



# National Security Transparency Commitment

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## Table of Contents

- [About the National Security Transparency Commitment](#)
- [The Six Principles of National Security Transparency](#)
- [Transparency at Departments and Agencies](#)
- [The National Security Transparency Advisory Group \(NS-TAG\)](#)
  - [About](#)
  - [Mandate](#)
  - [Advice to the Deputy Minister of Public Safety Canada](#)
  - [Meetings and Accountability](#)
  - [Meeting Summaries](#)
  - [Membership](#)
  - [Current NS-TAG Members](#)

## About the National Security Transparency Commitment

This Commitment is about integrating Canada's democratic values into our national security activities. Canadians have a responsibility to hold their Government to account for its decisions. This is essential to our democracy.

To do so, citizens must know *what* the Government does to protect national security, *how* the Government does it, and *why* such work is important.

The field of national security presents a unique challenge to this imperative. There are adversaries who would use information about how the Government protects national security to harm us. The Government of Canada is committed to enabling democratic accountability without providing information that could compromise Canada's security or the safety of Canadians.

## The Six Principles of National Security Transparency

This initiative outlines how the Government is fulfilling its commitment to transparency through the application of six principles, which have been categorized into three different action areas. To read more about the six principles, click on one of the three action areas below.

- Information transparency: to show what departments and agencies are doing to protect national security.
  - Principle 1
  - Principle 2
- Executive transparency: to explain the legal structure for protecting national security, and how choices are made within that structure.
  - Principle 3
  - Principle 4
- Policy transparency: to engage Canadians in a dialogue about the strategic issues impacting national security.
  - Principle 5
  - Principle 6

# Transparency at Departments and Agencies

The national security and intelligence community is made up of federal departments and agencies whose mandates include protecting the safety and security of Canada's territory, government, economy and people. Here you will find links to more information on what is being done within various Government of Canada departments and agencies to support transparency.

- [Canada Border Services Agency](#)
- [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#)
- [Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission](#)
- [Canada Revenue Agency](#)
- [Communications Security Establishment](#)
- [Canadian Security Intelligence Service](#)
- [Correctional Services Canada](#)
- [Department of National Defence](#)
- [Department of Justice](#)
- [Finance Canada](#)
- [Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis of Canada](#)
- [Global Affairs Canada](#)
- [Health Canada](#)
- [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada](#)
- [Parole Board of Canada](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
- [Public Safety Canada](#)
- [Royal Canadian Mounted Police](#)
- [Transport Canada](#)
- [Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat](#)

## ***National Security Act, 2017***

In 2016, the Government completed public consultations on a range of national security issues including accountability, information sharing, and a review of national security organizations. The results of the Government's consultation demonstrated a demand from the public for more transparency on national security. The responses to these consultations led to the announcement of the National Security Transparency Commitment alongside a number of legislative changes made within the National Security Act, 2017, which will strengthen security and protect rights.

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› [National Security Transparency Commitment](#)

# Information transparency

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## Principle 1

**Departments and agencies will release information that explains the main elements of their national security activities and the scale of those efforts.**

Government departments and agencies are already required to examine what data and information they have that can be released to the public. Departments and agencies with national security responsibilities are complying with this requirement, just like other Government institutions. However, given the need to protect national security operations, their ability to release information directly from their holdings is limited. Personal information, information about Canada's tactics and capabilities, and details on operations are embedded in much of the information held by institutions with a security mandate. A different approach is therefore required for national security-related information.

This principle calls on Government institutions to examine their holdings and release summary information that demonstrates what they do and the scale of those efforts. It will entail releasing information, for example, on the number of investigations conducted or the authorities used. While

summarized information will not disclose the details of national security work, it will enable Canadians to form a general understanding of how the Government works to keep them safe.

## Principle 2

**Departments and agencies will enable and support Canadians in accessing national security-related information to the maximum extent possible without compromising the national interest, the effectiveness of operations, or the safety or security of an individual.**

This principle calls on officials to plan for the potential release of information. For example, information should be managed in such a way that it is clear which information is sensitive, and why it is sensitive. Information should only be treated as sensitive when Canada's interests are at stake—where disclosure could harm national security or our relations—or personal information is included. Information is not to be protected to prevent embarrassment or to conceal inefficiency, errors, or problems.

The Government is also fulfilling its commitment to transparency through action in two other areas:

- Executive transparency, to explain the legal structure for protecting national security, and how choices are made within that structure
- Policy transparency, to engage Canadians in a dialogue about the strategic issues impacting national security

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› [National Security Transparency Commitment](#)

## Executive transparency

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### Principle 3

**Departments and agencies will explain how their national security activities are authorized in law and how they interpret and implement their authorities in line with Canadian values, including those expressed by the Charter.**

In Canada, the Government must be given the authority, usually through legislation, to undertake its activities. The Government will make the link between authorities and actions clear by explaining how legislation and other authorities are applied and interpreted.

All legislation is subject to Canada's constitutional documents, such as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Government will make clear how legislative authorities are in line with the rights and freedoms established by the *Charter*, as well as other Canadian values, such as multiculturalism and reconciliation.

### Principle 4

**Departments and agencies will explain what guides their national security-related decision making in line with Canadian values, including those expressed by the Charter.**

While the law identifies what the Government may do to protect national security, it provides the Government with room to choose when to use its authorities. The Government will be transparent with Canadians in how it determines when to use its authorities, and how it does so in a way that is consistent with Canadian values.

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› [National Security Transparency Commitment](#)

# Policy transparency

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## Principle 5

**The Government will inform Canadians of the strategic issues impacting national security and its current efforts and future plans for addressing those issues.**

The global security environment is constantly evolving, and Canada's own situation is developing along with it. The Government will be transparent with Canadians about the issues the nation faces in protecting its security. It will not always be possible to speak to specifics, such as technologies or capabilities, but the Government will work to provide information at the strategic level—the type of information that could play a role in determining changes to resources, legislation, or public policy. In doing so, this principle will put into context the information provided through initiatives under other principles.

## Principle 6

**To the extent possible, the Government will consult stakeholders and Canadians during the development of substantive policy proposals and build transparency into the design of national security programs and activities.**

This principle will see Canadians put the information provided through other principles to use. Before moving forward with substantive policy proposals, such as changes to what national security institutions are able to do, the Government will seek Canadians' input. Exceptions will be made for emergency situations, such as to respond to a crisis, or where the changes are more technical, such as to implement the recommendations of the courts.

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- Executive transparency, to explain the legal structure for protecting national security, and how choices are made within that structure

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