



# Youth Views on Addressing Privacy

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Most youth are concerned about privacy, including the protection of their personal information. Youth believe that the government should take an active role in educating the public about the importance of privacy, and in ensuring that the public’s privacy is protected by law.

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**From 2016 to 2019, the Department of Justice Canada reached out to young Canadians for their views on justice issues. The youth selected for these youth engagement projects were not provided with specialized training or information, but their opinions and perspectives on justice issues can inform policy decisions, including public information campaigns.**

## What we found<sup>1</sup>

- Although youth were not overly concerned with the government and private organizations (e.g. marketing companies and social media companies) accessing their personal information, they did express concern over privacy in specific personal situations (e.g. someone stealing their credit card, being stalked, etc.).
- Most young people were not overly concerned about public surveillance cameras or about the government accessing what people post on social media. As they understand it, communities and social media are public spaces.
- The majority of youth expected the government to share their information internally, across ministries, departments and agencies. They recognized that, in some cases, information-sharing benefits them (e.g. sharing information between a hospital and insurance company).
- In conversations about privacy, youth expressed the importance of explicit and clear consent standards for the use of all personal information — some framed this as a right.
- Young people were concerned that privacy legislation does not protect them in certain situations, including from cyberbullying, blackmailing, identity theft and racial slurs on social media platforms.
- Youth from remote communities did not have as many privacy concerns as others. As well, some Indigenous youth were not concerned about the privacy of their personal information.
- Overall, youth were open to their personal information being shared for planning and addressing social issues.

## More in depth

Young people want to be informed about potential positive and negative consequences of privacy, such as the terms of service contracts, when they are protected, etc. They believe privacy should be addressed in the school curriculum, and that there should be more information disseminated to the public in accessible and youth-friendly ways. They suggested relevant (“trending”) short videos and advertisements on social media platforms (e.g. Instagram and Snapchat).

Youth thought that each Canadian should have the knowledge and right to access all personal information that organizations and the government have on them. When data is used for research or sharing publicly, youth believed that organizations and government institutions should anonymize their data.

When asked about personal information, youth answered that they generally felt comfortable sharing information related to their name, age, place of employment, appearance, email address and consumer preferences in order to obtain better services from credible sources. However, they were less supportive of sharing details such as relationship status, information about their contacts, phone number, location/address, passwords, and date of birth.

When negotiating privacy, most youth found terms and conditions challenging to review but a few young people indicated a willingness to do research before using a service or piece of technology that they are unfamiliar with. However, they were more willing to trust services and new technology that are used by their friends and/or have a high number of users.

Youth expressed concern about governments accessing information that was disclosed to private organizations, such as *Ancestry* or *23andme* that identify clients’ ethnic identity. They were adamantly against their personal information being shared with any foreign governments. Generally, there were concerns about the understanding of privacy legislation and how it applied in/to other countries and other governments.

Overall, young people agreed that there should be consequences for individuals in organizations and government who misuse personal information, yet they feel as if this has generally not been the case in Canada. According to youth, consequences should include fines and penalties, losing/being suspended from a position (or being moved into a different position), public apology, restoration for those harmed (if applicable), and incarceration depending on the severity of the case.

## Method

Justice Canada, in partnership with the Students Commission of Canada,<sup>2</sup> conducted youth engagement projects from 2016 to 2019. Each project explored youths’ views, perceptions and expectations of the criminal justice system. This was done through developing and hosting a Justice Youth Action Committee (YAC),<sup>3</sup> gathering opinions through youth-led Community Action Projects,<sup>4</sup> and hosting the #CanadaWeWant Conference.<sup>5</sup> The findings summarized in this document are from the youth engagement on the Criminal Justice System project 2018-19.

**Youth Engagement on the Criminal Justice System Project 2018-19:** Fifteen Justice Youth Action Committee members representing Indigenous, non-Indigenous, rural, urban, and other diverse

populations joined bi-weekly calls, as well as engaged with justice material through a Facebook group and Messenger group from June 2018 to April 2019. In March 2019, over 150 youth participants from across Canada gathered for the annual #CanadaWeWant Conference; 18 young people from the conference took the lead to produce recommendations for Justice Canada and collectively affirm their recommendations with all 150+ conference participants. This project had multiple different issue-based focuses relevant to the work of Justice Canada. For the purpose of this research, the focus was on privacy.

This summary focused on data gathered from two sources:

- 1) The Justice YAC members' voices; they came from almost every province and territory in the country, and represented diverse identities, including racial, ethnic, religious, and gender identities. The Justice YAC members engaged in two privacy discussions, one hour per session, in February 2019.
- 2) The youth participants' from the 2019 #CanadaWeWant Conference, who generated and affirmed recommendations. The majority of the 18 youth leads identified as Indigenous.

**For further information on the findings and/or surveys mentioned in this document, please contact the Department of Justice's Research and Statistics Division ([rsd.drs@justice.gc.ca](mailto:rsd.drs@justice.gc.ca))**

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all findings are from the Youth Engagement on the Criminal Justice System Project 2018-19.

<sup>2</sup> The Students Commission of Canada is a national charitable organization with a mission to support young people in putting their ideas for improving themselves and their communities into action. The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement is a network of youth, youth organizations and academics focused on providing evidence on the benefits of youth engagement and positive youth development.

<sup>3</sup> The Students Commission selected members to join the Youth Action Committee for Justice Canada. The youth selected were from across the country, aged between 12 and 22 years, lived in urban and rural communities, were from diverse backgrounds and cultures, and had varied life experiences.

<sup>4</sup> Community action projects required YAC members to go into their communities and gather data from their peers using the survey questions identified on the calls. Youth could deliver a survey, a focus/discussion group, or interviews to collect this data.

<sup>5</sup> At the "Canada We Want" conference, the *CJS theme team* (a diverse group of youth from across Canada) generated recommendations for policy makers and other young Canadians regarding the criminal justice system.