ADHA NATIONAL DIGITAL HEALTH STRATEGY 2022:

ADA SUBMISSION

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1. Introduction & Current State

The Australian dental sector has thus far been relatively self-contained, with treatment delivery and health information exchange occurring mostly within, and between dental practices. An internal analysis estimates that less than 5% of communications in dentistry may occur between dental and non-dental practitioners, so there is clear scope to improve multi-disciplinary collaboration. In addition, given that the dental sector is majority private practice (90%), to facilitate widespread digital health adoption it will be critical to leverage needs and incentives that are specific to small business owners.

The following technologies are widely adopted and mature in dentistry:
- Websites, online marketing, and social media
- Use of practice aggregator platforms and online portals
- Communication methods – email, phone, fax
- Electronic health records and practice management systems (local server and cloud)
- Administration (bookings, billings, and payments)
- Digital treatment delivery (e.g. intraoral scanning hardware/software)

The following technologies are in the early stage of adoption in dentistry:
- Secure messaging
- Teledentistry and virtual care
- Computer-printable prescriptions

The following technologies are not yet adopted, developed or have very limited adoption in dentistry:
- E-Prescriptions
- My Health Record

Major barriers to adoption include:
- Lack of awareness of the importance of technology adoption, or the existence of certain technologies, by healthcare professionals and consumers.
- Lack of appropriate education for implementation and use.
- Lack of incentive for existing vendors to develop new technologies.

2. Key Priorities

The 2017 Australian Dental Association (ADA) consultation to the previous National Digital Health Strategy listed Secure Messaging and My Health Record as key priorities. Consultation with the ADA Dental Informatics and Digital Health Committee elicited further priorities which are listed below.

Secure Messaging:
- Patient files and records cannot currently be directly transferred between dental clinical information systems (CIS) due to a lack of unique health identifiers.
- The dental industry has one secure messaging software, but no clinical information systems that are ADHA-conformant. Internal analysis estimates that at least 90% of dental clinics are not using approved secure messaging, and are therefore relying on non-secure information sharing such as email or written letters.
- Discussions and progress with vendors in secure messaging are currently bottlenecked by the following concerns:
  - Standards specific to dental software are not clear (e.g., technical differences in dental vs. medical CIS databases)
  - Lack of financial incentives/grants for dental software vendors
  - Lack of clear value proposition, leading to difficulty prioritising on development roadmaps
  - Once certified, connecting to other ADHA-conformant software requires individual commercial agreements that can become exponentially complex to navigate.
- We respectfully request that ADHA continue to clarify expectations for major dental CIS vendors to implement secure messaging, either by communicating directly with them or through ADA.

My Health Record (MyHR):
- Information relevant for dental practices (usually patient medical histories) may be available on MyHR, however this information is still more readily obtained by paper or electronic intake forms.
- Connecting dental practices to MyHR remains a complex process. We suggest the Strategy may facilitate meaningful MyHR use in dentistry by streamlining this technical barrier to access and assisting with educating professionals in the value in connecting to MyHR.

E-Prescriptions:
- There is appetite among patients and dental providers for E-Prescriptions if the process can be made seamless. Some dental software vendors have also made progress, however similar to secure messaging, we would appreciate support in clarifying expectations for vendors.

Digital Health Capability:
Digital health literacy, including literacy in privacy and security, is varied across dentistry due to the relative nascence of this field, but also due to a lack of universal guidelines.

For example, dental providers are not generally aware that secure messaging should form part of a robust cybersecurity protocol.

The Strategy can assist the dental workforce in:
- Increasing awareness of the importance of digital health literacy:
  - Educating practitioners on what, why, and how digital health will improve clinical efficiency and outcomes for patients.
  - Building awareness for the dental community to understand the existence, benefits and implementation of new technology.
- Providing appropriate resources and education, including:
  - Partnerships with providers to include digital health education into curricula, CPD and accreditation.
  - Support for digital health implementation in dental organisations.
  - Support for digital health education pathways in dentistry.
  - Digital health practice guidelines adaptable for dentistry.

3. Summary

Although the dental sector has reached maturity in many areas of technology, there is a clear need to support dental integration into interdisciplinary national digital health frameworks.

The ADA supports a multi-pronged approach for dental stakeholders that will include:
- *For patients* – Awareness and the ability to advocate for what safe and seamless use of digital health technology in dentistry should look like, including how dentistry should function as part of a digital health ecosystem.
- *For dental providers* – Readily accessible digital health resources and education; clear best practice, legislative and policy guidelines; clear understanding of the value of certain digital health technologies, and correct support for implementing them.
- *For dental software vendors* – Clear standards, incentives, value proposition and support for developing digital health technologies.
- *For professional bodies* – Continued consultations to inform standards and objectives relative to dental needs, and assistance in forming policy for dental providers.

The ADA continues to fully support the development of the National Digital Health Strategy, and welcomes collaboration in defining and implementing the Strategy. We remain committed to advancing these initiatives and promoting digital health adoption in dentistry.

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On behalf of the ADA Dental Informatics and Digital Health Committee