



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate distribution

Abortion is healthcare, not a moral issue. Patient safety depends on healthcare privacy.

MELBOURNE – Thursday 10 November 2022

Recent news that Medibank customers' private data, including their use of abortion services, has been published on the dark web by hackers risks the safety of abortion patients.

"There is already too much stigma around abortion, which is a safe and legal medical procedure in Australia," said Carolyn Mogharbel, Acting CEO of Women's Health Victoria. "To conflate abortion with moral values just increases stigma and could discourage pregnant people from seeking this common medical procedure, accessed by 1 in 4 Australian women."

Over 600 calls are made every month, the majority from abortion seekers, to 1800 My Options - a sexual and reproductive health phonenumber and information service of Women's Health Victoria.

"A key concern of abortion seekers is privacy and confidentiality, and this is often a matter of safety," Mogharbel said. "All people seeking healthcare should be able to be confident in the privacy of their information. For people experiencing family violence, very young people, or those facing religious or cultural considerations, there is real danger due to this information being leaked."

Privacy issues have long term effects on people's confidence with health services, "Some people may not seek abortions in the future if they have concerns that their information may not be kept confidential," said Mogharbel. All healthcare services are required to keep patient information confidential, yet this recent hack highlights the need for vigilance with customer data. "The repercussions of a data hack such as this impacts trust in our entire healthcare system, and vulnerable patients will be impacted the most," continued Mogharbel.

All people concerned about their data in relation to the Medibank hack can seek advice relating to their data safety. Medibank and ahm customers can contact the company's cyber response hotlines by phone (for ahm customers 13 42 46 and for Medibank customers 13 23 31) or through the company website.

Victorians seeking information about healthcare privacy and healthcare records can do so via the Health Complaints Commissioner on 1300 582 113.

Any person seeking information about abortion, contraception or sexual health in Victoria can do so via 1800 My Options, 1800 696 784 or www.1800myoptions.org.au . All collected data is confidential and non-identifiable.



Quotes attributable to Carolyn Mogharbel, Acting CEO, Women's Health Victoria

“There is already too much stigma around abortion, which is a safe and legal medical procedure in Australia.”

“To conflate abortion with moral values just increases stigma and could discourage pregnant people from seeking this common medical procedure, accessed by 1 in 4 Australian women.”

“A key concern of abortion seekers is privacy and confidentiality, and this is often a matter of safety.”

“All people seeking healthcare should be able to be confident in the privacy of their information. For people experiencing family violence, very young people, or those facing religious or cultural considerations, there is real danger due to this information being leaked.”

“Some people may not seek abortions in the future if they have concerns that their information may not be kept confidential. The repercussions of a data hack such as this impact on trust in our entire healthcare system, and vulnerable patients will be impacted the most.”

-ENDS-

For media enquiries and interviews, please contact:

Carolyn Mogharbel, Acting CEO, Women's Health Victoria

Ph: 03 9965 0824

M: 0431 704 802

Email: carolynm@1800myoptions.org.au

About Women's Health Victoria

Women's Health Victoria (WHV) is a not-for-profit, state-wide women's health promotion, information and advocacy service, focused on improving the lives of Victorian women. WHV works collaboratively with women, health professionals, policy makers and community organisations to influence and inform health policy and service delivery for women. The work of WHV is underpinned by a social model of health and a commitment to reducing inequities in health which arise from social, economic and environmental determinants. **For more information, visit www.whv.org.au**