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**STATISTICAL COMMISSION and  
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**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
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**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

Joint ECE-WHO Meeting on Health Statistics  
(Rome, Italy, 14-16 October 1998)

SESSION I: Problems associated with the lack of coordination in national and international health statistics

**SHARING THE FRUITS OF COORDINATION OF HEALTH STATISTICS IN AUSTRALIA**

Supporting paper submitted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare<sup>1</sup>

**Summary**

Australia is a federation of 6 States and 2 Territories ('the States') with a central Government ('the Commonwealth'). The States operate the major part of the Australian hospital system and most community health services. There is a large private sector (most doctors, pharmacists, some hospitals and the bulk of allied health services). The Commonwealth is a major funder of the States' and the private sector's health services. Health expenditure represents 8.5% of GDP. The Commonwealth provides 45% of health expenditure, the States 23% and the private sector 31%.

In this mixed system, there is a strong commitment to consistent health information. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) is an independent government agency established to develop, collect and disseminate reliable, timely facts on the health of Australians and their health and community services.

National agreements commit all the 9 governments, AIHW and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to work together to develop consistent, reliable

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Richard Madden.

and comprehensive data on health and community services in Australia. Despite the constant political differences among all the players in the Australian health system, the information effort has been exceptionally successful. The Australian experience can help and even inspire others.

More tangibly, the tools developed in Australia can help others today. The tools are freely displayed through the AIHW's web site ([www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au)). The National Health Information Knowledgebase contains the National Health Data Dictionary (7<sup>th</sup> edition), a comprehensive set of nationally agreed definitions of terms used in health statistics. All definitions follow internationally agreed formats. Behind the dictionary is a National Health Information Model.

The paper will describe the health information coordination arrangements in Australia and describe the Knowledgebase, its current uses and its potential for further development, as well as for helping the development of improved health statistics in other countries and better consistency at international level.