



CALEDON
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL POLICY

**The Canada Social Report...
So Far**

by

Sherri Torjman

November 2015

The Canada Social Report... So Far

by

Sherri Torjman

November 2015

The *Canada Social Report* is being developed by the Caledon team: Ken Battle, Sherri Torjman, Anne Makhoul and Melanie Burston.

Copyright © 2015 by The Caledon Institute of Social Policy

ISBN 1-55382-657-4

Published by:

Caledon Institute of Social Policy
1354 Wellington Street West, 3rd Floor
Ottawa, ON K1Y 3C3
CANADA
Tel.: (613) 729-3340
E-mail: caledon@caledoninst.org
Website: www.caledoninst.org
Twitter: @CaledonINST

Table of Contents

What is the <i>Canada Social Report</i> ?	1
A. Current Content	2
Key Indicators	2
Policy Monitors	6
Welfare Incomes	8
Social Assistance Summaries	9
Minimum Wages	10
Poverty Data	11
Poverty Reduction Strategies	11
Social Policy Record	12
Canadian Tax and Credit Simulator (CTaCS)	13
Indigenous Peoples	13
Quality-of-Life Indicators	13
B. Future Content	14
Community Data	14
Demographic Data	14
Disability Data	15
Education Data	16
Employment Data	16
Health Data	16
Housing and Homelessness Data	16
C. Challenges	16
Regular updates	17
User feedback	17
Quality control	18
Expanded user base	19
Visual accessibility	19
Cost considerations	20
Conclusion	20

What is the Canada Social Report?

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. We know that this might be the expectation because most voluntary organizations and businesses produce an annual report that summarizes their major achievements and financial statements over the year.

But we decided against a printed version. Because of the nature of this work, the information would have been out-of-date before it was even produced in hard copy.

The *Canada Social Report* is a set of web-based materials, which are evolving on an ongoing basis. They are updated as work is completed from our own analysis, as new data sets are produced and as we learn about the relevant findings of other researchers and organizations.

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.

The *Canada Social Report* is an important initiative that we have long wanted to do. However, this work became all the more urgent when the former federal government announced the withdrawal of the long-form Census.

Prior to 2010, the Census collected high-quality, timely data about who we are as a nation. It provided a wealth of statistics on language, education, disability, citizenship, cultural origin, labour market activities, incomes and dwellings. It was a reliable source of detailed information about a wide range of variables describing Canadians.

We are now missing much of this invaluable data. While some new figures (e.g., income data) have replaced what we once had, they typically are not considered as dependable as surveys based on the gold-standard long-form Census. In addition to the Census, other key sources were put in jeopardy, such as national social statistics, data on persons with disabilities and trends in poverty.

As part of its platform, the Liberals made a promise to restore the long-form Census. It is now acting on that commitment. We look forward to the restoration of essential information that had been lost.

A. Current Content

The *Canada Social Report* (so far) consists of the following sections, each of which is described below:

- key indicators
- policy monitors
- welfare incomes
- social assistance summaries
- minimum wages
- poverty data
- poverty reduction strategies
- social policy record
- Canadian Tax and Credit Simulator
- indigenous peoples
- quality-of-life indicators.

Key Indicators

This section of the *Canada Social Report* focuses on the variables considered to be headline indicators. The purpose of these indicators is to provide a summary, at a glance, of how we are doing in the country from a social perspective. They are intended to present a snapshot of Canada's socioeconomic health and welfare.

There are three top indicators when it comes to social policy: unemployment, average incomes and poverty. Other hallmarks of well-being provide additional information and are discussed below in the section on Quality-of-Life Indicators.

Of course, headline indicators are simply that: a headline. They don't tell the story behind the story. They don't make clear any of the nuances or details that are so important to

understanding the full picture. They present a significant piece of information – but only as a snapshot and at a single point in time.

In order to provide a more fulsome picture, each of the three headline indicators will link to more extensive data on that topic. Take, for example, the unemployment variable.

The rate of unemployment generally is regarded as a crucial bellwether of a nation's economic and social well-being. While a single unemployment number tells a lot, it also tells a little.

As in all figures expressed as averages, substantial and meaningful detail is lost. Only a disaggregation of the overall number can provide the real story on unemployment. A click on the headline indicator will connect with the detailed information on its many dimensions and nuances.

The deeper dive on unemployment will present the jobless picture by province and territory, by age and by group including gender, persons with disabilities and indigenous Canadians.

