AIDH 2022 FEDERAL ELECTION STATEMENT

Shifting the dial on Australia's transition to a digital health future

It's the right of every Australian to expect a decisive and coherent plan to build the future of Australian health, and healthcare.

The rate at which society is becoming increasingly reliant on an accessible, interconnected health system leaves no room for complacency; we can't entertain shortcuts or be stalled by inertia. The future health and prosperity of the nation depends on our actions today.

The Australasian Institute of Digital Health 2022 Federal Election Statement outlines the digital health sector's priorities for the Australian healthcare system.

The Institute is strongly urging all political parties and candidates in the upcoming federal election to commit to supporting investment in the digital enablement of healthcare, and in the capability required for our health system to be responsive in an increasingly interdependent health and aged care landscape.

It is imperative that we preserve the momentum gained from the rapid scaling of consumer centric, digitally enabled health solutions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the leaders in healthcare delivered in a digital society, the Institute stands ready to work with any party that governs, to seize this unparalleled opportunity and ensure we leverage our current learnings to lead transformational change across the healthcare sector.

Priority 1:

A national strategy for virtual care

The digital enablement of healthcare is gaining momentum. With an increase in demand amongst consumers and a greater expectation that healthcare will be delivered digitally, the need for a *national virtual care strategy* - with a plan for implementation, is critical. Mere coordination between the federal government and the states and territories simply won't suffice.

Recommendation 1: The federal government supports the Institute in developing a National Virtual Care Strategy that aims to:

I. guarantee permanency of MBS funding for virtual care and telehealth consultations
II. support the development of innovative models of consumer-centric care
III. promote patient involvement in decision making
IV. address access and equity issues faced by consumers in rural, remote, and underserved areas
V. ease demand pressures on regional healthcare services
VI. educate and train clinicians in best-practice delivery of virtual care

Priority 2:

Addressing critical skills shortages and building the healthcare workforce of the future

The digital enablement of healthcare will continue apace, driven by consumer expectations, technology advancements and the need to improve the efficiency of care provision.

Investment in education, training and skills diversification is critical to ensure our current and future health workforce has the knowledge, and the competencies necessary to provide safe, effective, and consumer centric healthcare that is delivered in a digital society.

The health sector currently lacks a critical mass of personnel with health relevant technical expertise in computing and data harvesting, data storage, and data analysis. Additionally, greater understanding and awareness of how healthcare should be delivered in a digital environment is becoming increasingly essential.

Recommendation 2: The federal government addresses the technical digital skills gaps within the health sector by:

I. supporting the Institute to undertake a comprehensive consultation and engagement process to identify the barriers and opportunities for attracting necessary technical and data experts

II. developing, in close consultation with the Institute, a program to address the identified barriers, and to attract and retain experts with specific technical skills into the healthcare sector
III. supporting the Institute in clearly defining and promoting career pathways into digital health

Recommendation 3: The federal government supports the institute in their work to build the digital health capability of the healthcare workforce, championing expertise and professionalism that will:

I. upskill clinicians and healthcare workers in the digital delivery of healthcare
II. promote the acceptance, adoption, and adherence of digital health best practice

Priority 3:

Adequate enabling infrastructure for a 21st century healthcare system

The benefits of technology in the delivery of healthcare are underpinned by our ability to store and share data and clinical information across services to support the continuum of care.

The COVID19 pandemic highlighted a clear lack of consistency in data storage infrastructure, and capability in data linkage amongst and between pathology services, primary health providers, hospitals, and public health professionals.

These barriers to real-time patient and clinical data exchange uncovered challenges and systemic issues around governance and data sharing boundaries. Rapid scaling efforts to share health information and data also raised the importance of aqueduct cybersecurity systems.

Data should be seen as a strategic asset in informing policy analysts and decision makers on future directions of the Australian healthcare system, and health sector more broadly.

Recommendation 4: The federal government develops a comprehensive, national strategy for data storage and linkage, with a plan for its implementation that addresses:

I. the lack of cross jurisdictional standards adoption and sharing abilities
II. fragmentation of specialist health data
III. variability in open data standards use between states and health providers
IV. lack of standardised systems and data exchange models
V. unidirectional data transfer, i.e., one-way from a clinical setting to a registry but cannot be shared back
VI. the necessary cybersecurity standards to protect health information and data
VII. the strategic use of data in health sector directions