

# Electronic prescribing

## For health professionals

### Prescribers and patients in Queensland now have the option to use an electronic prescription as an alternative to a paper-based prescription

On 10 July 2020, the [Approved requirements for electronic prescriptions](#)<sup>1</sup> was certified ('certified instrument') in accordance with the Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulation 1996 (HDPR). The 'certified instrument' specifies the legislative requirements for a lawful electronic prescription that can be generated and sent by prescribers and received by dispensers. The approved requirements authorise electronic prescriptions for all Schedules of medicines for human treatment including Schedule 8 controlled drugs.

Prescribers can now create an electronic prescription using prescribing software that has a conformance ID<sup>2</sup> registered with the Australian Digital Health Agency (the Agency).

The certification of the Approved requirements for electronic prescriptions ensures the alignment of a nationally consistent prescribing framework in accordance with the Commonwealth Government's [National Health \(Pharmaceutical Benefits\) Regulations 2017](#) for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), and the [National Health \(Electronic National Residential Medication Chart Trial\) Special Arrangement 2018](#).

Prescribers and dispensers **must comply** with their obligations associated to these authorities under the HDPR.

### Who can give an electronic prescription?

All health practitioners authorised to prescribe under the HDPR can generate an electronic prescription to a patient.

While veterinary surgeons are recognised prescribers for the treatment of animals under the HDPR, they do not have conformant electronic prescribing systems available at this time.

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<sup>1</sup> 'approved electronic form', Appendix 9, Definitions, HDPR

<sup>2</sup> Software developers/vendors are required to attest the software meets the Agency's [technical framework](#) to ensure alignment with the regulatory framework, adherence to privacy and security principles and maintenance of patient choice.

## What is an electronic prescription?

Under the HDPR, an electronic prescription can only be created by authorised prescribers in the 'approved form', using a prescribing system that complies with the Agency's conformance process.

### Tokens and the Active script list

An **electronic prescription** is generated by a prescriber using conformant prescribing software. This sends the patient a unique QR barcode known as a 'token' via an App, SMS or email (token model). The token will be scanned by the dispenser to unlock the electronic prescription from an encrypted and secure **prescription delivery service**, allowing controlled and/or restricted drugs to be **dispensed**.

The functionality of the system will be further enhanced to enable a dispenser to access to a patient's electronic prescription, on verification of their identity, from an active script list (ASL). When available, the 'certified instrument' allows the use an ASL to retrieve a patient's prescription from a conformant electronic prescribing system.

### Electronic National Residential Medication Chart

The 'certified instrument' also authorises the use of a 'chart entry' (e-chart) in the electronic National Residential Medication Chart (eNRMC) trial, as an electronic prescription provided the entry includes all elements of a prescription required in the HDPR. Further information on the requirements for the eNRMC trial is detailed below under - *What are the arrangements for electronic national residential medication chart trial*.

Electronic prescriptions **do not apply to written instructions given**<sup>3</sup> under the Queensland Opioid Treatment Program (OTP) by an authorised OTP prescriber.

## Are electronic prescriptions limited to PBS subsidised medicines?

No. The HDPR does not distinguish between private and PBS prescriptions. An electronic prescription, including e-chart entries, that comply with the HDPR, may be used to prescribe medicines and is not limited to PBS subsidised medicines.

## Can paper prescriptions still be used?

Electronic prescribing is not mandatory but provides prescribers and their patients with an alternative to paper prescriptions. Handwritten and computer-generated paper prescriptions

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<sup>3</sup> *written instruction* – Appendix 9, Definitions, HDPR

continue to be legally acceptable ways to prescribe restricted (Schedule 4) and controlled drugs (Schedule 8) under the HDPR.

Image-based prescriptions refer to the digital transfer (e.g. fax or email) of paper prescriptions and are not electronic prescriptions. The interim arrangements for image-based prescriptions under the Commonwealth Government's National Health (COVID-19 Supply of Pharmaceutical Benefits) Special Arrangement 2020 has been extended until 31 March 2021 by the Commonwealth Government. Further information on these arrangements is detailed in the image-based prescription factsheets for [prescribers](#) and [pharmacists](#).

## How do I know if the prescribing system has a conformance ID?

The Agency's conformance process requires software developers to declare the electronic prescribing software as conformant (Conformance ID) with the national technical framework, allowing the secure transfer and exchange of prescription information through a conformant 'prescription delivery service' and 'dispensing system' – the 'electronic prescribing system'.

The Agency's register of [conformant software providers](#) details the current prescribing systems, prescription deliver services and dispensing systems that have attested the software specifications conform to the national technical framework.

## Security and integrity of the electronic prescribing system

Conformant software providers must work with electronic prescribing system users to ensure a supported version of the software and updates ([patch management solution](#)) are used to keep healthcare information secure.

Authorised prescribers and dispensers must ensure that they are using the current version of the software product for the electronic prescribing system. Policies and procedures (standard operating procedures) should be available for the service using an electronic prescribing system, to detail the arrangements to safeguard the integrity of the software security and retention of electronic records/documents.

## Can electronic prescriptions be written for controlled drugs?

An electronic prescription generated by conformant software does not require any handwriting as it is never printed and remains virtual. The conformant software requires that you have a unique login and it will attach your Health Provider Identifier – Individual (HPI-I) and the Health Provider Identifier – Organisation (HPI-O) as well as your PBS prescriber number to the string of information that is sent as the electronic prescription. This replaces your handwritten signature on a paper prescription. Using conformant software will mean that your electronic prescriptions should include the requirements under HDPR section 79 for prescriptions for controlled drugs (Schedule 8 medicines).

## labelling a suspected false or fraudulent electronic prescription

Electronic prescriptions that do not comply with the requirements of the HDPR must not be dispensed (refer to s82 – controlled drug and s193 – restricted drug). The dispenser must 'cancel' the prescription and send the cancelled prescription within 14 days. The cancelled electronic prescription can be sent as a screen shot and sent with the relevant information including any attachments to [MC&HTUInvestigations@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:MC&HTUInvestigations@health.qld.gov.au)

In these circumstances, reasonable steps must be taken by the dispenser to ensure the electronic prescription has been processed within the system to effectively remove it from circulation so that it cannot be dispensed, repeats are removed and appropriately annotated.

## What are the arrangements for electronic national residential medication chart trial?

The Commonwealth Government's National Health (Electronic National Residential Medication Chart Trial) Special Arrangement 2018 ([eNRMC Special Arrangement](#)) has been established to trial a system that enables an approved NMRC supplier (pharmacies) to dispense prescribed medicines using an eNRMC for PBS benefit, for a person receiving care at an approved residential aged care services (RACF) through an electronic residential medication chart system (software vendors). The Schedule of the eNRMC Special Arrangements lists the details for approved pharmacies, RACFs and software vendors taking part in the national trial.

## Resources on PBS arrangements

- Commonwealth Government, Department of Health – [electronic PBS prescribing initiative](#)
- Electronic prescriptions for [prescribers](#)
- Electronic prescriptions for [dispensers](#)
- [Claiming online](#) for PBS medicines

## For further information

Contact the Healthcare Legislation Improvement Unit

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