

# Processing Freedom of Information Requests

Department of Health and Human Services Archives

HSD/14/6089  
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## Freedom of Information (FOI) service

Freedom of Information (FOI) requests may be for Child Protection, Medical, Disability, Psychiatric Client or Wardship records. All requests from external parties for both Health and Human Services records are received and processed in the first instance by the Freedom of Information Unit, before being sent to Archives (see 'Receiving and actioning requests', below).

Records of Wards of the State: The FOI Unit responds to requests from clients who were in the care of the State after 1986 or relatives of wards seeking information held by the Department of Human Services on client or defunct agency files.

Some requests for State Ward records may arise from subpoenas and warrants received by the FOI Unit. **Note** that subpoenas and warrants must be served on the Unit – they are not to be received or processed by Archives.

## Statutory response time

FOI requests must by law be responded to within a 45-day period. The Bourke Street Archives Requests Team response must be completed within 14 **calendar** days of a request being passed to the team by the FOI Unit.

## Making requests – Freedom of Information unit

- The requests team has access to the shared network drive *n075\GROUP\Ciru\Foi\FOI Document Transfer*.
- New requests are placed by the FOI Unit in the shared network drive.
- The FOI Unit emails the Request Team at Bourke Street via the *FOIRequest/DHS* email inbox to advise when a new request has been placed in the shared drive.
- The FOI Unit creates a new folder (a 'request folder') in the shared network drive for each new request for information. The folder title includes the TRIM FOI file number and requester's name.
- Documents in each folder include:
  - The applicant's original request for information as received by the FOI Unit.
  - A memorandum addressed to the Request Team detailing the nature of the request. The memorandum includes the TRIM FOI file number, the client's name, and search record type e.g. Child Protection, Wardship, client status, Date of Birth. The memorandum stipulates the Archival Services response due date i.e. 14 days after the date of the memorandum.

## Receiving and actioning requests – Requests team

- The Request Team checks the email in-box at regular intervals daily for notification of new requests.
- When each new request folder is received in the shared network drive, the request folder is cut and pasted into the Archives shared network drive on server N071: *arc-serv2\FOI Requests*.
- The request is entered into the spreadsheet 'FOI requests Received in Archives' which is located in *arc-serv2\FOI REQUESTS*. The fields Date Request Received, Due Date, Request Name and Request Type are populated.
- The Requests Team:
  - prints out the request documents

- staples them to a printout of the registered FOI document in TRIM
- places them at the bottom of the search tray located within the requests team area for attention by other team members tasked with searching for records.

## Registering requests in TRIM


- Each FOI request search memoranda document received by the Request Team is registered in TRIM, using the Record Type *FOI Document*.
- The new document is contained to the TRIM FOI File whose number has been provided by the FOI Unit in the memorandum.

## TRIM process

- Select *File* followed by the drop-down menu option *New*.
- The Record screen appears, showing all Record Types.
- Select *FOI DOCUMENT*.
- Click on the *OK* button at the bottom of the screen.
- The *New Record FOI DOCUMENT* screen opens under the General Tab.
- Populate all the mandatory and non-mandatory fields with metadata.
- The Security Classification and Access Controls are preset to the required caveats of the Record Type.
- Click the *OK* button at the bottom of the screen to register the document.
- Print out the document using the *FACESHEET – FOI DOCUMENT* report type. Attach the printout to hard copies of the other documents held in the FOI Requests folder in the shared drive.
- Record the TRIM document number, e.g. FID/14/3586, in the spreadsheet located in *N071\arc-serv2\FOI REQUESTS* so that its progress in being actioned by the Request Team can be monitored.

### Tab – General

#### Mandatory fields

Mandatory fields must be populated. The icon  indicates a mandatory field. TRIM will not permit other tabs to be accessed until all mandatory fields have been completed.

The *New Record FOI DOCUMENT* screen shows  against five fields:

- Record Title (Free Text)
- Author
- Date on record
- Container
- Current Location (Assignee).

#### Non-mandatory fields

The following non-mandatory fields must be completed.

- Document Type
- Enclosed?

#### Document field metadata

- *Record Title (free text)* e.g. FOI request for Child Protection / Wardship records, client name and date of birth (DOB).
- *Author*: The FOI Team member who is the author of the memorandum.
- *Date on record*: The date the record was registered
- *Container*: The TRIM FOI File number.
- *Current location (assignee)*: The Request Team member registering the document in TRIM.

- *Document Type*: Select 'FOI Request' from the drop down menu selections.
- *Enclosed?* Ticking the box will grey out the Current location (assignee) field and contain the document to the TRIM FOI file number.

