



## **The Importance of Community Engagement Around Health Information Sharing**

### **Media Release**

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The importance of community engagement around the sharing of personal health information was reinforced at an event in Wellington which brought together over 40 health consumer representatives and advocates from across New Zealand.

The event hosted by the Health Information Strategy Action Committee (HISAC), was supported and jointly sponsored by the Privacy Commissioner, Health and Disability Commissioner and the Ministry of Health.

HISAC Chair Mr Paul Cressey acknowledged that historically engagement with the community about use of and access to personal health information had not been strong.

“We are committed to changing this. This was not a one-off event. HISAC see this as the beginning of ongoing dialogue and we were gratified by the strong attendance and the active participation by delegates.” Mr Cressey said.

The Health Information Strategy for New Zealand, launched in 2005, signals a future environment of increased information sharing among health care providers to improve patient outcomes. Any move towards increased sharing of personal health information can give rise to concerns about privacy.

“We envisage an environment where the richest information is collected by health care providers to support episodes of care, and appropriate sub-sets of information, which is generally anonymised, is provided regionally or nationally for administrative, funding and planning, and audit and research purposes”, said Mr Cressey.

We have to engage with consumers to ensure they understand what personal health information is collected by health care providers and the circumstances in which that information may be shared with others in the health sector.

HISAC, subsequent to the Consumer Forum, has agreed:

- To reconvene the delegates of the Consumer Forum within 6 months.

- To expedite the appointment of a consumer representative to the Health Information Strategy Action Committee and to other groups and sub-committees established by HISAC.
- To improve communications to the community around sharing personal health information and to seek the views of the Consumer Forum delegates about how best to achieve that.

Mr Cressey stressed “one thing remains paramount and that is information should primarily be gathered and shared to improve the health and independence of New Zealanders.”

A key theme to emerge from the Forum was the need to build the confidence and trust of consumers. A key aspect of that is to ensure the health sector complies with the Health Information Privacy Code when personal health information is being collected and shared.

“HISAC remains committed to ensuring privacy is paramount in all its work looking to the future information and technology environment in the health sector in New Zealand.” Mr Cressey said.

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## **Background**

### What is HISAC and what is its role?

The Health Information Strategic Action Committee was established by the Minister of Health in August 2005 to provide governance of, oversight of, and leadership for the implementation of the Health Information Strategy for New Zealand 2005.

### The Health Information Strategy for New Zealand

The Health Information Strategy for New Zealand (HIS-NZ) presents a sector-wide business strategy for the health and disability sector to develop and supply innovative health information systems. The success of HIS-NZ relies on the co-operation and collaboration of the entire health sector and has three broad objectives:

- to increase participation through networking and sharing of health information across the sector
- to support collaboration across providers in the care of consumers
- to improve targeting through improved decision-making.

### Information sharing in the New Zealand health sector

The Health Information Strategy for New Zealand (HIS-NZ) expressly discounts the creation of a single national repository of personally identifiable health information or a single national Electronic Health Record.

However, the strategy does signal increased information sharing amongst health providers involved in episodes of care. The strategy is also concerned with information that is used for population health, the funding, and planning of health services, and research purposes.