

# Answers to questions people sometimes have about the Victorian Population Health Study

## What steps do we take to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the information you provide?

Your privacy is important to us and we take it seriously. In order to carry out this study effectively, the Department of Health and Human Services collects personal and health information about you.

There are a number of laws<sup>1</sup> that apply to the collection and use of personal information as part of the study with which the Department of Health and Human Services must comply. For more information on the department's privacy obligations, please refer to the [Department of Health and Human Services privacy policy](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/privacy) <<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/privacy>> on the department's website.

The Department of Health and Human Services Human Research Ethics Committee is responsible for approving the study (including any changes) and needs to be satisfied that the study is conducted in a way that protects your privacy, as required by these laws.

The Department of Health and Human Services Human Research Ethics Committee first approved the conduct of the Victorian Population Health Study in 1999 and the study has received further approval by the committee periodically when changes have been made. The most recent approval was in September 2017.

The Human Research Ethics Committee also deals with any concerns that a member of the public may have before or after participating in the study.

If you have a complaint about the conduct of the study you may contact the Secretary of the Human Research Ethics Committee, Mr Jeffrey Chapman.  
Telephone: 03 9096 5239  
[Email Mr Jeffrey Chapman](mailto:research.ethics@dhhs.vic.gov.au) <[research.ethics@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:research.ethics@dhhs.vic.gov.au)>

Your participation in the study is *voluntary*. There are no consequences associated with not taking part in the study. You do not have to give a reason for not participating in the study.

If you decide to take part in the study, you can choose not to answer a particular question if you do not wish to do so. You do not have to give a reason for not answering a question.

The committee pays particular attention to how your personal information (name and telephone number and your address if relevant) and study responses are stored during the study period and how the information collected is stored and used after all the interviews are completed.

While the study is being conducted by The Social Research Centre (on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services), your study responses and personal information are stored in separate password-protected files.

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<sup>1</sup> These laws include but are not limited to: the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (Commonwealth), the *Health Records Act 2001* (Victoria), the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (Victoria), the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)* and the *Statutory Guidelines on Research under the Health Records Act 2001* (Victoria).

At the end of the study period, The Social Research Centre is required to delete your name and telephone number (and where relevant your address) and only information you have provided in answering the study questions is kept. This information is added to the information provided by other participants and forwarded to the Department of Health and Human Services for analysis.

## What happens to the data and how is it used?

The information collected from those who participate in the study is used to answer questions about population health that are of public interest or for research purposes only.

For example, the data are used to help the Department of Health and Human Services monitor the health status of the Victorian population over time and to help ensure that public health programs are relevant and responsive to current and emerging health issues.

This involves asking very broad questions such as 'What proportion of the Victorian population aged 18–24 years are current smokers?' and 'How many people in a particular region of Victoria reported that they are ex-smokers?'

The main findings from the study, including reports and factsheets from previous years, are available on the [department's website](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/vphs) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/vphs>.

All the results are reported at a summary level only (for example, by age group, by sex, etc). No individuals are identified and no individual's responses are reported.

The Department of Health and Human Services is the data custodian for the data from the Victorian Population Health Study. It is the duty of the custodian to ensure that the data are used responsibly and respectfully, and that privacy is safeguarded.

Other government departments, statutory agencies and researchers may request access to the data as an extension of this study or in the same general area of research.

Such access to the data is not automatic. It is granted on a case-by-case basis: only where a study has received approval from a Human Research Ethics Committee, only for the items needed to answer a particular policy, planning or research question, and usually requires a formal Department of Health and Human Services deed of acknowledgement and confidentiality.

The [Department of Health and Human Services privacy policy](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/privacy) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/privacy> is available on the department's website.

## Further information

Victorian Population Health Study  
Department of Health and Human Services  
GPO Box 4057, Melbourne VIC 3001  
Phone: Victorian Population Health Study Hotline - 1800 658 830

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