



Summary of our report

Ministry of Health: Supporting the implementation of patient portals



New Zealand's health system supports nearly every New Zealander at some time in their life. As part of providing better services to New Zealanders, the Ministry of Health is using emerging technology to help people use those services more easily.

Patient portals are secure websites that allow people to access their personal health information and interact with their doctor. Through patient portals, people can send secure messages to their doctor, order repeat prescriptions, and, in some patient portals, view lab results and doctors' notes. Private companies develop and run the patient portals, and primary health organisations and general medical practices buy access to them.

This report looks at how well the Ministry supported primary health organisations and general practices to implement patient portals.

Patient portals were an important part of the Ministry's strategic outcome to encourage and empower people to be more involved in managing their health and making decisions about their treatment. The Ministry and other health sector organisations clearly understood the intended benefits from using patient portals, which included improving people's access to, and the efficiency of, health services.

The Ministry worked well with the health sector and with a consumer panel that represented the interests of the general public. This collaboration contributed to improved uptake of patient portals. Working with a range of organisations in the health sector helped the Ministry to identify and address the reasons why some general practices were reluctant to implement patient portals. The Ministry is continuing to work with the health sector to provide support and advice to general practices, which should continue to increase the uptake of patient portals.

Because patient portals give people access to their personal health information, primary health organisations and general practices need to ensure that patient portals are safe and secure from unauthorised access. The Ministry has supported primary health organisations and general practices to manage people's personal health information effectively by contributing to an established framework of privacy rules and rights, standards, and guidelines.

Vital statistics:

- 29 pages
- Presented to Parliament on 29 November 2017
- Download from www.oag.govt.nz
- Contact: reports@oag.govt.nz

The Ministry monitored the uptake of patient portals but did not monitor whether the expected benefits were achieved. Therefore, the Ministry did not know what effect patient portals were having on its strategic outcomes. We did see evidence of benefits and, despite earlier concerns, patient portals did not appear to negatively affect general practices. These were promising signs. There is an opportunity for the Ministry to monitor the intended benefits from using patient portals and show these to general practices that are reluctant to offer patient portals.

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