



**Australian Government**

**Department of Health and Aged Care**

FOI reference: FOI 4874

Ms Bev D

Email: [foi+request-10963-689c9913@righttoknow.org.au](mailto:foi+request-10963-689c9913@righttoknow.org.au)

Dear Ms D

**Decision on your Freedom of Information Request**

I refer to your request of 12 December 2023, to the Department of Health and Aged Care (the department), seeking access under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Cth) (FOI Act) to:

*Correspondence, including briefs, emails and other documents between the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Office of the Minister for Health and Aged Care or the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Minister for Health and Aged Care regarding the following PHI circulars:*

- PHI 66/23 *Private Health Insurance (Medical Devices and Human Tissue Products) Rules (No. 2) 2023* [<https://www.health.gov.au/news/phi-circulars/phi-6623-private-health-insurance-medical-devices-and-human-tissue-products-rules-no-2-2023?language=en>]

- PHI 67/23 *New condition for surgical guides and biomodels listed on the Prescribed List* [<https://www.health.gov.au/news/phi-circulars/phi-6723-new-condition-for-surgical-guides-and-biomodels-listed-on-the-prescribed-list?language=en>]

- PHI 72/23 *Update on new condition for surgical guides and biomodels on the Prescribed List* [<https://www.health.gov.au/news/phi-circulars/phi-7223-update-on-new-condition-for-surgical-guides-and-biomodels-on-the-prescribed-list?language=en>]

- PHI 74/23 *Prescribed List – Private Health Insurance (Medical Devices and Human Tissue Products) Amendment Rules (No. 2) 2023* [<https://www.health.gov.au/news/phi-circulars/phi-7423-prescribed-list-private-health-insurance-medical-devices-and-human-tissue-products-amendment-rules-no-2-2023?language=en>]

### **Clarification / modification of scope of request**

On 19 December 2023, following consultation with you, you clarified that your request to the following:

*“For the 4 PHI Circulars listed above, I can confirm I am only seeking correspondence, including briefs, emails and other documents regarding surgical guides and biomodels.”*

### **FOI decision**

I am authorised under subsection 23(1) of the FOI Act to make decisions in relation to Freedom of Information requests. I am writing to notify you of my decision on your request.

I have identified three documents that are relevant to your request. These documents were in the possession of the department when your request was received.

I have decided to give access to all documents in part, subject to the deletion of exempt and irrelevant material.

A schedule setting out the documents relevant to your request, with my decision in relation to those documents, is at **ATTACHMENT A**.

My reasons for not providing access to material that has been deleted from the documents are set out in **ATTACHMENT B**.

### **Legislative provisions**

The FOI Act, including the provisions referred to in my decision, are available on the Federal Register of Legislation website: [www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A02562](http://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A02562).

The *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) (Privacy Act) can also be accessed from the Federal Register of Legislation website here: [www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A03712](http://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A03712).

### **Your review rights**

I have set out your review rights at **ATTACHMENT C**.

### **Publication**

Where I have decided to release documents to you, the department may also publish the released material on its Disclosure Log. The department will not publish personal or business affairs information where it would be unreasonable to do so.

For your reference the department's Disclosure Log can be found at: [www.health.gov.au/resources/foi-disclosure-log](http://www.health.gov.au/resources/foi-disclosure-log).

**Contacts**

If you require clarification of any matters discussed in this letter you can contact the FOI Section on (02) 6289 1666 or at [FOI@health.gov.au](mailto:FOI@health.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Rintoul". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dash at the end.

Andrew Rintoul  
A/g Assistant Secretary  
Prostheses Lists Reform Taskforce Branch  
Technology Assessment and Access Division  
23 January 2024

ATTACHMENT A.

SCHEDULE OF DOCUMENTS  
FOI 4874

Document	Pages	Date	Description	Decision on access <sup>1</sup>	Relevant provisions of FOI Act
1	3	26 October 2023	Correspondence	REI	s22 s47F
2	1	18 October 2023	Correspondence	REI	s22 s47F
3	5	30 October 2023	Ministerial submission MS23-001597	REI	s22 s47G

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<sup>1</sup> REI = Release with exempt information and irrelevant information deleted.

ATTACHMENT B.

REASONS FOR DECISION  
FOI 4874

1. Material taken into account

In making my decision, I had regard to the following:

- the FOI Act
- guidelines issued by the Australian Information Commissioner under section 93A of the FOI Act (FOI Guidelines)
- the terms of your FOI request as outlined above
- submissions from third parties consulted about documents which contain information concerning them
- the content of the documents sought, and
- advice from departmental officers with responsibility for matters relating to the documents sought.

2. Finding of facts and reasons for decision

My findings of fact and reasons for deciding that the exemptions identified in the schedule of documents apply to the parts of the documents are set out below.

