

## Mass metadata collection violates every individual's right to privacy

Commissioner Cavoukian releases a primer on metadata outlining its importance to freedom and privacy

TORONTO, ON (July 17, 2013) – Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner, Dr. Ann Cavoukian, today released "[A Primer on Metadata: Separating Fact from Fiction](#)," to explain that metadata actually can be more revealing than accessing the content of our communications. Since the recent revelations on the NSA's sweeping surveillance of the public's metadata, the term has been regularly used in the news, frequently without appropriate explanation of its meaning.

The paper aims to provide a clean understanding of metadata and dispute claims that the information being captured is neither sensitive, nor privacy-invasive, since it does not access the content contained in the associated communications. The paper outlines how metadata can actually be more revealing than its content. It considers the need for taking a proactive approach aimed at ensuring that governments achieve both security and privacy, in tandem, in an effort to ensure much-needed, over-arching accountability. The time to abandon "either/or" thinking is now.

### Myths and facts about metadata:

1) MYTH: Metadata is not a threat to privacy because it doesn't access any content.

FACT: You don't have to access the content of conversations to gain access to valuable information. Access to metadata can reveal the details of an individual's personal, political, social, financial, and working life.

2) MYTH: If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear.

FACT: Privacy isn't about hiding and it's not about secrecy. Privacy is all about control – personal control and freedom of choice. In a free and open society, individuals must be free to make informed choices about their lives, including when and to what extent they wish to reveal the personal details of their lives.

3) MYTH: If you want to be secure, you have to give up your privacy.

FACT: Not only *is* it possible to have security while protecting privacy, it is far preferable because that is the essence of freedom – going about one's daily activities without fear of the state surveillance looking over your shoulder. In free and open societies you are not expected to "tell all".

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Quotes:

“This primer underlines the importance of rejecting the outdated view that security trumps privacy and liberty. Canadians and Americans, like so many other freedom loving people, have given their lives for constitutional rights that say otherwise. We must band together and seek measures designed to provide for both security and privacy, in an accountable and transparent manner – our freedom and liberty may depend on it.”

Ann Cavoukian, Ph.D.

Information and Privacy Commissioner, Ontario, Canada

Download a copy of “[A Primer on Metadata: Separating Fact from Fiction.](#)”

View the [Commissioner’s Corner on YouTube video blog](#) about Metadata and the primer.

**About the Information and Privacy Commissioner**

The Information and Privacy Commissioner is appointed by and reports to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and is independent of the government of the day. The Commissioner's mandate includes overseeing the access and privacy provisions of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, as well as the *Personal Health Information Protection Act*, which applies to both public and private sector health information custodians. A vital component of the Commissioner's mandate is to help educate the public about access and privacy issues.

*Media contact:*

Trell Huether

Media Relations Specialist

Office: 416-326-3939

Mobile: 416-873-9746

Toll-free: 800-387-0073

[media@ipc.on.ca](mailto:media@ipc.on.ca)