

# Questions regarding the IHI



# FAQ

## What is the Individual Health Identifier (IHI)

The ability to **correctly identify** an individual is essential for patient safety. It helps to ensure that health and social care can be delivered to the right person, in the right place and at the right time.

An Individual Health Identifier (IHI) is a number that safely identifies a person who has used, is using or may use a health or social care service in Ireland. Providing an IHI for everyone who uses our services is a key factor in the development of the eHealth Strategy for Ireland.

**The IHI number will be used to safely identify the individual and enable the linking of their correct health records in the future from different systems to give a complete medical history.**



## What is the IHI Project within the HSE?

The Office of the Chief Information Officer and the Office of the Chief Operations Officer are tasked with establishing and implementing the IHI within the HSE.

Work has been ongoing for the past number of years to set up the technical requirements needed to establish the IHI across the HSE.

The IHI project is being rolled out across the HSE with an initial focus on acute and GP services. The IHI was used successfully embedded during COVID-19 matching 4.16 million records.

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## The IHI National Register

Everyone who uses our services will have an **IHI number** assigned by the HSE that is only assigned to them and will never be reallocated to anyone else even after death.

A unique identifier (IHI number) has been generated and associated with each IHI record. These **IHI records** constitute the establishment of the IHI National Register.

- **Inter-operable** dynamic interface
- **Store** the IHI number on the Health Service Provider consumer system
- **Notify** the IHI National Register of any updates to the individual IHI record that may have been notified to the consumer system by the individual.

**In line with National Service Plan 2022, the initial consumer systems that have been identified for integration with the IHI system are:**

- iPMS systems (5 of 13 instances)
- All GP systems
- PCRS systems
- National Screening and Immunisation systems
- National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) and HIPE
- NIMIS, MN-CMS, MedLIS, NCIS systems
- Community Services systems (as they are delivered)



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## What information is held on the IHI record?

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**The IHI number will be used to safely identify the individual and enable the linking of their correct health records from different systems to give a complete medical history.**

The IHI is an identifier record and **does not** contain medical records; the information held on the IHI includes

- ✓ **surname**
- ✓ **forename**
- ✓ **date of birth**
- ✓ **place of birth**
- ✓ **sex**
- ✓ **all former surnames**
- ✓ **mother's surname at birth**
- ✓ **address**
- ✓ **nationality**
- ✓ **personal public service number (PPSN), if any. The PPSN can be used to find an IHI number but an IHI number cannot be used to find a PPSN**
- ✓ **date of death in the case of a deceased individual.**

## Why do I need a IHI?

An individual health identifier (IHI) will uniquely **identify** every individual accessing health and social care services. The main benefit of having an individual health identifier is to ensure patient safety by correctly identifying a patient. Your IHI will help to improve the accuracy in associating your medical records held in different healthcare organisations so they are correctly attributed to you. Your IHI will provide the key to enable your electronic health care record.



## The HSE Health Identifiers (HIDs) Programme

The **HSE** has established the Health Identifiers (HIDs) Programme to:

- 1 Establish** the registers that will contain the health identifier numbers
- 2 Design** the business operational models for the maintenance of the registers
- 3 Embed** the technology systems required to support governance of the operational models
- 4 Transition** the registers and their maintenance into the appropriate

The **IHI project** has been established within the HIDs Programme to focus specifically on the IHI national register. Separate projects will be established to **focus** on the national registers for Health Care Practitioners and Health Care Organisations within the HIDs Programme.

The IHI National Register has been created and populated with **4,775,629** records from a trusted data source. A **unique identifier** IHI number has been generated and associated with each IHI record. These IHI records constitute the establishment of the IHI National Register.

### A suite of interfaces will be delivered to:

**Allow** a Health Service Provider consumer system to search for an interface with an IHI number for an individual

**Store** the IHI number on the Health Service Provider consumer system

**Notify** the IHI National Register of any updates to the individual IHI record that may have been notified to the consumer system by the individual.



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## Who will be issued with an IHI?

Every person who has used, is using or may use a health and social care service in Ireland will be assigned an Individual Health Identifier. Individual Health Identifiers can be used in both public and private healthcare settings. Your IHI will be assigned to you by the HSE and will not be re-assigned to anyone else even after your death.



## Is the IHI the same as an electronic health record?

No. The IHI is not the same as an electronic health record. An electronic health record is an electronic version of a patient's medical history which may hold medical or clinical information about you. Your IHI record will **NEVER** hold clinical or medical information

## Do I have to do anything to get my IHI?

No. You do not need to know your IHI to receive health or social care services in Ireland



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## What are the benefits of IHI for me?

