



CONNECTION GUIDE FOR SECURE MESSAGING

What you need to know about using secure messaging systems

This guide provides information to help allied health providers understand the key features of secure messaging systems used by healthcare services to exchange clinical documents. It also provides information about available software products to help providers select the most suitable option for their practice.

Unique identifiers

Secure messaging systems use different codes to assign identifiers to each practitioner or practice using that system. This helps to ensure the information is sent to the correct recipient.

- **Healthlink** uses an 8-digit code called an EDI which can either be practice or practitioner specific e.g. HLTHLINK.
- **Argus** uses an email address such as practicename@argus.net.au
- **ReferralNet** uses a ReferralNet ID
- **Medical-Objects** uses an 8-character alphanumeric identifier e.g. 123456ED

To promote the exchange of secure electronic communications across healthcare providers in your geographic region, you can advertise your secure messaging ID on documents such as reports and referrals so that others know how to communicate with you.

Lookup directories

Secure messaging systems include access to online directories that allow you to look up the identifiers for other providers. Once you know the identifier for the practitioner or practice you want to send information to, this can be used as the delivery address for correspondence sent from your practice to another provider. If a clinical software system is being used, the identifying code can be stored for each provider in the contact list/address book for quick look-up and use in future.

Provider maps

Several secure messaging vendors provide a map tool that allows a search of a geographical area for all registered users within that region. This is helpful for prospective users to see how many providers use that secure messaging system within their region. This is currently a key factor in selecting a secure messaging system due to the lack of interoperability between systems.

This example map is available via the Medical-Objects website. A link to the website can be found in the comparison table at the end of this guide.



Audit trail

One of the key benefits of using secure messaging is the availability of an audit trail to check whether a document has been successfully sent and/or received. Secure messaging systems include tools to allow senders to check the status of sent messages and action or re-send as necessary.

Registration

In order to use any of the available secure messaging software systems, a practice must first register with the software vendor. Once registered, the vendor will install/activate the secure messaging software and provide training on how to use it (i.e. how to send and receive documents and check the status of sent messages). Most vendors offer a free trial of their system to allow prospective users to trial the system before purchasing. Product registration links are provided in the comparison table.

Installation and setup

Once registered, the system setup/commissioning process will vary depending on a number of factors including whether you use clinical software that is compatible with the chosen secure messaging system, and whether you use a Windows or Mac operating system. The establishment process may involve:

1. Remote software installation and configuration by the vendor
2. Activation of a secure messaging module that forms part of existing clinical software
3. Access via a web-based portal that requires no local software installation

If access is provided via a web-based portal, software installation may not be necessary.

The requirements for installation and setup of secure messaging systems will also be dependent on which vendor/product is chosen and your practice's existing technical environment.

Templates

When creating documents to send via secure messaging, particular identifiers must be included in the document template so the receiving system can interpret the data and decrypt the message. This information typically includes provider number, patient first name, surname and date of birth. Specific requirements will be product specific so you will need to check the necessary details with the secure messaging vendor. This information will be provided during the product training process.

Cost

Fees vary between products. There are usually both one-off fees and ongoing subscription costs associated with using secure messaging software. An annual subscription fee is typical and an installation fee may be payable up front. Some products have a cost per message sent. Others charge fees based on the number of users. This means it is difficult to compare products on a cost basis. Please refer to the comparison table for more information.

Note: Some software vendors include secure messaging as a default application within their existing software so no additional subscription or setup costs are charged.

Interoperability

Secure messaging systems are currently not interoperable (compatible). Both the sender and recipient of documents exchanged via secure messaging must use the same software to be able to communicate with each other. For example, Healthlink users can only send to and receive from other Healthlink users and not to Argus users and vice versa. This is due to the variety of encryption methods in use.

The best way to select a suitable product is to find out which secure messaging system is being used by your most regular referrers/providers within your geographic region. Interoperability is slowly improving and it is intended that all secure messaging software in the future will be capable of communicating with each other (i.e. you will be able to send to and receive from any provider regardless of the secure messaging product installed).

Note: Argus users can now send to and receive from Referralnet users. It is also possible to have multiple different secure messaging systems installed and in use at a single practice e.g. Healthlink and Medical-Objects can both be installed in the same practice if required to be able to communicate with providers.

5 steps to secure messaging success

These are the key steps to selecting and implementing secure messaging software:

- Step 1** Find out which secure messaging software your regular referrers and contacts are using
- Step 2** Contact each software vendor/s to organise a free trial of their system/s to securely exchange documents
- Step 3** Select the secure messaging product/s that best meets your needs based on the software trial/s
- Step 4** Configure your software address book for quick lookup of contacts
- Step 5** Train your staff how to use the secure messaging system and notify your key contacts and referrers of your secure messaging identifier

Secure messaging software comparison table

These products all meet Australian Government secure messaging standards and comply with the Australian Privacy Principles. For further information, contact the vendors directly.

	Argus	HealthLink	Medical-Objects	ReferralNet
Product website	Argus	HealthLink	Medical-Objects	ReferralNet
Can be used without clinical software	Yes, Argus Word	Yes, via web portal	Yes, via cloud-based solution	Yes, via Word plugin
Can be used on Mac	Yes, cloud-based solution	Yes	Yes	Yes
Compatible clinical software	List available on website home page	List available on website , can enquire about others	List available on website	List available on website
Online Directory of contacts	Argus Address Manager	Provider map & Online directory	Provider map	Yes, available on request
Audit tool to check successful send/receipt of documents	Yes, Argus Message Manager	Yes, built into the EMR*	Yes, Delivery Report	Yes
Annual Subscription Fee (incl GST) for both sending and receiving messages. <i>*Please note, pricing is subject to change and should be seen as a guide only.</i>	User based: \$171 per FT user \$104 per PT user	Volume based: \$145 plus per message cost	User based: \$297 one user, \$463 (2-4 users), \$682 (5-10 users)	Volume based: \$132 entry (360 msg/yr), \$396 standard (1,500 msg/yr), \$858 premium (5,000 msg/yr)
Cost per message sent	No	Yes, dependant on volumes	No	No
Setup Fee (one-time fee)	\$275	No setup fee	No setup fee	No setup fee
Training and support	User Guides, training videos	User Guides, Knowledgebase	Videos, Knowledgebase	User guides, Video
Contact phone	1800 952 282	1800 125 036	(07) 5456 6000	(03) 9675 0600
Online registration link	Online registration	Service Registration (90-day free trial available)	Online registration	Online Registration, (free trial available)

*EMR – Electronic Medical Record