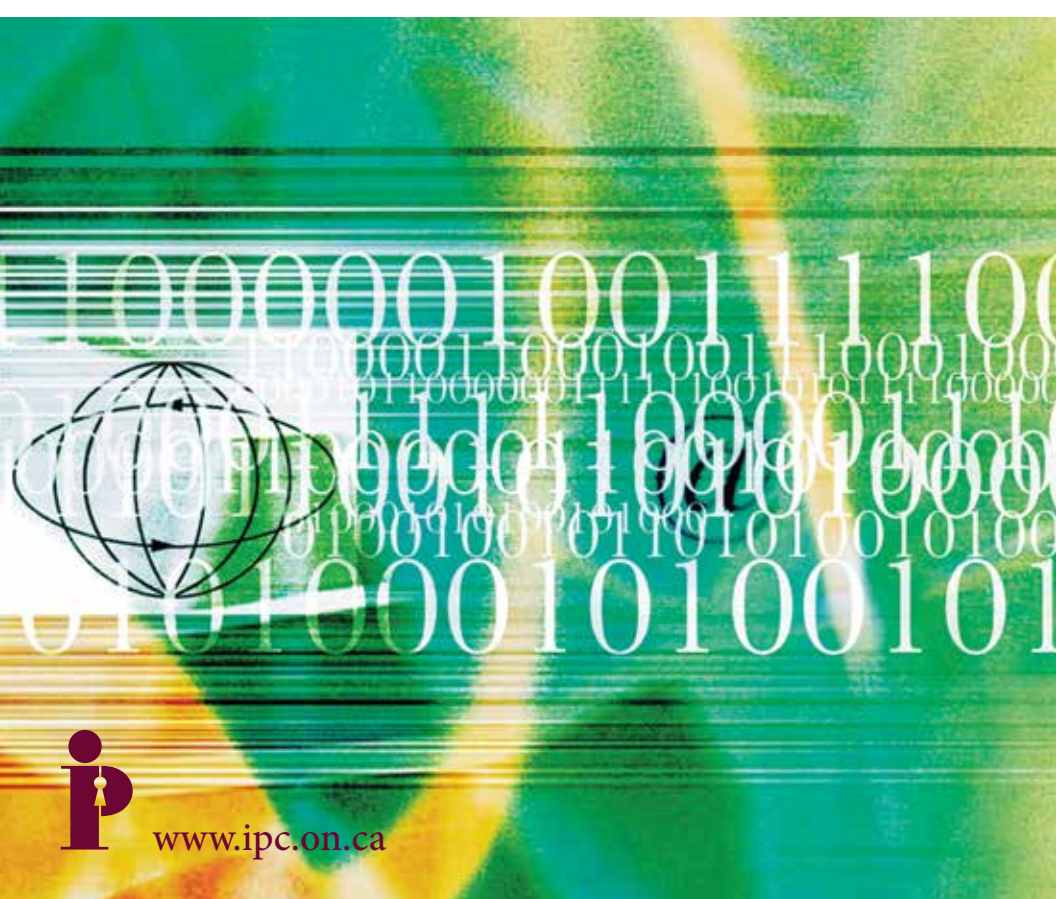


Your Privacy

Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner



www.ipc.on.ca



Introduction

Ontario's *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (the provincial and municipal *Acts*) help to protect your personal information held by provincial and local government institutions. It is the responsibility of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario (IPC) to ensure that public institutions abide by the *Acts*.

A third law, the *Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004* (*PHIPA*), governs the collection, use and disclosure of personal health information within the health-care system and also gives you the right to request access to your own personal health information held by health information custodians. (See the IPC brochure entitled *The Personal Health Information Protection Act and Your Privacy for more information about PHIPA.*)

THE FOLLOWING ARE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED ABOUT PERSONAL PRIVACY AND GOVERNMENT-HELD INFORMATION, UNDER THE PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL ACTS.

To which public institutions do the provincial and municipal *Acts* apply?

The provincial *Act* came into effect on January 1, 1988. It applies to all provincial ministries and most provincial agencies, boards and commissions, as well as colleges of applied arts and technology, universities and hospitals (as of January 1, 2012).

The municipal *Act* came into effect on January 1, 1991. It applies to local government institutions, including municipalities, police services boards, public library boards, school boards, conservation authorities, boards of health, transit commissions, certain municipal electricity corporations and certain local housing corporations.

The *Directory of Institutions*, which lists all of the public institutions covered by the *Acts*, can be accessed online at www.mgs.gov.on.ca.

What is personal information?

