

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **GOODWILL, OPTIMISM AND COLLABORATION: MARK AUSTRALIA'S E-HEALTH FUTURE**

Goodwill, optimism and collaboration were the hallmarks of the two-day National Health Information Summit which brought together local and international experts to discuss how information technology can improve the Australian health care sector.

The Summit, which was officially opened by Australian Government Minister for Health and Ageing The Hon. Tony Abbott MP, was used to discuss jurisdictional and national approaches to the convergence of health and information technology, including the newly formed National E-Health Transition Authority (NEHTA).

"NEHTA has been established to help us avoid a rail gauge problem in Australian health care in the future, by ensuring we are all using the same data standards between the systems of jurisdictions," said Ms Patricia Faulkner, Chair, National Health Information Group and Secretary, Department of Human Services, Victoria.

Dr Ian Reinecke, Chief Executive Officer, NEHTA, highlighted how a national approach will be more cost effective than a jurisdictional and sectorial approach in ensuring Australians receive the best health care possible based on the best information irrespective of where the patient presents in Australia.

"The current health business model is not sustainable in terms of cost, efficiency and quality of service, as long as we rely on information being exchanged using physical objects and paper, we accept hand written prescriptions and we require the retrieval of files for hospital admissions," said Dr Reinecke.

"A greater level of investment is required to break out of the current paper based model, and NEHTA will play a significant role in strategically determining the priority areas for investment in the short term," said Dr Reinecke.

"NEHTA will provide a focal point for stakeholders to devise and implement a national approach to connected e-health, and aim to facilitate an environment in which we can better use available information in the provision of health care," said Dr Reinecke.

Professor Bruce Barraclough, Chair, Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care used the Summit to highlight how e-health can enhance safety in health care by improving the quality of data available.

"To measure safety more effectively we need to improve the reporting of incidents nationally and locally, by increasing the use of performance data at the local level, by reviewing specific data required at local, regional and national levels, and by building better systems for data collection," said Professor Barraclough.

Professor Barraclough also highlighted the need to overcome cultural barriers to improve safety in health care.

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"We also need to overcome the culture of blame in health care which drives problems underground," said Professor Barraclough.

"Although it is challenging, perhaps we need to consider the public reporting of safety to ensure openness," said Professor Barraclough.

The Summit also included a presentation from Dr Bill Glasson, President, Australian Medical Association.

"The e-health revolution presents an exciting future and new frontiers, and the key to success will be winning acceptability and turning sceptics into believers," said Dr Glasson.

"E-health will improve medical practice in the areas of billing, record keeping, prescribing, patient history, research data and evaluation, and communication between doctors and referrers," said Dr Glasson.

"To move forward, we need doctors to embrace the concept of e-health, which should be viewed as both a business and health tool. And to ensure patient confidence and trust in the future, we need to build our health information systems centring on the patient's needs," said Dr Glasson.

"Trust and confidence are paramount and must always come first, acting as the basis upon which e-health initiatives are developed," said Dr Glasson.

Dr Glasson also raised awareness of the need to build national health infomatics capacity to support the acceptance and use of technology.

Ms Helen Hopkins, Executive Director, Consumers' Health Forum of Australia, a national member based organisation which represents more than 840,000 consumers, described activity the council was undertaking to ensure the consumer voice was present in decision making processes.

"Our aim is to incorporate consumers in shaping the future of e-health in Australia, and to provide an informed and respected voice on national e-health issues," said Ms Hopkins who is also a member of the Australian Health Information Council.

Health consumers and the wider community need to be involved in finding solutions to emerging e-health issues including informed consent, patient identification and data linkage.

Dr Robert Wooding, First Assistant Secretary, Information and Communications Division, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing reflected on the success of the Summit and e-health progress to date.

"It's reassuring that during the two-day Summit, there is agreement on e-health issues which we have had disagreement on in the past," said Dr Wooding.

"And although there is a tendency to question why the realisation of e-health is taking a long time, we should recognise and be proud of the achievements which have been made to date," said Dr Wooding.

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"More desktop products have been adopted by general practitioners than ever before and we now have the OACIS system in South Australia which is one of the most advanced hospital clinical information technology systems in Australia," said Dr Wooding.

"We also have automated pathology and radiology services, progress in the areas of standards and privacy, linking of data and increasing access to broadband in health environments," said Dr Wooding.

Delivering a keynote address, Mr Charles Parisot, Manager, Standards and Testing, GE Medical Systems highlighted that universal e-health standards (the way in which information is classified and documented) were a critical enabler of health care world wide.

Mr Parisot highlighted that both health care providers and vendors need to work in partnership to ensure health information systems meet the requirements of end-users.

#### **About the National Health Information Summit**

The two-day Summit brought together local and international experts to discuss how information technology can improve the Australian health care industry and:

- improve patient safety, the quality of health care and the patient-clinician relationship;
- support electronic health records and subsequent improvements in the quality of public health services and population research; and
- empower consumers and transform the patient-clinician relationship.

"It is a pivotal time in the Australian health sector as health and information technology converge and transform health care management and delivery," said Professor Andrew Coats, Australian Health Information Council Chair.

"We have a significant opportunity to realise the benefits of health and IM&ICT however, national collaboration is critical for long-term interoperability and connectivity across the health sector," said Ms Patricia Faulkner, National Health Information Group Chair.

The Summit was an initiative of the Australian Health Information Council and the National Health Information Group in collaboration with the Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care.

#### **ENDS**

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