

09

Electronic Referrals & Secure Messaging

Electronic Referrals & Secure Messaging

What are Electronic Referrals?

An Electronic Referral (also known as eReferral) is the seamless exchange of vital patient information from one healthcare provider to another using a secure messaging system. eReferrals are created using Clinical Document Architecture (CDA). CDA is a Health Level Seven (HL7) standard designed to facilitate the secure and efficient exchange of sensitive clinical information between systems and providers. Secure Messaging refers to the process of sending a letter or CDA document form one system to another. Using HealthLink's SmartForms (the secure messaging system) through your clinical information system, such as Best Practice, Medical Director, Genie or Communicare, a GP can send an eReferral together with the patient's medical history to the outpatient services at NSW Health, Transport NSW, Community Services, and My Aged Care. General practitioners can also send to specialists or allied health professionals who are registered as HealthLink providers and are enabled for SmartForms through the Specialist & Referrals tool, or through other secure messaging platforms like Medical Objects or Consultmed.

Why do Electronic Referrals matter?

eReferrals are vital to Australia's healthcare system because they improve efficiency, patient safety and communication by replacing paper-based systems with secure, integrated digital workflows. They can:

- Reduce administrative burden and costs for GPs and clinics (think of the valuable time reception and nurse staff can get back to spend more time with patients if they didn't have to fax and chase referrals manually)
- Save time for providers by automating data entry and reducing the need for follow-up calls. Notifications of referral receipt and outcome improve communication and can help reduce queries between providers
- Ensure patients receive timely and appropriate care by improving the accuracy and speed of information transfer
- Increased security and privacy - offers the most secure option over fax/efax and email



Electronic Referrals & Secure Messaging

How do Electronic Referrals benefit me and my practice?

Electronic Referrals may have many benefits to both the patient and prescriber:

- Smooth, efficient, easy way to submit referrals in real-time
- Integrated with existing practice management systems and pre-populate available patient data, saving you time
- Tracks whether your referral has been received – avoids lost referrals that delay access to care
- Reduces processing time
- Improve communication with other healthcare providers
- With HealthLink SmartForms, when sent directly from your practice software, a copy is automatically uploaded to the patients' My Health Record

How do Electronic Referral SmartForms work?

eReferral SmartForms are essentially a webform. When a GP has the patient records open in their clinical system, they simply click on the HealthLink icon and click on the link for the SmartForm they are wanting to refer the patient to.

The SmartForm then is pre-populated with patient and GP (or referrer) information for the GP to review and refine or add additional information to, such as recent scans, pathology reports, and the like. The GP also writes their reason for the referral as free text. Once the form fields are completed, simply 'send' the form. A PDF copy of the referral is then saved in the patients' outbound correspondence folder.

For more information on how to set up HealthLink and use it within your clinical information system, visit the [HealthLink Support website](#) and download the relevant user guides.



Electronic Referrals & Secure Messaging

Electronic Referrals Checklist for General Practice

Ensure that your practice clinical software is updated to the most recent version and is one of the software vendors connected with HealthLink. HealthLink is compatible with Best Practice, Medical Director, Communicare, Genie and Shexie.

Ensure your practice has a Healthcare Provider Identifier – Organisation (HPI-O) and is connected to the HI Service, and ensure your practitioners have Healthcare Provider Identifiers (HPI-I). Healthcare Identifiers are managed through HPOS, ensure they are linked in your clinical software.

Register your practice and your general practitioners to HealthLink's system. Go to HealthLink's registration page. One of their team members will assist you to register.

Coordinate with your IT personnel to integrate HealthLink in your practice management software. Integration guides are provided in HealthLink's Knowledge Base.

Ensure that patients Individual Healthcare Identifier's (IHI's) are validated through the practice clinical software. To validate a patient's IHI, you must have the following recorded in the patient's profile within the CIS: First name, last name, date of birth, gender and Medicare or DVA card number.

Familiarise yourself on how to use SmartForms. Read the User Guides and Frequently Asked Questions.

If you do not have compatible clinical software, you can access HealthLink's web portal. Log-in to [HealthLink's Web Portal](#) and enter your username and password (new users need to create an account first). Read through the Quick Start Guide on how to navigate the website.

Did you know?

When sending sensitive patient information externally to another healthcare provider, reasonable steps must be taken to protect the information transmitted and the privacy of the patient. Failure to take reasonable steps to protect health information may constitute a breach of the [Australian Privacy Principles \(APPs\)](#). It's advised you adopt a stringent policy and process to mitigate the risks associated with using unsecured or unencrypted messaging solutions.

The RACGP has provided a great [fact sheet](#) on how to manage risk when it comes to sharing patient information for care coordination. If a secure messaging option isn't possible (low risk), then ensure the next best option is setup and follows strict processes (e.g. sending & receiving encrypted emails or using an encrypted file transfer tool).



An Australian Government Initiative

GET IN TOUCH

Headquarters

First Floor, 187 Brisbane Street
PO Box 890
DUBBO NSW 2830

Phone **1300 699 167**

Email **digitalhealth.team@wnswphn.org.au**

wnswphn.org.au

