

Australian Government Information Access Survey

Prepared for: **Office of the Australian
Information Commissioner**



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Summary



Information Access



Demographics





Summary

Awareness and Importance of the right to access information

- Three quarters of respondents feel that their right to access information held by the government is 'very' (52%) or 'quite' (32%) important and the majority (87%) are aware of their right to do so.
- Awareness of the right to access information was highest for the Australian Government (83%) and lowest for Australian government ministers (36%).
- Overall, most would access government information via the internet or a government agency website, particularly younger 18-34 year olds.

Incidence of accessing information

- Over a third of respondents had attempted to access government held information, with younger respondents being more likely to have done so in the last three years.
- Government agencies (27%) were the most common entity for respondents to have accessed.
- The majority of those who tried were successful at accessing information.
 - Information that participants wished to access tended to be available online or sent to them straight away, although some of those who were successful needed to make a formal access application.
 - Most of those who were not able to access all they attempted to, were at least able to access a portion of the information they were seeking.
 - Success in accessing information did not vary significantly over state.
 - Participants were most successful at accessing complete procedural documents, and least successful at accessing their personal information.
- Reasons for not having contacted an agency was mainly a lack of need to, however almost one in ten respondents did not know they could.
- Most were likely to contact either the agency involved (31%) or the Ombudsman (32%) if they had an issue accessing information.
- The majority of respondents (84%) are not aware of the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner.

Research design

- Woolcott Research was commissioned by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner to measure citizens' awareness of their right to access government held information and investigate their experiences and outcomes when exercising that right.
- A mixed mode survey amongst n=1,005 participants aged 18+ years was conducted between 18th June and 30th June 2019. A breakdown of respondents by state/territory is displayed below.

ACT/NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
n=335	n=12	n=202	n=74	n=24	n=252	n=102

- Quotas were set by state, location (metro/regional), gender and age. Data was post-weighted to reflect the latest ABS population figures.

