

Media statement: Information commissioners and ombudsmen release survey results on community attitudes

27 September 2023

Information commissioners and ombudsmen from across Australia today released the findings of their third cross-jurisdictional study of community attitudes on access to government information.

The 2023 Cross-jurisdictional Information Access Study measures citizens' awareness of the right to access government information, and their experiences and outcomes in exercising that right.

Commissioners from NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, Ombudsmen from Tasmania and the ACT, and the federal Information Commissioner, sponsored the research for a third time, having conducted their inaugural study in 2019.

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

- The vast majority (91%) of Australians nationwide believed that their right to access information from government sources was important. This is consistent across the jurisdictions.
- The majority of respondents in each jurisdiction were aware that they had the right to access information from government departments/agencies (56% to 72%), with respondents from Western Australia and Queensland most likely to be aware of this right.
- The proportion of respondents who had tried to access information from government agencies varied (21% to 41%), with NSW respondents most commonly requesting information.
- The majority of respondents successfully accessed the information they requested. Respondents who requested information from federal agencies had a success rate of 85%. At a state and territory level, success in attempting to access information fell within the moderate to high range (68% to 78%).
- The success rate varied depending on the type of government entity and the kind of information requested. Respondents had the most success accessing information held by public universities and TAFEs, and the least success accessing information held by state and territory ministers and their staff.

The study provides important insights into citizens' attitudes and experiences that will help inform the commissioners and ombudsmen's activities to promote and support the right to access government information.

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

[Access the 2023 Cross-jurisdictional Information Access Study.](#)

[Access the 2023 ACT Jurisdictional Information Access Study.](#)

The right to access government information is independently overseen by state, territory and federal information commissioners and ombudsmen. Participating Commissioners and Ombudsmen released the following statement:

“The right to access information is a fundamental pillar of accountable, open and responsible government. The study results highlight the importance the community places on the right to access government information, and the duty of governments to promote and enable this significant right.

In our digital age, where information flows faster than ever, we must ensure that access to government information is not only upheld but continually improved. We are committed to advocating and promoting open, transparent, and accessible government, and to safeguarding the public's right to seek and receive the information they need to participate fully in our democracy.

The valuable insights provided in this third cross-jurisdictional study help to build a better understanding of information access frameworks across Australia. The survey also reinforces Australia's 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 when exercising that right.

The results demonstrate the continued need for information commissioners and ombudsmen to encourage governments to promote greater and full access to information they hold. It will also inform ongoing work to advance an effective and contemporary model of open government that supports public participation and is accountable and transparent.”

Co-signed by:

Angelene Falk, Australian Information Commissioner and Privacy Commissioner,
Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

Toni Pirani, Acting Freedom of Information Commissioner, Office of the Australian
Information Commissioner

Elizabeth Tydd, Information Commissioner, New South Wales

Rachel Dixon, Acting Information Commissioner, Victoria

Stephanie Winson, Acting Information Commissioner, Queensland

Catherine Fletcher, Information Commissioner, Western Australia

Richard Connock, Ombudsman, Tasmania

Iain Anderson, Ombudsman, ACT

MORE INFORMATION:

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Background information on the Information Access Study

Woolcott Research was commissioned by participating information commissioners and ombudsmen to investigate citizens' awareness and experience of the right to access information held by government agencies in NSW, the ACT, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia as well as federally. The report compares results between jurisdictions. The first cross-jurisdictional study was conducted in 2019.