

DIGITAL HEALTH GUIDANCE

Strengthening Medicare – General Practice Grants Program

17 May 2023

Overview

The Australian Government is investing \$220 million over two years through the Strengthening Medicare – General Practice Grants Program. The program aims to help general practices expand patient access and improve services, through one or more investment streams:

1. enhancing digital health capability
2. upgrading infection prevention and control arrangements
3. maintaining or achieving accreditation.

The grants can be used for staff training, purchase of equipment and/or services (including consultant services), innovation, minor capital works and the reimbursement of staff time (including contractor GPs) associated with these activities.

The guidance contained in this document relates to stream 1: enhancing digital health capability.

This stream aims to increase the uptake of contemporary digital health solutions including video telehealth, secure data storage and interoperable software that supports seamless, secure communication of patient data.

This document provides high-level guidance on areas general practices may choose to allocate grant funds towards. Any decisions should be discussed with internal or external IT providers.

Prioritising digital health spend

Identify particular 'pain points' or areas of greatest need. Consider where there are barriers, inefficiencies, internet/networking issues, knowledge gaps, cybersecurity risks and any other problems that may be improved by using or upgrading digital technology.

Questions to ask

- Are computers capable of running all software required, and do they support future updates?
- What are the staff knowledge gaps that may be addressed with training?
- Are there digitally enabled models of care that could be delivered by upgrading technology?
- What are the regular problems that staff report around IT, internet and software?
- Are there known risks or problems with software and equipment yet to be addressed due to the financial costs associated?

Resources

Free tools that may assist in identifying areas to focus on, include:

RACGP guide on information security - Provides guidance covering a range of areas specific to general practice: [RACGP - Information security in general practice](#)

Business.gov.au digital maturity self-assessment - A self-complete 10-minute questionnaire to measure the digital maturity of your business and suggests areas to focus on. Can be repeated as required. The tool is not specific to general practice or healthcare but may still provide useful insight: [What is your business's digital maturity? | business.gov.au](#)

HealthVitalIT - A website supported by South Eastern Melbourne PHN (SEMPHN), that provides guidance on a range of digital health topics. It includes a digital capability quiz and suggests pages based on responses. Entering the name of your practice and who is completing the form is voluntary. Results are shared with SEMPHN: [Improve your IT today | HealthVitalIT](#) and [HealthVitalIT Digital Capability Quiz \(surveygizmo.com\)](#)

Potential areas for spend

These are broad areas that practices could consider for allocating grand funds towards. Consultation with your IT provider will be important to determine the particular requirements for your practice.

IT hardware

Computers - Laptops and USB-C docking stations provide more portability for staff but need configuration and IT support to implement effectively. USB-C docking stations use a single cable to allow the charging of a laptop and connection to monitors.

Monitors - Ultrawide or large screen monitors are now available. Some monitors also now have integrated USB-C docks, allowing a laptop to be connected directly with one cable.

Telehealth capability - Equipment could be purchased to help enable video telehealth consultations. Quality webcams and headsets can help improve the clinician and patient experience. Most well-known brands offer good options. You will need to ensure that there are enough USB and/or audio ports on devices to allow the connection and that devices are compatible with computers. *NB: the HealthDirect Video Call telehealth platform is available free to general practices, contact Murray PHN if you would like to have an account set up for your practice.*

Software

Reviewing and improving practice software can help improve usability and experience for patients and staff, reduce the risk of incidents, and may even offer enhanced or additional capabilities.

Analytics platforms

- Can be leveraged to explore practice billing optimisation

Backups

- Automating and streamlining data backups

Booking systems

- Could be explored, these can enable more seamless patient bookings
- You should ensure any platforms support integration with your practice software

Integration with other providers (aged care, hospitals)

- Secure messaging products could be explored to enable more efficient communication with other local health providers

Microsoft 365 setup and configuration

- Cloud enabled email and document software
- Can allow staff to access email on mobile devices
- Allows advanced configuration around data and cybersecurity

Migration to cloud software

- May reduce the need for software updates
- May allow readiness for future changes to legalisation regarding health software and interoperability
- Additional functionality like offsite and mobile device access, along with additional options for integrated applications may be available
- Providers must ensure cloud products meet all their requirements
- All agreements/contracts should be read carefully, paying particular attention to data hosting locations, SLA guaranteed uptime, licensing fees and data backup and extraction costs.

Internet and networking

With software becoming increasingly reliant on good internet connectivity, having suitable internet speeds and quality computer networking can reduce problems that can be experienced with software. Consider:

- Router and Wi-Fi upgrades
- Improving internal networking such as adding new ethernet points
- Upgrading to 'Enterprise Ethernet' or fibre connections where available. This may be available for free via some telcos when committing to a three-year contract, this is limited to certain geographical areas: [business nbn Enterprise Ethernet | nbn \(nbnco.com.au\)](https://www.nbnco.com.au/business-nbn-enterprise-ethernet)
- Network security configuration to strengthen cybersecurity and reduce the risk of malware, ransomware or other cybercrime.

Training

Being able to cover staff training for digital health with grant funds is a unique opportunity. Consider staff and clinician's time for training and upskilling in digital health.

- Some organisations provide free or low-cost training programs and resources in areas such as telehealth and virtual care: [RACGP - Telehealth and Telehealth \(acrrm.org.au\)](https://www.acrrm.org.au/racgp-telehealth)
- The Australian Digital Health Agency's learning management system provides free training modules. Create an account: [DigitalHealth: For healthcare providers](https://www.digitalhealth.gov.au/digitalhealth-portal)

Consultant services

- Cybersecurity audits could be conducted by external consultancy firms to help identify risks and outline plans for mitigation.
- IT Provider due diligence could be conducted using a third party to ensure that IT providers meet security standards and contracts are sufficient for the individual needs of the practice.

Contact details

For more support, contact Murray PHN's Digital Health Team digitalhealth@murrayphn.org.au