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## **Electronic Prescribing Communique**

21 August 2020

Approved for external information

### **Background**

PHNs play a vital role in enabling successful digital health initiatives through local expertise and support. The managed rollout of electronic prescribing has now commenced in Melbourne.

This communique has been drafted to provide you with key messages and information about the rollout and will form part of an ongoing series of communiques to ensure alignment of messaging and to support the coordination of activities as electronic prescribing is enabled nationally. The Agency will be guided by the advice of healthcare professionals to identify other priority areas following the Melbourne rollout.

The following information is being communicated to General Practitioners and Pharmacists in the metropolitan Melbourne area by the Digital Health Agency, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia and software developers.

### **A Coordinated Rollout Approach**

Electronic prescribing is being implemented in General Practices and Community Pharmacies across Australia through a managed approach of testing and continuous improvement across a growing number of Communities of Interest (COI)

Given the current COVID-19 pandemic in Victoria and the challenges being faced by community pharmacists, doctors and their patients, we are working with the RACGP, Pharmacy Guild, PSA and software developers, to increase the adoption of electronic prescribing, starting with a broadscale Community of Interest across the metropolitan Melbourne area (within the Stage 4 lockdown areas).

This will see general practices and community pharmacies across metropolitan Melbourne increasing their electronic prescribing capability substantially over the coming weeks. To support this, we need to work together to ensure a coordinated rollout that follows some key overarching principles.

Further information about COI's can be found here:

<https://www.digitalhealth.gov.au/get-started-with-digital-health/electronic-prescriptions>

## National Rollout - Overarching Principles

- Pharmacies must be ready to dispense electronic prescriptions ahead of GPs using electronic prescribing
- Local healthcare professionals (GPs and Pharmacists) are best placed to communicate directly with each other to ensure they are both ready to support electronic prescribing
- Communities of Interest are well placed to support a managed rollout and capture systems feedback
- General Practitioners are best placed to determine the suitability of electronic prescribing for their patients
- A patient can always choose where their prescriptions are dispensed and whether the prescription is paper or electronic
- Rollout should prioritise areas with the greatest needs first

## General Practice and Pharmacy Readiness Steps

Step 1: Software activation – Pharmacists are being asked to contact their software supplier and ask them to activate electronic prescribing functionality. GP activation will follow closely behind once GPs have confirmed local pharmacy readiness.

Step 2: Communication between local pharmacies and local practices is critical - this will ensure they are both ready to issue and dispense an electronic prescription (noting that some pharmacies may require more time and resources to get their dispensing workflow ready). If they don't confirm this, it could mean that patients will have a delay in accessing their medicines including having to come back for a paper prescription.

Step 3: Stay informed – Healthcare professionals are being encouraged to attend webinars and education sessions by the Australian Digital Health Agency, the Pharmacy Guild and the RACGP to learn more about electronic prescribing and how it works. The Agency's Provider Adoption team can work with you to offer sessions for your local GPs and pharmacies to provide updates on electronic prescriptions, and to explore ways in which digital health tools can be used to support virtual health care during lockdown.

## What if GPs and Pharmacists are already using electronic prescriptions?

If pharmacies and practices have made the preparations above (Steps 1 and 2), they can and should commence electronic prescribing in line with their patient's choice.

Whilst we all work to increase access to electronic prescriptions across Victoria, other areas of Australia should continue to prepare for the broader rollout including updating and familiarisation with new software and participating in training opportunities provided by the Agency, peak bodies and software providers.

It's recognised that some GPs and pharmacists outside COIs have begun using electronic prescribing. There is no need to ask these clinicians to stop using electronic prescribing where it is working and benefiting providers and patients, in line with the principles outlined.

## Advice for Prescribing and Dispensing Software Developers

In line with the rollout principles and approach listed above we would encourage the following:

### Dispensing Software

- Prioritise and activate your Melbourne and then Victorian customers now to support the COVID-19 pandemic in that state. We will provide further advice on emerging priority areas in consultation with healthcare professionals and clinical peaks, at subsequent meetings.
- Activate other customers over the following weeks to build a national electronic prescribing capability.

