

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Fundamental change needed in data management to meet health challenges

A fundamental transformation in the way health data is managed is needed if Australia is to meet the health challenges of an ageing population, changing disease patterns and increasingly complex health conditions.

The Australian Medical Association has launched a report today highlighting the inherent dangers in Australia's isolated and incompatible digital health systems, which lead to delays in patient care and poorer health outcomes.

AMA Vice President Associate Professor Julian Rait said while the Australian Government had recognised the importance of digital systems in improving healthcare, action was still urgently needed to ensure information within systems can be seamlessly transferred to those who need it.

"While we've seen some progress in digital interoperability, only one in 10 specialists use My Health Record and only one in five diagnostic imaging reports are uploaded due to inefficiencies and incompatibilities between My Health Record and health IT software," A/Prof Rait said.

"Currently most healthcare data is stored in isolated databases that use proprietary software. The systems aren't compatible with each other. At the end of the day this means there are unnecessary delays in doctors getting access to crucial patient information."

Beyond national health record systems, the report cites an example of different departments in a hospital using software that is incompatible with other departments. In an extreme example, clinical notes taken in the emergency department must be printed off and physically carried to other departments, including the ICU.

"This not only creates double-handling of patients notes and duplication of work and resources, but it also causes unnecessary delays between diagnosis and treatment," A/Prof Rait said.

"This issue also impacts medical advances and research. Connected and accessible systems can generate new medical insights and can help move research discoveries swiftly from the laboratory to the point of care."

A/Prof Rait said a legislated authority was needed to enforce interoperability standards, including data sharing protocols between software systems.

"While Australia has voluntary codes in the digital health sector, we need to have mandated standards to realise the potential of digital systems being able to connect and share data. Having clear standards will create a level playing field for all relevant stakeholders and a fair marketplace for everyone.

"This is the main barrier to having systems in Australia that connect to each other. We need a set of agreed upon national standards that everyone signs up to, including the states and territories. Without this we are likely to still be working in ways that lead to poorer outcomes for patients.

"A fit-for-purpose health system must have connected digital systems that enable the more effective use of resources, particularly when those resources are limited.

"Australian governments have committed to digital interoperability, but we haven't moved to implementing it by establishing the legal frameworks, rules and regulations needed. Without this step, having systems that talk to each other, benefiting patients and doctors alike, will remain a pipe dream."

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[Read the AMA's report on digital interoperability](#)

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