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Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

10 February 2010

E-Health Foundations to be Laid

Today the Rudd Government has introduced legislation that lays the foundations for a future secure electronic health (e-health) system.

Today's legislation is an important part of the Rudd Government's reform agenda. Without healthcare identifiers there cannot be an integrated, consistent, e-health system in Australia.

The legislation, the *Healthcare Identifiers Bill*, allows for a unique 16 digit number to be created for every Australian and all health care providers by the middle of this year. The unique healthcare identifiers will provide a new level of confidence and accuracy – for both consumers and providers – for electronic communication of patient information between providers involved in patient care.

Individual Healthcare Identifier' or IHI's, will be provided to all individuals, in addition to Medicare numbers, as a further step to ensure the privacy and security of an e-health system.

IHI's are essential in creating a single process to accurately and consistently identify patients and healthcare providers.

For example, when a patient visits their GP for a checkup, the identifying number on their health record is different to the number at the pharmacy where they have their prescription filled or the pathology laboratory where they have their blood tests done.

The establishment of IHIs spells the end of this fragmented approach which causes inaccuracies and inefficiencies in the health system and puts patients at a higher risk of mismatched records and duplicate medical tests.

The Health and Hospital's Reform Commission found that the availability of person-controlled individual electronic health records 'one of the most important opportunities to improve the quality and safety of health care, reduce waste and inefficiency, and improve continuity and health outcomes for patients'.

The Rudd Government believes that e-health is a key part of reforming the health system by improving patient care and cutting inefficiency. The Government has backed its commitment to e-health by contributing to \$218 million via COAG to fund the National E-Health Transition Authority to 2012.

Minor amendments will also be made to the Privacy Act to ensure that the Federal Privacy Commissioner can act against any individual or company that misuses an individual's healthcare identifier. The expansion of the Privacy Commissioner's powers is a further example of the Government's determination to ensure the privacy and security of an e-health system.

For all media inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220.