3. Section 47F - Documents affecting personal privacy

Section 47F of the FOI Act provides that a document is conditionally exempt if its disclosure would involve the unreasonable disclosure of personal information about any person (including a deceased person).

Personal Information

Personal information has the same meaning as in the Privacy Act. Specifically, section 6 of the Privacy Act provides that *personal information* means information or an opinion about an identified individual, or an individual who is reasonably identifiable whether the information or opinion is true or not; and whether the information or opinion is recorded in a material form or not.

Paragraph 6.131 of the FOI Guidelines states that for particular information to be personal information, an individual must be identified or reasonably identifiable.

Paragraph 6.130 of the FOI Guidelines states that personal information can include a person's name, address, telephone number, date of birth, medical records, bank account details, taxation information and signature.

An individual is a natural person rather than a corporation, trust, body politic or incorporated association.

I am satisfied that parts of documents 1 and 2 marked 's47F' include personal information.

### Unreasonable Disclosure of Personal Information

Subsection 47F(2) of the FOI Act provides that in determining whether the disclosure would involve the unreasonable disclosure of personal information, I must have regard to the following matters:

- (a) the extent to which the information is well known
- (b) whether the person to whom the information relates is known to be (or to have been) associated with the matters dealt with in the document
- (c) the availability of the information from publicly accessible sources
- (d) any other matters that the agency or Minister considers relevant.

Paragraph 6.138 of the FOI Guidelines states that:

The personal privacy exemption is designed to prevent the unreasonable invasion of third parties' privacy. The test of 'unreasonableness' implies a need to balance the public interest in disclosure of government-held information and the private interest in the privacy of individuals. The test does not, however, amount to the public interest test of s 11A(5), which follows later in the decision making process. It is possible that the decision maker may need to consider one or more factors twice, once to determine if a projected effect is unreasonable and again when assessing the public interest balance.

I note that the AAT, in *Re Chandra and Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs [1984] AATA 437* at paragraph 259, stated that:

... whether a disclosure is 'unreasonable' requires ... a consideration of all the circumstances, including the nature of the information that would be disclosed, the circumstances in which the information was obtained, the likelihood of the information being information that the person concerned would not wish to have disclosed without consent, and whether the information has any current relevance ... it is also necessary in my view to take into consideration the public interest recognised by the Act in the disclosure of information ... and to weigh that interest in the balance against the public interest in protecting the personal privacy of a third party ...

Paragraphs 6.142 and 6.143 of the FOI Guidelines state:

6.142 Key factors for determining whether disclosure is unreasonable include:

- the author of the document is identifiable
- the documents contain third party personal information
- release of the documents would cause stress on the third party
- no public purpose would be achieved through release

6.143 As discussed in the leading s 47F IC review decision of 'FG' and National Archives of Australia [2015] AICmr 26, other factors considered to be relevant include:

- the nature, age and current relevance of the information
- any detriment that disclosure may cause to the person to whom the information relates

- any opposition to disclosure expressed or likely to be held by that person
- the circumstances of an agency's collection and use of the information
- the fact that the FOI Act does not control or restrict any subsequent use or dissemination of information released under the FOI Act
- any submission an FOI applicant chooses to make in support of their application as to their reasons for seeking access and their intended or likely use or dissemination of the information, and
- whether disclosure of the information might advance the public interest in government transparency and integrity

Paragraph 6.153 of the FOI Guidelines states:

Where public servants' personal information is included in a document because of their usual duties or responsibilities, it would not be unreasonable to disclose unless special circumstances existed. This is because the information would reveal only that the public servant was performing their public duties. Such information may often also be publicly available, such as on an agency website.

The document contains the personal information of ministerial office staff.

I am satisfied that the disclosure of personal information such as an individual's name and contact information contained within documents 1 and 2 would, in the circumstances, constitute an unreasonable disclosure of personal information for the following reasons:

- the individual whose personal information is contained in the document is identifiable
- release of this information would cause anxiety to the individual concerned
- no further public purpose would be achieved through the release of the personal information noting that the personal information is included in the document as a result of their employment circumstance
- the information is current and has not lost its sensitivity through the passage of time
- the placing of the personal information of individual who works for a Minister into the public domain has the potential to place the individual at risk of harassment, abuse, threats and intimidation. This would be detrimental to the individual concerned, and potentially also their families. Mitigating this risk is even more important with the prevalence of social media and technology allowing individual to be more easily identifiable and contactable in online environments
- the individual would not expect the information to be placed in the public domain, and detriment may be caused to the individual to whom the information relates, and
- the FOI Act does not control or restrict any subsequent use or dissemination of information released under the FOI Act.

For the reasons outlined above, I have decided that the parts of documents 1 and 2 marked 's47F' are conditionally exempt from disclosure under section 47F of the FOI Act.

Where a document is found to be conditionally exempt, the department must give access to that document unless access to the document at this time would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest. I have addressed the public interest considerations below.