## Search tools

Search tools at Bourke Street Archives include:

- Accession Registers and associated summary listings
- Historical registers
- Index cards and warrants
- Microfiche
- PROV Victorian Public Record Series (VPRS) listings
- TRIM

## File movement cards

*File movement cards* are used when boxes, files or registers have been removed from storage for scanning. Small slips of paper are used instead when index cards are removed from boxes for scanning.

Whether on a file movement card or a paper slip, details for any item must include:

- Date
- File title
- Taken by
- Requested by.

## Sending hard copy records to the Freedom of Information unit

Occasionally hard copy records are required by the FOI Unit, usually because the team is looking for very specific information and therefore scanning an entire file is not required.

- *Index cards*: Accession and stack location must be written in pencil on the bottom right hand side of the back of each card. **Note** that this is to identify the item's Home Location – originals are returned to storage and *only* scanned copies are sent to FOI
- *Files*: A fluorescent sticker showing the Accession and stack location of the file is attached, together with another sticker reading *WHEN FINISHED WITH FILE RETURN TO ARCHIVES*.
- The Current Location in TRIM must be updated to the requestor at the FOI Unit.
- Every file sent to FOI must be registered in TRIM to enable file tracking. Files not previously registered in TRIM must be registered prior to sending the file off-site.
- All original documents must be returned to the Bourke Street Archives using the process for *Transferring inactive records to departmental Archives* (HSD/12/18907).

## Completing requests

Once a record has been discovered by Archives staff:

- Locate the correct FOI Search Request Document in TRIM
- Enter record details as a search result in the Notes Field as created by Requests Team.
- Generate a printout of the FOI document, listing the search results.
  - Select the report *FACESHEET – TRIM ARCHIVES REQUEST*.
- Attach the request and response printouts to the record and place it on the 'FOI records' shelf next to FOI scanning officer's workstation.
- Update the record's location in TRIM to 'FOI Scanning Officer'.
- The record is scanned into the *arc-serv2\FOI Requests* shared network folder.

- Once scanning is complete, the records are placed in designated white buckets situated near the Level 3 repository to be returned by the Storage Team.
  - The TRIM request printouts must be shredded by the scanning officer.
- Once the record has been returned to its original position, the record's Location is updated in TRIM.
- The spreadsheet located in *arc-serv2\FOI REQUESTS* is updated and finalised to include:
  - The name of the officer who undertook the searches
  - The date the search was completed
  - The number of searches undertaken / Accessions searched
  - If a search has not found any records, enter 'Nil Results' in the Comments field.

## Appendix 1 – Most commonly used finding aids

Archives staff search for records using the departmental electronic and manual finding aids profiled below, as well as through web interface with resources at the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV).

### Electronic finding aids

#### TRIM

TRIM is the primary online search tool. Searches are often on client or client related names and dates of birth.

If a search results in a nil return, variants on the spelling of names or contractions of date formats may be used.

- e.g. use 'Jenny' instead of 'Jennifer'
- e.g. remove zeros from dates or use two digits only instead of using four for years ('96' rather than '1996')

Using *Any Word* searches will yield the greatest number of results

Using search filters will narrow down the range of records retrieved.

Note that many Accessions in TRIM include spreadsheets. If individual records have not been registered in TRIM, they are often listed in these spreadsheets.

#### Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) online Research Guides

PROV has published a number of Research Guides online at <http://prov.vic.gov.au/subject-list-of-guides>

The following guides frequently assist in locating records.

Number	Title
No. 5	Cemetery Records
No. 28	Public Works Department – Building Services Agency Plans
No. 29	Wills and Probate Records 1841 – 2009
No. 40	Railway Employment Records
No. 59	Mental Health Records
No. 60	Adoption, Wardship and Related Records
No. 71	Inquest Records

Archives staff who are registered as users with PROV are able to search Health and Human Services records in both open and closed collections.

Not all records at PROV are individually listed. In such a case, the appropriate box or boxes are requested as a loan from PROV and searches manually at the Archives.

#### RAPID

RAPID (*Redevelopment of Acute & Psychiatric Information Directions*) is a state-wide database. RAPID is designed to collect, process and disseminate patient level data. It contains information on health services admissions from 1983 to the present.

The Request Team does not have online access to RAPID. A Requests Team member emails the Office Manager, Clinical Quality & Safety, Chief Psychiatrist requesting checks of RAPID for patient histories. The Office Manager emails print screens of relevant patient histories to the Request Team member.