Summary



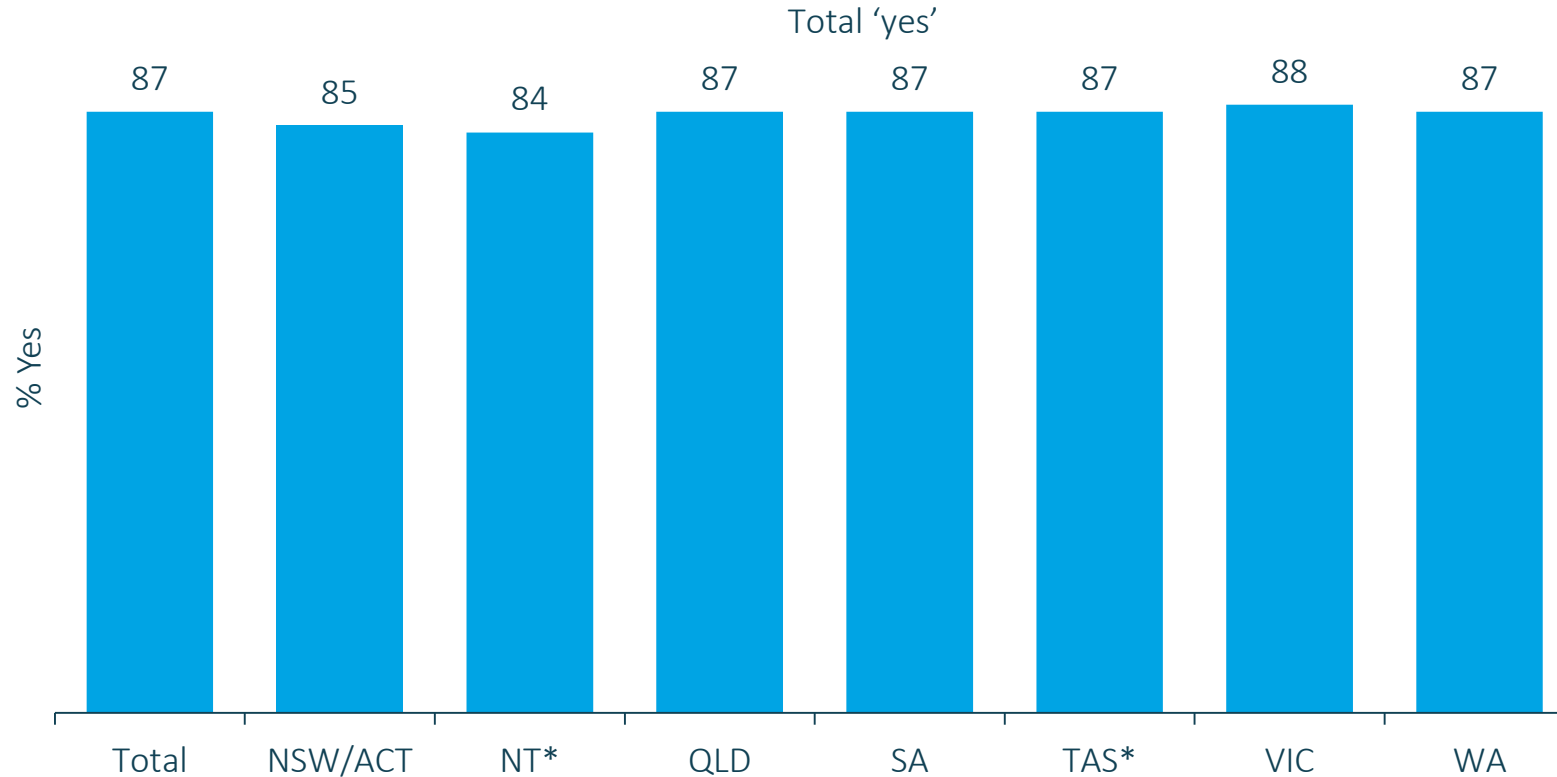
Information Access



Demographics



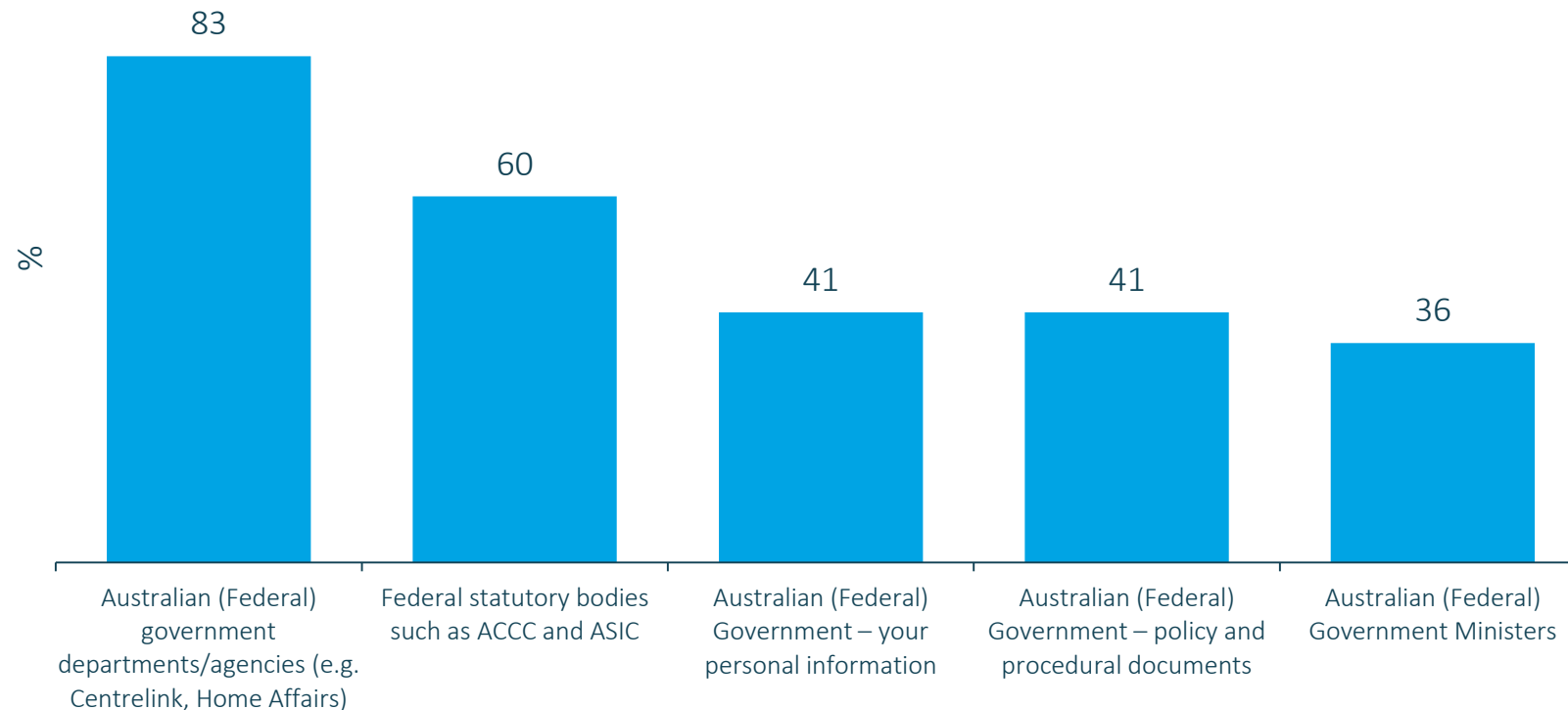
Total awareness of right to access information



The majority of the respondents were aware they had the right to access information held by a range of Australian Government agencies.

The proportion of those aware did not vary by state.

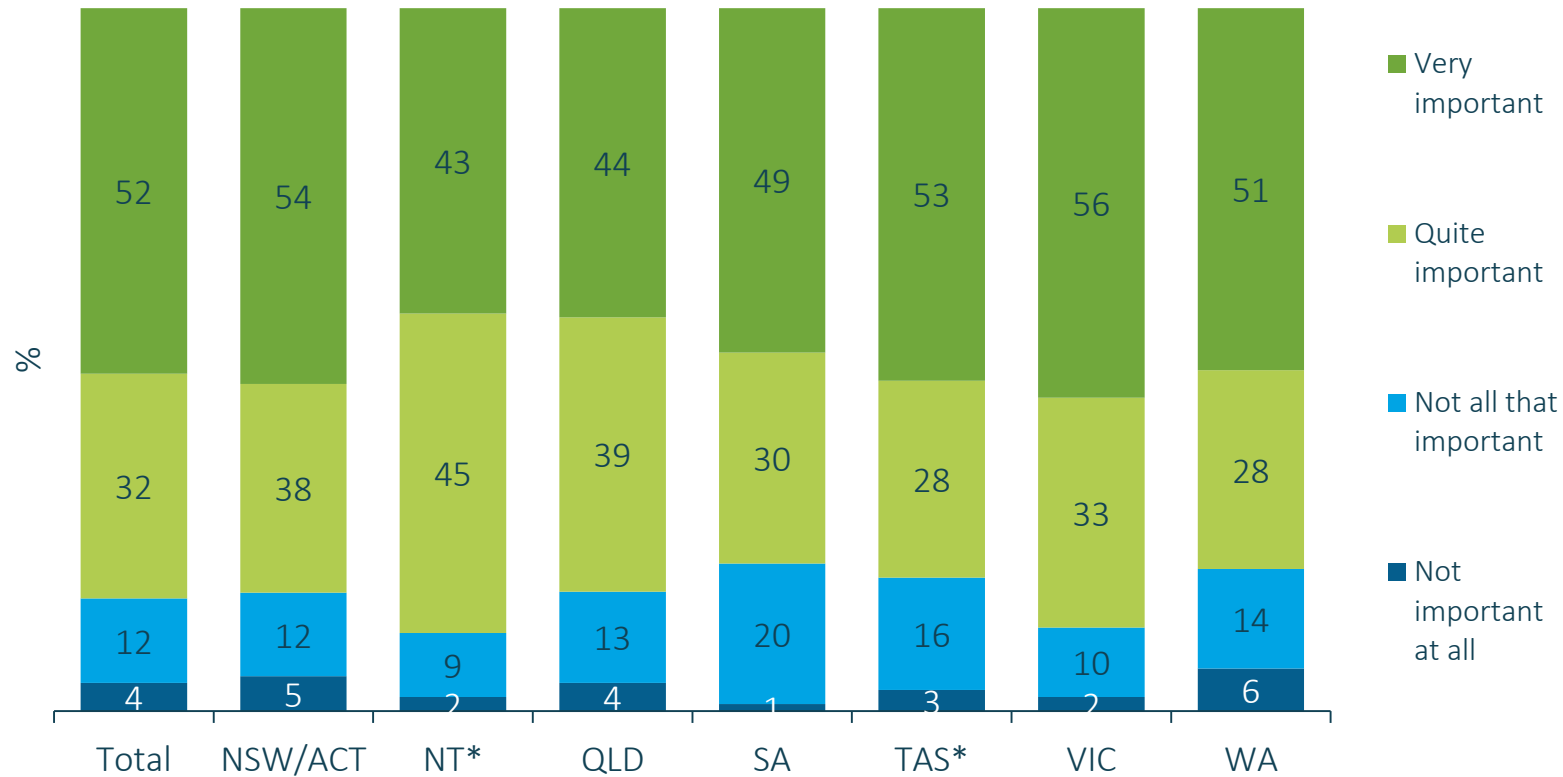
Awareness of right to access information from a range of Australian Government agencies



