



Healthcare Identifiers Framework Project

Public consultation – Frequently asked questions



Healthcare Identifiers Framework Project

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

About Healthcare Identifiers

What are Healthcare Identifiers?

Healthcare Identifiers are unique numbers allocated to healthcare recipients, healthcare providers and healthcare organisations in Australia by the Healthcare Identifiers Service (HI Service). There are three types of Healthcare Identifiers:

- Individual Healthcare Identifier (IHI): to uniquely identify individuals who use health services.
- Healthcare Provider Identifier – Individual (HPI-I): to uniquely identify healthcare providers.
- Healthcare Provider Identifier – Organisation (HPI-O): to uniquely identify healthcare provider organisations.

Why do we need Healthcare Identifiers?

Australia has a HI Service to enable the unique identification of healthcare recipients and healthcare providers across all health services and programs, across all states and territories. Unique identification is critical to delivering safe and connected healthcare and being able to communicate health information securely. The HI Service began operating in 2010 and is co-funded by all Australian governments.

What is the Healthcare Identifiers Framework?

The term 'Healthcare Identifiers Framework' (HI Framework) refers to the legislation, regulations, policy, governance, technology, and support processes that work together to support the operation of the HI Service.

Services Australia manages the HI Service on behalf of the Chief Executive of Medicare and is known as the 'HI Service Operator'. The *Healthcare Identifiers Act 2010* (the HI Act) and the *Healthcare Identifiers Regulations 2020* are the pieces of legislation that underpins the HI Service.

Do Healthcare Identifiers contain health information?

No. Healthcare Identifiers do not contain any health information and are not health records. The HI Service Operator collects and holds the personal information required to assign and validate Healthcare Identifiers, such as name, date of birth, gender, and address.

How does the Healthcare Identifiers Service work?

An authorised healthcare provider confirms a healthcare recipient's identity by requesting their IHI from the HI Service. They validate the healthcare recipient using their clinical or patient administration system and, if there is a match, the HI Service returns the IHI.

The healthcare provider can use the IHI as the unique identifier in their own systems, and when sending information between healthcare providers. A similar process occurs for HPI-I's and HPI-Os.

How are Healthcare Identifiers used?

Healthcare Identifiers are used across all types of public and private health services, such as hospitals, community health, general practice, pharmacies, allied health and diagnostic services, and aged care. Healthcare Identifiers allow healthcare providers to use systems and services that exchange health information safely and securely, with confidence that information is about the right person.

For example, this could be an electronic referral for a specialist appointment, an electronic prescription, a hospital sending a discharge summary electronically to the referring GP or information being uploaded to My Health Record.

Who is eligible for a Healthcare Identifier?

IHIs are automatically allocated to all Australians who hold a Medicare or DVA card. Non-residents such as overseas visitors on a long-term visa can apply for an IHI online through MyGov or by completing an application form.

HPI-Is are allocated to providers as part of provider registration. Providers who are registered with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) are automatically allocated an HPI-I. Providers who are not registered through Ahpra but who are members of a healthcare professional association can apply for an HPI-I directly with the Healthcare Identifiers Service.

HPI-Os are allocated to organisations that need to use the HI Service and access My Health Record. To get an HPI-O, organisations need to provide healthcare related services and employ at least one individual healthcare provider who has a HPI-I.

Do I need a Healthcare Identifier if I have a Medicare number?

Yes. Healthcare Identifiers are different to a Medicare number as they are unique to an individual over their lifetime. Medicare numbers may change over time and are not unique, as they can relate to multiple family members.

All Australians who hold a Medicare or DVA card are allocated an IHI, usually when they are registered with Medicare.

How is the security and privacy of Healthcare Identifiers managed?

Healthcare Identifier information is securely stored within the HI Service. All Healthcare Identifier information is stored in strict compliance with security and privacy controls, and multiple statutory frameworks including *the HI Act* and the *Privacy Act 1988*.

The HI Service protects individual privacy through legislation and technical security and access controls. The HI Act specifies that Healthcare Identifiers can be used for healthcare and related management purposes, with penalties in place for misuse.

The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) is the independent regulator of the privacy aspects of the *HI Act* and the HI Service and handles complaints. The HI Service Operator is required to [report annually](#), including any privacy and security issues.

