



## Ontario Government to Launch COVID Alert, a Contact Tracing App, in July

June 19, 2020

*By Jennifer McKenzie, Amanda Branch and Raffi Dergalstian*

On June 18, 2020, Prime Minister Trudeau announced that the Federal Government will be rolling out a free, voluntary, digital contact tracing app. We previously described how contact tracing works in our article [here](#).

Contact tracing raises a lot of privacy concerns. When Google and Apple announced in April that they would partner together to help governments develop this technology, concerns were raised regarding the efficacy of the app and the privacy of its users.

Shortly after the Google and Apple announcement, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (“OPC”) published an [assessment framework](#), “A Framework for the Government of Canada to Assess Privacy-Impactful Initiatives in Response to COVID-19” to assist government institutions “guide the development of privacy impactful initiatives that seek to alleviate the effects of the pandemic” (see our article [here](#)). Recommendations include ensuring that any of the proposed measures are necessary and proportionate, meaning that they limit the purposes for which personal information is collected and used and to use de-identified or aggregated data wherever possible.

In view of the privacy concerns, in his announcement about the app, Prime Minister Trudeau stated the Federal Government had spoken to the OPC; however, the OPC [stated](#) that they were only recently contacted by Health Canada regarding a COVID-19 exposure notification app and are awaiting information before providing recommendations to the Government of Canada.

Prime Minister Trudeau said he hopes that the app will be adopted uniformly across Canada. In July, Ontario will be the [first province](#) to make its version of the contract tracing app, called “COVID Alert” for to its residents. [COVID Alert](#) was developed by the Ontario Digital Service and a group of volunteers from Shopify.

As with any contact tracing app, privacy and security concerns could result in potential users feeling apprehensive about downloading and using Ontario’s COVID Alert. However, to try to assuage these concerns, the Ontario government has championed their “privacy-first” approach to this contact tracing app. To help ensure the privacy and security of its users, the Ontario government said that it plans to leverage volunteers from BlackBerry to audit the app.

The following are some of the ways the Ontario COVID Alert app proposes to protect its users’ privacy:

- The app will not use GPS location data and relies solely on Bluetooth technology for tracing.
- The app will protect the identity of its users by randomly generating anonymous codes and Bluetooth signals between phones rather than having any uploaded information be personally identifiable.
- If an individual tests positive for COVID-19, a health-care professional will give that person a randomized, temporary code to upload their test status anonymously to the database.

The COVID Alert app will be available in early July, but the utility of the app will likely depend on the number of Canadians who use it. Further, the Ontario government has emphasized that the app will be just one tool in its public health strategy and that everyone should continue to follow public health guidelines to stay safe, including physical distancing, wearing a face covering and washing your hands.



Content shared on Bereskin & Parr's website is for information purposes only. It should not be taken as legal or professional advice. To obtain such advice, please contact a Bereskin & Parr LLP professional. We will be pleased to help you.