

Pharmacy Insights

Electronic Prescriptions

Amendments to the *National Health (Pharmaceutical Benefits) Regulations 2017*, published on 30 October 2019 provide for electronic prescriptions to be recognised as valid prescriptions. Electronic prescribing provides an option for prescribers and their patients to have an electronic prescription as an alternative to a paper-based prescription.

The legislation includes additional form requirements for electronic PBS prescriptions and specifically provides assurance for privacy and security through encryption of the electronic prescription that is only made available to authorised healthcare professionals. The new system will see eScripts generated and sent to a prescription delivery service, from which dispensing pharmacists can download the script.

The Australian Digital Health Agency (ADHA) published its technical framework for the system on 31 October, as well as its key principles which must be adhered to by prescribing platforms. The key principles of the electronic prescribing project are:

- (a) security and privacy of patient information
- (b) integrity of prescription data to ensure patient safety
- (c) ensures a patient's right to choose their approved prescriber
- (d) ensures a patient's right to choose the pharmacy to supply their medicines
- (e) electronic and paper prescriptions will co-exist as the legal form of a prescription. Electronic prescribing will not be mandatory and patients and prescribers will be able to choose their preferred form of prescription
- (f) paper and electronic prescriptions will continue to meet the relevant Commonwealth and State and Territory legislation
- (g) electronic and paper prescriptions will be valid in existing PBS supply settings. electronic prescribing is not intended to change the broader PBS policy environment
- (h) electronic prescribing will support ADHA's Strategy principle of leveraging existing assets and capabilities to reuse and build on existing infrastructure. This will reduce the impacts on processes for clinicians.

Despite the above legislative changes, a number of steps still remain before electronic prescriptions will be able to be issued by doctors and downloaded and used by pharmacists in dispensing medicines. Similar amendments need to be made to corresponding State and Territory Regulations relating to prescribing and dispensing poisons, and the ADHA continues to work on the technical framework and software required to support electronic prescriptions before electronic prescriptions can be rolled out to healthcare providers.

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