



Privacy fact sheet 13

Healthcare identifiers: General information for healthcare providers

June 2012

This fact sheet provides general information about healthcare identifiers for healthcare providers using the system.

Information about your compliance obligations is available in the following fact sheets: Individual Healthcare Identifiers—Compliance obligations of private healthcare providers and Individual Healthcare Identifiers—Compliance obligations for state and territory healthcare providers.

What are healthcare identifiers?

The Healthcare Identifiers (HI) Service allocates three types of healthcare identifiers:

- Individual Healthcare Identifier (IHI)—for individuals receiving healthcare services
- Healthcare Provider Identifier—Individual (HPI-I)—for healthcare professionals involved in providing patient care
- Healthcare Provider Identifier—Organisation (HPI-O)—for organisations that deliver healthcare (such as hospitals or healthcare practices).

Healthcare providers are assigned a unique HPI-I. A provider will have only one HPI-I, regardless of the number of qualifications attained or healthcare organisations they work for.

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) issues HPI-Is automatically to its successful registrants. Health professionals not covered by AHPRA can register for an HPI-I directly with the HI Service Operator (Medicare). AHPRA began allocating HPI-Is from mid-2010.

Healthcare organisations need to apply to the HI Service Operator to be assigned an HPI-O.

What is the purpose of healthcare identifiers?

The purpose of IHIs is to provide a way for healthcare providers to more accurately match the right records to the patient they are treating and improve accuracy when communicating information with other healthcare providers.¹ It is intended that this will help to avoid situations where one patient's information is recorded on another patient's file or where health records are sent to the wrong provider.

The purpose of HPI-Is and HPI-Os is to also provide, in combination with secure authentication mechanisms, greater certainty that information is communicated between the right providers at the right location to support a patient's ongoing healthcare.

The HI Service was the first stage of the Government's electronic health reforms, and the foundation of what will be a national, personally-controlled electronic health record (eHealth record) system.

What is the Healthcare Identifiers Service?

The HI Service is a national system for uniquely identifying healthcare providers and individuals. The HI Service is operated by Medicare and commenced on 1 July 2010. The HI Service Operator:

¹ The purpose is set out in s 3 of the *Healthcare Identifiers Act 2010*.

- assigns IHIs to individuals
- assigns and maintains HPI-Is and HPI-Os
- maintains a database of IHIs, which includes identifying information about the individuals to whom the IHIs relate (for example, name, gender, date of birth and, where necessary to assist identification, further data such as addresses, Medicare numbers, Department of Veterans' Affairs file numbers, or aliases)
- allows authorised users to access the HI Service to collect IHIs
- maintains an audit log of the details of who accessed an IHI and when it was accessed
- keeps the identifying information associated with IHIs up to date and accurate, including deactivating or retiring IHIs and the associated identifying information when no longer needed, and

- maintains a Provider Directory Service. This will allow healthcare providers to look up the details of other providers who have agreed to include their details.

The HI Service Operator does not hold any clinical information.

The information provided in this fact sheet is of a general nature. It is not a substitute for legal advice.

For further information

telephone: 1300 363 992

email: enquiries@oaic.gov.au

write: GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW 2001

GPO Box 2999, Canberra ACT 2601

or visit our website at www.oaic.gov.au