According to a review of recent studies, global healthcare spending on EMR/EHR technology is expected to top $24.8 billion USD in 2017 and continue growing to over $29 billion by 2020. The ongoing, worldwide increases in electronic health record (EHR) and electronic medical record (EMR) adoption and spending on healthcare information technology is spurred primarily by commitment to patient safety. Hospitals using EHR/EMR systems have a 3 to 4 percent lower mortality rate than those that don’t, as EHRs help reduce prescription entry errors and provide access to clinical decision support in the workflow and medication error alerts. There’s financial incentive to expand healthcare technology as well. The average doctor spends 8 hours a week on paperwork. Studies estimate that during the first 15 years of implementation, EHR/EMR could save around $42 billion USD each year in the costs of paper charting, in both materials and staff hours.

RISE OF EHRs IN AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND
Recognizing the advantages of EHR and healthcare information technology in controlling costs and maintaining care quality, healthcare organizations across Australia are poised to spend an estimated AU $1.865 billion on EMR/EHR systems by 2018. High upfront setup costs and fears over information security have delayed some Australian hospitals from fully embracing digitalisation. But the benefits EHRs can provide, from improvements to efficiency to enhancements to patient care, have outweighed the inconvenience. By 2010, 90% of Australian clinicians were using electronic patient records. National eHealth Strategy set standards for terminologies and interoperability among EHRs used in Australia, and new vendors have begun to offer consumer EHR options (under regulation from the commonwealth) to create more choices and sophistication for users.

WHAT TECHNOLOGY IS AUSTRALIAN HEALTHCARE MISSING?
In the Australia region, gaps in reliable core clinical information are hampering EHRs from providing the most effective clinical decision support.

According the Australian Medical Association (AMA), core clinical information should go beyond basic patient information to include allergies, adverse reactions, recent pathologies, diagnostic tests, and discharge summaries. But due to fragmentation of health information, this key data isn’t always accessible to every EHR. Clinical screening mechanisms are more likely to identify harmful duplicate therapies and potential adverse reactions with a fuller the picture of the patient’s history, treatments, and unique circumstances.
However, the more information that is available, the more likely an EHR will generate too many unnecessary alerts. This creates “alert fatigue,” the negative perception clinicians develop of EHR alerts because there are simply too many alerts being generated. Clinicians get into the habit of overriding most alerts without really examining them, increasing the likelihood they will miss a vital warning. The AMA notes that EHR systems need to be designed with effective filtering and search functions to help avoid this information overload.\(^\text{iv}\)

**Population aging** is a pressing concern throughout Australasia, where the number of adults over 65 is expected to increase from 13 percent to 25 percent of total population in Australia\(^\text{v}\) and to over 25 percent in New Zealand\(^\text{vi}\) in the next 30 to 35 years. The costs of caring for this growing cohort are expected to rise, leading healthcare experts to encourage greater focus on proactive care and managing chronic conditions.\(^\text{vii}\) EHRs will be a useful tool in this endeavor, providing clinicians with quick access to patient information, a direct link to timely clinical knowledge, clinical screening functions, and a more effective means to coordinate treatment and communication among multiple caregivers for older patients with more than one chronic condition.

EHR systems that include patient portals will also be key in the region, as they can connect patients to care reminders and valuable health information to encourage better compliance.

**LOOKING AHEAD**

What will the future of healthcare technology look like for Australasia? Experts to see some of the following trends:

- **Technological advancements** to support and help professionals better understand clinical decision making
- Greater focus on **proactive and preventative medicine** to help control rising costs and lessen hospitalizations for the increasing number of older adults
- Expansion of **telehealth** and remote patient monitoring capabilities to help serve patients who are not always able to be assessed on site, particularly those living in remote areas
- Improvements in collecting, storing, and providing useful access to key patient data through **interoperable electronic systems**
- Greater focus on **healthcare tourism** to generate revenue for general health services for Australians, a practice that’s proved successful elsewhere in Asia Pacific\(^\text{viii}\)

Despite being an advanced and high-performing healthcare system, the industry in Australia and New Zealand continues to evolve along with healthcare technology, and hospitals need trusted partners to help them succeed. Healthcare information technology vendors that are committed to global best practices, scientific research, implementation support, and solution innovation can help a health system reach its EHR goals for improved efficiency, cost savings, and enhanced patient care.

Wolters Kluwer’s Clinical Effectiveness solutions help healthcare professionals measurably improve the quality and effectiveness of care. We provide evidence-based clinical content and advanced decision support technology wherever healthcare professionals are working, so they can make the best possible decisions for their patients. Solutions include Lexicomp® drug references, Medi-Span® drug data, and UpToDate® clinical decision support, all of which integrate into EMRs and clinical workflows to provide proactive, efficient access to valuable decision support at the point of care.