Awareness of the right to access information was highest for Australian Government and lowest for Australian Government ministers.

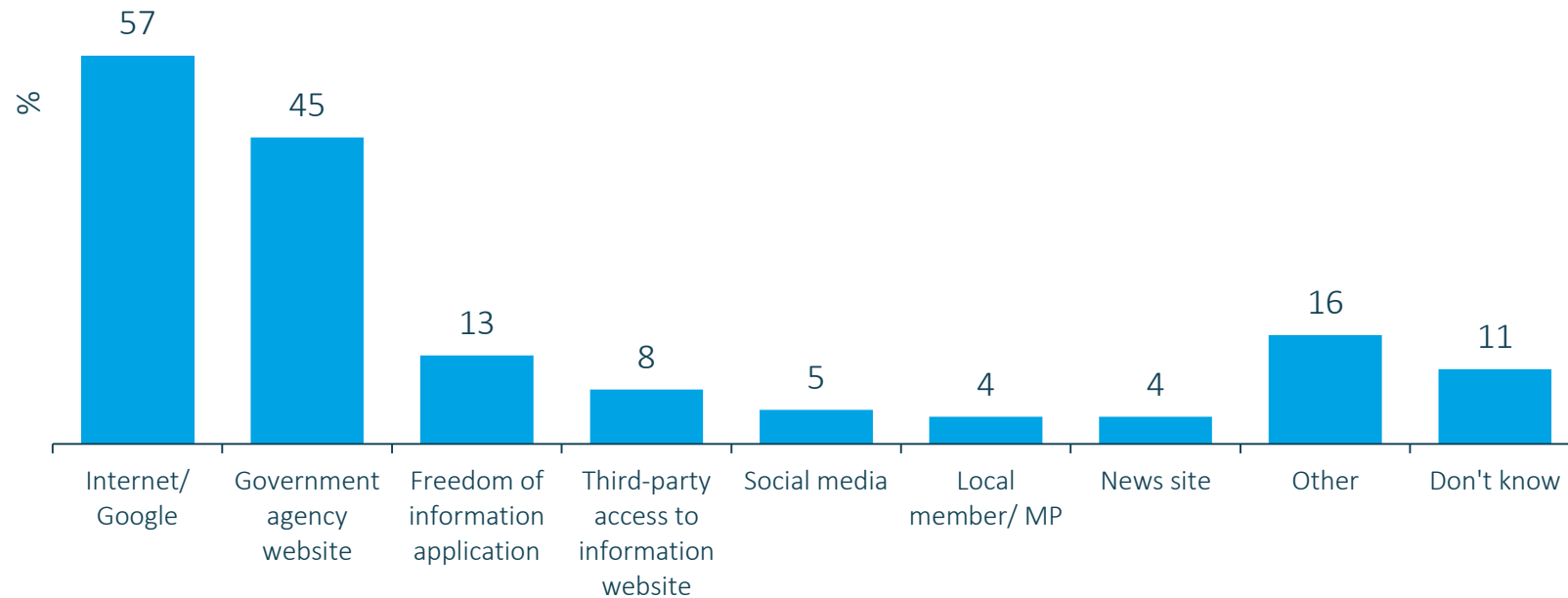
Males were significantly more aware of their ability to access personal information, while older participants were more knowledgeable of their right to access policy and procedural documents, information held by statutory bodies and Ministers.

Importance of having the right to access information



Three quarters of participants felt that their right to access information held by the government is 'very' or 'quite' important.

