Minister for Health and Community Services Jane Aagaard today released a Discussion Paper seeking public comment on how to best protect the privacy of Territorian’s health details.

Mrs Aagaard said the Discussion Paper would canvas public opinion on health-specific privacy legislation that would cover both the private and public health sectors in the Northern Territory.

“Ensuring that personal health information is protected by robust and effective privacy safeguards has become one of the most important issues on the national health agenda,” she said.

"With the introduction of electronic record-keeping systems, as well as developments such as telemedicine and the use of computer and telecommunications systems to improve remote access, people need to be assured that their privacy is respected.

"Without this assurance of privacy and confidentiality in regard to sensitive personal information, people may not seek the health care they need, which may in turn increase the risks to their own health and the health of others.”

Mrs Aagaard said the Federal Government had recently introduced privacy legislation to cover private health care providers, while the NT Government had developed a draft Information Bill to deal with privacy issues in the public sector.

"In light of these developments, it is timely to look at the option of one seamless privacy regime for all those dealing with health information in the Territory,” she said.

The purpose of the Discussion Paper is to stimulate dialogue and provide the public and key industry stakeholders with the opportunity to respond to and make comments on the proposal.

It is the intention of the Department of Health and Community Services to consult as extensively as possible in the development of any proposed health-specific privacy legislation.

Public meetings are planned for all major centres and will be well advertised. These meetings will commence mid-April which will give interested parties sufficient time to absorb the content of the paper and the outlined proposal.

Copies of the Discussion Paper will be widely circulated and are available from the Health Information Privacy Office, PO Box 40596, Casuarina NT 0811 or telephone 8999 2472. The Paper can also be accessed via the Health Information Privacy Webpage at [http://www.health.nt.gov.au](http://www.health.nt.gov.au), where details of the public meetings will also be posted.