



## Ten steps to protect your personal information

April 2012

This 10 step guide gives you a snapshot of some of your privacy rights. Protecting your *personal information* also protects your privacy.

Personal information is defined in s 6 of the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) (Privacy Act) and means information that identifies you or could identify you. There are some obvious examples of personal information, such as your name or address. Personal information can also include medical records, bank account details, photos, videos, and even information about what you like, your opinions and where you work.

### 1. Know your privacy rights

The more you know about your rights, the easier it will be for you to safeguard your privacy. The Privacy Act contains privacy principles that Australian, ACT and Norfolk Island Government agencies, and most private sector organisations, must follow when they handle your personal information.

For more information about your privacy rights, and how organisations and agencies have to protect your privacy, go to [www.oaic.gov.au](http://www.oaic.gov.au), or call our Enquiries Line on 1300 363 992.

### 2. Read privacy policies and notices

Each Australian, ACT and Norfolk Island Government agency, and organisation, has publicly available policies that tell you how they handle your personal information. Usually this information can be found on an agency or organisation's website.

The Personal Information Digest page and business page on our website have more detail about what these policies should contain.

Also, when an agency or organisation wants to collect your information, the agency or organisation needs to take reasonable steps to let you know:

- the reason(s) why they are collecting your personal information
- whether the collection of your personal information is required or authorised by law

- any person, body or agency to which your personal information may be disclosed.

Private sector organisations must also take reasonable steps to let you know the main consequences if you do not provide your personal information. This information can be given to you in writing, in person or over the phone, or made available online.

### 3. Always ask why, how and who

There may be times you are asked for your personal information when it doesn't really need to be collected.

**Example:** Very few businesses need information about your medical history

If you think the information you are being asked for is not needed, ask why it is being collected. This helps you to know how your personal information is going to be used, and if it is going to be given to some other agency or organisation.

### 4. Only give out as much personal information as you need to

There are many times when you may not need to give out your personal information.

**Example:** You may not need to tell a retail outlet your marital status.

Always think before handing your personal information over. Ask the agency or organisation why they need that information or talk to us about what else you can do.

## 5. Ask for access to your personal information

You have a general right to have access to the personal information that agencies or organisations hold about you. Having access is also a good way of checking that the information held about you is accurate and up to date.

Sometimes under the Privacy Act, an agency or organisation can deny access for a particular reason. You should be told the reason and why the organisation or agency is relying on that reason.

You also have another way to access your personal information from an agency. If you seek access under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Cth) (FOI Act), the agency is obliged to consider the request under the FOI Act rather than the Privacy Act. Access under the FOI Act may be subject to specific exemptions.

## 6. Make sure the information an organisation or agency holds about you is accurate and up to date

When your personal information changes, don't forget to tell the agencies and organisations you do business with about changes to your personal information. It's a good idea to do this in writing.

Agencies and organisations must take steps to reflect the changes to your personal information that you tell them about. This helps keep their records accurate, complete and up to date.

## 7. Take steps to protect your online privacy

Looking after your privacy online will help protect your personal information from abuse.

### Examples :

- Good computer security includes installing reputable anti-spyware, anti-virus scanners and firewall software.

- Keep these security tools up to date.
- Make sure you are visiting secure web sites before handing over personal information such as banking and credit card details.
- If you use social networking sites, make sure that you read their privacy policies, and choose the privacy settings that best suit your needs

There is more information about online security and social networking on our website.

Be careful — there are many email scams out there. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has useful information on how to protect yourself against scams on their website at [www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au). State and Territory Departments of Fair Trading may also have lists of current scams.

## 8. Make sure your hard copy records are properly destroyed

Don't leave your personal information lying around. Properly destroying personal information you don't want others to see before throwing it out will also help to protect you from potential identity theft.

**Example:** Shred documents and physically destroy expired banking and government-issued cards.

For more information, go to the Attorney-General's Department Identity Security page and download the *ID Theft Booklet – Protecting Your Identity*.

## 9. You can 'opt out' if you do not want to have further contact with the organisation

Checking the 'opt out' option when you are filling out a form will help to make sure that you don't get unwanted promotions and spam emails from that organisation (or its subsidiaries).

For more information about spam emails and SMS, please visit the Australian Communications and Media Authority website at [www.spam.acma.gov.au](http://www.spam.acma.gov.au) or see our *Spam FAQs*.

## 10. Privacy problems

If you consider that your personal information has not been handled properly, first contact the agency or organisation. Give them 30 days to deal with your complaint.

If you are not happy with their response, you can then make a complaint to us and we may be able to investigate the matter.

For more information go to the privacy complaints section of our website, or call our Enquiries Line on 1300 363 992.

### **Don't leave your privacy to chance.**

The information provided in this fact sheet is of a general nature. It is not a substitute for legal advice.

#### **For further information**

**telephone:** 1300 363 992

**email:** [enquiries@oaic.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@oaic.gov.au)

**write:** GPO Box 2999, Canberra ACT 2601

GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW 2001

or visit our website at [www.oaic.gov.au](http://www.oaic.gov.au)