An Individual Health Identifier (IHI) has the following benefits for you:

- **Improved** accuracy in identifying you and your medical records will lead to safer and better care being provided to you.
- **Improved** accuracy in identifying and associating your records in different healthcare organisations.
- **Your health information** can be shared safely and seamlessly between health service providers, for example on referral letters sent from a private GP to a public hospital.
- **The use of an Individual Health Identifier** also enables the electronic transfer of your health information, which results in faster care for you.



## Is medical information stored on my IHI record?

No. Medical or clinical information will **NEVER** be stored on your IHI record. Health service providers may however use your IHI, to uniquely identify you, when communicating with other health service providers about your care for example when a medical consultant is corresponding with your GP or visa versa.

## Is the IHI supported by legislation?

Yes. The Health Identifiers Act 2014 was enacted by the government to allow two new national data collections—called the National Register of Individual Health Identifiers and the National Register of Health Service Provider Identifiers to be created and operated.

## Could my PPSN be used instead of an IHI number?

No. Your PPSN could not be used instead of an IHI number. Your IHI will be used across both the public and private health sectors. For example, your IHI will need to be included in written communications between your public hospital and your GP who may be in the private sector. Your PPSN can only be used in the public sector and so it cannot be used for communication with private healthcare providers.

In 2009, the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) published 'Recommendations for a Unique Health Identifier for Individuals in Ireland' and recommended that based on international best practice, the safest and most cost-effective option for an IHI in Ireland would be a new healthcare identifier and that the PPSN should not be used as the identifier in health and social care. Evidence from other countries tells us that for many reasons, including that of privacy and patient safety, it is better to have a separate number to identify you when you access health related services

## Is my IHI the same as my PPSN?

No. Your IHI is not the same as your Personal Public Service Number (PPSN). Your IHI is a unique number that will only be used in the health and social care system and is different to your PPSN.

## Who will look after and mind my IHI record?

Your **personal** information will need to be processed in order for you to receive effective and safe health and social care. The Health Service Executive have looked at how your information will be used and are conducting a Privacy Impact Assessment to make sure that the right safeguards are being put in place to **protect** your information and to ensure that it is used correctly.

**The Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA)** will show any risks that have been identified to the privacy of your information and the safeguards that need to be put in place to reduce these risks.



## Can someone use my IHI to look up my PPSN?

No. It will not be possible for anyone to look up your PPSN using your IHI. However, you may provide your PPSN to your health service provider to allow them to find your IHI from the IHI Register.

Your PPSN **will not\*** be provided to your health service provider when they retrieve your IHI from the IHI register.

**Note:** \*in some instances, your health service provider may be entitled to your PPSN on a legislative basis if they are for example providing you with a publicly funded health service for example a medical card. In this case they may be provided with your PPSN.

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## How the central IHI register was set up?

The plan was to initially populate the **National Register of IHIs** from existing reliable data sources – known as trusted sources.

The database of the Public Service identity (PSI) dataset maintained by the Department of Social Protection was used to do this as it's data was already verified as accurate.

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## Why is the PPSN number stored as part of my IHI record?

HIQA conducted an international review of how other countries set up their IHIs and the majority of countries that were reviewed, use data from existing trusted sources in the creation of the IHI. This allows for economies to be achieved as it is the best use of existing public infrastructure.

An example of a trusted source for the National Register of IHIs is the database of the PublicService Identity (PSI) dataset (which includes the PPSN) maintained by the Department of Social Protection.

### The reasons why the PPSN is included in your IHI record are:

- **To allow** the central IHI Register to be created and subsequently updated from trusted sources over time.
- **To get** the best use of existing public infrastructure.



## What is a privacy impact assessment?

HIQA and the Data Protection Commissioner both recommend that the **Data Privacy Impact Assessment** is used wherever personal information is processed. The Data Privacy Impact Assessments are particularly important in the health and social care sector where the information is considered to be sensitive information.

The Data Privacy Impact Assessment or PIA involves examining the **privacy** implications of a project, to make sure that personal information is protected and that the project complies with all relevant legislation. Where the PIA identifies privacy risks, it proposes safeguards that should reduce these risks without impacting on what the project is aiming to achieve.

The HSE is currently undertaking a PIA for the IHI which will include a public consultation which will allow you to have a say in what is being done. The Data Privacy Impact Assessment will then be **published** and will show all the risks that have been identified and the safeguards that will be put in place to reduce the risks.

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## What sort of access will health service providers have? How can I be sure that my information is used responsibly?

