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**Keynote by Patricia Koseim, Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario
IPC Privacy Day Event
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The power of PETs: Privacy enhancing technologies

Land acknowledgement

Good morning everyone, and thank you for joining us today.

I want to respectfully acknowledge that as we gather here, we are meeting on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples.

We also acknowledge that Toronto was originally named Tkaronto, meaning, “where there are trees standing in the water.” It is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit. We are thankful to work and live on this land, which is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples.

We offer this land acknowledgement to recognize, respect, and honour this territory, the treaties, the original occupants, their ancestors, and the historic connection they have with this land.

Welcome

Welcome everyone to Privacy Day 2025. This is an internationally recognized day dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of protecting personal information and privacy.

In recognition of that goal, the theme of our event today is — *The Power of PETs: Privacy Enhancing Technologies*.

I'd like to give a warm welcome to our six panelists who have kindly agreed to participate in today's event, and the more than 1,700 people who are joining us here, both in person and online.

We are in for an exciting discussion on privacy enhancing technologies — or PETs — and how they can address some of the most pressing privacy issues facing organizations today.

J'aimerais aussi souhaiter la bienvenue à nos participants Francophones! La webdiffusion d'aujourd'hui sera traduite simultanément en français.

Today's event will also be posted on our [YouTube channel](#) for future viewing as well.

Innovation and privacy enhancing technologies

In the spirit of today's event, let me quote Harvard Business School Professor, Theodore Levitt who said:

“Creativity is thinking up new things. Innovation is doing new things.”

As regulators and privacy advocates, it’s incumbent on us to think and do new things. If we have any chance of keeping up with technology and staying relevant, we have to meet innovation with innovation.

By being innovative, we can help enable responsible use of data in ways that benefit our health, our economy, and our society — without compromising our right to privacy.

We need innovative approaches, methods and technologies to protect digital information as it races across the public, private and health sectors.

I use the word “races” quite deliberately here, as digital technologies continue to advance at lightning speed, spurred on by incredible innovations and fierce competition.

By way of analogy, let me draw from the world of ski racing. We are in Canada in the month of January after all!

In recent years, skis have undergone tremendous innovation in terms of composition materials, their length and shape, high performance bindings, special types of wax and damping technologies to absorb vibration at high speeds. So much innovation in fact, that the sport has become downright dangerous!

But luckily, we are seeing other innovators step up to the gate to ensure the safety of skiers with innovative technologies such as high-shock-absorbing safety helmets, air bag vests that inflate on impact, and cut-proof long underwear to protect against razor-sharp edges.

Even race officials as regulators of the sport are using high tech snow-making technology to adapt to see-saw weather conditions and are adjusting the distance between gates, turn radius and gradient of slopes to keep the racecourse within safe limits.

Just as in ski racing, we too, as privacy advocates and regulators, have to get innovative with how we minimize the risks associated with rapidly accelerating digital technologies.

The power of PETs lies in their ability to minimize the risk to personal information while unlocking the potential of data to improve programs and services.

Privacy enhancing technologies, as they’ve expanded and improved over time, are becoming essential tools for utilizing data in both beneficial and privacy-protective ways.

There is already positive momentum around PETs. A growing number of regulators around the world are actively advancing the adoption of these technologies, including de-identification, synthetic data and differential privacy.

The Information Commissioner's Office in the United Kingdom provides [guidance](#) on PETs for data protection officers. It explains the different types of PETs available and how these can help achieve lawful compliance.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe has also issued [guidance](#) on synthetic data. It explains how creating detailed synthetic datasets can allow for greater analytical insight while maintaining the confidentiality of individuals and organizations.

And Singapore's Infocomm Media Development Authority has a [Privacy Enhancing Technology Sandbox](#). It can match organizations with PET vendors, provide grants to implement pilot projects, and offer regulatory support to ensure compliance.

This innovative PET sandbox is referenced in a recent report, co-authored by Dr. Teresa Scassa and Elif Nur Kumru of the University of Ottawa, in partnership with my office. It's called [Exploring the Potential for a Privacy Regulatory Sandbox for Ontario](#), and it's available on our website.

The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada issued a [report](#) in 2017 on the tools and techniques of PETs. It includes a review of the types of technologies available.

But truth be told, PETs have been around for a while now.

As far back as 1995, the Ontario IPC introduced the concept of privacy enhancing technologies in a [joint report](#) issued with the predecessor of the Dutch Data Protection Authority. The report describes how PETs can be built into the design of new information technologies to enable greater use of anonymized data for daily transactions.

In 2016, the Ontario IPC released its award-winning guidance called, [De-identification Guidelines for Structured Data](#).

And today, with the support of IPC's current [Scholar-in-Residence](#), Dr. Khaled El Emam, we are working to update that guidance, in light of developments of the past decade.

We are currently consulting with specialists from a broad range of sectors, and we expect to issue our updated de-identification guidance later this year. So please stay tuned.

Conclusion

So, whether it's de-identification, synthetic data, differential privacy or other types of PETs, we have to keep in mind that there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

Every organization is different, and we need to make these privacy enhancing technologies accessible and easy to adopt for organizations, both big and small, so that everyone can benefit.

By embracing and encouraging the widespread adoption of PETs, we can effect change that unlocks the value of data while preserving privacy, creating real and beneficial outcomes for all.

And most importantly, we cannot lose sight of the most critical success factor for any organization — public trust.

To gain and maintain that trust, organizations have to be able to demonstrate that they have people's privacy interests top of mind.

Adopting privacy enhancing technologies to protect personal information, or to avoid the use of personal information altogether, is a huge step in the right direction.

So, it's time.

It's time we meet innovation with innovation.

While data is a valuable commodity, privacy enhancing technologies demonstrate that innovation and privacy can go hand in hand. By investing in, and adopting, PETs, organizations can protect privacy while unlocking economic and social opportunities, building trust, and driving long-term success.

Thank you again to our panelists and welcome to everyone who is joining us today.

I will now hand things over to the IPC's Director of Technology Policy, Dr. Christopher Parsons, who will be moderating two very interesting and inspiring panel discussions this morning.

Thank you. Merci.