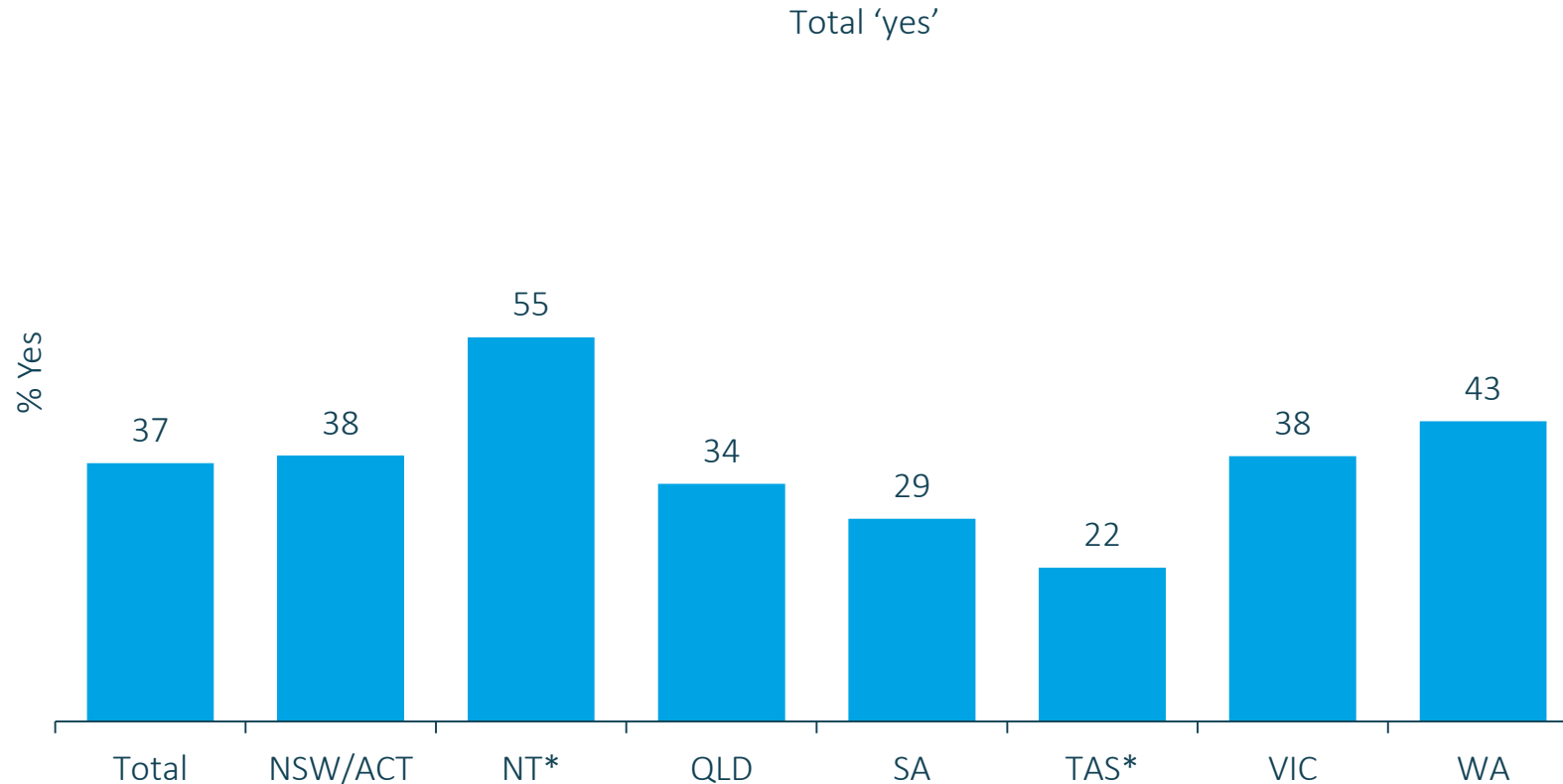
Presumed source of Government information



The most common source of access to information was felt to be through the internet.

Younger respondents (18-34) were significantly more likely to search for government information via an internet search, a third-party website, social media or news sites, whereas older respondents were more likely to contact their local member/MP or seek information from sources that were not listed, such as friends and family.

Incidence of attempting to access information

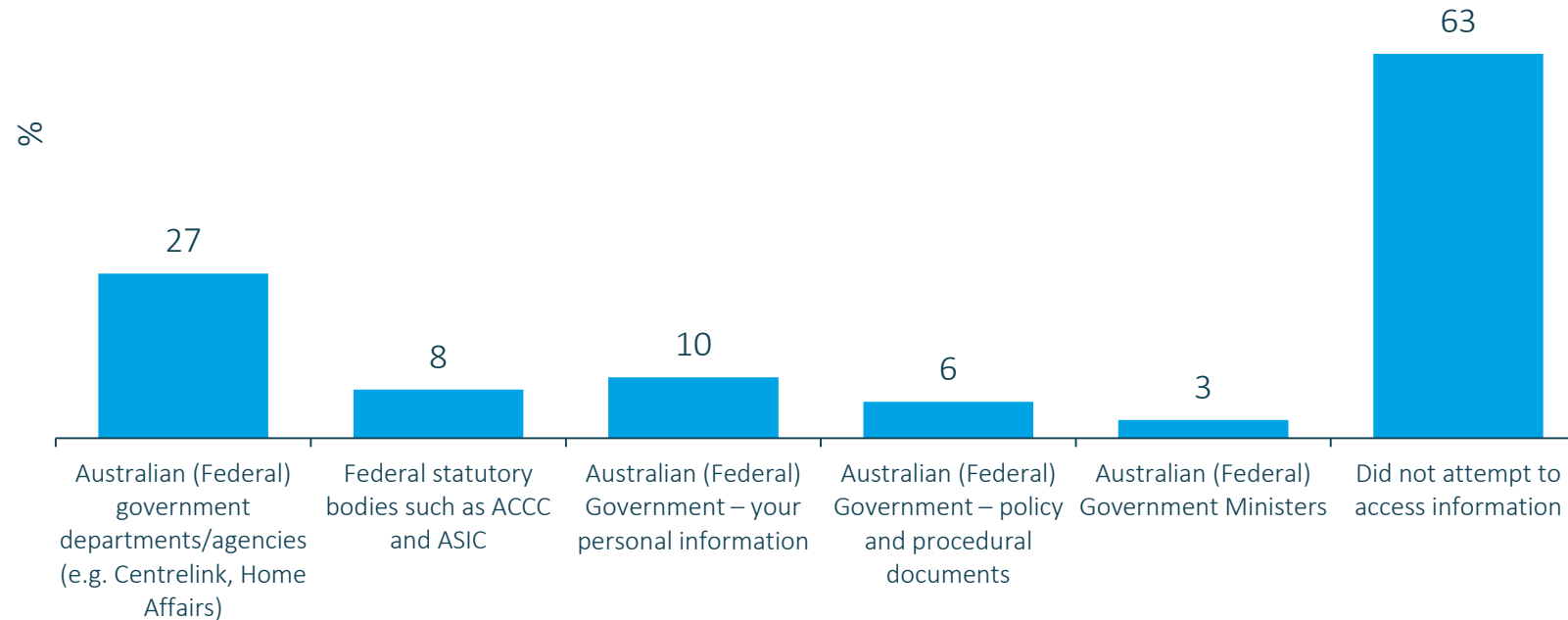


Over one third had attempted to access information held by at least one in the range of Australian Government agencies.

