

Media statement

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AIDH announces support for international digital vaccine passport

A digital vaccine passport would put Australia on the front foot in managing returning overseas travellers during the next stage of the pandemic, Australian digital health leaders said today.

The Australasian Institute of Digital Health has declared its support for a digital international Yellow Card* which would verify details of a person's vaccination for COVID-19, whether they received the vaccine in Australia or anywhere else in the world.

On the eve of Australia's vaccination rollout, AIDH Board Chair Bettina McMahon said Australia was better prepared than any other country to accept internationally standard digital vaccine passports.

"The Australian Government has recognised the need to include overseas administered vaccines in the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) and is currently consulting on ways for healthcare providers to enter this information into the AIR," she said.

"Given we only have a trickle of vaccinated international travellers entering Australia, this workaround is manageable, and it makes sense to focus first on Australians receiving the vaccine here.

"AIDH supports work on the international Yellow Card which will eliminate this manual step ahead of more Aussies coming home when global vaccination rates increase and international borders open again," she said.

Ms McMahon said Australia was way ahead of every other country to adopt a digital Yellow Card for COVID because the essential technology was in place.

"We have the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) which is a fully digital record of a person's vaccines, and anyone who receives the COVID vaccine in Australia will get their COVID vaccine details put in the AIR.

"We have consumer portals for the AIR through the My Health Record and Medicare app. And clinical information systems in Australia that connect to the My Health Record enable authorised healthcare providers to view digital vaccination records in real time."

"The missing link is people who received their vaccine overseas."

AIDH Fellow Grahame Grieve has been assisting the World Health Organisation on its digital [COVID Yellow Card project](#) which commenced in October 2020. As a global leader in health informatics, Mr Grieve has provided advice on the proposed data model.

"Many countries have a great need for a valid, secure digital record of vaccination which is recognised by other countries, given the travel patterns of people around the world and the challenges they're facing in managing outbreaks," he said.

"So, they're moving at pace to define a standard to record vaccination status that can be digitally shared across systems and borders. The project has some way to go, but there is a lot of support and momentum for this work."

AIDH Fellow and Board member Dr Monica Trujillo has held Chief Medical Officer and Chief Clinical Information Officer roles over many years in Australia and overseas.



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“One of the success factors for Australia is the utilisation of digital pathology systems, which have provided up to the minute data for clinicians and health system administrators on COVID cases” she said.

“We have an incredible digital health workforce in Australia who proved their value in 2020. Their great capability and readiness to support this campaign through skills, expertise and innovation has kept us on top of this in our region.

“It is critical that we have comprehensive digital records for the next phase of managing the pandemic – vaccination. We’re in a great position for people receiving the vaccine in Australia, so let’s get on the front foot for travellers,” Dr Trujillo said.

“Imagine this – when booking your flight to Australia you enter details of your COVID digital Yellow Card. Your airline and Australian Border Control check the validity of this vaccination record, and Australians could request the record be uploaded to the AIR, ensuring that your doctor in Australia could also see this information.”

But Grahame Grieve raised a challenge that many people involved in standards development would be aware of.

“Unfortunately, the greater the need for a standard, the greater the number of standards created”.

Mr Grieve is referring to work such as the [Vaccination Credential Initiative](#) the [International Air Transport Association](#), [World Economic Forum](#) and G7 on similar projects, none of which are interoperable with the WHO work. Given the global need for a digital vaccination record that seamlessly travels with the individual, global agreement on the data standards will be essential.

Ms McMahon said she was optimistic interoperability could be achieved in vaccination records. “If there was ever a need to agree on one standard, it’s now and for this. We already have standards for vaccines in the AIR, we have an existing medical workflow with international Yellow Cards, and we have some of the smartest health informaticians in the world working on this.”

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Background:

*The Yellow Card, or Carte Jaune, is a medical passport issued by the World Health Organization. It’s an official record that some countries require for entrance, and it can document vaccination against diseases ranging from cholera and yellow fever to such childhood illnesses as rubella. The term ‘Yellow Card’ is used more generally to describe an internationally recognised record of vaccination.