

# How do I access records held by a government organisation?

**Government organisations, like schools, hospitals and police, may keep records you need. This fact sheet provides information about requesting records and how knowmore can help.**

## Why do I need records?

This information could be important to:

- your identity
- your personal and family history
- making a complaint about what happened to you as a child
- applying for compensation.

Non-government organisations, like religious and community organisations, might also hold information about you. If you want access to these records read knowmore's fact sheet '*How do I access records held by a non-government organisation?*'

knowmore can advise you about accessing your records.

## What are my rights?

Australian law gives you the right to access information that governments hold about you. The law places a duty on the government to search for and release this information to you.

However, sometimes governments may be

able to withhold records, for example if they contain sensitive information about another person or government.

## What to expect

The older the information you request the less likely it is to be found. Some records may not exist or may have been destroyed. Even if you do find records, they may contain minimal or inaccurate information and may not answer all of your questions.

## How do I request my information?

### Informal requests

You can contact the government department or agency and ask if they will give you your records for free, without a formal application.

### Formal requests

You can make a written application to the government department or agency. In most cases you will not be charged for access to your personal information but fees may apply.

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1800 605 762 | [knowmore.org.au](https://knowmore.org.au)

Image inspired by original artwork by Ngunawal man Dean Bell, depicting knowmore's connection to the towns, cities, missions and settlements within Australia.

knowmore acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters across Australia upon which we live and work. We pay our deep respects to Elders past and present for their ongoing leadership and advocacy.

You can usually find the application form on the department or agency's website under 'Right to Information' or 'Freedom of Information'. You can also call the department or agency and ask them to send you the form.

It is important that you are clear about what information you want. For example, *"all information relating to [your name]'s time in care"*, or *"the police report I made in 19[xx] to [insert suburb] Police Station about..."*

You might need to include a copy of some photo identification so that the organisation knows that they are giving the records to the right person.

knowmore can advise you about how to make a request.

### Reducing fees

If fees do apply, you can ask the government department to reduce or waive them. This is not always possible, but you should ask if it can be done.

### Support services

Some support services, like Find & Connect ([www.findandconnect.gov.au](http://www.findandconnect.gov.au); 1800 16 11 09) may assist you to access your records.

### Protecting privacy

The law says that the government cannot give you another person's personal information unless that person gives permission. In such cases the government may black-out portions of the document to protect another person's right to privacy.

### Asking for a review of a decision

If the government withholds information you can ask them to review this decision or ask an external agency to look at the decision. You may have only a short amount of time to request a review.

knowmore can advise you how to request a review.

### Trauma and emotion

Accessing information about your childhood can have a significant emotional impact. The information may bring up traumatic memories or uncomfortable feelings.

It is a good idea to view your information with someone you trust, like a friend or support person.

Information about support services can be found on knowmore's website below.

### How to contact knowmore

- Visit: [www.knowmore.org.au](http://www.knowmore.org.au)
- Free call: 1800 605 762
- Email: [info@knowmore.org.au](mailto:info@knowmore.org.au)

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