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Australia releases digital health skills and training plan

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A national digital health skills and training plan has been released to help the Australian health workforce use technology and further drive the digital transformation of health services to meet community demand.

As with every other sector, adoption of technology is critical for the healthcare system and the Roadmap sets out how the Australian health workforce of more than 767,000 registered healthcare providers (as at March 2020) can be transformed over the next decade.

The development of the National Digital Health Workforce and Education Roadmap acknowledges people are the health sector's most valuable asset and that we need to shape education and training to meet their needs and to support the provision of the best care possible to patients.

The government has invested in a range of areas to expand the use of digital health, including workforce training, incentives to providers, and support for telehealth, My Health Record and electronic prescribing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of these systems to ensure delivery of quality patient care during an emergency.

A dramatic expansion in the use of telehealth has been a key element of the fight against COVID-19. Between 13 March and 9 September, 29.6 million Medicare-eligible telehealth services were delivered to 10.4 million patients, resulting in $1.52 billion paid in Medicare benefits.

As part of the COVID-19 National Health Plan, the Australian Government also fast tracked the start of electronic prescribing. This gives prescribers and patients the option to use an electronic prescription, sent by text message or email, as a legal alternative to a paper prescription.

The e-prescription contains an electronic token and other instructions which can be shown to or forwarded to the dispensing pharmacist, who scans the token to reveal the prescribed medicine.

The Roadmap is a key element of the National Digital Health Strategy and was developed following a summit late last year attended by healthcare educators, professional bodies and employers.