#### **4. Section 47G - Business information**

Section 47G of the FOI Act provides that a document is conditionally exempt if its disclosure would disclose information concerning a person in respect of his or her business or professional affairs or concerning the business, commercial or financial affairs of an organisation or undertaking, in a case in which the disclosure of the information:

- (a) would, or could reasonably be expected to, unreasonably affect that person adversely in respect of his or her lawful business or professional affairs or that organisation or undertaking in respect of its lawful business, commercial or financial affairs; or
- (b) could reasonably be expected to prejudice the future supply of information to the Commonwealth or an agency for the purpose of the administration of a law of the Commonwealth or of a Territory or the administration of matters administered by an agency.

#### Business information

Paragraph 6.184 of the FOI Guidelines states that the conditionally exempt information must have some relevance to a person in respect of his or her business or professional affairs or to the business, commercial or financial affairs of an organisation or undertaking.

Paragraph 6.192 of the FOI Guidelines states that the use of the term 'business or professional affairs' distinguishes an individual's personal or private affairs and an organisation's internal affairs. The term 'business affairs' has been interpreted to mean 'the totality of the money-making affairs of an organisation or undertaking as distinct from its private or internal affairs'.

Paragraph 6.194 of the FOI Guidelines states that 'profession' is not static, and is clearly intended to cover the work activities of a person who is admitted to a recognised profession and who ordinarily offers professional services to the public for a fee.

The part of the document 3 marked 's47G' contains business affairs information that is relevant to the business, commercial or financial affairs of an organisation or undertaking. This information is relevant to the profitability and financial viability of an organisation or undertaking and does not relate to its private or internal affairs.

As such, I am satisfied that this information is business information.



### Unreasonable adverse effect of disclosure

Paragraph 6.187 of the FOI Guidelines states that the presence of 'unreasonably' in subsection 47G(1) implies a need to balance public and private interests. The public interest, or some aspect of it, will be one of the factors in determining whether the adverse effect of disclosure on a person in respect of his or her business affairs is unreasonable. I must therefore balance the public and private interest factors to decide whether disclosure is unreasonable for the purposes of paragraph 47G(1)(a); but this does not amount to the public interest test of subsection 11A(5) which follows later in the decision process.

Paragraph 6.188 of the FOI Guidelines goes on to state that the test of reasonableness applies not to the claim of harm but to the objective assessment of the expected adverse effect. I must balance the public interest against a private interest of the affected third parties, preserving the profitability of a business.

I am satisfied that the disclosure of the business affairs information would result in an adverse effect on the business, commercial or financial affairs of an organisation or undertaking. I have also had regard to the public and private interest factors, and I am satisfied that the preservation of the profitability and ongoing viability of the affected third party business outweighs the public interest in the disclosure of this information.

### Prejudice future supply of information

Paragraphs 6.198-6.200 of the FOI Guidelines state:

6.198 This limb of the conditional exemption comprises two parts:

- a reasonable expectation of a reduction in the quantity or quality of business affairs information to the government
- the reduction will prejudice the operations of the agency

6.199 There must be a reasonable likelihood that disclosure would result in a reduction in both the quantity and quality of business information flowing to the government. In some cases, disclosing the identity of the person providing the business information may be sufficient to prejudice the future supply of information. Disclosure of the person's identity may also be conditionally exempt under s 47F (personal privacy). In these cases, consideration should be given to whether the information may be disclosed without also disclosing the identity of the person supplying the information.

6.200 Where the business information in question can be obtained compulsorily, or is required for some benefit or grant, no claim of prejudice can be made. No prejudice will occur if the information in issue is routine or administrative (that is, generated as a matter of practice).

For the reasons outlined above, I have decided that the part of the document 3 marked 's47G' is conditionally exempt from disclosure under section 47G of the FOI Act.

Where a document is found to be conditionally exempt, the department must give access to that document unless access to the document at this time would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest. I have addressed the public interest considerations below.

## 5. Disclosure is not in the public interest

Pursuant to subsection 11A(5) of the FOI Act, the department must give access to conditionally exempt documents unless access to the documents at that time would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest. I have therefore considered whether disclosure of the documents would be contrary to the public interest.

Paragraph 6.5 of the FOI Guidelines states:

The public interest test is considered to be:

- something that is of serious concern or benefit to the public, not merely of individual interest
- not something of interest to the public, but in the interest of the public
- not a static concept, where it lies in a particular matter will often depend on a balancing of interests
- necessarily broad and non-specific and
- relates to matters of common concern or relevance to all members of the public, or a substantial section of the public.

### Factors favouring disclosure

Section 11B of the FOI Act provides that factors favouring access to documents in the public interest include whether access to the documents would do any of the following:

- promote the objects of the FOI Act (including all matters set out in sections 3 and 3A)
- inform debate on a matter of public importance
- promote effective oversight of public expenditure, or
- allow a person to access his or her own personal information.

