

Frequently Asked Questions about eHealth and Disclosure Directives

What is eHealth?

- B.C.'s eHealth initiative is about using information technology to provide the best possible patient care to all British Columbians. The Province has seven eHealth projects underway that will be implemented across B.C. over the next several years.
- eHealth is using computer technology to put your lab test results, diagnostic scans, medication histories and electronic prescriptions in an 'electronic health record'. Your electronic health record is a secure, private record containing your key health history that your doctors and other health providers will be able to use when providing you with care.

What is the electronic health record?

- B.C.'s electronic health record is the cornerstone of the Province's eHealth strategy to deliver faster and more effective treatment to patients. By making health care records available in computer systems province-wide, eHealth will enable health providers to quickly and securely see your health records, and share information about your health care encounters with each other so they can provide you with the best possible care.

Why do we need electronic health records? What are the benefits?

- Electronic health records will improve health system efficiency and reduce wait times.
- Your doctor and other health providers will be able to make the best treatment decisions and provide you with the best care when they can see all the information about your encounters with our health system.
- Your health providers will be able to function as a coordinated 'team', bringing a more collaborative approach to your care.
- You will likely not need to have tests repeated or procedures delayed until background information can be collected.
- Electronic health records are a faster and more secure, private way of sharing your personal health information among the health providers that need it.
- eHealth will reduce distance as a barrier to quality care by removing the need to move physical files because they will be available electronically.
- eHealth will provide telehealth services that will reduce patient travel and enable better health services in rural and remote areas of the Province.

For more information, visit: www.health.gov.bc.ca/ehealth/index.html.

Who will be able to see my electronic health record?

Health providers providing you with care will be able to see portions of your electronic health record when they provide you with care. No health provider will be able to see your records unless they are caring for you. How much they can see depends on their role.

What will my doctor or other health provider be able to see in my electronic health record?

It will depend on what kind of care they are providing. For example, your x-ray technologist may see your x-rays but he or she won't be able to see your prescription history. Your pharmacist may see your prescription history but he or she won't be able to see your x-rays; while your doctor may see both your prescriptions and your x-rays.

Access to portions of your personal health information will be permitted based on each health provider's role in providing you with care. Their role will determine exactly what information they can see, as well as what information they can add to your electronic health record.

The principle of 'Least Privilege' will be applied when determining each health provider's access. This means that each health provider will have access to the minimum amount of information required in order to fulfill their duties to provide you with care.

When will my health providers begin using my electronic health record?

Within the next few months, the first health information bank – for lab test results – will be made available. So if the health provider providing you with care has the proper authorization, they will soon be able to see your lab test results. Over the next few years, other health information banks will be added.

What is the difference between an Electronic Medical Record (EMR) and an Electronic Health Record (EHR)?

The provincial EHR is different from a practice-based EMR. The EMR record for a patient will contain more detail about particular patient visits in the office than may be shared to the provincial EHR record. Like paper-based charts, an EMR will only contain information created by the providers in the practice or sent to them by other clinicians, such as consult letters and lab test results.

A patient's EHR is a longitudinal record of their health history, including such things as diagnostic test results, past treatments and prescription drug profiles that are received from multiple sources over time. The EHR allows for the collection, storage and delivery of this clinical information from several different systems to form a single EHR and make it accessible to authorized healthcare providers at the point of care.

How do disclosure directives work?

- Each time your doctor or other health provider calls up your electronic health record on their computer screen, it will be assembled from your health records stored in secure ‘health information banks’. The Province is setting up a health information bank for each type of health record (one for lab test results, another for prescriptions, etc.)
- You can place a disclosure directive on your records stored in one or more of these health information banks. A disclosure directive is a tool that gives you the right to choose who will be able to access your electronic health record. In case of emergency, those health providers working in emergency care settings can override your keyword.

If I put a disclosure directive on my electronic health records, will it make a difference to the health care I receive?

- You will always have access to the best care services your health providers can provide. But you’ll get faster service if the people caring for you don’t need to wait for your files or repeat tests when your latest medical information is not readily available.
- If you can provide your keyword to the health providers caring for you, your records can be temporarily made available.
- Basically, the more you limit who has access to your electronic health record, the more difficult it can be for your health providers to provide you with timely care. They may have to repeat testing and gather more information to ensure they make the best decision possible - information that may have been available to them if they had access to your entire health record.

What about in an emergency – if I can't provide my keyword?

- In emergency care settings, health providers caring for you can override your disclosure directive – if they determine that your personal health information is necessary for timely care.

How do I put a disclosure directive on my electronic health record?

- You begin the process by mailing in a disclosure directive application form which you can download from the eHealth website at: www.health.gov.bc.ca/ehealth/dd_process.html. You may also call Health Insurance B.C. Contact Centre with questions and to have forms mailed to you. The Health Insurance B.C. Contact Centre can be reached by phone at the following numbers:

Health Insurance BC Contact Centre (HIBC)
Lower Mainland: 604-683-7151
Elsewhere in BC: 1-800-663-7100

- Once you've completed the form and sent it back, it will be processed and you will be mailed a receipt.
- When you receive the receipt you'll call HIBC and they can help you set up the keyword you wish to use.
- You'll need to do a new disclosure directive for each health information bank as they come online, but for now, the only one you will be able to put a keyword on will be the lab test result bank.

How do I find out more information about disclosure directives and my electronic health record?

Online:

- Visit www.health.gov.bc.ca/ehealth/index.html to find out more about eHealth and your electronic health record.
- Visit www.health.gov.bc.ca/ehealth/dd_process.html for more details about disclosure directives.

By mail:

- Request an information package and forms from:

Disclosure Directives
Ministry of Health Services
1515 Blanshard St
Victoria, B.C. V8W 3C8