

26 September 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Committee Secretary

**Submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee
in relation to the My Health Record system**

Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia (R&DVSA) endorse the submission made by the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response (GCDVIR) to the above inquiry.

R&DVSA is a non-government organisation that provides a range of counselling services to people whose lives have been impacted by sexual, family or domestic violence and their supporters.

In line with GCDVIR's submission, we hold serious concerns that the My Health Record system may compromise the safety and wellbeing of women and children who are experiencing family violence.

In particular, we share concerns that a perpetrator may use the My Health Record system to gain unauthorised access to the following kinds of sensitive information about his partner:

- Sensitive health information, for example information about her sexual history, sexual health, pregnancy status, or mental health;
- Her current location;
- Any disclosures she has made to health practitioners about the violence; or
- Any support she has sought in relation to the violence.

Unauthorised access by a perpetrator may occur in one of several ways. The perpetrator may have access to his partner or children's log in details. He may be a health practitioner himself and have direct access to the system, or have a family member or friend who is a health practitioner and is willing to access the system on his behalf. Alternatively, he may have access to sufficient personal information about his partner or children in order to opt-in to the system on their behalf, without either their consent or knowledge.

Where unauthorised access by a perpetrator occurs, there is a significant risk this may facilitate the continuation or escalation of family violence.

In the context of a family law matter, there is a specific risk that a perpetrator may exploit sensitive health information in order to coerce their partner to consent to an unsafe parenting arrangement. For example, a perpetrator may threaten to expose their partner's history of mental health or drug and alcohol issues to the court unless their partner agrees to unsupervised contact with the children.

In response to these privacy and security concerns, there is a further risk that people experiencing family violence may be afraid to access the health services they require.

For these reasons, R&DVSA believe the proposed My Health System presents an unacceptable safety risk for women and children experiencing violence. We urge that the Government suspend the system until these privacy concerns are addressed. Further, we recommend that any further reform must be guided by consultation with family and domestic violence experts, service providers and people who have experienced family violence themselves.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please do not hesitate to contact me on (02) 8585 0348 or by email at kajhalm@rape-dvservices.org.au.

Yours faithfully,

Kajhal McIntyre
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