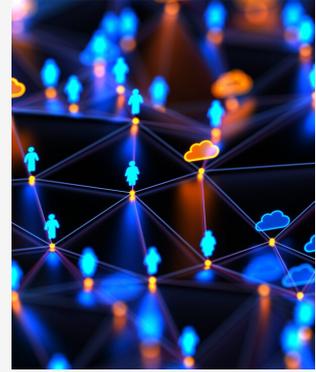


## Honouring Canadian privacy trailblazers on International Women's Day

MARCH 6, 2025 11 MIN READ



### Related Expertise

- [Privacy and Data Management](#)

Authors: [Éloïse Gratton, Ad. E.](#), [Joanna Fine](#)

In honour of International Women's Day, we take the opportunity to reflect on the achievements of women who have shaped the field of privacy in Canada. These inspiring women have not only broken barriers but have become champions of privacy rights and gender equity. Their journeys through the privacy profession are a testament to resilience, innovation and leadership, and their contributions continue to inspire the next generation of women in tech, law and cybersecurity.

Below, we celebrate the stories of these remarkable leaders, their thoughtful advice to other women in the field, and their reflections on the importance of diverse voices in leadership at this critical chapter in privacy law and policy.

### A serendipitous path to privacy



The question of whether privacy found them, or if they found privacy, is a recurring theme in the experiences of these professionals. As **Information and Privacy Commissioner of**

**Ontario Patricia Kosseim** shares: “It’s more like we bumped into each other!” As a young lawyer, Patricia helped businesses comply with Québec’s first private sector privacy law, and her academic background opened doors in the health privacy world. These early experiences cemented Patricia’s interest in privacy and sparked her remarkable career across the public, private and health sectors.



For **Saba Zia, Senior Legal Counsel, Data Protection, at RBC**, an interest in privacy developed organically from its intersection with her files in labour, employment and human rights law. Saba gives credit to the privacy lawyers she worked with early in her career: “Their passion for the subject matter was contagious,” she recalls.



For others, a career in privacy law blossomed from business needs and practicalities. **Oxana Iatsyk, Privacy Officer at Walmart Canada**, notes how privacy came to the forefront during her work on the international launch of the toy-to-life game WEBKINZ in 2007. At that time, Canada had no clear guidelines on children’s privacy and targeted advertising in the gaming

sector, a challenge that motivated Oxana to familiarize herself with global best practices and ensure that privacy considerations were embedded into the product from the start.



**Suzanne Morin, VP, Chief Privacy and Data Ethics Officer at Sun Life**, is driven by the “grey” areas of privacy: “What drives me most about privacy is that it’s not black and white (that would be less interesting) as I thrive in the grey, and it allows me to influence others on doing what feels right, which is not always that easy to do.”



**Bridget McIlveen, Chief Privacy Officer at The Estée Lauder Companies**, was drawn to privacy law for its intellectual complexity and real-world impact: “With privacy laws still evolving, I saw an opportunity to shape interpretations and navigate uncharted regulatory challenges.” As she deepened her expertise, she “came to appreciate privacy’s critical role in fostering consumer trust and responsible innovation.”

## Pivotal moments and trends shaping privacy perspectives



Many privacy professionals point to a series of developments, rather than a single moment, that led to the current significance of privacy issues. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid digitization of businesses was a “transformative period” for technology and privacy, according to **Jackie Moher, Managing Counsel, Privacy and Law Clerks at CIBC**. Now facing even more complex challenges such as cyber risks and the ethical use of AI, Jackie stresses that privacy professionals “must strike a balance that safeguards individuals’ rights while also fostering innovation and maintaining Canada’s competitiveness in an increasingly interconnected world.”

**Suzanne Morin** highlights the trend of privacy law reform, which poses harmonization and compliance challenges. Although “privacy principles for the most part have not changed after decades of laws”, the introduction of stronger enforcement powers and greater penalties makes it essential for organizations to prioritize demonstrable accountability. “Document, document and document, and train, train and train again,” Suzanne reminds privacy professionals.



**Danielle Young, Chief Counsel, Privacy and Cybersecurity, and Global Chief Privacy Officer at Manulife**, is excited to see how the community of privacy professionals and interest in the field continues to grow — interest from individuals, governments and businesses alike. As Danielle notes, “Data protection and our profession as privacy professionals is becoming appreciated as a business enabler and an integral part of achieving any digital ambition.”