While national averages are important barometers of the overall health of a nation, a single snapshot in time provides no indication as to whether the information is good or bad. It is not possible to judge how well a nation is faring on these core dimensions of socioeconomic health unless the figures are compared to some external baseline or standard measure – or to themselves over time. In the case of the latter, trend data provide the comparator base.

The *Canada Social Report* will include graphs on unemployment rates over many years. Only then is it possible to determine how well we are doing compared to our past performance. Only then is it possible to set desired future targets.

Under normal cycles in a market economy, the unemployment rate in the country will always ebb and flow. It generally goes up and down over time in a wave-like pattern. While no one likes or wants to see rising unemployment, this moving pattern is typical and not unexpected. A certain level of 'cyclical unemployment' is considered normal in a market economy – though it is far from normal or acceptable for the affected households.

However, the policy red flags start waving when the trend data in a given area – in this case unemployment – start showing unusual or sharp patterns. For example, a moderate pattern of ups and downs that suddenly starts to spike raises concern about joblessness rising from its normal cyclical state to a much higher, more troubling level.

While there is typically no standard measure to identify the national worry mark, it is generally agreed that there are serious problems when unemployment reaches double digits. An unemployment rate of 10 percent or higher means that more than one in ten employable individuals are out of work – not a desirable state.

The disaggregation will also show that certain groups, such as youth and indigenous Canadians, face disproportionately higher rates of unemployment. These groups are already in double-digit territory and have been for some time. However, their faces tend to get lost in the aggregated average numbers, which lose the concrete substance of this very significant social concern.

Similarly, the national unemployment rate masks the fact that certain regions of the country, notably the Atlantic provinces, typically experience much higher rates of joblessness than others. It is a predominantly resource-based region challenged by a tough climate and limited economic base.

But when the data are disaggregated by jurisdiction, the trends paint a different picture. Newfoundland and Labrador used to be the province with the highest rate of unemployment in the country. The chronic problem was exacerbated by the collapse of the cod fishery. However, there was an economic rebound linked to the discovery of offshore oil.

All this to say: The overall unemployment number presents a snapshot of how we are doing as a nation *writ large*. But the breakdowns that give more detailed information paint a more complete picture. Both general and specific data are important.

In addition to unemployment rates, this section includes employment rates, which refer to the number of employed persons expressed as a percentage of the total population 15 years of age and over. The employment rate is another crucial indicator of the economic well-being of a nation.

Rates of employment and unemployment, not surprisingly, are linked to income. While total incomes consist of a variety of sources, including government benefits and investment income, employment is the primary determinant of income. Canadians' incomes are determined primarily by their relationship to the paid labour market. Rate of pay and duration of work are two key variables that drive income level.

Average incomes represent a vital barometer of the economic health of Canadian households. But once again, average figures mask essential details that become apparent only through disaggregation.

A breakdown of the overall average income will show wide variation by jurisdiction with higher incomes in Alberta, BC and Ontario than in other parts of the country. These numbers will highlight the extent to which two-earner households tend to fare much better, not surprisingly, than single-parent households with only one earner, and single workers.

It is difficult to assess the meaning of a single figure. How do we know if a given level of average income is adequate or not? By contrast, when a single figure is presented as part of a trend – say this year relative to previous years – we have a better idea as to whether incomes are rising, staying the same or falling. Their current value compared with their past levels helps determine whether we need to be concerned about the trend.

The detailed background material will also present trends in median income – i.e., the amount that divides the income distribution in the population into two equal groups, with half of all households in the country having income above that level and half having income below that level. Median income is included because it is the key variable employed in the calculation of the Low Income Measure, discussed below.

The poverty rate is the third key indicator that provides a barometer of a nation's socioeconomic health. In this case, two headline indicators are presented. The first is the national poverty rate determined through a measure known as the low income cut-off (LICO), as calculated by Statistics Canada.

The LICO represents an income threshold where a family spends on average 20 percentage points or more of its income on food, shelter and clothing than the average family, leaving less money for other expenses such as health, education, transportation and recreation. LICOs are calculated for households and communities of different sizes, and will be included in this section.

As in the other two top indicators (unemployment and incomes), details matter. The accompanying breakdown will present the wide variations in poverty rates by jurisdiction. It will also show significant differences by population group, with indigenous Canadians, new Canadians, persons with disabilities and young people showing disproportionately higher low income rates.

Statistics Canada's Low Income Measure (LIM) typically is used in international comparisons, though its use is spreading in Canada. The LIM is a fixed percentage (50 percent) of median adjusted economic family income, where "adjusted" means that family needs are taken into account. This section will link to the Poverty Data component of the *Canada Social Report*.

