve the digital health strategy and consult with stakeholders to ensure that the Strategy achieves quality health outcomes for both consumers and providers of health care.

ACN welcomes the approach taken to inform the Strategy with the opportunity to start from scratch and allow for comment free of any constraints.

Information Technology (IT) uptake is increasing in Australia and across the globe in many sectors, yet the full potential of IT in the health sector has not truly been realised. The uptake of health applications is still limited with data collection and integration not regularly integrated into health care and disease prevention processes and practices. There is an immediate need to improve interoperability between systems and devices to ensure full operational capability.

The new digital health strategy must ensure that collaboration is at the core of all new initiatives. This will ensure that solutions address the issues identified by care professionals and users of health care services in partnership with public institutions, researchers and IT suppliers. The framework for the new Strategy must be based on a common purpose and shared direction.

**The current health care system**

*What aspects of healthcare need improvement?*

The current restrictions on health professionals' scopes of practice limits the flexibility of health care services and their ability to respond to consumer needs. Some duties performed by general practitioners can be performed by nurse practitioners (NPs). Many of these procedures are more efficient and cost effective, if performed by NPs. Although not a technological solution, price is a factor that must be looked at if more Australians are to adopt technological solutions that will improve their health and health care.

Additionally, ACN recommends an opt-out approach to MyHealthRecord rather than an opt-in. This would still allow those who do not wish to participate to remove themselves from the service and include many more people who are not opting in to MyHealthRecord because they perceive it to be too difficult. The current number of just under 4.5 million registered consumers should be much higher. In particular, ACN would strongly suggest that all residents at aged care facilities be registered and have a MyHealthRecord.

Another area that needs improvement is communication of the capabilities and benefits of obtaining access to health records and other relevant information. Many consumers are unaware of the potential benefits of MyHealthRecord, or believe there is no real benefit for them, and therefore do not register. More consumers would be interested in MyHealthRecord if:

- it could provide links to alternative sources of information that support self-care, where appropriate;
- it could provide links and alerts to appropriate services to individuals who need to address care issues; and
- if it were adopted by more service providers.

*What are the barriers to improving performance?*

The most significant barrier to improving performance in digital health technology is the low uptake by consumers. Demand drives sustainability which will in turn drive innovation. In particular, demand must increase among Australia's ageing population which is a high user of health care services.

Another barrier is funding and the opportunity for research translation in a culture that does not necessarily reward innovation, with the number of digital solutions not as high as those in a culture that promotes innovation. In an era where many medical devices can be wirelessly enabled and assist with a person's health care, there is value in encouraging innovation to seek new ways of tackling problems. Hospital costs are high and more effort should be made to lower hospital presentations, even if it occasionally results in a failed attempt.

The lack of inclusion of health professionals in the development of digital health solutions - particularly nurses – is another barrier that needs to be overcome. Nurses make up the

majority of the registered health care workforce yet they are under-represented in the health information technology development lifecycle in Australia. Evidence from overseas has seen nurses make a significant positive impact to the health and safety of patients. For example, gerontological nurses in the United States have had great success in promoting improvements in nursing sensitive measures such as patient falls by modelling adoption and use of Electronic Health Records and by leading quality improvement efforts that engage both senior leadership and front line nursing staff.[1]

Integration of health care data is perhaps one of the biggest barriers to improving health care. In an environment of multidisciplinary health care across multiple delivery systems, there is a need for structural change to address the lack of resources, training and operation of 'silos', both amongst individual organisations and within them.

### Digital technologies used in health and wellbeing activities

*How would you like to see the digital technologies change peoples' experiences of managing their health, and the way they interact with the healthcare system?*

ACN looks forward to the day when the most vulnerable and socially and geographically isolated Australians are able to obtain the same health care that many take for granted. This must be one of the aims of the new Strategy. The use of telehealth and telecare provides an opportunity for those in country areas to stay in their homes, if they prefer, rather than move to urban areas that provide the support and services they need. Young people with a disability, in particular, can struggle when placed in aged care facilities away from their family.

For many families, the provision of home health care is the only economically viable option. However, the market for digital health care solutions is so small that the technologies available are too expensive.

Another factor that influences how people interact with the health care system and digital technologies is the level of consumer expectation. Many consumers are aware of smartphone applications that are designed for health monitoring, logging and planning. However, they are not aware that many of these applications are not compatible with other applications and information systems. The health care sector needs to develop digital technologies that are compatible with the systems used by hospitals and community and primary health care providers. This ability would encourage more people to engage in the management of their health.

