



My Health Record

What is it?

My Health Record (MHR) is a centralised digital database housing an individual's health information. The information can be accessed by the individual, selected healthcare providers and various other participants in the MHR system. From 16 July 2018, the MHR scheme will transition from being 'opt-in' to 'opt-out', meaning unless an individual chooses not to participate in the scheme, an MHR account will automatically be created for them.

What information is stored on an MHR?

Healthcare providers such as GPs, specialists, pharmacists and hospital staff can all add documents to your MHR. The information can include prescriptions, a list of allergies, medical conditions, pathology test results (such as sexual health screenings), referral letters, hospital discharge summaries, X-ray reports and HIV status. Your MHR will also feature up to two years of Medicare data.

Are there privacy concerns?

There are measures that allow individuals to control who can access the information stored in their MHR and you will be able to set a password so that only certain people can access individual pieces of information. However, in order to properly operate the privacy controls you will need to understand and assess every single piece of information on your MHR and make a decision about who it should be shared with. You will also need to have the IT skills to operate the system and set the controls. If you have limited time or limited tech skills, you may not be able to effectively operate the privacy controls and your information could be unnecessarily disclosed.

Also, there are a wide range of circumstances in which any privacy controls you set can be overridden without your consent, meaning that data can be disclosed without your knowledge. These include making information available to third parties for purposes that are unrelated to

healthcare – such as law enforcement.



Currently, information not held in a MHR (say, in your file at your doctor's) is only available to third parties with judicial oversight, meaning a warrant or a subpoena is needed to search and access the information. The MHR removes these protections and allows

the system operator to directly disclose your information upon request by an enforcement agency. Any information in a MHR can be disclosed for the purposes of a police investigation.

By centralising data, MHR makes search-and-access by non-health-related agencies to surveil people or populations possible without permission. Further, when you remove information from your MHR it is not fully deleted – it remains available to government and law enforcement agencies for 130 years. When you are considering if you need a MHR you should think about such unintended privacy disclosures. Remember, if you do not opt out consent is implied.

What are the benefits of an MHR?

A central database of an individual's health information means your MHR can be accessed anywhere, anytime by doctors, specialists and hospitals – which is particularly useful for people with HIV who are in the care of multiple healthcare providers. In an emergency situation, healthcare providers will have instant access to a person's medical history and be better able to manage a patient's care. When you see a new doctor or healthcare provider, a list of medicines, chronic condition details and the results of recent tests will be instantly available to them.

What are the risks of an MHR?

There are concerns that the MHR puts the most vulnerable and stigmatised populations of society – such as people with HIV, people who use drugs and sex workers – at greater risk of unnecessary criminal prosecutions. A person's MHR will be accessed by a broad range of individuals and bodies that are not necessarily healthcare professionals and who may have limited, outdated or stigmatised understandings of HIV. Despite privacy settings, a wide range of circumstances allow for the disclosure of MHR information. This could potentially lead to an increased risk of prosecution for some marginalised groups.

So what should you do?

It is important to make an informed decision as to whether or not you want to participate in the MHR scheme. Be aware that the onus is on individuals to opt-out. If you do not opt out an MHR account will automatically be created for you. By default, MHR documents are set to general access to all healthcare providers. While you are able to block access to your MHR documents, they will still be available to government and enforcement agencies. Vulnerable populations – such as people from gender and sexual minorities, sex workers, people who use drugs and people with HIV – need to be mindful of the potential risks of the MHR scheme i.e. an elevated possibility of criminal prosecution and unwanted disclosure of HIV status. The window period for opting-out is from 16 July 2018 to 15 October 2018.

How to opt-out

For information on how to opt out of the MHR click [here](#).