18-34 years olds were more likely to have contacted at least one organisation, while those aged over 55 years were less likely to have attempted to access information.

Attempts to access information from a range of Australian Government agencies

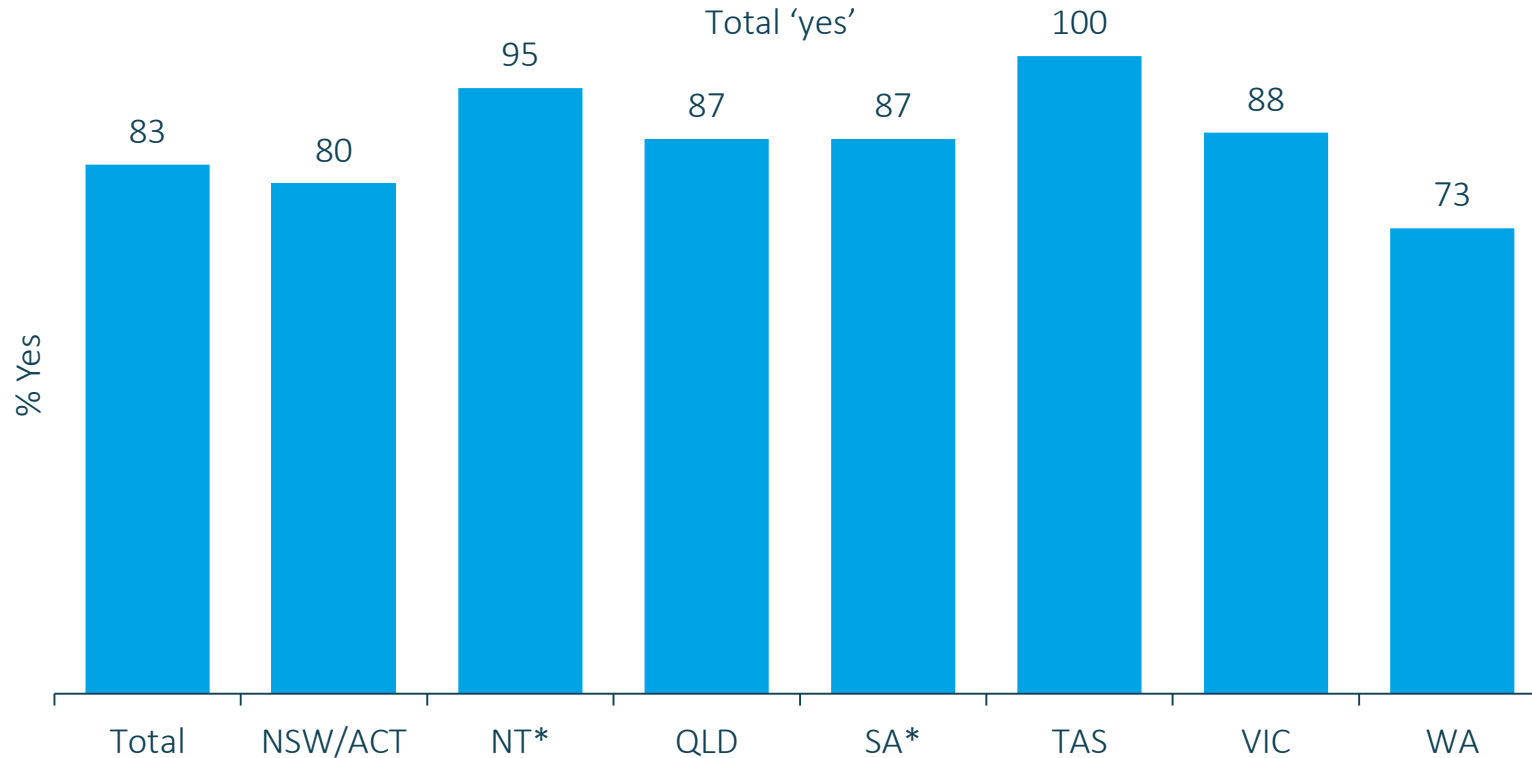
Respondents attempting to access information, had tried on average to contact 1.5 agencies



Around a third had tried to access information held by a the Australian government.

Younger respondents (18-34) were more likely to have contacted the Australian government to access personal information or procedural documents.

Success in attempting to access information



Most respondents who tried to access information were successful in doing so at least once.

Younger respondents (aged 18-34) were significantly more successful in accessing information while those aged over 55 were significantly less likely to be successful.

Success in attempting to access information from a range of Australian Government agencies

	Total # (n=269)	NSW/ACT # (n=100)	NT # (n=2*)	QLD # (n=48)	SA # (n=15*)	TAS # (n=4*)	VIC # (n=65)	WA # (n=34)
Australian Government								
Yes, it was already available online	n=157 (59%)	n=51 (51%)	n=2	n=32 (67%)	n=10	n=4	n=39 (60%)	n=19 (56%)
Yes, they sent it to me straight away	n=36 (13%)	n=13 (13%)	-	n=6 (13%)	-	-	n=13 (20%)	n=4 (11%)
Yes, but I had to make a formal access application	n=25 (9%)	n=12 (12%)	-	n=2 (5%)	n=2	-	n=4 (7%)	n=5 (13%)
No, I only got partially what I wanted	n=25 (9%)	n=13 (13%)	-	n=4 (8%)	-	-	n=5 (8%)	n=3 (8%)
No, I did not get it	n=15 (6%)	n=7 (7%)	-	n=1 (2%)	n=2	-	n=2 (2%)	n=4 (11%)
Other	n=10 (4%)	n=4 (4%)	-	n=3 (6%)	n=1	-	n=2 (3%)	-

N.B These are raw scores and not percentages

Most respondents across the states who tried to access information held by the Australian Government were successful in doing so.

