



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Health and Ageing**

Ms Juanita Fernando  
Chair, Health Sub Committee  
Australian Privacy Foundation  
GPO Box 1196  
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Ms Fernando,

Thank you for your letter of 22 January 2010, to the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon. Nicola Roxon MP, concerning recent media reports about the Healthcare Identifiers Service and the impact on the delivery of pseudonymous healthcare services. The Minister has asked me to respond on her behalf.

Healthcare identifiers are unique numbers which will be assigned to individual healthcare consumers, healthcare providers and provider organisations.

In November 2008, the Council of Australian Governments agreed that all individuals receiving healthcare in Australia will be assigned a healthcare identifier to support better management of patient information and communication between healthcare providers involved in patient treatment.

A healthcare identifier will be automatically assigned to individuals enrolled in the Medicare program run by Medicare Australia and to those who have a Department of Veterans' Affairs treatment card. Individuals who do not receive a healthcare identifier through these processes will be assigned a temporary (unverified) number when presenting to a participating healthcare provider for treatment. A temporary number can be verified where the individual provides demographic information to Medicare Australia (as the Service Operator) confirming their identity.

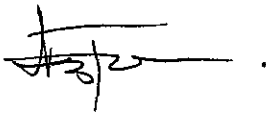
There may be some circumstances where individuals may wish to access health services using a pseudonym. These processes are supported by the existing privacy framework for the appropriate handling of health information and will not be affected by the introduction of healthcare identifiers.

There are a number of ways in which individuals can currently receive healthcare using a pseudonym. Medicare Australia has operational arrangements in place which allow for an individual's preferred name to be recorded and listed on their Medicare card. Certain information such as evidence that an individual is known in the community by the preferred name may be required to support this process.

These arrangements will be leveraged for the purposes of the Healthcare Identifiers Service and will allow individuals to obtain healthcare services under their preferred name.

In addition, where an individual chooses to obtain a healthcare service under a pseudonym which has not been recorded by Medicare Australia as their preferred name, their healthcare identifier will not be used for that particular healthcare service. Healthcare will not be denied to the individual where a healthcare identifier is unavailable.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Liz Forman', written over a horizontal line.

Liz Forman  
Assistant Secretary  
eHealth Branch  
9 February 2010