

# Serious breach notification

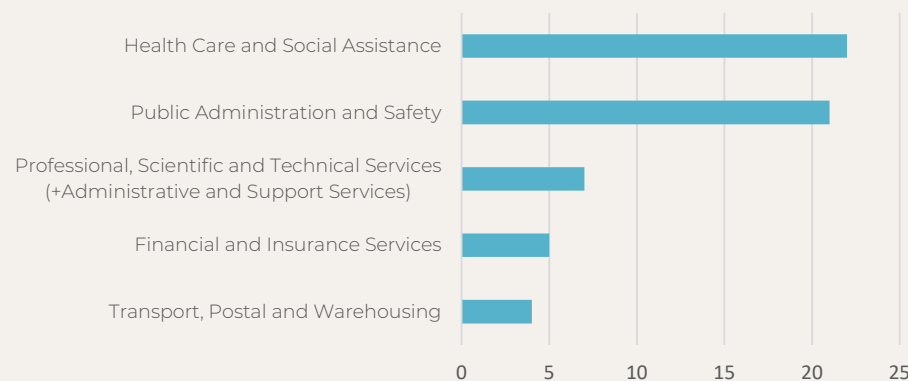
## four months in

### Privacy breaches cause real harm to the people affected.

More than half of the serious privacy breaches reported to our office involved emotional harm, and around one third resulted in a risk of identity theft or financial harm. Some breaches can cause more than one type of harm to the individuals affected.

Percentage of breaches involving:	
Emotional harm	65%
Financial harm	30%
Reputational harm	30%

### Top 5 industries reporting serious breaches



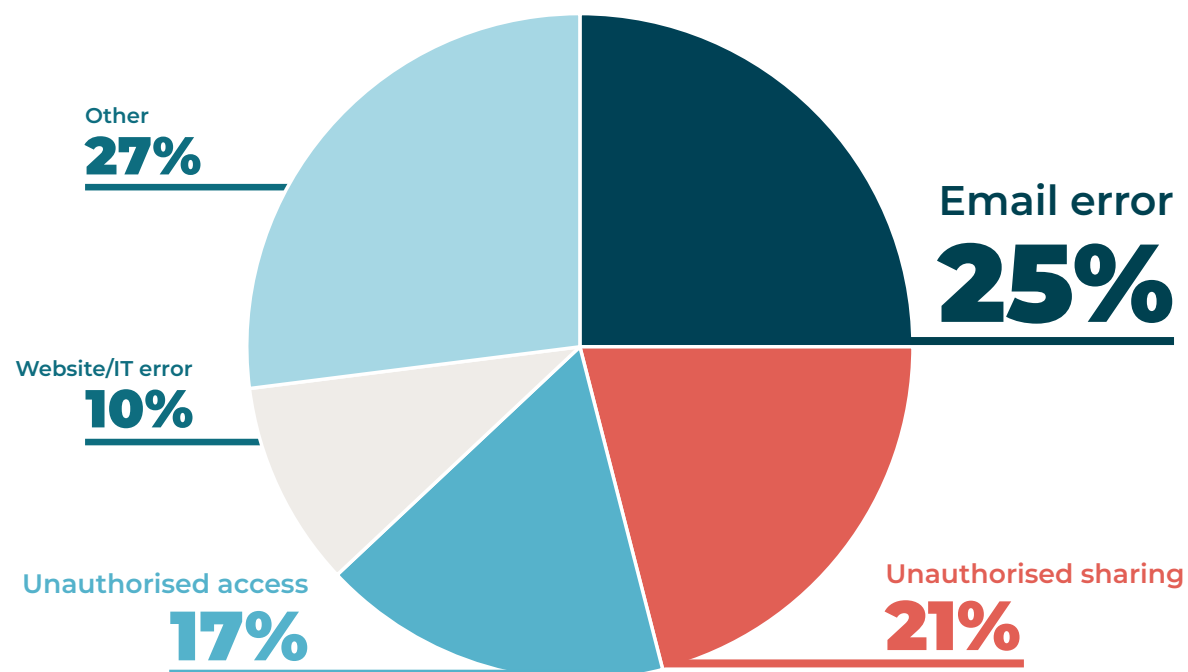
At this early stage in mandatory reporting, a high number of reports from one sector doesn't necessarily mean poor privacy practice – it may mean these sectors are more aware of their obligations to report.

Breaches can occur in any sector – public, private, or non-profit. We have had breaches reported from the social assistance sectors, financial and insurance services, education and training, retail trade and accommodation, and even mining.

Organisations **must report serious breaches** as soon as they practically can. Don't take a 'wait and see' approach.



Most common serious breaches by type



Consistent with a long-standing pattern, email errors are the most common type of privacy breach reported to our office. They're easy to prevent with training and the right procedures.

Be careful when including personal information in emails, double check attachments, have a send delay and use Bcc when sending to multiple recipients.

# 65%

of serious breaches were notified to individuals by the time the breach was reported to the Privacy Commissioner. There are narrow grounds for not notifying individuals of serious privacy breaches so we will be considering this issue further.

### Personal information is sensitive

Over three quarters of serious privacy breaches reported to our office involved information that was likely to be sensitive.

Remember, the personal information you collect and use is incredibly important to people and can cause serious harm if it gets into the wrong hands.

### Sensitivity of information breached

Sensitive or likely sensitive	84%
Not likely sensitive	9%
Don't know	7%

### What we're doing

Reporting serious privacy breaches to the Privacy Commissioner became mandatory on 1 December 2020. There were 76 serious privacy breaches notified to us between 1 December 2020 and 31 March this year.

We have seen a 97% increase in the number of breaches reported to us in comparison to the preceding six months.

### Compliance

For the first six months of the Privacy Act 2020, our office has been focused on educating organisations and businesses to help them understand their new legal responsibilities. When you report a privacy breach to us, we want to help you make it better!

The Privacy Commissioner does have powers under the Privacy Act to enforce compliance when organisations repeatedly fail to meet their obligations or should know better.

For example, if breaches generated by email errors persist in organisations that are not taking the necessary precautions, we are prepared to use enforcement action to support behaviour changes.

Use our **NotifyUs** tool to report serious privacy breaches to us as soon as you can.

### Be prepared

- Protect the personal information you hold – privacy is precious!
- Learn from privacy breaches and near misses. Change practices to stop the same mistakes from happening again.
- Have a privacy breach plan.