

For immediate release

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Annual Report and Service Plan 2024/2025: Commissioner calls for transparency by default in public service, privacy law reforms to strengthen rights in digital age

VICTORIA – In his office’s newly published Annual Report, BC Information and Privacy Commissioner Michael Harvey called on public bodies and organizations to prioritize transparency to build public trust and for government to reform laws to meet modern privacy challenges.

The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia’s Annual Report and Service Plan 2024/25 was tabled this morning in the BC Legislature. The report outlines systemic challenges that require an increased focus on transparency through robust access to information processes, and for privacy protections that reflect today’s challenges, including the rise of artificial intelligence.

Numbers show growing pressure on privacy and access rights

The report provides an in-depth look into the OIPC’s work from April 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025, including an overview of major investigations, court rulings, and a statistical breakdown of files processed by the office. The statistical trends reflected in the report underscore growing challenges to the access and privacy rights of people in British Columbia.

Among the highlights of the report were:

- **Requests for reviews up by 13%:** Files where access to information applicants challenged public bodies’ access to information decisions were up from 668 in 2023-2024 to 755 in 2024-2025.
- **Deemed refusals up by 32%:** Requests for OIPC review of cases where applicants allege public bodies failed to respond to access requests within legislated timelines increased from 264 to 348.
- **Privacy complaints up by more than 25%:** The number of privacy complaints across both the public sector *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the private sector *Personal Information Protection Act* increased from 361 to 456.
- **Number of files sent to inquiry stage up by 50%:** The number of cases where investigation and mediation do not resolve disputes and they are sent to an inquiry conducted by OIPC adjudicators increased from 147 to 222.

“The numbers in this year’s report tell a story of people who want their public bodies to be transparent, who want their personal information protected, and who are, in too many cases, left frustrated by opaque institutions and deceptive privacy practices,” said Commissioner Harvey. “At a time when it is more important and ever to maintain public trust in public institutions, and when personal information is so central to people’s autonomy and dignity in the digital age, these numbers are a warning we cannot afford to ignore.”

Transparency by default

The report highlights the OIPC's work over the reporting period to promote transparency among all public bodies, including the office's investigations into Vancouver Coastal Health Authority's duty to assist applicants, and municipalities' records disclosure practices.

The Commissioner said a culture change was needed among public bodies to ensure that transparency is built into initiatives from the outset, not treated as an afterthought. "The role of every public body in this province is not just to provide services to the public, but to do so in a manner that is accountable and transparent to the people they serve. Taking a 'transparency by default' approach from the outset of every new program, process, policy, or initiative can achieve this," he said. "We need to think about transparency, accountability, at the earliest stages and at the highest levels to build the trust that our democracy needs to survive, and flourish."

Digital age realities demand renewed privacy protections

Commissioner Harvey also underscored the changing stakes around people's personal information in the digital age. In his message, the Commissioner notes that privacy is about much more than keeping personal information safely secured from prying eyes, it's about giving people a genuine choice over what information they share and how it's used. That choice means dignity and empowerment in a world where our digital selves are so central to our individual identities.

Deceptive design practices, and the vast amounts of personal information AI technologies need to function, challenge those rights. Commissioner Harvey called for PIPA to be reformed to ensure that it is fit for purpose to stand up for people's privacy rights in the age of AI.

OIPC Service Plan goals

The OIPC also published its Service Plan, measuring progress of four key goals over the reporting period covered as well as over the next four years. The goals are:

1. Uphold privacy rights and monitor protection of personal information
2. Promote and advocate for an open, accountable and transparent public sector.
3. Promote information and privacy rights and obligations to public bodies, organizations, and individuals.
4. Enhance the quality and capacity of the OIPC's people, systems, processes and culture.

These goals and the overall priorities of the office are the subject of the OIPC's ongoing public consultation to determine strategic goals for the next three years. The OIPC is accepting written submissions as part of the public consultation at OIPCTraining@oipc.bc.ca until June 30. For more information, visit:

<https://www.oipc.bc.ca/news-events/events/>

Full report: Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia Annual Report and Service Plan 2024/25: <https://www.oipc.bc.ca/documents/budget-annual-report-service-plans/2978>

Report highlights: <https://www.oipc.bc.ca/documents/infographics/2980>

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