

Emerald connects with healthcare online

A group of local healthcare professionals are joining forces with the Australian Digital Health Agency and Commonwealth-funded primary healthcare organisation Central Queensland, Wide Bay, Sunshine Coast PHN to make Emerald one of the first towns in Australia to have its residents fully connected with their healthcare online.

The PHN's Central Highlands-based Digital Health Project Officer, Caren Bennett, said the aim of the initiative is to help empower people to better track their own health records.

"I'm thrilled to be playing a part in creating what's called a Community of Excellence," Ms Bennett said.

"Part of that means we're working as a group to connect all healthcare providers in Emerald to the national My Health Record system, training them on how to use it, and sharing the benefits of the system with the community.

"My role is also to help empower people to keep better track of their own health records, which is vitally important when you live in a regional area like we do, and may have to travel or see multiple different providers for healthcare."

"I'll be out and about in the community over the coming weeks and months supporting workshops and delivering resources to help people get connected with their My Health Record and to improve digital health literacy, which has changed a lot in 2020 due to the coronavirus."

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant it's more important than ever for people seeking medical attention to understand the digital health options available to them, like Telehealth appointments, and electronic prescriptions.

Local physiotherapist Zak Nichols said being part of the Communities of Excellence program, spearheaded by well-known local general practitioner and President of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, Dr Ewen McPhee, was incredibly valuable to healthcare providers as well as patients.

"It means as healthcare professionals we're able to share medical and access medical information, and send referrals digitally in a way that's safe and secure, and maintains a patient's privacy," Mr Nichols said.

"As a healthcare provider, access to these digital platforms means I'm able to improve access to health services for my patients, improve the quality of information for other healthcare providers and also reduce costs and duplication of information.

"I would encourage anyone who isn't already signed up, or has any questions or queries about how to use these online tools and systems like My Health Record, Telehealth, or secure messaging, for example, to send myself or Caren an email, or to come along to one of our information sessions.

"Most of these digital health tools are free or come at a low cost to use, and are a great way to better keep our community connected and healthy."

Emerald is one of just three towns in Australia to trial the ADHA's Communities of Excellence model, which will be replicated across Australia.

The PHN is hosting networking event for health providers on Tuesday 17 November.

For more information, email CoE@ourphn.org.au or visit digitalhealth.gov.au/coe

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