

Releasing personal information in parliamentary workplaces

Meiying's story (fictional)

Meiying works as an Electorate Officer, and takes a phone call from a constituent, Wayne, who regularly contacts the office. Wayne is highly distressed and says he's going to harm himself. When Meiying confirms what she heard, Wayne says he doesn't want Meiying to take any action because it will only make things worse. Meiying tells Wayne she is worried about him, and talks about how she needs to help Wayne stay safe. She then invites Wayne to create a plan to connect him with appropriate support – however, Wayne ends the call.

Meiying discusses the situation with her supervisor and decides to contact the local mental health crisis service. Meiying outlines her conversation with Wayne and provides information the office has noted about Wayne over time, such as his name, general location and previous conversations regarding risk of harm.

! What is the Privacy Act?

The *Privacy Act 1988* (Privacy Act) regulates the way our personal information is handled.

The Privacy Act includes 13 Australian Privacy Principles (APPs), which apply to Australian Government agencies and some private sector organisations.

The Privacy Act does not apply to registered political parties and political acts and practices – in effect, the work of a parliamentarian and their staff. However, Ministers have responsibilities under the Privacy Act for any personal information they handle in their role.



Emergency disclosures

! Even where the Privacy Act applies, any person in a parliamentary workplace can disclose personal information when there is an immediate threat to a person's life or risk of harm, or a serious threat to the public.

For example, a constituent may contact an electorate office and state they plan to harm staff because they do not agree with the parliamentarian's policy approach. In this case, the officer receiving the call should attempt to gather as much detail as possible from the caller, and report any information they have to the police.

If you or someone else's life is in danger, or there is an immediate risk of harm, call emergency services on 000. For emergencies at Parliament House, call (02) 6277 7117.

Support

You can contact the PWSS for support handling personal information in Commonwealth Parliamentary workplaces when managing work health and safety, responding to a threat from a constituent, dealing with a workplace complaint, or if you are concerned someone has mishandled your personal information in the workplace.



www.PWSS.gov.au



24/7 Support: 1800 747 977SMS:



0487 112 755