Q8/Q9 – Did you access the information successfully?

Base: Respondents who tried to access information from Australian government departments/agencies (Total n=269, NSW/ACT n=100, NT n=2*, QLD n=48, SA n=15*, TAS n=4*, VIC n=65, WA n=34)

*CAUTION; small base size

Success in attempting to access information from Federal statutory bodies

	Total # (n=80)	NSW/ACT # (n=28*)	NT # (n=0*)	QLD # (n=13*)	SA # (n=4*)	TAS # (n=1*)	VIC # (n=30*)	WA # (n=6*)
Federal statutory bodies								
Yes, it was already available online	n=36 (44%)	n=16	-	n=7	-	-	n=12	n=1
Yes, they sent it to me straight away	n=15 (19%)	n=4	-	n=1	n=2	-	n=8	n=1
Yes, but I had to make a formal access application	n=16 (19%)	n=4	-	n=1	n=1	n=1	n=6	n=3
No, I only got partially what I wanted	n=6 (8%)	n=2	-	n=1	n=1	-	n=1	n=1
No, I did not get it	n=6 (7%)	n=2	-	-	-	-	n=3	n=1
Other	n=2 (3%)	-	-	n=2	-	-	-	-

N.B These are raw scores and not percentages

Those who contacted Federal statutory bodies were also largely successful.

Success in attempting to access personal information from the Australian Government

	Total # (n=97)	NSW/ACT # (n=31*)	NT # (n=3*)	QLD # (n=12*)	SA # (n=11*)	TAS # (n=2*)	VIC # (n=28*)	WA # (n=9*)
Personal information								
Yes, it was already available online	n=36 (37%)	n=11	n=2	n=6	n=6	-	n=11	-
Yes, they sent it to me straight away	n=18 (18%)	n=3	-	n=2	n=1	n=2	n=9	-
Yes, but I had to make a formal access application	n=16 (16%)	n=5	n=1	-	n=2	-	n=5	n=3
No, I only got partially what I wanted	n=13 (13%)	n=8	-	n=1	n=1	-	n=1	n=2
No, I did not get it	n=11 (12%)	n=2	-	n=3	-	-	n=2	n=4
Other	n=3 (3%)	n=1	-	-	n=2	-	-	-

N.B These are raw scores and not percentages

Respondents tended to be successful in accessing personal information from the Australian Government.

Q8/Q9 – Did you access the information successfully?

Base: Respondents who tried to access personal information from the Australian Government (Total n=97, NSW/ACT n=31*, NT n=3*, QLD n=12*, SA n=11*, TAS n=2*, VIC n=28*, WA n=9*)

*CAUTION: small base size

Success in attempting to access policy and procedural documents from the Australian Government

	Total # (n=56)	NSW/ACT # (n=19*)	NT # (n=3*)	QLD # (n=13*)	SA # (n=6*)	TAS # (n=1*)	VIC # (n=11*)	WA # (n=2*)
Personal information								
Yes, it was already available online	n=38 (68%)	n=12	n=3	n=11	n=5	-	n=6	-
Yes, they sent it to me straight away	n=3 (6%)	-	-	-	-	n=1	n=1	n=1
Yes, but I had to make a formal access application	n=10 (18%)	n=2	-	n=2	n=1	-	n=3	n=1
No, I only got partially what I wanted	n=5 (9%)	n=5	-	-	-	-	-	-

N.B These are raw scores and not percentages

Nearly all those who attempted to access policy and procedural documents were successful.

Q8/Q9 – Did you access the information successfully?

Base: Respondents who tried to access policy and procedural documents from the Australian Government (Total n=56, NSW/ACT n=19*, NT n=3*, QLD n=13*, SA n=6*, TAS n=1*, VIC n=11*, WA n=2*)

*CAUTION: small base size

Success in attempting to access information from Ministers

	Total # (n=34*)	NSW/ACT # (n=12*)	NT # (n=2*)	QLD # (n=4*)	SA # (n=1*)	TAS # (n=1*)	VIC # (n=12*)	WA # (n=2*)
Personal information								
Yes, it was already available online	n=11	n=3	-	n=2	n=1	-	n=4	n=1
Yes, they sent it to me straight away	n=4	n=1	-	n=1	-	n=1	n=1	-
Yes, but I had to make a formal access application	n=7	n=1	-	-	-	-	n=5	n=1
No, I only got partially what I wanted	n=5	n=4	-	n=1	-	-	n=1	-
No, I did not get it	n=2	n=2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other	n=5	n=1	n=2	-	-	-	n=1	-