**Oxana Iatsyk** articulates another common challenge in the industry: convincing C-suite executives of the value of investment in privacy. “Executives often prioritize initiatives with a clear and immediate return on investment,” she says, noting that privacy issues tend to be viewed as a distraction from core, revenue-generating business functions. By converting her messaging to emphasize quantified privacy risks and long-term benefits, Oxana has learned how to effectively advocate for privacy as a strategic advantage.

As she considers the rise of digital technologies that enable mass information collection, sophisticated analytics and microtargeting, **Patricia Kosseim** takes a macro view of the critical role privacy professionals play in shaping rights-centric data policy. “Through enlightened, concerted and united efforts, we must persevere to find our way back to a place where our informational rights are respected and where these technologies are deployed to improve the human condition, not diminish it.”

## International Women’s Day: the importance of diverse voices in privacy

Like many other fields, the privacy profession thrives when women and other diverse voices are part of the conversation — particularly when it comes to addressing these complex and emerging challenges. “Women often bring different experiences to problem-solving,” says **Oxana Iatsyk**. “Their lived experiences can highlight risks and vulnerabilities, particularly concerning issues disproportionately affecting women.” Incorporating these voices, particularly at “the helm of the function” can help ensure that AI models, privacy policies, and technologies are developed with the needs of all users in mind.



**Alexis Wiseman, General Counsel, Corporate Secretary and Chief Privacy Officer at PC Financial**, stresses the need for women in leadership roles, particularly as technology evolves and more and more people turn to generative AI models as regular sources of information. “If we want these models to operate with integrity, there is no shortcut,” she explains. “Women, with our own varied and layered experiences, must assume leadership roles in this space: to create the algorithms, source the data, and remove historical bias.”

According to **Danielle Young**, women and other diverse voices not being represented in leadership roles is a “missed opportunity” when it comes to addressing complex challenges in privacy and can create an environment “ripe for group think and stagnation”. Danielle also walks the walk: “I won’t attend any events that fail to have diverse representation of speakers. Our community has so many incredibly diverse leaders that it is wholly unacceptable not to have that expertise reflected in any panel.”

For many privacy professionals, International Women’s Day is a call for both celebration and critical reflection of diversity in the field. As **Saba Zia** notes: “International Women’s Day is an opportunity to reflect on what we can do to create a more inclusive community and also take a moment to celebrate our achievements.” **Jackie Moher** echoes this duality: “It’s a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the progress we’ve made and the work still ahead in advocating for women’s representation and empowerment.”

## Building opportunities for women in privacy

When asked about creating more opportunities for women in the privacy profession, many of these inspiring leaders emphasized the importance of support, education, and breaking down barriers. **Oxana Iatsyk** stresses that far beyond International Women’s Day, “women should be supported and celebrated for the value they bring to the table, every day of the week”.

In reflecting on her own experiences as a young lawyer, **Patricia Kosseim** notes that the undervalue and underappreciation of women in the workplace “aren’t just individual hurdles; they reflect deeper, systemic issues in the profession that require collective effort to change.” This recognition deepened her commitment to mentorship, advocacy, and support of women privacy professionals.

**Jackie Moher's** approach to creating more opportunities for women in privacy involves challenging the notion of a niche "privacy industry" and implementing initiatives to promote women's technological expertise more broadly. Although women are more represented in law than in STEM fields, "we need well-rounded professionals who understand the interplay between legal frameworks and technological advancements", particularly in the fields of cybersecurity and AI.

For **Danielle Young**, affordable childcare and workplace flexibility are critical structures for ensuring women's full participation as privacy professionals. As a leader, Danielle takes a thoughtful approach to supporting her team members as full individuals: "Ask the person what would help alleviate some of the daily stressors and ensure she is able to bring her best self to work . . . flexibility should be dealt with on an individual basis and never in broad strokes."

## The role of mentorship in shaping future leaders

For many of these women, both formal and informal mentorship have played an essential role in their careers. As **Saba Zia** shares, her journey into privacy law was supported by senior mentors who made time for career advice and guidance. "Mentorship is a cornerstone of our profession," she explains, adding that she is committed to paying it forward and mentoring others. **Bridget McIlveen** also reflects on the importance of mentors that supported her. "Along the way, I was fortunate to find mentors and colleagues who reinforced my passion and continue to inspire my work in privacy today," she says.

In a similar vein, **Oxana Iatsyk** notes the importance of taking the time to guide others in the profession: "It was harder to find a privacy mentor in the early 2000s than to be a mentor to those that came after me . . . my role as a coach and team leader is to raise privacy talent that will go beyond my achievements."

