



NEWS RELEASE

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

Toronto, Ontario, November 27, 2024 - 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 individuals. In 2023, there were 123,319 victims (aged 12 years and older) of intimate partner violence reported to police. While alarming, this statistic very likely underrepresents the true number of IPV incidents nationwide, as many cases go unreported.

Professionals working in the justice, health care, and social services sectors play an important role in reducing or eliminating IPV harm. Private-sector actors can also help identify and take necessary and reasonable steps to prevent potential IPV-related harm to clients and employees. A critical component of IPV prevention and mitigation includes the timely and responsible disclosure of personal information. Effective information-sharing could mean the difference between life and death.

In recent years, Canadians have seen a number of public inquiries and inquests involving IPV, which highlighted misconceptions about Canada's privacy laws. Organizations and their staff reported feeling conflicted about how to respond to an IPV situation due to concerns around their obligations of confidentiality and the risk of infringing privacy rights.

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 urges governments to work with their respective privacy regulator or ombuds to ensure organizations develop clear privacy policies around permissible disclosures, conduct public education campaigns, develop culturally sensitive and trauma-informed tools to support

organizations serving at-risk communities, and proactively disclose IPV-related data, statistics, and trends to help inform and improve policymaking on this issue.

The resolution also calls on public institutions and private sector organizations to establish corporate policies on permissible disclosures, require staff training, adopt culturally-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches particularly among marginalized, racialized, or vulnerable groups and consider the unique experiences of Indigenous communities, be transparent up front about potential disclosures and document them when they occur, ensure privacy and security safeguards are in place, and respect data minimization principles.

For their part, Canada’s privacy regulators commit 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.

“Intimate partner violence (IPV) is an epidemic in Nova Scotia. Our province has experienced far too many tragedies related to this pervasive problem,” says Tricia Ralph, Information and Privacy Commissioner for Nova Scotia. “Generally, privacy laws allow for the sharing of personal information without consent where there is risk of serious harm. However, professionals can feel unsure whether sharing such information is allowed for fear of causing a privacy breach,” notes Commissioner Ralph. “Harm or loss of life should not happen because of uncertainty about privacy laws. This resolution gives guidance on this important issue. It also calls on governments and organizations to proactively develop privacy policies and tools around the disclosure of personal information for IPV prevention.”

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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