N.B These are raw scores and not percentages

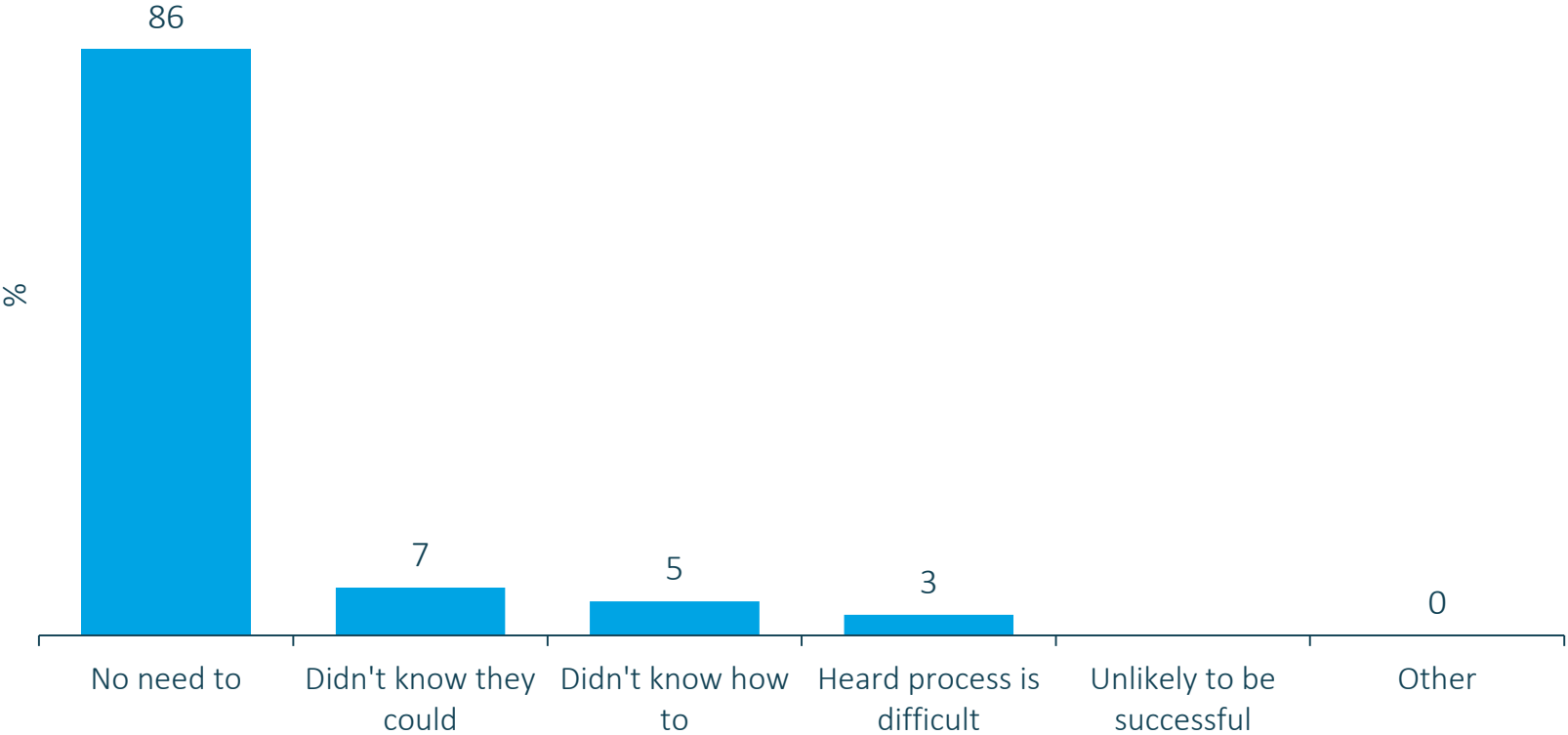
The majority of the small number of respondents who attempted to access information from Ministers were successful in doing so.

Q8/Q9 – Did you access the information successfully?

Base: Respondents who tried to access information from Australian Government Ministers (Total n=34*, NSW/ACT n=12*, NT n=2*, QLD n=4*, SA n=1*, TAS n=1*, VIC n=12*, WA n=2*)

*CAUTION: small base size

Reasons for not attempting to access information

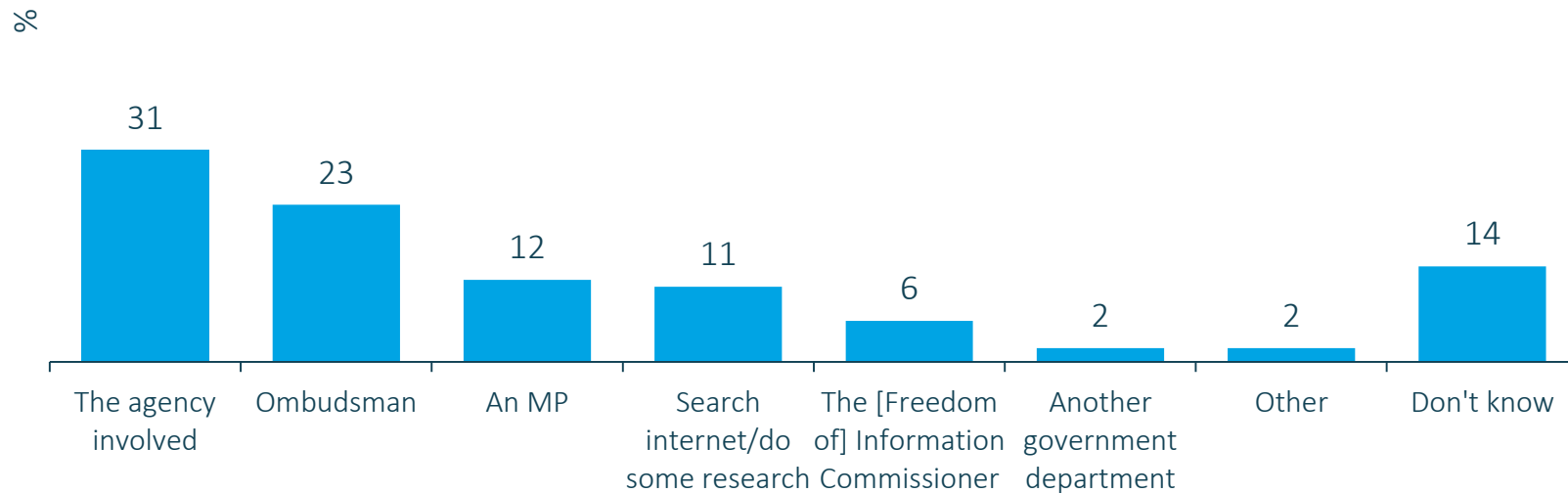


The main reason for not attempting to access government information, was a lack of need to.

Around one in ten respondents are unaware of being able to access information, with this more prevalent in Queenslanders and amongst those aged 18-34.

