

Digital health and access to services



What is digital health?



Digital health refers to technologies that can facilitate the delivery of healthcare and collect and share a person's health information. It is not a replacement for in-person care; rather it allows more choice and more involvement in care choices.

In Australia, digital health includes:

- mobile health and applications (such as SMS reminders and wellness apps)
- electronic prescribing
- electronic health records (including My Health Record)
- telehealth and telemedicine (e.g., telephone, video, online)
- wearable devices (such as fitness trackers and monitors)
- robotics and artificial intelligence. (See page two for more examples.)



In 2022, 80% of Australians had used the internet to access a health service.

Digital inclusion in Gippsland



Digital inclusion is about ensuring that everyone can access and use digital technologies effectively.

Digital inclusion is made of three parts (scores 0-100):

1. Access to an internet connection and the use of various digital devices. Gippsland has lower digital access, 69.5 compared to the national average 72.0.
2. Digital affordability is the quality and connectivity of the internet service. Gippsland scored 94.5 compared to the national average of 95.0.
3. Digital ability is what consumers can do online and the level of confidence. In Gippsland, the average was lower at 58.8 than the national average of 64.9.



77.7% of households in Gippsland accessed internet at home compared to 83.7% in Victoria; East Gippsland had the lowest proportion of 74.7%.



People with low socio-economic status and younger people are more likely to use mobile devices rather than stationary devices in the home.

Living regional using technology to access health support is vital to keeping me safe as well as saving money and time on travel.

- Community member

Why is digital health important?



Digital health has the potential to lead to better health outcomes by:

- Allowing people to access the healthcare they need
- Health care providers can access the right information in a timely manner
- Greater interconnectedness of health data between providers.

The [Australian Digital Health Agency's](#) national vision is a healthier future for Australians through connected healthcare.

Health system outcomes enhanced by digital health



1. Australians are supported to look after their health and wellbeing



2. Australians have equitable access to health services that meet their needs



3. Australians benefit from coordinated, safe, consumer-centred health and wellbeing services



4. Australians benefit from evidence-based decision-making

Strengthening Medicare 2023-24 budget

[announcements](#) include a commitment to digital systems that can enable improved access to primary care. Key initiatives include modernising My Health Record and MyMedicare to strengthen the relationship between doctors and their patients.

What is Gippsland PHN doing?



Our staff support the primary care sector to understand and use the following digital tools and systems:

- My Health Record
- Secure Messaging
- POLAR GP
- MyMedicare
- Capacity Tracker
- Lifeguard Remote Patient Monitoring
- ePrescribing / eRequesting
- Gippsland Pathways

Support for improved information flow between hospitals and general practice includes:

- Discharge Summary Improvement Project
- An eReferral project planned for 2024
- Exploring data linkage projects with the Victoria Agency for Health Information

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Community perspective



Trying to solve the service navigation issues usually has an assumption that everyone has a computer and Wi-Fi and quite often they don't.
- Community member

A Gippsland PHN survey in 2021 found that many people already use technologies for their health, or would like to use digital technologies as often as possible.

- **55%** - phone calls with doctor or other professional
- **49%** - text messages
- **36%** - link to websites
- **35%** - mobile apps
- **33%** - video call with doctor or other professional
- **18%** - social media

Summary findings from community engagement in Gippsland in 2021 about digital health:

Barriers

- Prefer face to face consults
- Network/connectivity issues
- Lack of digital literacy

Enablers

- Uniformity across digital health platforms
- Awareness of telehealth options
- Access to reliable devices and technical support

Benefits of digital health

- Convenience of telehealth: saves time and cost of travel
- Electronic prescriptions
- Sharing digital health records

Digital health concerns

- Privacy of data, hacking, storage of information
- Accuracy of telehealth assessments
- Cost associated with devices/telehealth

Improvement opportunities

- Build primary care capability for hybrid care models
- Work towards uniformity and streamlining services.
- Education for service providers and clients.
- More equitable community access to equipment, data and skills.

Professional perspective



- There is growing awareness of My Health Record and uptake has improved but there are challenges;
 - ◊ barriers for busy GPs to incorporate its use in their daily practice
 - ◊ benefits of having access to a patient's record when seeing new patients
 - ◊ more documents are uploaded and views by clinicians are increasing

The doctor in ED of a hospital can login to My Health Record and retrieve the information (so) they will be well aware of it when treating the patient in ED.
- Community member

- Gippsland Pathways is used but there are challenges with keeping referral information up to date
- Communication between the hospital system and general practice still has some major gaps.

I'm still trying to find out if my patients go to the hospital
- General Practitioner

- About a remote patient monitoring project:

By regularly monitoring their symptoms our participants have found they are more aware of the early signs and have adapted their behaviour in response to these symptoms rather than ignoring them
- Values Based Healthcare project team

- Telehealth is valuable but requires improvements to meet provider and patient needs:
 - ◊ Good as an alternative to offer choice
 - ◊ 50% of mental health appointments were via telehealth during the pandemic



- Share digital health records to personalise care.
- Move to value rather than volume in health - see the Value Based Health Care issues paper gphn.org.au/resources
- Data linkage projects