Refer to process, Requests for psychiatric patient medical histories, for further details.

## Archival Transfer Application (ATA)

ATA is a decommissioned, formerly stand-alone Access database that has been uploaded into TRIM as a registered document, **HSD/12/4614**, in order to retain 'Read only' functionality. It is a search tool of last resort when records have not been located elsewhere and uses a simple text search function to retrieve records.

- ATA lists Accessions ranging between 1993 and 2004.
- Metadata is structured according to four fields:
  - Accession Number
  - Box Number
  - Record Number
  - Description
- Text searches are undertaken using the **Description** field.
- ATA contains mostly Office of Housing Accessions and a smaller number of Accessions containing records pertaining to the operations of a number of other business units.

## Manual finding aids

Manual finding aids are used to search for records that are not registered in TRIM. Any of these may be accessed depending on the type of records being requested.

These comprise:

- Accession registers
- Admission and discharge patient index cards
- Historical registers
- Office of Housing volumes
- Microfiche folders<sup>1</sup>

Refer to the document *Manual finding aids (HSD/14/6090)* for further details.

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<sup>1</sup> **Note:** Digitisation of the Microfiche folders will occur shortly (July 2014).

## Appendix 2 – Summary description of most frequent searches

### Searching for wardship and other records (from HSD/14/6084)

- Search in TRIM for name and DOB of the applicant or name given by applicant.
- Records located at PROV are identified and ordered.
- Records relating to institutional admission dates as outlined on the relevant Ward card are searched for and retrieved. The Ward card is the primary search tool which documents a client's recorded admissions and discharges through various institutions.
  - Scanned copies of Ward cards may be printed to aid searching. If a card is scanned, a copy must be saved in the appropriate search folder in *P:\arc-serv2\FIND Requests*.
- Most child protection and disability records are identifiable on TRIM through searching by name or date of birth.
  - Some series collections are not grouped as an Accession in TRIM. Items within these series are registered at Box level only. In such a case, consult the Manual Series Registers for Box contents listings. (Refer to the *Manual Finding Aids* process for the use of registers).
- If no records are identified through searching TRIM, microfiche index cards must be searched (see the *Manual finding aids process*).
- Refer to the process Requests for psychiatric patient medical histories by approved mental health services for directions on searching for psychiatric patient records.

### Digitised Ward Cards

- All Ward Cards are digitised and registered as PDFs contained to Accession AS/1990/015 in TRIM
- The Accession is now located at PROV – VPRS 16205.
  - A spreadsheet is attached to the Accession linking each TRIM box number to its corresponding VPRS box barcode number
- There are 59 boxes contained to the Accession.
  - The record number of each pdf. is derived from the box number to which it is contained
  - The client's name is used as the Records Title

### Microfiche records

- Microfiche records are searched to verify a client's wardship and identify the Ward number.
- The Ward number is used to identify the corresponding Ward register, which can then be ordered from PROV.

### Searching for psychiatric patient medical treatment histories (from HSD/14/8375)<sup>2</sup>

- Search for a Chief Psychiatrist Card (CPC). There is only one card for each patient. Cards contain the following information:
  - The patient's name and date of birth.
  - History of admissions to and discharges from any Victorian institutions (voluntary or recommended admissions and dates of admissions and discharges)
  - Clinical summaries.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that this process remains in draft form as at July 2014, owing to the restructuring of the Department of Health and resulting changes to business practices.

- Search for all records as per admission dates on either CPC or RAPID printout. Records held at Archives and PROV are on the Psychiatric & Hospital Master hardcopy listings situated on Level 3.
  - There are multiple hardcopies of these listings situated around the various teams on Level 3 and is also available in *F:\arc\_serv2\Chief Psych-PATIENT File Requests*.
- 'PROVguide 59: Mental Health Records' can be found at <http://prov.vic.gov.au/provguide-59>.
  - This webpage lists all the former mental health institutions for which PROV holds records. Each institution has its own Agency Number and Series Titles attached, describing the type of records held including their date range and public access status.
- Check the historical institutional admission/discharge registers situated in the Level 3 repository. Note the patient number from the register entries.
- Search for Warrants. Warrants are legal documents generated by the institution when a patient is admitted. Many of the Warrant accessions are arranged by historical register number. Warrants contain the following information:
  - The patient's name on an Application for admission to a named institution, including their status (e.g. Voluntary Patient)
  - Discharge notification from an institution (named) attached on a separate, later warrant
  - Statement of Personal Details of Patient – a comprehensive range of personal details.
- Photocopy or scan the relevant pages from registers.