Where can I go to get more information on Healthcare Identifiers?

There are various sources of information on Healthcare Identifiers, including:

- [Services Australia – Individual Healthcare Identifiers](#)
- [Services Australia - Healthcare Identifiers Service for Health Professionals](#)
- [Office of Australian Information Commissioner - Healthcare Identifiers](#)
- [Australian Department of Health and Aged Care - Healthcare Identifiers and the Healthcare Identifiers Service](#)

You can also contact the HI Service Operator with any specific questions on healthcareidentifiers@servicesaustralia.gov.au, or by phoning 1300 361 457.

About the Healthcare Identifiers Framework Project (the Project)

Why is the Healthcare Identifiers Project happening, and why now?

Healthcare Identifiers have been used in Australia since 2010. Reviews have found that Healthcare Identifiers are successfully achieving their core purposes of accurate and consistent identification, but that they are not being used as widely as they could be. This is preventing healthcare recipients, healthcare providers from benefiting from a more connected healthcare environment.

As more information is shared electronically the importance of accurate and unique identification becomes even more important, and healthcare recipients and providers now expect seamless digital services by default.

With state, territory and Commonwealth governments all having committed to improving care pathways and health outcomes through better use of digital technology and data, it is important that the Healthcare Identifiers Framework keeps pace with how healthcare and supporting services are being delivered, and to ensure that healthcare recipients and healthcare providers have access to richer health information.

What level of change is intended, and what will it mean for me?

The Healthcare Identifiers Framework Project (the Project) won't change the core purposes, scope or uses of Healthcare Identifiers, and will maintain privacy and security provisions including penalties for misuse. The changes that are being considered will make it easier for Healthcare Identifiers to be used in healthcare services and programs across Australia.

Any changes to the HI Framework recommended through the Project will be informed by the outcomes of public consultation processes and will need to be agreed by all state and territory governments. Any legislative changes will need to be agreed by the Australian Parliament.

If the proposed changes are supported, healthcare providers should notice Healthcare Identifiers being used more often in the clinical and medical record systems, and that Healthcare Identifiers are used more frequently on reports and referrals. Healthcare recipients should notice that the services they use become more connected over time and have better access to health information.

Will any of the proposed changes mean my health information is less secure?

No. Increased the use and usability of Healthcare Identifiers will increase the ability for health information to be shared safely, securely, and seamlessly across Australia's health system.

Access to and use of personal information and health information is protected through multiple statutory frameworks, including (but not limited to) the *HI Act*, the *Privacy Act 1988*, and other State and Territory health legislative frameworks.

Will any of the proposed changes impact my ability to access, use or provide healthcare services?

No. You will continue to access, use, and provide services as you currently do. Healthcare Identifiers are used to identify a healthcare recipient or provider accurately and consistently. Access and eligibility to use or provide any service or program is managed by those services and programs and is not determined by the Healthcare Identifier itself.

Healthcare Identifiers are only for use in health-related programs and services. The public consultation process is seeking input on the most appropriate range of health-related services, programs, and providers that will be able to use Healthcare Identifiers.

When will changes be made?

The Department aims to provide a detailed set of recommended changes to the Healthcare Identifiers Framework to all Australian governments for consideration in mid-2023. This public consultation process will help inform the recommendations.

Any changes to the *HI Act* and Service will occur after an agreement has been reached. The timings will depend on the complexity of the changes.

The Department will undertake further targeted consultation with stakeholders (including healthcare consumer representative groups) that may be impacted by the legislative changes to understand any actions that need to be taken, ahead of time.

Where can I go to get more information on the Project and proposed changes?

The Department will hold a series of webinars that you may wish to attend:

- Information Sessions on the Healthcare Identifiers Framework Project and Public Consultation Process:
 - o Thursday 15 December 2022 – 2.30pm to 3.30pm AESDT
 - o Wednesday 18 January 2023 – 2pm to 3:00pm AESDT
- Interactive Sessions on the Healthcare Identifiers Framework Project Problem Statements and Consultation Questions:
 - o Wednesday 8 February 2023 – 2pm to 4:00pm AEST
 - o Wednesday 23 February 2023 – 2pm to 4:00pm AEST

You can register for any of the [webinars online here](#).

The Department will also maintain information on the status of the Project on the Department's [website page for Healthcare Identifiers](#).