A sanction has been imposed on a hacker who released Australian health insurer client data

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A man walks past a Medibank branch in Sydney on Oct. 26, 2022. A Russian national has been sanctioned on Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024, by the Australian government for his role in a cyber attack which compromised the personal details of more than 10 million Australians. Credit: AP Photo/Rick Rycroft, File

A Russian national has been sanctioned by the Australian government

for his role in a cyber attack that compromised the personal information of more than 10 million Australians.

In October 2022, client data from Medibank, Australia's largest health insurer, was released by an extortionist, including details of HIV diagnoses and drug abuse treatments, after the company refused to pay a ransom for the personal records of current and former customers.

On Tuesday, the Australian government imposed its cyber sanction powers for the first time against Aleksandr Ermakov after Australian Federal Police and intelligence agencies, with support from undisclosed 'global partners' made the link between the Russian citizen and the cyber attack.

Australian Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles said the sanctions imposed are part of Australia's efforts to expose cyber criminals and debilitate groups engaging in cyber attacks.

"In our current strategic circumstances we continue to see governments, critical infrastructure, businesses and households in Australia targeted by malicious cyber actors," Marles said in a statement on Tuesday.

"We continue to work with our friends and partners around the world to ensure cyber criminals are held to account for their actions and we will relentlessly pursue activities which disrupt their capability to target Australians in the cyber space."

This sanction makes it a criminal offense, punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment, to provide assets to Ermakov, or to use or deal with his assets, including through cryptocurrency wallets or ransomware payments.

Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong said the sanction sends a clear

message to cyber criminals.

"There are costs and consequences for targeting Australia and targeting Australians," she said in a statement.

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