

International Universal Access to Information Day

[Home \(/\)](#) > [Media centre \(/media-centre\)](/media-centre) > International Universal Access to Information Day

The Hon Mark Dreyfus KC MP

28 September 2022 | Speech

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we meet, and pay respect to their Elders past and present.

I extend my respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples present today.

Thank you for the invitation to speak today as we mark *International Universal Access to Information Day* – also known as *Right to Know Day*.

I am honoured to be recognising this important day as Australia's Attorney-General.

I would like to acknowledge the Australian Information Commissioner and Privacy Commissioner, Ms Angelene Falk, and Freedom of Information Commissioner, Mr Leo Hardiman PSM KC.

This global event recognises the importance of the community's right to know and to access to government-held information.

It also reinforces the role of government in promoting transparency and accountability.

Regrettably, the previous government did not believe that Australians have a right to know.

In contrast, the Albanese Government is committed to restoring public trust and strengthening standards of integrity in our federal government.

Open access to information is essential for good decision-making, genuine engagement in democratic government, and combatting corruption.

Citizens need this access to know *how* they are being governed.

The Information Commissioner's theme for this year's International Universal Access to Information Day is 'openness through e-governance'.

Our lives are increasingly conducted online.

The shift to a digital economy and online service delivery elevates the importance of correctly designing access to information systems and processes that are fit for the digital age.

All government agencies need to ensure that digital access systems are user-friendly and people-centred, and which build community trust by reinforcing more effective and efficient access to information.

Government has the opportunity to make better decisions and deliver services more seamlessly to Australians by making better use of data.

Taking advantage of this opportunity means we need to focus on some specific things.

The Australian Government generates a lot of data as a result of our activities, and we need to manage it well.

We anticipate the use of data by Government and in the broader economy will continue to grow exponentially.

In many cases, the value of data increases significantly when it is linked – whether with other data we hold, or data held by others.

We need to treat people's data with respect, through consideration of ethical and appropriate use of data, keeping it secure, and meeting strong privacy standards.

The Albanese Government is committed to my Department completing the Privacy Act Review to ensure that individuals' privacy is protected and that consumers are empowered, while at the same time, acknowledging the importance of commercial interests and ensuring that our digital economy can prosper.

Today, we also acknowledge the importance of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act)*.

This Act, now in operation for almost 40 years, provides everyone with a legally enforceable right to obtain information from a government agency or minister, whether it is information about themselves or information about government policy.

The Government strongly supports the effective operation of the FOI Act to ensure that it continues to meet the objectives of:

- increasing scrutiny of the government's activities;

- developing further the quality of political democracy by giving the opportunity to all Australians to participate fully in the political process;
- improving the quality of decision making by government; and
- enabling individuals to have access to information about them that is held on government files.

The proactive disclosure of government-held information promotes open government and advances our system of representative democracy.

I acknowledge the great work done by the Australian information access commissioners and ombudsmen to develop the Open by Design Principles. The principles recognise that:

- information held by government and public institutions is a public resource;
- a culture of transparency within government is everyone's responsibility; and
- appropriate, prompt and proactive disclosure of government-held information informs community, increases participation and enhances decision-making, builds trust and confidence, is required and permitted by law and improves efficiency.

Notably, the Office of the National Data Commissioner is responsible for implementing the Data Availability and Transparency Act (DATA) scheme, which is a new way for sharing government data.

The scheme will enable Australian Government agencies to safely, accountably and transparently share public sector data, where appropriate, with accredited users, and contains strong safeguards to manage the risks of increased public sector data sharing.

I strongly encourage all Australian governments and public institutions to commit to being Open by Design, by building a culture of transparency and by prioritising, promoting and resourcing proactive disclosure.

Today, I also re-pledge Australia to the Open Government Partnership.

This partnership, totalling 77 countries and 106 local governments and representing over two billion people, is based on the idea that an open government is more accessible, more responsive, and more accountable to citizens.

I intend to restore the forum that will co-develop Australia's Open Government National Action Plan.

I thank the Information Commissioner for inviting me to speak today.

There is further work to be done by government and civil society to ensure open access to information.

I trust that you will be inspired by the panel discussion that follows and the events being organised by the Information Commissioner this week.

I want to conclude by assuring you all that the Albanese Government is firmly committed to transparency and accountability, to ensure we have better government for all Australians.

[ENDS]