

Your Personal Health Information and The Department of Health and Wellness

Our privacy commitment to you

The Department of Health and Wellness is responsible for the Nova Scotia provincial health care system. We provide health care services to the public. We plan and manage the health care system. We are committed to safeguarding the privacy and confidentiality of your personal health information and will only collect, use and disclose the minimum amount necessary to fulfil our mandate.

The Personal Health Information Act (PHIA)

The *Nova Scotia Personal Health Information Act* came into force June 1, 2013 and is the law that protects your personal health information. *PHIA* applies a consistent set of rules for the health sector to manage both your paper and electronic personal health information. *PHIA* balances your right to have your information protected, with the need of the health system to use your information to provide, support and manage the health care system and provide you care.

As a “custodian” of personal health information, we are required to keep your personal health information safe and secure. The following will summarize why and how we collect, protect, use and disclose your personal health information.

What is personal health information?

Personal health information is identifying information about you, and may include demographic information (name, address, date of birth), your health card number, information related to your physical and mental health care, and financial information related to your application and eligibility for health care services. Personal health information can be recorded and unrecorded, and continues to be protected after you are deceased.

Why do you collect and use my personal health information?

The Department’s role as defined in our mission is to plan and manage the overall provincial health care system. To achieve our mission, we collect your personal health information for many purposes:

- to provide you with insured health services and benefits through the Nova Scotia Pharmacare programs;
- through the nine provincial programs such as Cancer Care Nova Scotia and the Reproductive Care Program to set and monitor standards of care, offer education programs and participate in health research;
- to pay physicians, dentists, and other providers who provide insured services to you;
- to plan, manage, and evaluate health care services provided to you and other Nova Scotians; and
- to create a provincial electronic health record (e.g., SHARe), which is a comprehensive record of your personal health information.

When do you access or disclose my personal health information to others?

The personal health information we collect from you is used within the Department to plan and manage the Nova Scotia health care system. Any employee of the DHW who is required to access your personal health information to conduct their work would have access to it. We may disclose your personal health information to other health care providers to deliver health care services to you or to researchers under circumstances permitted by *PHIA*.

Do you need my consent to disclose my personal health information?

We will not use or disclose your information without your consent – whether it is express consent or knowledgeable implied consent. We are committed to protecting your privacy and will only disclose your personal health information without your consent when it is absolutely necessary and is required or permitted by *PHIA* or another law.

You have the right:

- to know why your information is collected and, how it is used and disclosed;
- to request access to your personal health information;
- to question how correct and complete your personal health information is and ask for corrections;
- to ask us not to give out your personal health information to other health care providers and understand that we will take reasonable steps to comply with your request unless permitted or required by law to disclose your information;
- to be told if your personal health information is stolen, lost, or improperly accessed; and
- to make a complaint to the Department if you think we have not followed the rules in *PHIA*.

What happens if you lose my personal health information or someone who isn’t authorized to see it gains access to it?

If there is a privacy breach of your personal health information and we believe this may cause you harm or embarrassment, we are required to notify you of the breach. If we do not notify you, we are required to notify the Review Officer.

What If I am not satisfied with the way the DHW has handled my complaint?

You may request a review under *PHIA*. The Review Officer for *PHIA* can be reached at:

Review Officer
Personal Health Information Act

PO Box 181
Halifax, NS B3J 2M4
Toll-free: 1-866-243-1564
(902) 424-4684
Fax: 902-424-8303
www.foipop.ns.ca

Who do I contact for more information about *PHIA* and my rights?

You can reach our *PHIA* Contact person at:

Privacy and Access Office

NS Department of Health & Wellness
1894 Barrington Street
P.O. Box 488
Halifax, NS B3J 2R8
Toll Free: 1-855-640-4765
(902)-424-5419
phia@gov.ns.ca