Metadata guidelines

for Healthdirect Australia information partners
Purpose of this document

This document is designed to provide Healthdirect Australia information partners with guidelines on how to implement and manage metadata in order that their online resources can be harvested by Healthdirect Australia and displayed accurately in search results. Harvesting is the process of ingesting partner content into the Healthdirect platform.

This document includes information on the following:

- What type of resources can be harvested?
- What is metadata?
- Why do we need metadata?
- Who creates the metadata?
- Once we add the metadata, do we need to maintain it?
- Do we need to add metadata to the entire site?
- What if we don’t have a CMS?
- What type of metadata does Healthdirect Australia prefer?
- Which metadata fields are required?
- How do I write appropriate titles and descriptions?
- What will happen if we are unable to implement metadata?

If you have any questions after reviewing this document or you would like us to speak to your web manager or developer, please contact your partner manager and she or he will arrange this.

Executive summary

How metadata can help users find your resources

The key focus for Healthdirect Australia’s digital services is to promote resources on information partner sites. To do this our harvester uses metadata to catalogue and present resources in the form of search results.

There are two ways that you can use metadata to assist this process:

Option A:

- Include metadata fields containing an accurate and unique title and description for the resource in either DC metadata or HTML meta tags.

Option B:

- Include a metadata field containing an accurate and unique title only as either DC metadata or HTML meta tags.
- Ensure there is no description field in your metadata. The harvester will scan any available HTML text and auto-generate a description.

Maintenance

It is important that metadata fields are reviewed by the information partner each time a change is made to the resource.
**What type of resources can be harvested?**

Throughout this document we refer to ‘resources’. A resource is a discrete item of content published on an information partner website.

The term ‘resource’ can refer to:

- Documents such as fact sheets, articles Q&A
- Audio and video files
- Apps, tools, widgets
- Online programs
- Social media
- Information about offline services provided by information partners, such as support groups (where the information partner has online health information that meets the eligibility criteria).

In order to be harvested resources must be presented in HTML or have an HTML cover page which has acceptable metadata as outlined in the following sections. This applies to PDF documents, multimedia content and interactive tools (such as calculators, apps, videos etc).

If a PDF resource does not have an HTML cover page Healthdirect Australia may at its discretion create deep links manually. This is not recommended and will restrict the number of pdf resources we can link to.

**What is metadata?**

Metadata is defined as data about data. It is what helps search engines such as Google, Yahoo, Bing and the search function on your website identify what a resource is about and its relevance to a search query. A metadata record typically includes, but is not limited to:

- basic information such as title, author, version, dates
- a description or summary of the content
- the possible use of the content
- the intended audience
- legal information about the ownership or rights held over the resource
- how to access the resource and any access restrictions

Search engines also use metadata to help showcase the resource on search results pages, helping the user decide if it is relevant to their search without clicking to find out more. Therefore, it is ideal to have well written information in the metadata record as it increases the likelihood of that resource being chosen and is one of the search engine optimisation (SEO) practices that can be controlled.

**Example of title and description displaying in Google search results:**

- **Complications of peripheral vascular disease** | Healthdirect...
  - www.healthdirect.gov.au/.../complications_peripheral_vascular_disease
  - Peripheral vascular disease can result in additional complications. Find out about common problems from the information and resources on this page.
Why do we need metadata?

Metadata improves the ability of a user to search for and discover information online. It is especially useful for resources such as videos, audio recordings where there is no searchable text.

Most importantly for Healthdirect Australia information partners, when a user performs a search on one of our websites the metadata showing a title and description for your resource is presented in the search results. It is important to maintain these fields so the most accurate and current information is displayed.

Example of title and description displaying in healthdirect search results:

Who creates the metadata?

Partners are responsible for creating and applying metadata to their online resources. Healthdirect Australia can provide advice if required.

Once we add the metadata, do we need to maintain it?

Yes. If you make changes to the content on your website, the corresponding metadata fields need to be updated.

Where do we add the required metadata fields?

The title and description metadata fields need to be within the <head> </head> tags in the source code, in order for our harvester to identify it.

Do we need to add metadata to the entire site?

For the purpose of Healthdirect Australia harvesting your content, we need you to add it to the pages that we link to. However, it is best practice to incorporate maintenance of the metadata into your content management system. This ensures that the metadata automatically updates whenever changes are made to the content. If you are using a form of metadata called HTML meta tags, this will also provide SEO benefits when your site is indexed by external search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing.
What if we don’t have a CMS?

If you do not have a CMS (content management system) you will need to update each page by accessing the source code. This may require working with your developer.

What type of metadata does Healthdirect Australia prefer?

DC metadata
Healthdirect Australia’s harvester scans the source code for each resource for Dublin Core (DC) metadata as a first preference. It will capture whatever is in the DC fields, even if this is incomplete or incorrect. It should be noted that DC metadata will not improve SEO on external search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing.

HTML meta tags (or meta elements)
If DC metadata fields are not present in the source code, the harvesting tool will search for HTML meta tags. These are already present on many websites as these are used by external search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing to categorise pages correctly and to improve SEO.

Which metadata fields are required?

There are two options for implementing metadata fields for the harvester:

Option A:

- Include metadata fields containing an accurate and unique title and description for the resource in either DC metadata or HTML meta tags.

Option B:

- Include a metadata field containing an accurate and unique title only as either DC metadata or HTML meta tags.
- Ensure there is no description field in your metadata. The harvester will scan any available HTML text and auto-generate a description.

Maintenance

It is important that metadata fields are reviewed by the information partner each time a change is made to the resource.

Examples of metadata code:

- The DC metadata for title:
  `<META NAME="DC.Title" CONTENT="This is the title of the page">`

- The DC metadata for description:
  `<META NAME="DC.Description" CONTENT="A blurb to describe the content of the page appears here.">`

- The HTML meta tag for title:
  `<title>This is the title of the page</title>`

- The HTML meta tag for description:
  `<meta name="description" content="A blurb to describe the content of the page appears here."/>`
How do I write appropriate titles and descriptions?

The title and description that you feature in the metadata for your resources will display in search results on Healthdirect Australia websites (see page 2).

If the titles and descriptions are accurate and succinct, your resources are more likely to appear in relevant search results. Users will also find it easier to browse and evaluate the results.

In terms of implementing metadata, there is no set length for titles and descriptions. However, Healthdirect Australia recommends titles should be up to 60 characters and descriptions should be 160 characters. This ensures the whole title and description is seen and is not cut off by the search engine. This also enables the user to identify what the page is about quickly.

Writing an effective title
Ensure that each page/resource has a unique and informative title. Where possible, this should be the same as the heading published on the page. Try to avoid page names such as ‘Home’ for the homepage, aim to include the best key words that relate to the content while keeping it short and to the point. Avoid jokes or puns in titles. Also avoid having the same title repeated across different pages.

Writing an effective description
Ensure that each page/resource has a unique and informative description. The description should elaborate on the title and provide a reasonable expectation of what the user will find by clicking through to the resource.

What will happen if we are unable to implement metadata?

For a resource to be harvested it must meet the minimum requirement for metadata. This means there must be a Title field expressed in either DC metadata or HTML meta tags. If your organisation is an approved partner with online resources that do not comply with the minimum requirement Healthdirect Australia may, at its discretion, agree to manage a small number of resources manually. This would be viewed as a temporary measure till such time as metadata can be implemented.

Metadata compliance does not affect the publication of your partner profile page.

Should you require further information or support, please notify your allocated partner manager who can arrange to have our information manager talk with you and/or your developer.