



## The Canada Social Report Needs You

On June 16, 2015, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy launched a new initiative called the *Canada Social Report*. Despite its name, it is not a report in the traditional sense of the word. The *Canada Social Report* is a compilation of various sources of economic and social data and information. Somehow, the name *Canada Social Compendium* didn't cut it – even though that's precisely what it is.

Unlike most reports, the *Canada Social Report* is not a single printed document. Rather, it is a set of web-based materials, which are updated on an ongoing basis. It is intended to be 'alive' and ever-changing – as new data and relevant documents become available.

While there are distinct sections of content, users need go to only one web address to find the information. The *Canada Social Report* basically acts as a national portal to social data.

Why did the Caledon Institute believe it was important to undertake this challenging initiative?

When it comes to social issues, we know that good evidence is power. High-quality data are essential to make the case for why we should pay attention to a certain concern or why it is worthy of investment. A data void leaves the political door wide open to myths and misconceptions, rhetoric and ideology – none of which work in the interest of high-quality, effective social policy.

There is no charge for accessing the materials that comprise the *Canada Social Report*. A major guiding principle for this initiative is our belief that cost should not be a barrier to solid and accessible data, which forms the basis for intelligent policy formulation.

*The Tamarack Institute has invited Caledon to host a webinar on the Canada Social Report on August 26, 2015.*

The *Canada Social Report* was developed in response to the demise of the mandatory long-form Census. Prior to its abolition in 2010, the Census collected high-quality, timely data as to who we are as a nation. It provided a wealth of detailed statistics on language, education, disability, citizenship, cultural origin, labour market activities, incomes and dwellings.

We are now missing much of this valuable data. While some new figures have replaced what we once had, they typically are not considered as reliable as the gold-standard long-form Census. In addition to the Census, other key sources had been placed in jeopardy, such as national social statistics, data on persons with disabilities, and welfare incomes and statistics.

But even in the absence of this problem, the *Canada Social Report* would be a worthwhile effort. Researchers, academics and organizations use this vital information for a variety of purposes. They may want to understand the nature of a given problem or make the case for why we should pay attention to it. Some users may need to know about the social programs currently in place to address an identified concern. Still others may want to track the progress made (or not) in tackling a selected issue.

Three major types of data comprise the *Canada Social Report*. Statistical, program and evaluative data are described below.

*Statistical data* help define the nature of a certain problem, such as poverty. How prevalent is poverty in this country? Has it changed over time? Which regions are disproportionately affected? How do single-parent families, seniors, aboriginal Canadians, visible minorities and persons with disabilities fare relative to the general population?

*Program data* comprise several major streams of information. The Social Programs component (to be developed) will describe the major social interventions in Canada, with a primary focus on income security. The Social Policy Record sets out a chronological account of key social policy developments. Other sections, including Welfare Incomes and Social Assistance Summaries, present detailed analyses of a specific income security program – in this case, social assistance.

The *evaluative data* section will make links to studies that have been compiled by various groups and organizations to assess progress against a certain social problem or to determine the state of our collective well-being. Evaluative data often take the form of composite indices, which combine various measures to arrive at an overall picture. The Canadian Index of Well-Being is a prime example. Other notable links will include the Quality of Life Reporting System produced by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Vital Signs undertaken by the Community Foundations of Canada.

While the *Canada Social Report* is coordinated and hosted by the Caledon Institute, the contents represent the work of a broad spectrum of respected researchers, academics and social organizations. It is information that is collectively gathered, produced and shared.

The *Canada Social Report* belongs to you. Please tell us what you need to know – and what *we* need to know to make it better.

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