



Our Ref: 4507-04

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Dear Ms Ho

## **PRIVACY AND RESPONSIBLE INFORMATION SHARING DISCUSSION PAPER**

Thank you for the invitation to provide input on the Privacy and Responsible Information Sharing Discussion Paper.

As a safeguard to the independence of my function as an Officer of the Parliament, it is not my usual practice to comment on the development of policy or legislation. I note, however, that the Discussion Paper refers to 3 of my reports that deal with issues of information sharing. I would also like to direct you to a further 2 of my most recent (2019) reports which may be relevant to your considerations: [Access to State-Managed Adult Mental Health Services](#) and our [Analysis of the Department of Health's Data Relating to State-Managed Adult Mental Health Services from 2013 to 2017](#).

The first audit identified gaps in the delivery of adult State-managed mental health services that left mental health sufferers often reliant on less suitable and higher cost care. We linked instances of care from in-patient, Emergency Department, and community treatment services to create anonymised patient journeys for individuals accessing the State's mental health services over a 5-year period.

Our audit team's extensive data analytics exercise, further detailed in the second report, highlighted the benefits of data linkage and provided a proof of concept to WA Health. The exercise did have some limitations in terms of providing a complete picture, for instance we did not have access to data from non-governmental organisations or primary care (GP) services.

While I will not provide direct feedback, my Office's work reinforces the importance of appropriate safeguarding of personal and confidential data in all aspects of government data storage and handling, supported by a robust information classification system. Therefore, I will follow with interest the development of legislation reflecting the Government's commitment to protecting individual privacy, while also exploring the potential for data sharing to improve public sector service delivery.

Yours sincerely

CAROLINE SPENCER  
AUDITOR GENERAL  
30 October 2019