

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## First step taken towards a statewide eReferral system for Tasmania

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Primary Health Tasmania has chosen digital health innovators HealthLink and HealthCare Software to help Tasmania's health sector take its first steps towards a streamlined, statewide electronic referral system.

Primary Health Tasmania – Tasmania's PHN – is working in close partnership with the Tasmanian Department of Health and Tasmanian Health Service to build an eReferral system for Tasmania.

The Australian Government-funded project is all about making it easier for Tasmania's primary healthcare providers to send, receive and navigate electronic correspondence in the interest of delivering more efficient and appropriate patient care.

In this, Primary Health Tasmania's digital health spokesperson, Russell Bowden, says Tasmania already has some powerful digital tools at its disposal: Tasmanian HealthPathways to help practitioners navigate referral pathways, the Tasmanian Health Directory for sourcing provider contact details, and HealthLink to send secure messages to each other.

"This project is about embedding these tools within the GPs' workflows and building links between them to make it easier for healthcare providers to communicate in an efficient and timely way," Mr Bowden says.

"If we can do that, the flow-on effects will be more people getting the right care at the right time, in the right place."

HealthLink and HealthCare Software will now set about building standardised, statewide digital templates that can be auto-populated with key referral details, and compatible web interfaces to join up existing silos of patient information.

After that, two Tasmanian hospital outpatient departments will trial the system for six months, as well as trials of the system between private primary care providers. It is expected the evaluation of this trial will provide valuable information for the future implementation of a statewide electronic referral system.

HealthCare Software chief executive John Elkerton says the Hobart-based e-health company is thrilled to be teaming up with HealthLink.

"It's exciting to be able to offer an innovative, comprehensive solution to this acknowledged challenge, and improve the efficiency and quality of referrals from primary care to hospitals across Tasmania," Mr Elkerton says.

HealthLink spokesperson Jean-Christophe Meunier agrees greater and easier use of eReferrals

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across the Tasmanian health system will be a game changer for GPs and hospital-based health professionals alike.

“This pilot solution is all about enabling two-way communication – the hospital can send back electronic referral status updates to the GP, and the GP can submit additional information back to the hospital,” Mr Meunier explains.

“This ensures the patient triage process is fully supported and optimised.”

The eReferral project arose in response to Primary Health Tasmania research and consultation that revealed low awareness among providers of the referral pathways available, and a lack of standard tools to support electronic communication between them.

“Our research found about 90 to 95 per cent of Tasmanian general practices have secure messaging software installed, but most are just using it to receive discharge communication and pathology results,” Mr Bowden says.

“An easy-to-use, statewide eReferral system will help structure and standardise the flow of patient referral information coming from primary healthcare providers.”

Southern-based General Practice Liaison Officer (GPLO) Dr Annette Barratt said she and her GPLO colleagues were happy to support the project and welcomed its early stages.

“GPs have frequently expressed their desire for efficient, encrypted two-way electronic communication between general practice and the hospital system,” she says.

“This project is providing the first steps in the process.”

*Primary Health Tasmania is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation working to connect care and keep Tasmanians well and out of hospital. It was established on 1 July 2015 under the Australian Government’s Primary Health Networks Program to support and enable a coordinated, primary care-focused health system.*

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