

Trust, transparency, and democracy in an era of misinformation

Federal, Provincial, Territorial Information Commissioners and Ombuds
responsible for overseeing access to information Resolution - November 2025

Resolution

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Context

Transparency is a key pillar of our democracy. It empowers citizens to be informed, hold public institutions to account, and participate in decisions that affect their lives. It supports a healthy information ecosystem that enables access to a range of sources and ideas, promoting free and evidence-based discourse. In doing so, transparency helps to foster public trust.¹ Trust in public institutions is crucial for the effectiveness and legitimacy of democratic systems.

Misinformation² can erode public trust. In our digital age, false and misleading information can quickly reach and influence mass audiences, contributing to confusion, polarization, and social discord.³ Misinformation thrives in our modern information ecosystem, where online algorithms reward divisive and emotionally charged content, and artificial intelligence tools create realistic imagery that makes it hard to tell what is real and what is fake.⁴ This can make it challenging to navigate public discourse, affecting citizen engagement and trust.

When public institutions are not transparent, or when they communicate in a way that is misleading, this too can undermine trust and allow misinformation to flourish. Citizens may try to fill the void otherwise, by drawing their own conclusions based on incomplete or inaccurate information. This can fuel conspiracy theories and prevent citizens from meaningfully holding their governments to account based on facts rather than fiction.

1. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [2021 Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions](#) found that “trust in government is strongly associated with whether people can easily access information.”

2. This resolution uses the term misinformation to refer to a range of false and misleading information without implying a particular intent when that information is shared. Misinformation refers to information that is false or misleading but shared without an intent to cause harm, while disinformation refers to the intentional dissemination of false information for the purpose of deceiving, influencing, or otherwise causing harm. Another term, malinformation, refers to information that is genuine but distributed with an intent to cause harm (such as the release of hacked documents or sharing a real image deliberately out of context). When disinformation or malinformation is unknowingly shared by someone who believes it to be true, it can also fall under the category of misinformation. Other commonly used terms such as “fake news,” “propaganda,” “alternative facts,” “hoaxes,” and “manipulated media” have similar but distinct (and in some cases unclear) meanings. For further reading, see Claire Wardle’s [Understanding information disorder](#) and the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security’s [How to identify misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation](#).

3. See the Ontario IPC’s 2023 Info Matters Podcast episode with Dr. Alex Himelfarb: [Trust and truth: Navigating the age of misinformation](#), and the Council of Canadian Academies 2023 report [Fault Lines: Expert Panel on the Socioeconomic Impacts of Science and Health Misinformation](#).

4. The 2024 [Disruptions on the Horizon](#) report from Policy Horizons Canada analyzed plausible events and circumstances that could affect Canadian society in the coming years. It identified the most likely disruption in the next 3-5 years to be that “people cannot tell what is true and what is not.”

The consequences are significant. Misinformation can shape opinions, behaviours, and even public policy. It can distort public discourse, influence elections, harm public health and safety, destabilize economies, and ultimately undermine the shared understanding necessary for collective decision-making in a democratic society.

In this context, public access to reliable⁵ information is critical. By embracing transparency and proactively making accurate information available to the public, public institutions can play a crucial role in strengthening our collective information ecosystem, countering misinformation, enhancing trust, and preserving the integrity and resilience of democratic societies.



Recalling

Recent calls to action made by the FPT Information Regulators to advance transparency and access to information in this emerging context, including in a joint resolution on [Facilitating Canadians' access to government records to help restore trust in our institutions](#) (Quebec City, October 2023), followed by a further joint resolution on [Transparency by default – Information Regulators Call for a New Standard in Government Service](#) (Toronto, October 2024).



Therefore

Canada's FPT Information Regulators call for the adoption of concerted measures to enhance the transparency and accountability of public bodies/institutions, counter misinformation, and strengthen the public trust needed for an effective and sustainable democracy.

More specifically, FPT Information Regulators call on their respective governments to promote a more robust information ecosystem by:

1. Modernizing access to information laws in their respective jurisdictions, including by codifying an explicit duty to document⁶ on the part of public bodies/institutions, as well as minimum requirements for the proactive disclosure of information and records to the public.
2. Adequately funding and resourcing public bodies/institutions so they can provide timely and effective responses to access to information requests, implement proactive disclosure in practice, and actively pursue open government and open data initiatives in a manner that is secure and privacy protective.

