



Media statement: Information Access Commissioners and Commonwealth Ombudsman release survey results on community attitudes

30 September 2021

Information Access Commissioners and Commonwealth Ombudsman today released the findings of their second cross jurisdictional study of community attitudes on access to government information.

Commissioners from NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and the Ombudsman from the ACT, sponsored the research for a second time, having conducted their inaugural study in 2019.

The 2021 Information Access Study measures citizens' awareness of the right to access government information, and their experiences and outcomes in exercising that right.

The research provides a broad insight into citizens' views and experiences of the right to access information. Key findings include:

- The importance of the right to access information is consistently recognised by respondents in each jurisdiction (ranging from 85% to 90% in 2021, consistent with 85% to 93% in 2019)
- The majority of respondents in each jurisdiction were aware that they had the right to access information from government departments/agencies (73% to 83% in 2021, consistent with 77% to 85% in 2019).
- The majority of respondents were aware of their right to access information from state government agencies and local councils, consistent with 2019.
- On average 3 in 10 respondents had contacted at least one government agency in the past three years to obtain government information.
- In general, citizens were able to obtain information successfully in each jurisdiction (61% to 88% in 2021, consistent with 60% to 91% in 2019*).

This year, a number of jurisdictions also took the opportunity to ask respondents two questions regarding government's increased use of data, algorithms and other forms of artificial intelligence to inform decisions. It was found that:

- The majority of respondents in the surveyed jurisdictions agreed that agencies should be required to publicly report on artificial intelligence that is used to inform decisions that impact individuals (75% to 86%).
- The majority of respondents also agreed that agencies should publicly report on the information they maintain (80% to 86%).

Through enhanced understanding of community attitudes and experiences, the study's results will help inform activities to promote and support the right to access government information.

The results will also enable governments to examine the performance of their respective access to information laws from a citizen perspective.

[View the research findings here.](#)

The right to access government information is independently overseen by the state, territory and commonwealth Information Commissioners and Ombudsmen. Participating jurisdictions released the following statement:

“The right to access information is a fundamental principle of an open and democratic government. The results of the 2021 study reinforce the continuing importance the community places on the right to access government information, and the duty of governments to promote and enable this significant right.

In a contemporary and increasingly digital environment agencies should adopt an Open by Design approach. By adopting an Open by Design approach, governments can ensure access, openness and transparency as we move increasingly to digital government and data informed decision-making.

The valuable insights provided in this second cross jurisdictional survey involving four Australian states and the ACT will assist in building a better understanding of information access frameworks. It reinforces commitments under the Open Government National Action Plans to better measure and understand the value citizens place on the right to access government information, and their experiences and outcomes.

The results will assist Information Access Commissioners and the ACT Ombudsman to encourage governments to promote access to government-held information. It will drive jurisdictions to continue their work to advance an effective and contemporary model of open government that supports public participation and is accountable and transparent.”

Co-signed by:

Elizabeth Tydd, Information Commissioner, New South Wales

Sven Bluemmel, Information Commissioner, Victoria

Rachael Rangihaeata, Information Commissioner, Queensland

Catherine Fletcher, Information Commissioner, Western Australia

Penny McKay, A/G Commonwealth Ombudsman, ACT

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** The results recognise that the legislation varies in each jurisdiction with one jurisdiction (ACT) only recently introducing legislation to provide the right to information.*

For further information, please contact:

The Office of the Information Commissioner (WA) by email to info@oic.wa.gov.au or phone to 6551 7830.

About the Western Australian Information Commissioner

The Information Commissioner is an independent officer who reports directly to Parliament. The position is established by the *Freedom of Information Act 1992 (WA)* (**the FOI Act**) and is supported by staff of the Office of the Information Commissioner.

The main function of the Information Commissioner is to, in response to complaints by applicants, provide independent external review of decisions made by agencies on access applications and requests to amend personal information under the FOI Act.

The Information Commissioner's other responsibilities include:

- ensuring that agencies are aware of their responsibilities under the FOI Act;
- ensuring that members of the public are aware of the FOI Act and their rights;
- providing assistance to members of the public and agencies on matters relevant to the FOI Act; and
- recommending to Parliament legislative or administrative changes that could be made to help the objects of the FOI Act to be achieved.

See more detail about the results of the 2021 Western Australian study <[here](#)>.