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Te Whatu Ora one step closer to a unified health record system



Stephen Forbes

sforbes@nzdoctor.co.nz

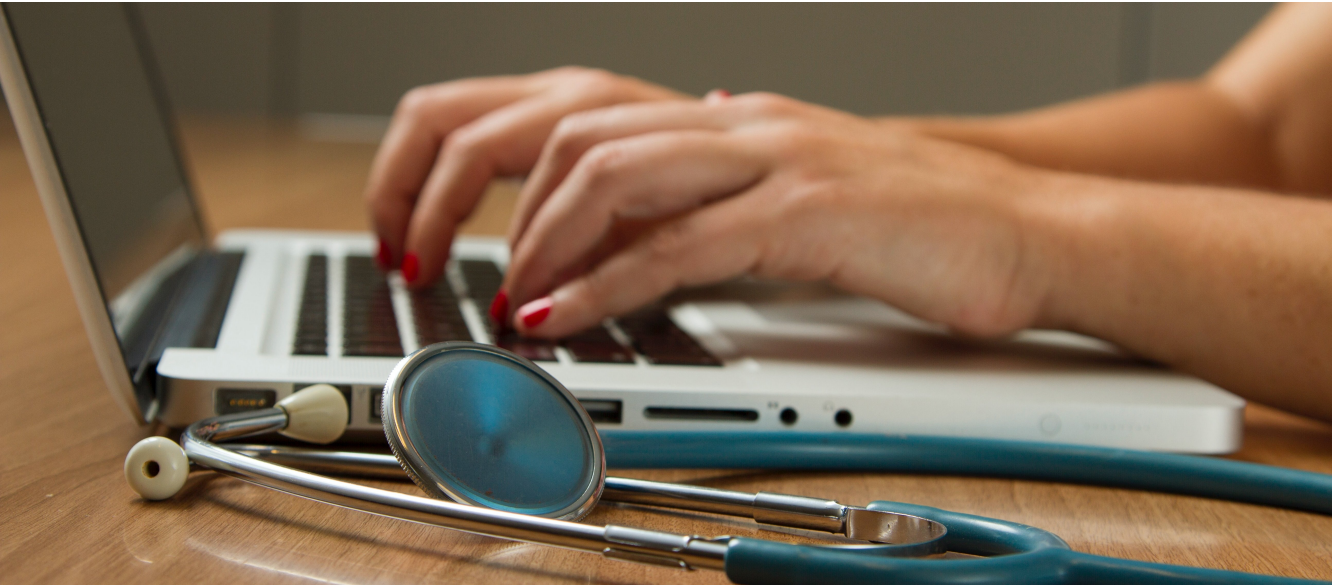


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Patients will be able to access their health records next year but first Te Whatu Ora must verify identities
[Image: National Cancer Institute on UnSplash]

Millions of New Zealanders are expected to be able to access their health records online from mid-2024 as part of the first stage of Te Whatu Ora's Hira programme.

From next year, patients will have access to everything, from their vaccination status and details on what medicines they are prescribed, to diagnostic test results, says Te Whatu Ora national digital services manager of consumer identity and access Samuel Wong.

They will also be able to use it to update their personal details, Mr Wong said during a presentation to a stakeholder hui held by Te Aka Whai Ora and Te Whatu Ora.

Hira will also provide a unified system for healthcare providers to access patient health records and is based on technology used as part of the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out, he says.

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Vaccination technology underpinning new system

The My Covid Record system was established in August 2021 to allow people to access information on their vaccination status by logging in using a My Health Account.

And according to Mr Wong, 3.5 million New Zealanders have since created accounts.

“So we are now working to use that same technology behind My Health Account to enable access to more services and information for people, their carers and whānau,” he says.

“But to do that, we need to ensure that the people using the accounts are who they say they are online.”

Cybersecurity critical

Only 6 per cent of New Zealanders with My Health Accounts meet the required standard of online security needed for the new Hira system.

Mr Wong says a person's verified digital identity is like a fingerprint and is unique to them. Te Whatu Ora is verifying the details of millions of people who created the accounts.

“Using My Health Account as a starting point, we want you to use one digital ID for all our future health websites and services no matter where you are and what device you have,” he says.

It's all about making it easier for people to access the health information they want, whenever they need it.

“The future of digital patient-centred health information and services is all about ID and access.”

Need for unified health records

New Zealand's lack of a unified health records system has been a problem for years, with information stored in different places and formats and difficult to access for many.

People often have to repeat their health details to different providers and cannot easily access information themselves, and healthcare professionals can't always get a true picture of a person's health to inform treatment decisions.

HiNZ backs Hira

Health Informatics New Zealand chief executive Tim Corbett says the

project is central to the Government's health reforms.

Health Informatics New Zealand chief executive Tim Corbett

"The Hira platform and the idea of bringing all that data together under one system is how we're going to get those efficiencies [in health] and it is international standard, which is great," Mr Corbett says.

The fact the system is based on the existing My Covid Record has some major advantages, he says. “Because they are building Hira on the back of an existing system...it can be built to a much tighter time frame and there will be less guestimates involved. And the bonus of doing it quickly is you don’t get the same cost and project inflation.”

Mr Corbett says COVID-19, with its resulting lockdowns and isolation protocols, led to a rapid uptake in digital health in New Zealand and the Hira project is expanding on that.

He concedes the need for cybersecurity in health is more important than ever and he expects the system will use a two-step authentication process. But Mr Corbett says the same principles now underpin much of our everyday lives, from using online banking to international travel.

Projected costs

Te Whatu Ora director of sector digital channels Michael Dreyer says the cost of building and operating the first stage of the Hira project is \$143 million.

However, a 2021 business case from the Ministry of Health said the lifetime cost of the first stage investment, based on a 10-year “horizon”, was expected to be \$338 million.

Te Whatu Ora was asked for a more detailed breakdown on the costings, as well as information on what companies are involved in the Hira project, but it failed to respond.

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