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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Privacy authorities pass resolution urging safeguards for sharing personal health information

ST. JOHN'S – Canada's federal, provincial, and territorial information and privacy commissioners and ombudspersons are calling for a concerted effort across the healthcare sector and amongst governments to modernize and strengthen privacy protections for sharing personal health information.

The Yukon's acting Information and Privacy Commissioner (IPC), Jason Pedlar, is meeting in St. John's, Newfoundland this week with his colleagues from across the country. In a joint resolution released today, Pedlar and other information and privacy regulators noted that the use of outdated and vulnerable technologies, such as faxes and unencrypted email, threatens to erode the public's confidence that personal health information is secure.

"Personal health information is one of the most sensitive types of information about an individual," said Pedlar. "There are many modern and practical ways to facilitate the legal and secure sharing of personal health information, such as encrypted email services, secure patient portals, electronic referrals, and electronic prescribing. It is critical to protect this information in order to maintain Canadians' trust in the health system."

The joint resolution outlines measures for adoption by governments, health institutions, and health care providers, as well as ways that privacy authorities will assist.

For governments, this includes a call for a strategic plan and supports, funding and other incentives to encourage the adoption of secure digital technologies and to implement frameworks that provide reasonable protection of personal health information.

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“The resolution also calls for assurances that all infrastructure for sharing health information is available and accessible to all Canadians, including those in the North and other remote areas of Canada,” added Pedlar. “We recognize that communication challenges are still present in some areas, such as limited infrastructure. We are looking for workable solutions that can be implemented in the Yukon and elsewhere.”

The resolution also sets out measures to be taken by the health care sector, including phasing out fax and unencrypted email, as soon as reasonably possible, when communicating personal health information. These should be replaced by modern secure transmission methods such as encrypted email, secure patient portals, electronic referrals and electronic prescribing. Custodians, referred to more generally as health care providers, should also implement responsible data governance frameworks that provide reasonable safeguards to protect personal health information, including monitoring electronic systems, regular auditing of risks to privacy and security, and, in the event of breaches, response plans and mitigation measures.

The resolution lists ways in which Canada’s information and privacy commissioners and ombudspersons will collaborate to assist in these improvements, including provision of privacy and security guidance. In the Yukon, the Office of the IPC remains available to provide advice to custodians, including its Toolkit for Small Custodians, found [here](#).

The resolution can be found [here](#) and the national news release [here](#).

The Ombudsman, Information and Privacy Commissioner, and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner is an independent officer of the Yukon Legislative Assembly. For more information, please go to www.yukonombudsman.ca.

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