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[1] McFadden KL, Stock GN, Gowen CR. Leadership, safety climate, and continuous quality improvement: Impact on process quality and patient safety. Health Care Management Review, Feb. 2014;21

**Health professionals**

*What gets in the way of health professionals being able to connect, communicate and coordinate with the right people?*

Connecting and communicating requires effective networks supported by interoperable systems that allow smooth information flow. There is still an absence of effective networks that allows all health professionals, health system users and relevant service providers the ability for real time communication and efficient information exchange. Advances have been made with some diagnostic service providers, which is a great advancement, however, more needs to be done. At present there is no seamless data transfer between Primary Health Networks nationally and the Local Health Networks (however named) at state level. Information sharing is necessary for improved communication and coordination.

**Data, technology and improved health and wellbeing**

*How could data and technology be better used to improve health and wellbeing?*

The design of new technology and digital health initiatives must be based on a collaborative approach and not just a centrally driven plan or strategy imposed on users. For new services and solutions to be successful they must be defined by service users, carers and health care professionals. The process must be open and transparent. This will allow for greater collaboration across the spectrum – from software/hardware providers to health care professionals and the general public.

There is also a need to recognise people's transition from passive engagement as health care recipients in a traditional doctor/patient relationship to a focus on prevention and self-care. This requires not just a cultural shift but also a change in approach to how data and technology are now being used. It is imperative that the responsibility for sharing information is understood by everyone throughout organisations and across communities.

**Organisational priorities and digital health**

*What are your organization's priorities in respect to digital health or eHealth?*

ACN will be looking to address some issues with respect to eHealth and health information technology overall, including:

- working with training organisations to include health informatics and health information technology in the nursing curriculum;

- including more nurses on government decision-making boards working on eHealth strategies;

- including more nurses in the health information technology lifecycle – from initial consultation and design to final implementation and evaluation; and

- working with the nursing profession to establish and promote data standards.

**Innovation in healthcare**

*What are the barriers or obstacles to innovation in health and care?*

A major barrier to innovation is the rate of adoption of new technology, which can be affected by the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of the technology. In the context of Australia's health and health care industry, if nurses, doctors, administrators and senior managers are familiar with a technology, trained in its use and understand the benefits of its application, there is more chance that it will be adopted. Too many new technologies and solutions are thrust on health professionals without the appropriate training and communication.

Proper adoption of technology with on-the-job training would not only increase an organisation's familiarity and confidence with new technology but also increase the chance of the organisation adopting new digital solutions.

Another obstacle to innovation is the absence of true interoperability across the health sector, resulting in systems that don't talk to each other. This means that the benefits available from interoperable systems cannot be realised. There is a clear need to establish standards across the industry to guide developers and ensure everyone is working towards a common purpose of interoperability.

*What opportunities would you prioritise in respect to innovation in health and care?*

ACN would strongly advocate for the inclusion of nurses in the design, testing and evaluation phases of new technology in health and care. Nurses play such an important role in health care and are perfectly placed to be involved in new innovations and maximise their potential. ACN would recommend the inclusion of nurses as a top priority.

**Priority initiative for My Health Record**

*What should be the immediate priority initiative for the My Health Record to ensure it delivers real value for clinicians and the public?*

The immediate priority should be to improve communication of the benefits and capabilities of My Health Record to the general public, especially the aged. Anecdotal evidence amongst the nursing profession has found that the general public still have a level of distrust regarding privacy of their health record. A campaign with a consistent message regarding

safety of information privacy, along with an explanation of the benefits of having a My Health Record, will be needed to promote greater uptake.

ACN advocates for the Federal Government to put measures in place to facilitate communication between Primary Health Networks and state based Local Health Networks (however named). This would increase the benefits of having a My Health Record and move towards an interoperable environment that enhances a person's experience through the health care sector.

ACN would also strongly suggest that all participants in new initiatives, such as Health Care Homes, must have a My Health Record if they are to participate, as well as all residents of aged care facilities. This would ensure all clinicians are able to access the necessary information on a patient at all times.

**Conclusion**

Nurses make up the largest professional group of the health workforce and are uniquely positioned to provide valuable insights into how health care spending can be most effectively utilized in the pursuit of a new digital health strategy. The nursing workforce is highly educated, flexible, fiscally accountable and responsive to patient and community needs and has a unique position to get a feel of where new innovation should be directed. Rated as the most highly regarded and trusted of all professions, nurses utilise public confidence to guide consumer experience, enhance primary health care capacity and reach, and have the greatest impact on the success or failure of health reform. The new digital health strategy will need the support and endorsement of nurses if it is to succeed.