### Prescribing Software

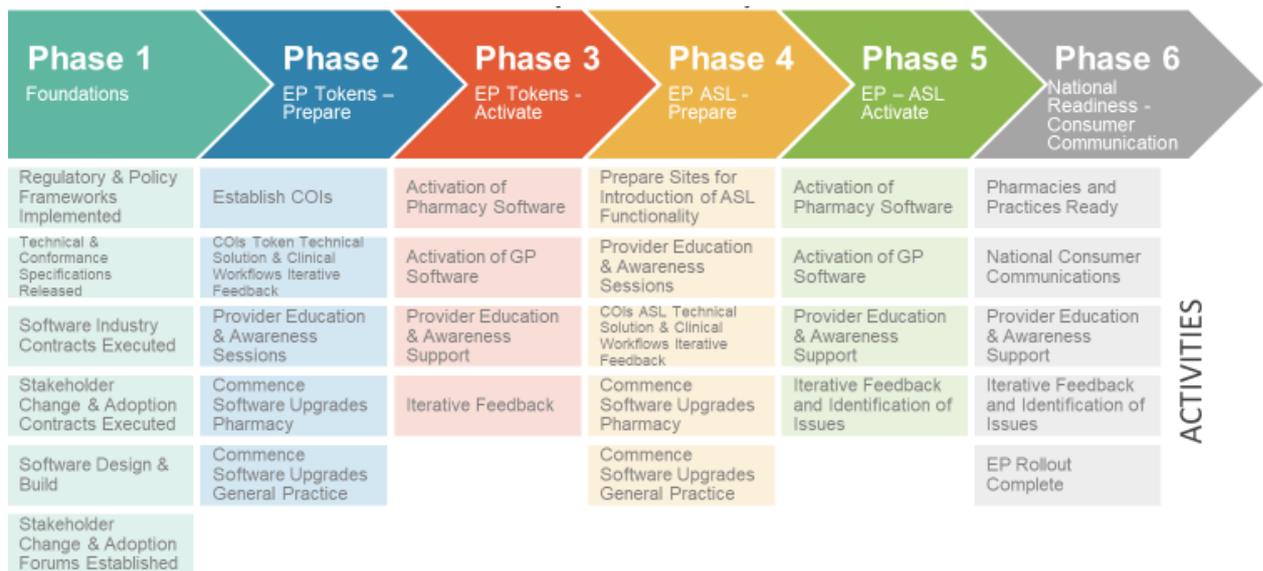
- Prioritise and activate your Melbourne customers shortly, noting the pharmacy readiness principle and rollout steps outlined above. We will provide regular pharmacy readiness updates commencing from next Monday. GPs may also contact you to request activation of the electronic prescribing capability and you should confirm they have pharmacies in their local area ready to dispense, before activating electronic prescribing.
- We will provide further advice on emerging priority areas in consultation with healthcare professionals and clinical peaks, at subsequent meetings.

## Additional Information on National Rollout Phasing and Key Activities

Tokens are the first major piece of functionality being activated as part of the national electronic prescribing rollout. Following this, software vendors will release more functionality called Active Script List, which will offer pharmacists the ability to see all active scripts for a patient and the ability to dispense from this list, with the consent of the patient.

Figure 1 provides a snapshot of the end-to-end rollout and the key activities in each phase. We are currently at Phase 2 and 3. Note that Phases 3 and 4 will also occur in parallel. As Pharmacies activate token functionally, the Department of Health and the Digital Health Agency will be working to introduce ASL functionally into targeted COIs to embed the technical capability and clinical workflows. Further details will be provided in the coming weeks.

Figure 1 National Rollout Phases and Key Activities



## Other Related Information

All medicines, including Schedule 8 and 4D medicines, can be prescribed and dispensed with conformant software through an electronic prescription, providing patients with a safe and secure way of obtaining medicines remotely. The electronic prescription is the legal order to supply so there is no requirement to send any paper form to the pharmacy for medicines including Schedule 8 and 4D medicines to be supplied to patients.

## Patient Choice

It's important to remember that electronic prescriptions are an alternative to paper. If a patient's preferred local pharmacy is not ready for electronic prescriptions, patients can still choose to get a paper prescription from their doctor.

## Resources

For more information about electronic prescribing and electronic prescriptions, see:

- **Department of Health:** [www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/electronic-prescribing](http://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/electronic-prescribing)
- **Australian Digital Health Agency:** [www.digitalhealth.gov.au/get-started-with-digital-health/electronic-prescriptions](http://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:** <https://www.digitalhealth.gov.au/news-and-events/events>
- **The RACGP information for GPs and patients:** <https://www.racgp.org.au/electronicprescribing>
- **Pharmaceutical Society of Australia Dedicated Electronic Prescriptions Support Line for pharmacies:** 1300 955 162. Available 0830am to 7.00pm AEST

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