

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT FACT SHEET 4: Your medical privacy

Health professionals can have a lot of sensitive information about you. This may include your medical history, any medications you take, your sexual relationships, any procedures you have had, as well as your contact and insurance details.

Australia has strict **privacy laws** to protect your information.



What is doctor-patient confidentiality?

When you share information with a health professional, they are **legally required** to protect your confidentiality, by keeping your information **safe and private**. This means that they **cannot share** any personal or health information about you with others - **not family members, partners, universities, employers or the immigration department**. Unless there is a serious safety risk, any exceptions to this will be discussed with you first.

There are **serious penalties** for health workers who break these privacy laws. If you are concerned about how your information has been treated, contact the **Health Services Commissioner**.

Consenting to medical procedures

In Australia, you need to provide **informed consent** before having any medical treatment. This means you voluntarily **agree** to a medical treatment, after you have been **given full information** about the treatment and understand the **risks and benefits**.

In most cases, only **you** can consent to the medical procedure. You do not need to be a certain age, have parental permission or be married, and **no one else can give consent on your behalf**. This applies to medical services such as contraception, pregnancy termination, STI testing or treatment.

Partner notification

There are a few circumstances where health professionals will need to contact your sexual partner(s), such as when you have certain STIs. This is because it's important to let your partner(s) know so they can be treated, and you are not infected again. This process, called 'partner notification' is needed to prevent the spread of STIs in the community.

'Partner notification' can be done **anonymously**, to protect your confidentiality and privacy. Your healthcare professional can notify your partner(s) by phone or email, and your patient details **will not be shared** with them.

For help with partner notification, go to [Let Them Know](#) for information, conversation examples and an anonymous SMS and email partner notification service.

Always ask

If you have any concerns around your privacy and medical information, it's best to ask the health service or your insurance provider directly. For example, you can:

- Ask your insurance provider if anyone else will be able to that you went to a GP
- Ask your GP what details will be sent to your private health insurance company