Health service providers will have access to a national register of individual health identifiers to:

- **Obtain** your IHI
- **Send** requests to update your IHI record

Before they are provided with access to your IHI there will be **checks** to ensure that certain safeguards are in place to protect your information. These checks will ensure that your information is used correctly and check that the health service provider has the right procedures in place to make sure that they look after your information.

IHI records need to be kept safe and secure under legislation – both the Data Protection Act and the Health Identifier Act 2014 apply. **Penalties** apply if it is discovered that your IHI is not adequately protected or used incorrectly.

## I'm worried about identity theft as many of my personal details will be included in my record, will there be safeguards in place to prevent this from happening?

The **Privacy Data Impact Assessment** conducted by the HSE has examined these risks and identified safeguards that will be put in place to protect your IHI record and minimise the risk of this happening. Your IHI record is considered personal data under the Data Protection Act, and must be treated appropriately by anyone that uses it, including the health identifiers operator. Importantly, under the Health Identifiers Act 2014, penalties will apply if your IHI record is used incorrectly

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## What is safe level of registration?

**Face-to-face** registration for a Public Services Card is called SAFE (Standard Authentication Framework Environment) registration. This is used by the Department of Social Protection in association with your Public Services Card (PSC). It is designed to assign a level of certainty to the information that the Department of Social Protection holds about you.

SAFE level 2 is only assigned after you have had a face-to-face interview at your local social welfare office where you have produced documents, including photographic documents, which proves your identity. During the appointment your photograph is taken and your signature is recorded. More information about the Public Services Card (PSC) and the SAFE registration process may be found at [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie).

## Why is safe level of registration being included on the IHI register?

**The IHI register** will include the SAFE level of registration so that anyone that is providing you with health or social care services can have a high level of certainty about identifying you.

The HSE are using the system operated by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) so that the Individual Health Identifier programme can make best use of the significant investment already made, averting the need to replicate the DSP data collection and verification process.



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## Will using my IHI change the way my health information is shared?

No. Having an IHI on your medical record will not change how and when health services providers share information about you. Your health information is considered to be sensitive personal data under the Data Protection Act.

This means that the eight rules of data protection, set out within the Act, must be adhered to and must follow the eight rules of data protection:

- **Obtain** and process information fairly
- **Keep** it only for one or more specified, explicit and lawful purposes Use and disclose it only in ways compatible with these purposes
- **Keep** it safe and secure
- **Keep** it accurate, complete and up to date
- **Ensure** that it is adequate, relevant and not excessive
- **Retain** it for no longer than is necessary for the purpose or purposes Give a copy of his or her personal data to an individual, on request

## Who will govern what other agencies have access to the IHI?

The Health Identifiers Act states which agencies have access to the IHI. The HSE has put in place controls (both legal and technical) that ensure that only those that are legally entitled to access the IHI will be able to do so.

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## How will my IHI be used?

Your IHI can be stored on your health services providers' computer systems. It will also be included on any paper records that are printed off. It will be used on your medical records held by the health service providers that you attend.

Here are some examples of potential uses of IHI in the future:

After you attend your GP, your IHI will be stored locally on your medical record whether paper or electronic. Any time your GP communicates with another health service provider on your behalf, your IHI will be included on that communication.

**For example**, should you require a blood test, your GP will include your IHI with this request. The hospital will return both your IHI and the result of your blood test to your GP. This allows your GP to safely confirm that the results relate to you.

**Your IHI will be recorded on your medical record in a hospital's computer system if you attend an emergency department. When the hospital sends a discharge letter to your GP, your IHI will be included in the communication to your GP. The discharge letter may be paper or electronic.**

**This allows your GP to safely confirm that the discharge letter, relates to you.**



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## Who will access my IHI?

Your IHI can be accessed by your health service providers (as defined by the Health Identifiers Act) both public and private, when they provide a health or social care service to you.

Under the Health Identifier Act 2014, other agencies can have access to the National Register of Individual Health Identifiers, as follows:

- **Chief Inspector of Social Services**
- **Child and Family Agency**
- **Health Research Board**
- **Irish Blood Transfusion Service**
- **Irish Medicines Board**
- **Mental Health Commission**
- **National Cancer Registry Board**

These organisations are listed in the Health Identifiers Act 2014, as follows:

- **Board na Radharcmhastóirí**
- **Central Statistics Office**
- **A Coroner**
- **Dental Council**
- **Health Information and Quality Authority**
- **Health Insurance Authority**
- **Inspector of Mental Health Services**
- **Irish Medical Council**
- **National Treatment Purchase Fund Board**
- **Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland**
- **Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland • Pre-hospital Emergency Care Council**
- **A registration board established by or under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2015**
- **An undertaking authorised to operate a scheme of health or health related insurance under the Health Insurance Act 1994**



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