

**September 13, 2023**

**Report finds positive steps taken to address vulnerabilities within BC's public health database**

**VICTORIA**— A follow-up report has found the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) has taken meaningful steps to incorporate recommendations aimed at strengthening the privacy and security of the Provincial Public Health Information System (System), following the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner's (OIPC) December 2022 report that found the PHSA's failure to address security and privacy vulnerabilities put British Columbians at risk.

The System, managed by PHSA, holds personal health information, some of it very sensitive, about every British Columbian. It supports, among other things, frontline workers delivering primary healthcare and helps public health officials track the spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

The initial investigation found major gaps in the System's technological controls, and made seven recommendations, including that the PHSA:

- acquire, configure, and deploy a privacy-tailored proactive audit system;
- ensure a multi-factor authentication solution meeting Provincial Standards is used to log onto the System;
- encrypt personal information within the database at rest; and
- create appropriate written security architecture that includes full systems design documents and operations manuals for each component of the System.

The follow-up review found that six months later, two recommendations have been fully implemented, three have been substantially implemented, and the remaining two have been partially implemented with progress continuing.

"The implementation of the security architecture document now provides a roadmap to the PHSA for applying the security controls that should have been in place from the outset. Performing regular penetration testing will now help identify the control areas that need strengthening, including user education. While there is more work to be done, I am encouraged by the PHSA's efforts and commitments to addressing the recommendations and ensuring the trust of British Columbians in the health System," said BC Information and Privacy Commissioner Michael McEvoy.

Examples of the steps taken include:

- encrypting personal information, including tables containing personal information, in the System;
- implementing an ongoing application vulnerability management program to monitor for risk exposures;
- completing initial patching updates; and
- reporting on risk management assessments to senior management.

## *News Release*

The OIPC remains committed to following up with the PHSA until all recommendations are sufficiently addressed.

The full follow-up report is available here: <https://www.oipc.bc.ca/reports/investigation-and-audit-reports/>

An overview fact sheet summarizing the follow-up report is available here:  
<https://www.oipc.bc.ca/media/17553/panorama-follow-up-overview-sheet.pdf>

A video message from the Commissioner is available here: <https://youtu.be/AmJUdqCDI-E>

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