

MEDIA RELEASE

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BROAD SUPPORT FOR 12-MONTH EXTENSION TO OPT-OUT PERIOD FOR 'MY HEALTH RECORD'

The Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL) has joined a growing chorus of national peak community groups supporting Senate moves to extend the opt-out period for the 'My Health Record' by 12 months. The deadline to opt-out is currently tomorrow - but the recommended deadline extension – along with a host of other recommendations from a recent Senate Committee report, remain unaddressed.

"My Health Record is a new online summary of your key health information. The idea being that whether you're visiting a GP for a check-up - or in an emergency room following an accident and are unable to talk - healthcare providers involved in your care will be able to access important health information about things like allergies, medicines you are taking etc. that are relevant to your care. This will be especially useful for groups such as children and older people who may have impaired comprehension and/or communication. The idea is that it will help make sure that people get the right treatment and avoidable mistakes are prevented in healthcare settings," said Melanie Walker, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of AIVL.

"While the concept is sound, AIVL's concerns are focused on the potential for unintended consequences for people who use drugs. People who use drugs are already often confronted with stigma and discrimination in healthcare settings. The implementation of *My Health Record* as it currently stands will mean that for many people, there will be a whole host of people in healthcare settings who will have access to a lot more information than previously. While in some cases this may be useful, there are many instances in which access to additional information may not be helpful and may indeed contribute to experiences of stigma and discrimination by people.

"For instance, does a podiatrist need to know that a patient had a previous admission to a drug treatment program? Such information is not likely to add value to the therapeutic intervention, but the knowledge of the disclosure could result in people not wanting to access services at all for fear of discriminatory treatment. AIVL is worried that this could result in people who use drugs withdrawing from engagement with the health system and thereby experiencing more negative health outcomes over time.

"As it currently stands, the proposed system also allows for information on individual My Health Records to be given to law enforcement agencies and other Government bodies without consent. There are also particular concerns for people affected by family or domestic violence.

"A 12-month extension to the opt-out deadline – which is currently tomorrow – would allow time for the Government to respond to the recommendations of the recent Senate Committee report to ensure that the benefits of the new initiative are maximised and potential unintended consequences adequately addressed," said Ms Walker.

AIVL is the national organisation representing people who use/have used illicit drugs and is the peak body for the state and territory peer-based drug user organisations.

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