**Alexis Wiseman** also takes a thoughtful approach to promoting women's participation in the workplace: "I regularly watch for the quieter voices in my meetings," she shares, making a point of amplifying the voices of women who often go unheard. Her small acts of support help build confidence and credibility in young women, "accelerating their opportunities to work on strategic company initiatives."



On a practical level, **Jasmine Adhami, Senior Director, Legal Affairs, and Privacy Officer at Dollarama**, highlights the value of teaching young privacy lawyers to succeed in the context of multidisciplinary industries, beyond an emphasis on “knowing the law”. As Jasmine explains, one of her early managers stood out by encouraging her to go “into the field” and collaborate with their business’s broader technology, architecture and cyber teams.

**Suzanne Morin** never turns down an opportunity to connect or mentor: “It allows me to help, and I learn so much.”

## Balancing professional and personal life

For many women, balancing work and personal life while also promoting women’s representation in the tech and privacy industries is a constant challenge. In thinking about balance, **Patricia Kosseim** recognizes the sacrifices of earlier generations of women lawyers: “Through their own battle scars, they helped normalize the concept of work-life balance. . . it is doubtless thanks to them that I and so many others were able to pursue our professional aspirations, while also raising a family without guilt or apology.”

Although **Danielle Young** frankly acknowledges how challenging it is for newer practitioners to have a semblance of balance, she encourages women to “go easy on themselves”; taking periods of their careers to prioritize caregiving responsibilities does not preclude their long-term success and the achievement of their professional goals. **Alexis Wiseman** adopts a similarly nuanced perspective, suggesting that women should redefine balance by focusing on their personal levels of “acceptable” versus “unacceptable” chaos at any point in time.

## Advice for young women in privacy

For those aspiring to build a career in privacy or cybersecurity, the advice from these leaders is clear: embrace curiosity, learn continuously, and seek opportunities to collaborate.

**Suzanne Morin** encourages curiosity, on-going learning, and the building of trust in strong business partnerships, as privacy requires collaboration across various business functions. “You can’t do privacy well unless you have strong partnerships,” she says.

**Alexis Wiseman** echoes this advice: “as a general rule, women are natural connectors, and the most important skill in this field is the ability to collaborate with others across a variety of functions . . . thoughtful questions are truly the fastest way to level-up your advice, integrate into the broader business, and build your reputation as a trusted, practical and strategic advisor.”

**Bridget McIlveen** highlights that understanding basic IT and security concepts are critical for navigating privacy issues: “Work closely with technical colleagues and learn basic IT and security concepts.” She emphasizes that the cross-functional nature of privacy means that working well with legal, tech, and business teams is key. She encourages young women to “stay curious, embrace learning, and don’t shy away from new challenges — privacy is constantly evolving, and those who adapt will thrive.”

**Jasmine Adhami** also notes the importance of lawyers understanding the technical aspects of privacy in order to effectively highlight risks, propose solutions, and gain credibility in key business conversations. She advises young women to familiarize themselves with the particularities of data flows, back-end infrastructure, and data storage systems within their companies.

While also encouraging young women to build a strong foundation in the technical and legal aspects of privacy, **Danielle Young** stresses the value of strong interpersonal skills in effectively communicating privacy topics to stakeholders. She also advises women to “be bold enough to reach out” to others in the field, as privacy practitioners (particularly women) are “an incredibly supportive bunch”.

**Patricia Kosseim** is especially encouraged by the young women entering the privacy field: “They bring fresh perspectives, a deep commitment to ethical leadership, and a willingness to challenge where the momentum seems to be taking us. As the next generation of privacy leaders, they will play a key role in shaping data policy and driving responsible innovation.”

## Looking ahead

As we reflect on the journeys of these incredible women, it is clear that they are not only shaping the privacy profession, but also leading the charge for greater gender equity in tech. Through mentorship, advocacy, and their innovative contributions to privacy, they are laying the foundation for a more inclusive, supportive, and diverse industry.

The stories of these women in the privacy profession are inspiring reminders of the power of resilience, leadership, and mentorship. As privacy becomes ever more critical in the digital age, the contributions of women in this field are invaluable. Their voices are critical to innovation and the development of pragmatic solutions to complex privacy and data issues and respectful data practices.

On this International Women’s Day, let us celebrate these leaders and commit to continuing the work they’ve started: creating a future where women in privacy and technology are not only recognized, but also empowered to lead and innovate.