



OmbudsmanSA

STATEMENT ON AN INVESTIGATION

Published under section 26 of *Ombudsman Act 1972*

Date of Final Report: 4 December 2024

Southern Adelaide Local Health Network's Record Keeping Practices



Essential Insights

Robust record keeping practices are essential to good government administration and are key to ensuring trust and accountability in government. In the context of health records, a failure to manage patient information properly, can compromise patient care. State government agencies and public officers are reminded to create, store and maintain official records in accordance with the State Records Act and policies and practices relevant to their duties.

INVESTIGATION OF A COMPLAINT

The Ombudsman investigated the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network (**the SALHN**) regarding an allegation of misconduct by an employee. The investigation did not substantiate misconduct, but the Ombudsman noted that the complainant's patient file was incomplete.

The Ombudsman's investigation found that the SALHN had erred in its record keeping, and that this amounted to an error under the *Ombudsman Act 1972*.

The Ombudsman said that the collection and maintenance of records is essential to good administration and, in this instance, the failure to do so in a fulsome manner was a serious error, noting:

- the State Records Act sets out obligations that the official records in an agency's custody must be maintained in good order and condition¹
- good record keeping in a health setting is vital to patient care and the duties that medical staff hold. This is re-enforced by the Code of Conduct for Doctors in Australia that sets out 'maintaining clear and accurate medical records is essential for the continuing good care of patients'
- good record keeping is important to ensure trust in and accountability of government.

It is acknowledged that, since this incident, SAHLN has rolled out its Electronic Medical Record (EMR) across its Mental Health Service which aims to improve patient record keeping and compliance with the State Records Act.

KEY OUTCOMES FOLLOWING THE OMBUDSMAN'S INVESTIGATION

The Ombudsman recommended that the SAHLN:

- include in its internal audit plan a regular audit of medical records to ensure compliance with the State Records Act;
- ensure relevant and robust record management training is provided to staff.

The Ombudsman intends to monitor compliance with these recommendations.

¹ *State Records Act 1997*s13.