



**Australian
Privacy**

Enquiries For This Release to:

Juanita Fernando
Chair, Health SubCommittee
Australian Privacy Foundation
Tel: 0408131535
Board6@privacy.org.au
<http://www.privacy.org.au>

Public Statement

The Health Identifier Bill - another unnecessary threat to our privacy?

Amidst all the current fuss about networked privacy problems, consumers can't afford to overlook the Health Identifier (HI) Bill currently before the Senate.

If this law is passed, every piece of information health authorities know about you can be linked together by a single number, without real safeguards against deliberate or accidental abuse.

- **The necessary precautions have not been taken:** there is no agreed national framework for Electronic Health Record (EHR) system privacy and security, no big picture design of the EHR system connections enabled by the HI so you can tell where the risks are, and no word on the Australian Law Reform Commission's recommended changes to health privacy law; indeed they have been pushed onto the back burner.
- The HI Bill instead authorises health services to index all of your health information, enabling 600,000 health workers across Australia, and an unknown number of organisations, to use and disclose it, **whether you want them to or not**. The recently announced personal health record will apparently not change this.
- Have you ever used medication for a mild bout of depression, taken Viagra, or had an STD? Such sensitive information is already accidentally exposed all too often. Can you imagine the damage to public and private health once the **inevitable scandals from improper disclosures under a half-planned national scheme** begin to roll out, as patients start to doubt and distrust the confidentiality of their medical records that used to be relatively safe with their doctor and hospital, and become more reluctant to be frank about their health symptoms for fear of disclosure?
- **You won't even be able to verify your own information** on the UHI system, which may be incorrect or incomplete, without working through administrative staff.

- **What's less well known:** a centralised national Unique Healthcare Identifier (UHI) would contribute nothing essential to eHealth systems, or to the patient care benefits linked to an EHR. The better alternative, far safer 'federated' eHealth systems in Western Australia, Victoria and Queensland work now, without the need for a national HI; and they get the balance between convenience, clinical needs, privacy and security about right.

The choice is simple: do we want the federal government to number us and possess the key to all of our electronic health records, without properly addressing the obvious privacy problems, or would we prefer to control who we trust with the key?

For further information see the APF eHealth Data and Health Identifiers policy (<http://www.privacy.org.au/Papers/eHealth-Policy-090828.pdf>) and the eHealth Care Data Breach Statement (<http://www.privacy.org.au/Papers/eHealth-DataBreach-090828.pdf>)