



## **Australian Health Ministers' Conference**

### **First step taken towards national e-health system**

13 July 2009

National consultations are set to begin on the legislative framework to underpin the governance, privacy and agreed uses for national healthcare identifier numbers essential to a secure national e-health system.

Healthcare Identifiers are unique numbers that will be given to all healthcare providers, healthcare centres and healthcare consumers. These unique numbers will provide a new level of confidence when communicating patient information between the myriad of private and government healthcare providers and systems.

To date there has been no single method of accurately and reliably identifying the patient receiving healthcare, the healthcare providers or the organisations managing care.

Mismatching of patients with their records and medical results is a documented problem for the health system. There is a clear link between avoidable patient deaths and poor medical records management.

All Australian residents will be allocated an Individual Healthcare Identifier (IHI) to support better communication between healthcare providers involved in patient treatment – but no patient will be forced to use it to access any health service.

The IHI service will be managed initially by Medicare Australia – a trusted and secure provider of dedicated health related services. This will be separate to its funding and claims functions. The IHI will not replace a patient's Medicare number, which is used for claiming government healthcare benefits.

The IHI service will hold only enough information to clearly identify the person. No clinical information or medical records will be stored in the IHI service and an IHI will not need to be declared for an individual to receive healthcare

The Australian Health Ministers' Conference asked for consultations to be held so that a broad range of perspectives can contribute to making the legislation robust and effective – balancing the privacy of personal information with the healthcare benefits that can be gained through better sharing of health information.

Consultations with key industry stakeholders will be held during July and a discussion paper detailing the legislative framework will be available online from 13 July to allow broad community input.

The consultations on the drafting of legislation build on earlier consultations with key stakeholders about the recommendations in the Australian Law Reform Commission's report on its review of Australian privacy laws, including health privacy protections.

The Australian Health Ministers' Conference believes strong privacy protection for patient health information is fundamental to delivering high quality individual and public health outcomes.

The discussion paper can be accessed online at [www.health.gov.au/eHealth/consultation](http://www.health.gov.au/eHealth/consultation) from 13 July.

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