Having regard to the above, I consider that disclosure of the conditionally exempt information at this time:

- would provide access to documents held by an agency of the Commonwealth which would promote the objects of the FOI Act by providing the Australian community with access to information held by the Australian Government.
- would not inform debate on a matter of public importance
- would not promote effective oversight of public expenditure, and
- would not allow you access to your own personal information.

### Factors weighing against disclosure

I consider that the following public interest factors weigh against disclosure of the conditionally exempt information at this time, on the basis that disclosure:

#### s47F

- could reasonably be expected to prejudice the protection of the relevant individual's right to personal privacy, noting that the substance of the document has been released to you and disclosure of the personal information would not provide you with any further insight into the workings of government
- would not achieve any public purpose and, on balance, would harm the individual's right to personal privacy.

#### s47G

- could reasonably be expected to prejudice the department's ability to obtain confidential information
- could reasonably be expected to prejudice an agency's ability to obtain similar information in the future

In making my decision, I have not taken into account any of the irrelevant factors set out in subsection 11B(4) of the FOI Act, which are:

- (a) access to the document could result in embarrassment to the Commonwealth Government, or cause a loss of confidence in the Commonwealth Government;
- (b) access to the document could result in any person misinterpreting or misunderstanding the document;
- (c) the author of the document was (or is) of high seniority in the agency to which the request for access to the document was made;
- (d) access to the document could result in confusion or unnecessary debate.

### Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, after weighing all public interest factors for and against disclosure, I have decided that, on balance, disclosure of the conditionally exemption information would be contrary to the public interest. I am satisfied that the benefit to the public resulting from disclosure is outweighed by the benefit to the public of withholding the information.

### **6. Section 22 - deletion of irrelevant and/or exempt material**

Section 22 of the FOI Act applies to documents containing exempt material (subparagraph (1)(a)(i)) and irrelevant information (subparagraph (1)(a)(ii)) and allows an agency to delete such material from a document.

I have deleted material in the documents which can reasonably be regarded as irrelevant to your request and prepared an edited copy for release. This information has been marked 's22' in the documents released to you.

The documents contain the names and telephone numbers of Department of Health and Aged Care employees and some duplication of documents. When your request was acknowledged on 13 December 2023, we notified you that this material would be considered irrelevant to the scope of your request unless you told us that you were seeking access to that material. On the basis that you did not notify us otherwise, this information has been deleted under section 22 of the FOI Act as outlined above.

As I have decided that some of the information in the documents released to you is exempt from disclosure, I have prepared an edited copy of the documents by deleting the exempt information from the documents under section 22 of the FOI Act as outlined above.

## ATTACHMENT C

### YOUR REVIEW RIGHTS

If you are dissatisfied with my decision, you may apply for a review.

#### Internal review

You can request internal review within 30 days of you receiving this decision. An internal review will be conducted by a different officer from the original decision maker.

No particular form is required to apply for review although it will assist your case to set out the grounds on which you believe that the original decision should be changed.

Applications for internal review can be made by:

Email: [FOI@health.gov.au](mailto:FOI@health.gov.au)

Mail: FOI Unit (MDP 516)  
Department of Health and Aged Care  
GPO Box 9848  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

If you choose to seek an internal review, you will also have a right to apply for Information Commissioner review (IC review) of the internal review decision once it has been provided to you.

#### Information Commissioner review or complaint

You also have the right to seek Information Commissioner (IC) review of this decision. For FOI applicants, an application for IC review must be made in writing within 60 days of the decision. For third parties who object to disclosure of their information, an application for IC review must be made in writing within 30 days of the decision.

If you are not satisfied with the way we have handled your FOI request, you can lodge a complaint with the OAIC. However, the OAIC suggests that complaints are made to the agency in the first instance.

While there is no particular form required to make a complaint to the OAIC, the complaint should be in writing and set out the reasons for why you are dissatisfied with the way your request was processed. It should also identify the Department of Health and Aged Care as the agency about which you are complaining.

You can make an IC review application or make an FOI complaint in one of the following ways:

- online at [www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/reviews-and-complaints/](http://www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/reviews-and-complaints/)
- via email to [foidr@oaic.gov.au](mailto:foidr@oaic.gov.au)
- by mail to GPO Box 5218 Sydney NSW 2001, or
- by fax to 02 9284 9666.

More information about the Information Commissioner reviews and complaints is available on the OAIC website here: [www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/foi-review-process](http://www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/foi-review-process).

### **Complaint**

If you are dissatisfied with action taken by the department, you may also make a complaint directly to the department.

Complaints to the department are covered by the department's privacy policy. A form for lodging a complaint directly to the department is available on the department's website here: [www.health.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/complaints](http://www.health.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/complaints)