The Tasmanian Department of Health (the Department) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the current review of the [National Health Privacy Rules 2018](https://www.oaic.gov.au/engage-with-us/consultations/national-health-privacy-rules-2018-review/) that set out how Australian Government agencies may use, store, disclose and link Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) and Pharmaceutical Benefits Schedule (PBS) claims information. The Department supports any efforts that enable modernisation of government information policy and that will streamline or simplify the process to access and use MBS and PBS data.

The MBS and PBS datasets are widely recognised as containing data valuable for analyses that can provide insights into trends in the health and wellbeing of Australian communities and thus offer significant potential for improved planning in health service delivery. It is also recognised that the personally identifiable data they contain are highly sensitive and protection from inappropriate access or use is paramount.

In the last five years there have been two significant reports – the Productivity Commission’s (2017) *Data Availability and Use* and the Senate Select Committee on Health’s (2016) *Big Health Data: Australia’s Big Potential* – which highlighted the importance of improving access to health data sets. These reports, alongside the *Data Availability and Transparency Bill 2020* and this review of the Rules, provide a linkage to the current National Health Reform Agreement’s focus on Enhanced Health Data and are welcome. It is widely acknowledged that the legal, policy and governance environment surrounding data availability, use and reuse in Australia is complex. It is hoped this review will further improve safe access to these data by reducing the complexity in the authorisation of information sharing. Ideally any changes that can be made to the Rules to enable Tasmania to access de-identified MBS and PBS data at SA2 level (ABS) for health planning, policy development and evaluation and leading to better public health services are encouraged.

The Department would also like to see changes to the Rules that would enable the Australian Government to more easily assist Tasmania access MBS and PBS data to research the impact of COVID-19 on the health system and to evaluate novel responses to this emergency that could provide a broader benefit to Tasmanians. However, it is noted that access to these data has been subject to the application of various policies and protocols by the Australian Government. For this reason, Department’s position is that no additional security measures should be added to access MBS and PBS data beyond those covered in the Australian Government’s Protective Security Policy Framework, and the Information Security Manual.