Q10/Q9. Why haven't you tried to access government held information?
Base: Respondents who had not attempted to access information (Total n=635)

Presumed sources of resolving issues accessing information

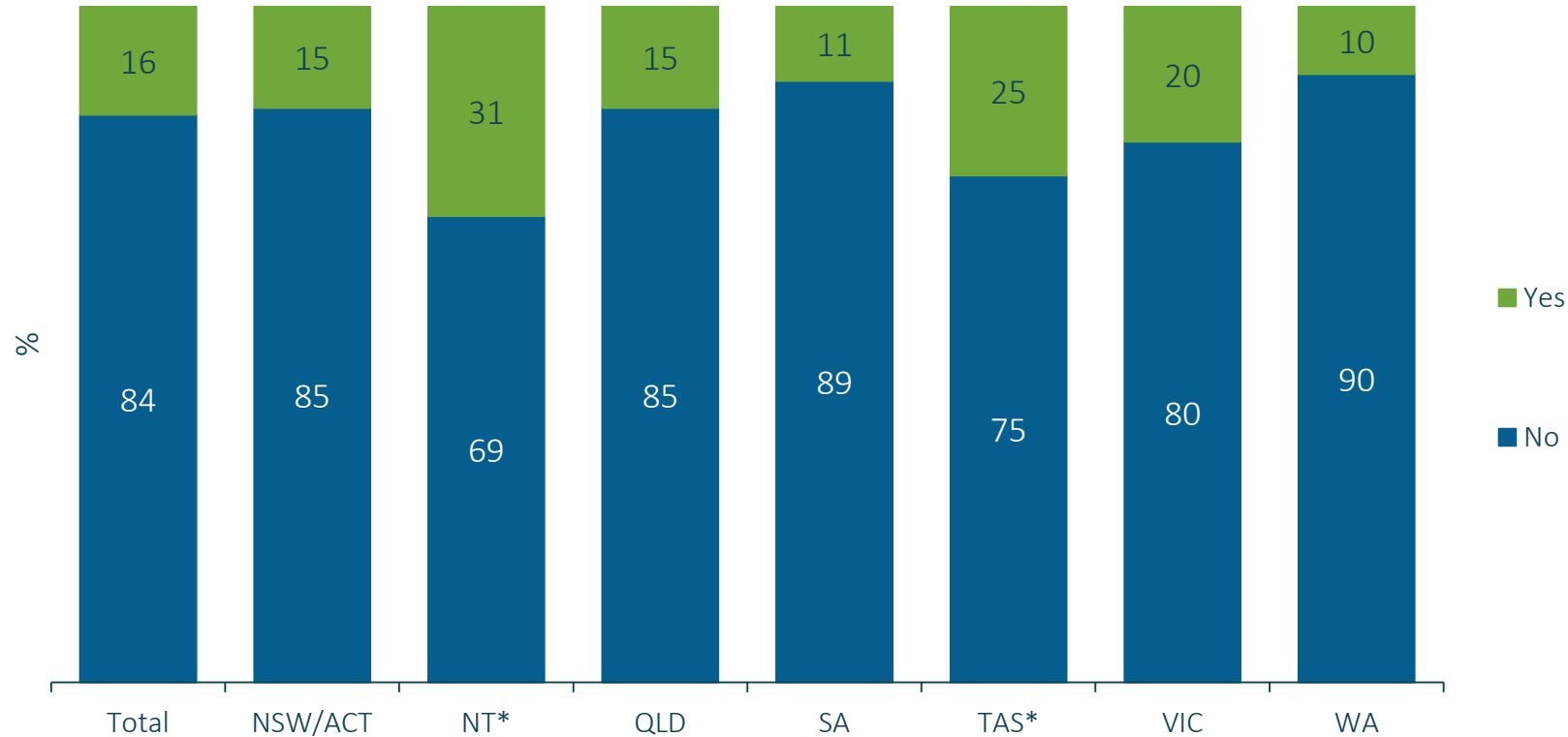


Most were likely to contact either the agency involved or the Ombudsman if they had an issue accessing information.

Younger respondents (18-34) were more likely to address another government department or not know what to do.

Over 55 year olds more likely to contact an MP.

Awareness of the OAIC



The majority of respondents were not aware of the existence of the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner.

Those unaware of OAIC were more likely to have not tried to access information held by any government entity.

Q11/Q12. Before today, did you know that there is a body called the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner that exists to uphold Australian (Federal) Government freedom of information laws?

Base: All respondents (Total n=1005, NSW/ACT n=335, NT n=12*, QLD n=202, SA n=74, TAS n=24*, VIC n=252, WA n=102)

*CAUTION: small base size

Summary



Information Access



Demographics



Participant demographics

	Total % (n=1005)	NSW/ACT % (n=335)	NT % (n=12*)	QLD % (n=202)	SA % (n=74)	TAS % (n=24*)	VIC % (n=252)	WA % (n=103)
Gender								
Male	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Female	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Age								
18-24	10	14	-	9	6	9	8	8
25-34	19	14	36	19	19	10	20	26
35-44	15	13	21	16	20	14	16	20
45-54	19	22	16	19	14	18	19	16
55-64	14	15	-	12	13	24	15	10
65-74	14	13	25	16	18	6	12	14
75+	9	9	2	8	9	20	10	8

Q2/Q3. Which of the following age brackets do you belong to?

Q3/Q4. Are you...?

Base: All respondents (Total n=1005, NSW/ACT n=335, NT n=12*, QLD n=202, SA n=74, TAS n=24*, VIC n=252, WA n=102)

*CAUTION: small base size

Participant demographics

	Total % (n=1005)	NSW/ACT % (n=335)	NT % (n=12*)	QLD % (n=202)	SA % (n=74)	TAS % (n=24*)	VIC % (n=252)	WA % (n=103)
Working status								
Working full time	36	38	42	33	33	38	39	28
Working part time	18	19	18	16	20	16	17	21
Student	6	7	-	6	6	12	3	4
Unemployed	8	7	7	6	6	-	8	10
Engaged in home duties	7	5	8	4	4	-	9	12
Retired	25	23	25	31	31	34	23	25
Main language spoken								
English	94	94	91	96	95	96	93	96
Other	6	6	9	4	5	4	7	4

Q12/Q13. Which of these categories best describes you?

Q13/Q14. What is the main language spoken at home?

Base: All respondents (Total n=1005, NSW/ACT n=335, NT n=12*, QLD n=202, SA n=74, TAS n=24*, VIC n=252, WA n=102)

*CAUTION: small base size



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Commonwealth Information Access Survey

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