



**Australian
Privacy
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MEDIA RELEASE

Health Minister's One Big Database One Bad Idea

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"Public health programs to tackle the spread of disease could be undermined by the Government's blatant disregard for privacy," warned Australian Privacy Foundation Chair, Anna Johnston, today.

"Centralising every Australian's health records onto one giant database run by the Government might be Tony Abbott's idea of a whizbang way to control disease, but it would undermine the very health improvements he is trying to promote", she said.

The Australian Privacy Foundation, the leading non-government organisation dedicated to protecting the privacy rights of Australians, was today responding to a number of statements recently made by the Minister for Health.

"Tony Abbott has apparently said he sees no reason why the health records of all Australians should not be held on a central database," said Ms Johnston today.

"We can give Tony three reasons why this *Big Brother* approach to our health records is bad news," she said.

"One - the dangers of a centralised database include hacking and unauthorised use. Everything from the Pentagon to Paris Hilton's address book has been hacked into in recent years. No system is 100% secure," said Ms Johnston.

"Two – the ID numbers used for health records are more likely to become all-purpose identity numbers. Joe Hockey has already suggested the planned unique patient number could also be used by Centrelink and other government departments", said Ms Johnston.

"And three - a centralised repository of health information will tempt other people to use the information for unrelated purposes. Your insurance company or potential employer will no doubt insist on seeing your complete health record before you get that life policy or new job", she said.

"The resulting loss of trust in the privacy and security of our health information will dissuade many people from seeking treatment for conditions which carry social stigma or the risk of discrimination", said Ms Johnston.

"If the Minister for Health cannot see why creating a single national database of every person's health records is a problem, he should look at his own media releases for an answer", said Ms Johnston.

"Tony Abbott recently announced a plan to spend \$12.5 million on tackling chlamydia. Stopping the spread of sexually transmissible infections is an important goal, but the prospect of having the results recorded forever on a Government database could be enough to dissuade anyone from being tested", she said.

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