

December 15, 2021

Report finds BC's access to information system remained resilient during first year of COVID-19 pandemic

VICTORIA— A report released by Information and Privacy Commissioner Michael McEvoy has found that the access to information systems of select public bodies maintained relative resilience during the first year of the pandemic.

In BC, the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) establishes access rights for individuals and sets out requirements for public bodies to respond to access requests. The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for BC (OIPC) conducted a review of the access to information systems of selected public bodies to better understand their responses while under the strain of the first year of the public health emergency. The public bodies, including three public health authorities and the BC Government, were looked at specifically because of the higher volume of requests they handled during the year.

“During an emergency like the pandemic, the mechanisms for requesting information are critical,” said Commissioner McEvoy. “The systems in question, while not perfect, made adjustments to deal with the demands of the pandemic and performed reasonably well,” he said.

Interviewees noted an overall increase in both the number and complexity of access requests, challenges around conflicting priorities for staff, and the reality of limited access to physical records when working from home. To address these challenges, public bodies employed a variety of strategies to maintain access to information programs, such as using staged releases to help applicants get some records while the public body continued to process the larger request.

In addition, the report comments on ongoing discussion about proactive disclosure of records and information related to the pandemic.

Special Report 21-03: The Impact of COVID-19 on Access to Information is available here: <https://www.oipc.bc.ca/reports/investigation-and-audit-reports/>

Media Contact

Michelle Mitchell | Senior Communications Manager
Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for BC
250 217-7872 | mmitchell@oipc.bc.ca
Twitter: @BCInfoPrivacy