



Where can I get more information?

If you would like more information about Department of Health data collections or you have a comment or complaint concerning the use of your personal information, please visit the web page:

Information About Health Data
www.health.wa.gov.au/healthdata

Or telephone:

Information Planning
Information Collection and Management
Department of Health
Phone (08) 9222 4222

Information about your Health Data



Did you know?

Important health facts about the health of Western Australians can be worked out thanks to the collection of health information. For example:

- Coronary heart disease was responsible for approximately one in every five deaths reported throughout WA in 2003.
- Smoking is the principal cause of preventable death in WA.
- 70% of neural tube birth defects, such as Spina Bifida, can be prevented if the mother takes adequate folate.
- Australia has the highest incidence of skin cancer in the world. Queensland has the highest incidence, followed by WA.



The data collections

The Department of Health WA collects health information to find out about the health of Western Australians. Information is collected about the diagnosis and treatment of patients treated in hospitals in WA and about important things such as cancer, mental illness, and the health of mothers and babies.

The data has been collected for many years and it is now possible to identify trends in health over many years. The data is used to help improve the health of Western Australians and the quality of health care.

How is information collected?

When you receive care from a health service, information is collected about you, your health condition and the health care you receive. Your health service provider is required to provide the Department of Health with a summary of this information. For example, for a hospital visit, the summary includes the number of days in hospital and a code for the reason for your stay. It also includes your name and address. This summary is not the same as the detailed clinical record that is used for your treatment at a health service.

Most of the information collected by the Department of Health comes from hospitals. Your general practitioner and pathologist provide information for compulsory reporting, such as for infectious diseases and cancer.

Legal obligations

Hospitals and health providers have to report information to the Department of Health under laws such as the *Health Act* and the *Hospital and*

Health Services Act. This is to make sure that the data is complete and reliable.

How is the information used?

The information held about you in the Department of Health is not used for your individual health care but is used to improve the health of all Western Australians.

Health information is used for planning health services. For example, the data is used to decide where new hospitals are needed or where dialysis services should be provided. It is also used to identify the best methods of care such as the best way to provide care for patients with cancer. The Department of Health WA also reports statistical information to the Commonwealth Government. This information is required for WA to receive Commonwealth funding.

Research

Researchers in the Department of Health, hospitals and universities use the data for health-related research. Information gathered over many years is used to study the effects of disease and treatment on the whole population of Western Australia. An Ethics Committee, which includes community members, must approve all research. Researchers must follow strict conditions to keep the information secure and confidential. Research reports never identify individual patients unless the patient agrees.

Protecting privacy

The Department of Health is committed to protecting the privacy of the information in the data collections. Code numbers are used to link the records about each person so that



connections can be made between different health conditions without identifying people. As much identifying information as possible is removed before any analysis is done. Computer programs are used to analyse the data.

Individual patients cannot be identified in any published reports because the reports only use total numbers, such as the number of patients with a particular disease.

How is information kept?

The information is kept in separate collections in high security locations. Access is limited to a small number of authorised staff. The best electronic security systems are used to protect the collections. Staff with access to personal health information have a legal duty to protect the confidentiality of the information.