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AUDITOR GENERAL RAISES CONCERNS ABOUT THE SECURITY OF SENSITIVE INFORMATION STORED BY AGENCIES

In his latest report released today, Auditor General Colin Murphy raised concerns about the confidentiality, integrity and availability of sensitive information that is held by agencies in databases and business applications.

In the first section of his two-part Information Systems audit report, Mr Murphy looked at how seven government agencies were managing the security of their databases and found none of them adequately prevented unauthorised access to and data loss from their databases.

'The 13 databases we looked at across the seven agencies are critical to agency functions and hold personal and sensitive information of employees and the public,' Mr Murphy said.

'Most concerning was that we continue to find weak controls in some basic, easy to fix areas such as passwords, patching and setting of user privileges.

'To assist agencies in addressing the security of their databases we have provided guidance material in this report outlining suggested security controls and practices to improve the security of their databases – I encourage all agencies, and not just those audited, to use this guidance.'

The second part of the report includes the results of Applications Reviews of four agency applications:

- Integrated Court Management System – Department of the Attorney General
- LAW Office – Legal Aid Commission Western Australia
- WA Seniors Card Management System – Department of Local Government and Communities
- Services Information Management System 2 – Drug and Alcohol Office of WA.

Mr Murphy found that while all four applications were performing well and addressing business needs, there were some weaknesses around data validation, manual processing and information security.

'Particular areas of concern were around data access and logging, software patching and updates, and general security practices in agency IT environments,' he said.

'These weaknesses increase the risk to the confidentiality, integrity and availability of sensitive information that is entrusted to agencies.

'All the agencies we audit understand the criticality of their IT systems to their operations, however, too many underestimate the risks that exist to those systems.

'I urge agencies to take note of the findings and act on the recommendations of this report to help ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information.'

The Auditor General's *Information Systems Audit Report* (Report 23 – November 2015) can be downloaded from the Office of the Auditor General website at www.audit.wa.gov.au

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