



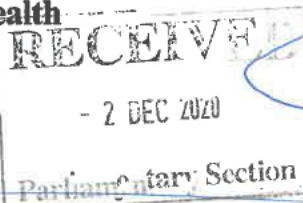
Australian Government
Department of Health

**Department Initiated
Information Brief**

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Version (1)

Date sent to MO: 30/11/20



To: Minister Hunt

subject: **EVALUATION OF THE OPERATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF COVIDSAFE AND THE NATIONAL COVIDSAFE DATASTORE**

Minister Hunt			
Signed		Date: 1 / 12 / 2020	
Comments:			
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Key Issues:

- The *Privacy Act 1988*, as amended by the *Privacy Amendment (Public Health Contact Information) Act 2020*, requires that you table a report on the "operation and effectiveness of COVIDSafe and the National COVIDSafe Data Store":
 - 94ZA(1) The Health Minister must as soon as practicable, after the six month period, cause a report to be prepared;
 - 94ZA(3) The report is to be laid before Parliament within 15 sitting days after the completion of the preparation of the (final) report.
- The COVIDSafe app was launched on 26 April 2020 while the Privacy Act amendments commenced on 16 May 2020.
- For the purposes of the first report, the period to be reported on will be from 16 May 2020 to 15 November 2020.

4. The Department has engaged an Australian company, Abt Associates, to perform an independent evaluation of the operation and effectiveness of COVIDSafe and the National COVIDSafe Data Store. Abt Associates will be partnering with Bdna who will provide input to the technology components of the evaluation.
5. The evaluation is scheduled to be conducted over 11 weeks, and commenced September 2020, with Abt due to provide a draft report to the Department in early December 2020.
6. The evaluation will (in part) interview state and territory personnel directly involved in COVID-19 contact tracing, as well as Department of Health and DTA staff.
7. The evaluation will focus on three evaluation and seven technology domains. The evaluation domains are:
 - **Appropriateness:** which includes the design, if it was fit for purpose, is working as expected and the uptake of the application. It will also assess the app (and datastore) to determine if was an appropriate response for its policy intent;
 - **Implementation:** barriers and enablers for use, ease of use, process used to assist manual tracers, effectiveness of using datastore information, access, utilisation and the reduction in manual contact tracing effort.
 - **Efficiency:** cost-efficiency of program compared to no application and other comparable applications (pending the availability of international data). This will also include assessing the app and datastore, to determine the extent to which it meets requirements efficiently, and is cost-effective.
8. Abt Associates advise that initial findings are not particularly positive against the above criteria, based on quantitative data and interviews with state and territory Public Health Officers.
9. This aligns with preliminary findings from the NSW Ministry of Health's evaluation of the app, to be presented to the Public Health Association of Australia conference on 8-10 December, which suggests a more targeted use of the app, for example in situations where a case is unable to give a comprehensive and reliable exposure history, or when customer record keeping at exposure sites is lacking.
10. Abt has said it will reflect on the rapid implementation of the app and the constraints imposed by privacy requirements in the context of rapidly evolving understanding of the virus.
11. The evaluation will emphasise lessons for future optimisation of the app and discuss examples of other solutions implemented internationally, and possible development paths (as discussed through state and territory interviews).
12. The evaluation will also provide an area on improvements that have already been made to the app (including the Portal and system management) and planned future improvements.
13. At the same time, the Department has also engaged Maddocks to conduct an updated or supplementary Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) for COVIDSafe, and will ensure that the PIA and Departmental response are completed by early December 2020.

14. The Department is working closely with the Digital Transformation Agency with respect to the above evaluations/assessments, and their input will be sought throughout the process.
15. The Department will draw from the above evaluations/assessments and intends to develop a draft report to you by early February 2021, so that the final report can be tabled in late February 2021.

Background:

16. Abt & associates is a data-driven global business with a mission to improve the lives of people worldwide, with offices in Brisbane and Canberra, and 3600 staff across the world. Abt has knowledge of the Australian health system, with a highly experienced team in the delivery and management of complex and multi-jurisdictional health programs. For this evaluation, Abt has teamed up with Bdna, who recently partnered with the Gold Coast University Hospital to deliver a contact tracing solution for COVID-19 and other communicable diseases using cloud platform infrastructure.
17. Abt is exploring the effectiveness of the COVIDSafe 'system' (comprising the App, the Datastore and the health portal) by exploring the three domains of, appropriateness, implementation and efficiency.
18. Bdna will conduct a technical assessment including an assessment of international benchmarks and technological options for future improvements, against the following domains:

Purpose: The purpose of the COVIDSafe application and national datastore, including the collection and analysis of data and methodologies supports best practice.

Usability: The COVIDSafe application and national datastore should be intuitive and simple to use for both the consumer and the contact tracer respectively.

Information accuracy: COVIDSafe application and national datastore information should be valid and reliable. Data provided to the contact tracer should be current and accurate. Evidence to this effect should be presented. Feedback data to the COVIDSafe consumer should be considered.

Organisational attributes: The COVIDSafe consumer is aware of how the application was developed, funded and other endorsements.

Reputation and transparency: Data collected from the COVIDSafe consumer should be fit for purpose and as little as needed

Comparison and opportunities: A summary of international experience and current technological developments of contact tracing technologies that can be leveraged to improve how COVIDSafe and the national datastore contribute to the effort of contact tracers.

Value for money: What are the barriers and pre-conditions for the COVIDSafe application to optimise the coverage of the manual contact tracing processes and contribute to Australia's successful management of COVID-19.