



# Office of Consumer Affairs: An Overview



# About Us

The Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) promotes the interests and protection of Canadian consumers. Well-informed and confident consumers help stimulate competition and innovation in the Canadian marketplace.

The OCA aims to ensure that consumers have a voice in the development of government policies and are effective marketplace participants. It provides research and analysis on marketplace issues in support of both policy development and intergovernmental harmonization of consumer protection rules and measures.

It also identifies important consumer issues and develops and disseminates consumer information and awareness tools. Finally, the OCA provides financial support to not-for-profit consumer and voluntary organizations, in the form of a Contributions Program, to encourage them to reach financial self-sufficiency and assist them in providing meaningful, evidence-based input to public policy in the consumer interest.



## Our Contact Information

Office of Consumer Affairs  
Industry Canada  
235 Queen Street, 6th Floor, West Tower  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0H5

Tel: (613) 946-2576  
Fax: (613) 952-6927  
Email: [consumer.information@ic.gc.ca](mailto:consumer.information@ic.gc.ca)  
Website: [www.ic.gc.ca/consumer](http://www.ic.gc.ca/consumer)

# Our Mandate

“Promoting the interests of Canadian consumers”

Under the *Department of Industry Act*, the Minister of Industry is mandated to promote and protect consumer interests throughout Canada. The Minister's powers also extend to measures to strengthen the national economy, promote sustainable development, ensure an efficient internal market governed by effective marketplace rules, and foster science and innovation.

The OCA contributes to this broad mandate by helping to build trust in the marketplace, so that consumers can protect themselves and confidently and knowledgeably drive demand for innovative products and services at competitive prices.

## Strategic Directions

The OCA bases its strategic directions and agenda on the following three themes:

### **Vulnerable Consumers in the Marketplace**

We assess the nature of consumer vulnerability in Canada and help ensure that policy developments do not impact disproportionately on the most vulnerable or disadvantaged Canadian consumers.

### **Consumers in the Electronic Marketplace**

We help to increase consumer confidence in the electronic marketplace as new technologies emerge. We work on issues such as e-commerce and electronic payment mechanisms, and lay the groundwork for possible future policy initiatives in areas such as commercial e-services and mobile commerce.

### **Consumers in the Sustainable Marketplace**

In collaboration with key stakeholders, we work to improve the understanding of the consumer's role in sustainable production and consumption, and we engage in research and policy development on how best to educate and equip consumers to deal with sustainable consumption issues in the marketplace.

# Our Partners and Clients

## The Consumer Measures Committee (CMC)

The OCA co-chairs this joint federal/provincial/territorial committee which provides a forum for national cooperation to improve the marketplace for Canadian consumers, through the harmonization of laws, regulations and practices and through actions to raise public awareness. Information on the Consumer Measures Committee, including information for researchers, is available at [www.cmcweb.ca](http://www.cmcweb.ca).

## Canadian Consumer Organizations

Canadian consumer organizations offer various services such as consumer assistance and advocacy on consumer protection issues. These organizations also provide effective input into policy development, research on consumer-related issues and trends and consumer education activities. A list of Canadian consumer organizations is available at [www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/oca-bc.nsf/eng/ca01509.html](http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/oca-bc.nsf/eng/ca01509.html).

## Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

The OECD aims to help countries develop effective consumer policies and promote efficient, transparent and fair global markets for consumers. Canada (via the OCA) has chaired the OECD's Consumer Policy Committee since March 2006. Information on the OECD is available at [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org).

## National and International Standards Organizations

Standards play an important role in helping improve quality of life and consumer confidence among Canadians. The OCA works with the Standards Council of Canada and, at the international level, with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Consumer Policy Committee to help ensure the consumer voice is heard in the standards development process.

## Canadian Consumers

Economic instability, the globalization of supply chains, and dramatic shifts in the technologies used to market and sell goods and services are affecting Canadian consumers in numerous ways. We help represent the consumer voice in policy-making and provide Canadians with relevant and timely consumer information.



# Our Policy Resources

## Contributions Program for Non-Profit Consumer and Voluntary Organizations

Overseen and managed by the OCA, the program provides consumer and voluntary groups with the means to produce high quality and timely research on consumer issues affecting the Canadian marketplace. It allows consumer groups to develop policy advice that is both credible and useful to decision-makers. Two types of funding are available under the Program: Research Project Contributions and Development Project Contributions. Development Project Contributions are aimed at institution and capacity building for consumer and voluntary organizations and Research Project Contributions support sound research and analysis directed at consumer protection issues which are national in scope. For more information on the Contributions Program visit [www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/oca-bc.nsf/eng/h\\_ca00175.html](http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/oca-bc.nsf/eng/h_ca00175.html).

## Consumer Policy Research Database

The Database is a collection of Canadian research references on consumer-related topics. Its objective is to increase knowledge transfer across the consumer policy research community. To access the Consumer Policy Research Database, go to [www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/oca-bc.nsf/eng/h\\_ca02236.html](http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/oca-bc.nsf/eng/h_ca02236.html).

Below are a few examples of the resources

we offer to researchers and policymakers interested in consumer issues.

## Consumer Trends

The Consumer Trends Report provides an overview of economic and marketplace trends of relevance to consumer policy and identifies research gaps and opportunities for future work by the consumer affairs community. The OCA occasionally produces Consumer Trends Updates which are brief reports on research or policy developments related to themes explored in the Consumer Trends Report. These reports are available for download at [www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/oca-bc.nsf/eng/h\\_ca02216.html](http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/oca-bc.nsf/eng/h_ca02216.html).

## Consumer Research Post

The Consumer Research Post e-Bulletin provides timely and relevant research and consultation news for consumer affairs professionals in government, academe, business, and civil society. To view the current issue and for access to past issues, visit [www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/oca-bc.nsf/eng/h\\_ca02217.html](http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/oca-bc.nsf/eng/h_ca02217.html).

# Our Consumer Resources

The OCA offers information for consumers to help them make confident and well-informed decisions in the marketplace. We offer resources on topics such as purchasing a cellphone or television, preventing identity theft, managing debt, and information regarding landlords and tenants. The following are a few examples of resources we offer for consumers:

## Canadian Consumer Handbook

The Canadian Consumer Handbook is Canada's premier consumer advice publication. It offers advice on topics such as contracts, housing, identity theft, being an environmentally responsible consumer, and much more. It is a useful reference for consumers and provides assistance to consumer affairs professionals who offer information to their clients. The Handbook also includes a directory of government and non-government contacts in a variety of areas. It was created and is updated by the Consumer Measures Committee, a partnership of federal/provincial/territorial consumer agencies. To access the Canadian Consumer Handbook, go to [www.ic.gc.ca/consumerhandbook](http://www.ic.gc.ca/consumerhandbook).

## ConsumerInformation.ca

ConsumerInformation.ca is Canada's most extensive source of online consumer information. It provides Canadian consumers with a single-source window to information and contacts for many consumer-related enquiries. The initiative is founded on a strategic partnership among federal departments and agencies, provincial and territorial ministries and non-government organizations. For more information, visit [www.ConsumerInformation.ca](http://www.ConsumerInformation.ca).

## The Complaint Courier

The Complaint Courier is a good resource to help consumers complain about a product or service. This online tool provides instant access to the resources and expert advice consumers need to navigate their way through the complaint process from start to finish, and explains how to make any type of complaint in a clear, organized and effective way. To access the Complaint Courier, go to [www.ComplaintCourier.ca](http://www.ComplaintCourier.ca).