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### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of Right to Know is to raise awareness of an individual's right to access government information, while promoting freedom of information as essential to both democracy and good governance.

### **ORIGIN**

International Right to Know Day originated in 2002 in Sofia, Bulgaria at an international meeting of access to information advocates, who proposed that September 28 be dedicated to the promotion of freedom of information worldwide. Representatives of Freedom of Information (FOI) organizations from 15 countries took part – Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Hungary, India, Latvia, Macedonia, Mexico, Moldova, Rumania, Slovakia, South Africa, and USA, as well as representatives of international organizations active in the FOI field.

Since 2002, the popularity and scope of Right to Know Day has grown. In Canada for example, Right to Know celebrations have expanded into a week-long event coast to coast. Right to Know Week events consist of conferences and panel discussions, workshops and seminars, the tabling of special reports and studies on access to information, as well as presenting awards in recognition of those who support access to information rights.

### **WHY EXERCISE YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW?**

Every Canadian citizen has the right to request access to government records – a right that is preserved through various federal, provincial and territorial laws across Canada. This democratic right is essential to fostering greater government accountability and transparency.

- ✓ Discover information about your government's decision-making process regarding policies and priorities.
- ✓ Gain a better understanding of a government related issue that is important to you.
- ✓ Have all relevant information in hand when casting your vote.

### FAST FACTS

- Approximately 40 countries and 60 non-governmental organizations participate in the annual celebration of Right to Know Day.
- Over 90 countries worldwide have introduced freedom of information legislation; Sweden being the world's first by adopting FOI rules in 1766.
- The first Canadian provinces to introduce their own provincial access to information legislation were Nova Scotia (1977), New Brunswick (1980), Newfoundland (1981), and Québec (1982).
- On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1983—Canada's birthday—the *Access to Information Act* came into force.
- Today, all Canadian provinces and territories have freedom of information legislation and a commissioner or ombudsperson responsible for ensuring that the rights of information requesters are respected.

“The overarching purpose of access to information legislation, then, is to facilitate democracy. It does so in two related ways. It helps to ensure first, that citizens have the information required to participate meaningfully in the democratic process, and secondly, that politicians and bureaucrats remain accountable to the citizenry.”

(Justice Gérard La Forest – Supreme Court of Canada, *Dagg v. Canada*, 1997)