



NEWS RELEASE

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Federal, Provincial and Territorial Privacy Commissioners Issue Joint Resolution on Securing Public Trust in Digital Health Communications

HALIFAX – In a joint resolution, Canada’s information and privacy regulators call on health sector institutions, health providers, governments, and regulatory colleges to replace traditional fax and unencrypted email with more modern, secure and interoperable digital health communication infrastructure.

The most common type of data breaches in the health sector continue to be dominated by the misuse of antiquated and insecure communications technologies such as traditional fax machines and unencrypted email to transmit personal health information of Canadians. Data breaches in the health sector can cause significant harm to affected individuals, including potential discrimination, stigmatization, financial and psychological distress. If individuals begin to lose trust in the health system, they may withhold or falsify personal health information, avoid treatment, or hesitate to consult their health providers altogether, putting their own lives and health at risk to protect their privacy.

“In Nova Scotia we continue to see the use of fax machines and misdirected or unencrypted emails as the most common causes of data breaches in the health sector,” says Tricia Ralph, Information and Privacy Commissioner for Nova Scotia. “In order for individuals to trust their personal health information within the healthcare system, custodians must commit to phasing out insecure systems and replacing them with more modern and secure digital alternatives.”

Canada’s information and privacy regulators recommend that health providers develop a strategic plan to phase out the use of traditional fax and unencrypted email and replace them with more modern, secure and interoperable digital alternatives in a gradual and coordinated fashion. The joint resolution provides nine recommendations to all levels of government, regulatory colleges, and health sector institutions and providers. These include amending laws and regulations to further provide for meaningful penalties, including administrative penalties for health providers that willfully refuse to take reasonable measures necessary to protect personal health information, and ensuring that the alternative means of digital health communication are equitably available and accessible to all Canadians.

Related document:

Joint Resolution: [Securing Public Trust in Digital Health Communications](#)

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