

For immediate release

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Federal, provincial, and territorial privacy regulators address responsible information sharing in situations involving intimate partner violence

VICTORIA - Privacy authorities across Canada have issued a joint resolution to guide the responsible disclosure of personal information in situations involving intimate partner violence (IPV). Finalized at their October annual meeting, hosted by the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, the resolution aims to empower organizations and their staff to make informed decisions about privacy, confidentiality, and public safety.

IPV is a pervasive problem in Canada, primarily harming women and gender-diverse people. In 2023, there were 123,319 IPV incidents involving victims aged 12 and older reported to police. While alarming, this statistic very likely underrepresents the true number of IPV incidents nationwide, as many cases go unreported.

Justice, health care, and social services professionals play an important role in reducing or eliminating IPV harm. Private sector employers and human resource departments, along with private health and counselling providers, non-profit support organizations, and others in the sector can also help identify and take necessary and reasonable steps to prevent potential IPV-related harm to clients and employees. These people often need to share personal information to prevent and mitigate IPV. Timely and responsible information sharing could mean the difference between life and death.

In recent years, several public inquiries and inquests related to IPV in Canada have revealed that organizations and staff often feel conflicted about how to respond to IPV situations due to concerns about confidentiality obligations and the risk of infringing privacy rights. These sentiments reflect misconceptions about Canadian privacy laws.

Canada's privacy regulators collectively affirm that Canada's privacy laws generally permit the disclosure of personal information if there is a risk of serious harm to health or safety. The resolution calls for a collective effort from governments and organizations to develop privacy-compliant governance frameworks for responsible information-sharing in cases involving risk of serious harm to life, health, or safety when certain conditions are met.

The resolution's calls to action for government and other public and private organizations emphasize the need for clear privacy policies on permissible disclosures across all sectors, as well as the need for education in this area – both in-house and public. They also stress the

importance of this work being carried out using culturally sensitive, trauma-informed approaches.

In turn, Commissioners committed themselves to working collectively to clarify permissible disclosures under their respective privacy laws by engaging with governments and other key interested parties to educate professionals, affected individuals, and the public on when and how personal information can be disclosed in IPV situations. Together, they aim to provide ongoing policy guidance and support for the responsible disclosure of personal information to help prevent situations of IPV.

“The idea that privacy is a barrier keeping survivors of intimate partner violence from the support they need is a troubling, persistent and dangerous misconception. In BC, our public and private sector laws allow information sharing when it could help someone in crisis or prevent a tragedy,” said Michael Harvey, Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia. “This resolution dispels these misconceptions and makes it clear that privacy laws are not impediments, but have the potential to empower: supporting survivors through the timely, safe and responsible sharing of highly sensitive personal information.”

Learn more:

- Resolution: [Responsible information-sharing in situations involving intimate partner violence](#)
- [Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario hosts annual meeting of federal, provincial, and territorial information and privacy commissioners and ombuds](#)
- [Sharing Information in Situations Involving Intimate Partner Violence: Guidance for Professionals](#)
- [S4-Episode 5: Addressing intimate partner violence: Information sharing, trust, and privacy | Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario](#)

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