



**Australian
Privacy
Foundation**

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MEDIA RELEASE. NEW EVIDENCE: THE HEALTH IDENTIFIERS BILL

“We find it appalling that the national government has offered no coherent analysis, architecture or governance framework for the Health Identifiers Bill currently before the Senate”, says Chair of the Health Sub Committee, Dr Juanita Fernando. She continues, “The evidence suggests that some health authorities may actually be misinforming Australian consumers and patients as well. “

“We are concerned by government efforts to introduce a national identification scheme linked to improved health outcomes for patients”, says Dr Fernando.

“The recent *Healthcare Identifiers Service Implementation Approach: The right information at the at right place, at the right time* v1.0 document, drafted by the National E-Health Authority (NEHTA), suggests Australian health authorities will adopt a national health identifier plan that is similar to that used in the UK. Indeed, as with the UK study, the document also refers to a so-called ‘tipping point’. UK citizens can opt out of the NHS plan whereas Australians will never be permitted to opt out of the Healthcare Identifiers Service”.

1. The UK report highlights the lack of evidence to support alleged benefits linked to Health Identifiers (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/scriefullreport.pdf>).

2. The UK report shows that millions of citizens were unaware that their medical records are being uploaded to the online Summary Care Record system (<http://www.ihealthbeat.org/articles/2010/6/17/report-millions-of-uk-residents-unaware-of-online-ehr-postings.aspx>).

Dr. Fernando continues, “We have warned that the first time many Australians will be aware they have been assigned an identification number is when they visit the doctor's office or Medicare and a staff member at the service counter asks the patient to confirm identifying information (<http://www.privacy.org.au/Papers/Hi-Senate-100304.pdf>). The UK evidence supports APF warnings”.

3. As leading Australian health informatician, Professor Enrico Coiera, recently pointed out in the context of health IT “The news from the UK ... is that large scale IT programs should never be managed by government.” (<http://aushealthit.blogspot.com/2010/05/professor-enrico-coiera-spoke-on-e.html>).

The lead author of the UK report, Trish Greenhalgh, is now calling for “frank and open debate” to re-evaluate the online health database (<http://www.ihealthbeat.org/articles/2010/6/17/report-millions-of-uk-residents-unaware-of-online-ehr-postings.aspx>).

“We have been calling on governments for this debate in Australia for more than a year without success. Yet the Health Identifier Bill is due to become law soon, with numbers being allocated to Australian citizens from July 1, 2010”, says Dr Fernando. “When will the farce end?”