



## **Interconnection a major step forward for the Health Network**

### **Media Release**

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Key telecommunication vendors have signed an agreement to interconnect their secure health networks. Telecom/Gen-i, TelstraClear and Healthlink have defined an industry solution and interconnection agreement based on a neutral switch that connects their respective secure VPN networks. The solution will be available from July 2008. The Health Information Strategy Action Committee (HISAC) initiated the agreement with the support of the Ministry of Health. Datacom has been selected to run the switch.

The major benefit for health professionals using an accredited health network is that they have access to all possible health systems and applications as they become available without needing to know which network those systems run on. The implementation of a neutral switch will bring the Health Network into line with industry best practice.

Existing Ministry applications such as National Health Index lookup and Pharmac Special Authorities will be progressively moved to delivery via this interconnection point. A range of new applications are signalled for exclusive delivery via the interconnection switch and to customers of accredited network services. These new applications include:

- online pharmacy claiming
- eReferrals and discharges
- electronic prescribing
- Health Practitioner Index lookup
- General practice patient notes transfer
- B4 School checks
- Secure email
- laboratory test orders and results transfer

The interconnection agreement is a key milestone in the establishment of the 'Connected Health' environment which is currently under development by the Ministry of Health.

Graeme Osborne, Chair of the HISAC Infrastructure Sub-Committee said, "This is a major step forward for the New Zealand Health Network. It provides health professionals with choice and certainty, and ensures information exchanged between health care providers is secure. HISAC has been pleased to work with the industry in arriving at this agreement."

The third accredited provider of health network services Healthlink has chosen not to join the interconnection agreement. Healthlink have been actively engaged throughout the development of the interconnection agreement, but have decided not to be a foundation signatory to the agreement. Healthlink raised a number of issues which they suggested precluded them from joining the interconnection agreement at this time. While HISAC acknowledged these issues, they were in themselves not material to the interconnection agreement.

Over time, Healthlink customers will not be able to access health applications which are available exclusively through accredited networks and the neutral interconnection switch.

“We have made it clear to Healthlink that they are welcome to join the interconnection agreement at any time. However, we were not prepared to further delay the implementation of the interconnection switch.”

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## **Background**

### What is HISAC and what is its role?

The Health Information Strategic Action Committee was established by the Minister of Health in August 2005 to provide governance of, oversight of, and leadership for the implementation of the Health Information Strategy for New Zealand 2005.

### The Health Information Strategy for New Zealand

The Health Information Strategy for New Zealand (HIS-NZ) presents a sector-wide business strategy for the health and disability sector to develop and supply innovative health information systems. The success of HIS-NZ relies on the co-operation and collaboration of the entire health sector and has three broad objectives:

- to increase participation through networking and sharing of health information across the sector
- to support collaboration across providers in the care of consumers
- to improve targeting through improved decision-making.

### The Health Network

The Health Network is a secure communications network that enables the Ministry of Health, District Health Boards and health care professionals to communicate securely with one another over a closed, electronic network.

For more than 5 years the Health Network has been provided by two accredited providers: Healthlink and Gen-I (Telecom) with a limited interconnection between their respective networks.

It was understood that when a third provider of services was accredited, an interconnection agreement between the network providers would be required. TelstraClear meet the requirements of accreditation early in 2007.

### Connected Health

Connected Health will establish a set of network reference standards and minimum core components that will provide a basis for secure accessing, sharing and transferring information between health provider organisations. This will form the foundation for development of a national Connected Health community.

The programme is working with the ICT industry to enable them to build products and services to meet the needs of the sector, and working with the sector to ensure the suppliers effectively meet these needs.

The products and services that are developed will be certified by a suitable testing authority. This will give health providers the confidence to invest in products and services that will work with any other Connected Health-certified products and services used by other members of the health community.

The Connected Health programme is not providing a new health network but providing: reference standards, linking infrastructure, and a security regime to allow current networks – including the current Health Network to link together better.