5. The [International Partnership for Information and Democracy](#) defines information to be reliable "insofar as its collection, processing and dissemination are free and independent, based on cross-checking of various sources, in a pluralistic media landscape where the facts can give rise to a diversity of interpretation and viewpoints."

6. See the 2016 [Statement of the Information and Privacy Commissioners of Canada on the Duty to Document](#), and accompanying [Backgrounder: Duty to document](#).

3. Funding the development and adoption of digital infrastructure that considers factors like independence, data sovereignty, and public ownership to support secure and sustainable repositories of public information.
4. Supporting media and civil society in facilitating the public's right to know, and taking measures to enhance Canadians' awareness of their access to information rights.
5. Following recommendations by experts in information integrity related to promoting digital and media literacy, supporting access to reliable information from a plurality of sources, and regulating online platforms to enhance transparency about algorithms and targeted content.

FPT Information Regulators also call on public bodies/institutions to ensure the documentation, availability, and integrity of public information and enhance public trust by:

6. Ensure organizations develop privacy policies around the permissible disclosure of personal information in ensuring the creation of records that explain the context, facts, and bases for their decisions, actions, and policies.
7. Recording information completely and accurately and storing it in a way that supports timely access and transparency, avoiding practices that make information hard to find like the use of code words or storing records on a mix of official and personal systems.⁷
8. Embracing public scrutiny of the information on which their decisions and policies are based, and empowering citizens to challenge the use of any erroneous information they may hold,⁸ which can lead to course corrections and even better policy decisions.
9. Making and tracking corrections and updates when information they hold is found to be unreliable, while retaining access to historical records for posterity, and taking measures to reduce misunderstandings when answering requests for information that is known to be outdated or inaccurate, such as explaining context, adding disclaimers, or appending correct information.
10. Recognizing the importance of timeliness when responding to access requests, particularly when there is an opportunity to provide early clarity or counter-perspectives on issues about which misinformation may be circulating, and dedicating sufficient resources and training to help reduce undue delays, which may be perceived as an attempt to hide something or avoid accountability.
11. Facilitating access to public information without the need to file a request, especially when it relates to significant public interest issues such as the environment or public health, by implementing open data initiatives, proactively and routinely disclosing records, and designing public-facing websites to make policy-related materials and information easy to find.⁹
12. Communicating in a straightforward and responsible manner when releasing politically sensitive records, being mindful of the line between managing contentious issues and providing information to the public in a way that is misleading.

7. See the 2024 resolution of Canada's Information Commissioners and Ombuds, [Transparency by default – Information Regulators Call for a New Standard in Government Service](#).

8. Examples may include scientific research that has been debunked, or incomplete or inaccurate data. This information may be held and used unknowingly, or in some cases intentionally.

9. In a [2019 article for Policy Options](#), Professor Amanda Clarke discusses how simple, streamlined government websites focused on service delivery can impact the public's ability to find policy-relevant information such as speeches, reports, and press releases when their designs do not prioritize searching for or navigating to those types of materials.

As FPT Information Regulators, we ourselves commit to advancing transparency and enhancing public trust by:

13. Advocating for improved access to information laws that reflect the realities, needs, and challenges of our digital age, including issues related to the volume of information to be managed, risks and opportunities presented by advancing technologies, and the need for sustainable public access to reliable current and historical information.
14. Exploring opportunities to collaborate with and learn from other regulators and oversight bodies, such as those that oversee elections, communications policy, security, and public integrity on matters related to misinformation and enhancing public trust.¹⁰
15. Continuing our efforts to enhance efficiency and reduce processing times for access to information complaints, appeals, and reviews to support the release of public information in a timely manner.
16. Advancing our own transparency efforts, such as publishing statistical information about caseloads, outcomes and file processing times.

10. For example, the [Canadian Digital Regulators Forum](#) is a partnership between the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the Competition Bureau, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, and the Copyright Board of Canada formed to collaborate on matters relating to digital markets and platforms.