“Personal information” means recorded information about you. This may include your name, address, sex, age, education, medical or employment history – and any other information about you.

How does a public institution obtain information about me?

Institutions collect personal information as part of their role in providing services to the public. You give personal information to a public institution when you fill out an application for programs or services, such as a driver’s licence or building permit.

How do Ontario’s Acts protect my personal information?

The *Acts* require public institutions to protect the privacy of your personal information in their possession. There are specific rules on how they may collect, use, retain, disclose and dispose of your personal information.

How does a public institution use the personal information it collects?

The institution must tell you how it intends to use the information it collects. It must also provide you with the name of the person in the institution who can answer any questions you may have about how your personal information will be used.

Who has access to my personal information?

Access to your personal information is usually available only to persons in the public institution who need the information to do their jobs.

There are certain public records containing personal information which are open to all members of the public. Land registration records and assessment rolls are examples of this type of record.

Where is my file?

There is no master government file about you. If you've dealt with a public institution, it will probably have information about you. For example, the Ministry of Transportation has your driving record, a school board has your child's school records and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has your doctor's billing records.



How do I find out what personal information provincial and local governments have about me?

In most circumstances, the *Acts* give you the right to see your personal information held by a public institution. In many cases, you should be able to obtain your personal information just by calling, writing or visiting the appropriate institution.

How do I request correction of my personal information?

Contact the public institution which has the information and explain that you would like to correct your personal information. If the institution refuses to correct your personal information, you may require that a statement of disagreement be attached to your file.

That didn't work – now what?

If you didn't obtain the information you want, or they refuse to correct your personal information, make a written freedom of information request.

That sounds complicated. Is it?

Not really. Simply follow these steps:

Step 1: Complete a request form, or write a letter stating that you are requesting information or asking for a correction of your personal information under one of the two *Acts*. (A generic *request form* is available in the **Forms** section of the IPC’s website – www.ipc.on.ca.)

Step 2: Forward the completed request form or letter to the “Freedom of Information and Privacy Co-ordinator” at the public institution most likely to have the information you are looking for.

Is there a fee?

A \$5 application fee must accompany your request for access to your personal information. As well, you may be charged for photocopying and shipping costs. No fees are charged for the time required to locate and prepare records containing your personal information.

How long must I wait?

Public institutions that receive information requests under the *Acts* must respond within 30 calendar days of receipt of a request, unless there are special circumstances.

I’m not satisfied with the institution’s response. What do I do?

If the public institution won’t allow you to see or correct your personal information, you have the right to appeal the decision to the IPC. The appeal fee is \$10.

(The cheque or money order should be made out to “The Minister of Finance”.)

To appeal, write a letter to the Registrar at the IPC, describing why you are not satisfied with the institution’s decision. Or download, complete and mail in the appeal form that can be found in the **Forms** section of the IPC website (www.ipc.on.ca).

I'm not satisfied with how my personal information is being handled. What can I do?

If you feel your personal information has been improperly collected, used or disclosed by a public institution, call, write or visit the appropriate government office and try to resolve the matter yourself.

That didn't work – now what?

If you still can't obtain satisfaction, you may write to the Registrar at the IPC and explain your concern. Or, you can download, complete and mail in the privacy complaint form that can be found in the **Forms** section of the IPC website.

What happens next?

An *IPC analyst* may call you to clarify your concern and to tell you what has happened in similar cases. The analyst may also direct your complaint to another government body if they are in a better position to deal with your situation.

In some cases, a *mediator* will be assigned to your file to look into the matter and attempt to resolve your complaint. The matter may also be transferred to an investigator to conduct an investigation.



What happens to the public institution?

If your personal information is not being handled properly, the IPC will make recommendations to the public institution to prevent similar occurrences from happening again. An order may be issued if the investigator has found the public institution to be in contravention of privacy legislation.

I have more questions. Who can answer them?

If you have questions about the handling of your personal information held by public institutions or about Ontario's access and privacy legislation, please contact an IPC Information Officer at info@ipc.on.ca.





About the IPC

The role of the Information and Privacy Commissioner is set out in three statutes: the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Personal Health Information Protection Act*. The Commissioner is appointed by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and is independent of the government of the day.



For more information:

**Information and Privacy Commissioner
Ontario, Canada**

2 Bloor Street East, Suite 1400
Toronto, Ontario M4W 1A8 CANADA

Tel: 416-326-3333 or 1-800-387-0073

Fax: 416-325-9195 TTY: 416-325-7539

info@ipc.on.ca www.ipc.on.ca



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