Several sources of data will comprise the Key Indicators section. It will include trend data that the Caledon Institute produces, research results published by other organizations and links to relevant Statistics Canada data. Statistics Canada is launching a new series of tables for 20 economic and social data time series in order to add more depth and context to some of its key datasets. We will also draw on data produced by provincial and territorial statistical agencies, which furnish a goldmine of information.

Policy Monitors

The section on Policy Monitors tracks key social policy developments at the federal, provincial/territorial and municipal orders of government. Updates are posted to the *Canada Social Report* on a regular basis.

The following is an alphabetical listing of the categories of tracking, which include groups of Canadians as well as social policy-related issues:

- Budgets
- caregiving
- children
- communities
- disability
- education
- employment
- food security
- governance
- health
- homelessness
- housing
- inclusion
- income security
- indigenous peoples
- minimum wages
- poverty reduction
- recreation
- seniors
- social economy
- social finance
- taxes
- Throne Speech
- women
- youth.

The monthly federal monitor tracks initiatives in areas for which Ottawa has primary responsibility. These include certain populations (primarily indigenous Canadians) as well as social programs administered by the federal government: Employment Insurance, Old Age Security, the Guaranteed Income Supplement, the Canada Pension Plan and child benefits. Selected federal data are also presented, including information from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and findings from relevant Statistics Canada reports, such as the prevalence of food insecurity in the country.

The provincial/territorial monitor also documents, on a monthly basis, key developments in social policy, including income security (social assistance, minimum wages and income programs) and social services. This monitor is somewhat longer than the federal version because provinces and territories have primary responsibility in Canada for the delivery of social programs and services. As in the federal case, the provincial/territorial monitor highlights initiatives related both to population groups and programs/services.

The federal and provincial/territorial monitors are set up in a similar format with a common search function. Users of this material can view all the new developments in any given jurisdiction. If, however, they do not need or want to review all the presented information, they can use the search function to find the required content by subject(s) and/or by jurisdiction.

The municipal policy monitor tracks major changes in six key policy areas: food security, homelessness, housing, recreation, affordable transportation and poverty reduction. The municipal monitor currently includes only the largest cities in Canada: Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Montréal and Halifax. This select group was chosen as a starting point in order to build a solid foundation for the municipal monitoring process.

Several decisions were made in selecting both the identified policy areas and the cities.

First, we had to choose the areas of policy that fall within the local government domain but that are social policy-based. We were not concerned with municipal developments related to water or sewage treatment, for example, even though we recognize their intrinsic and powerful links to positive health and well-being.

Second, in addition to specific subjects, we decided to include in the municipal monitoring section relevant plans that had a social policy focus. These are aspirational strategic plans that set out core directions and visions which the city seeks to achieve. The visions pertain to overall direction, sustainability, neighbourhoods and equity. They include, for example, Vancouver's Healthy City for All, Montréal Sustainable Community Development Plan 2010-15, Neighbourhood Placemaking in Halifax and the work of the Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Affairs Committee.

Finally, we had to determine the level of geography on which to focus, depending on each municipality's governance structure. Municipal tracking can be done at the city proper or at the larger regional level, which typically comprises the inner city and the surrounding regions or suburbs. Montréal's complex governance structure led us to track region-wide developments. Calgary and Edmonton are not set up as formal regional governance structures. In Toronto and Vancouver, we chose to track the core city only and not the regions.

Welfare Incomes

Welfare in Canada is a continuation of the flagship report of the National Council of Welfare, which was dismantled by the federal government in 2012. At the time, the Caledon Institute made a commitment to continue producing the welfare incomes and poverty statistics for which the Council was noted.

Sherri Torjman and Ken Battle had been involved in 1986 in developing for the National Council of Welfare the methodology for calculating welfare incomes. We knew how difficult it would be to re-establish the entire data series if it were lost.

Welfare in Canada focuses on the incomes of four different households living on that program of financial support. Total welfare incomes consist of the sum of two main components: 1) social assistance, and 2) federal and provincial/territorial child benefits as well as relevant federal and provincial/territorial and tax credits.

Social assistance is the income program of last resort. It is intended for individuals and families who have exhausted all other monetary resources. Every province and territory has its own social assistance program, so no two are exactly the same. Each program has different administrative rules, eligibility criteria, benefit levels and provisions across the country.

The most common method of assessing the adequacy of any income program is to compare it to a recognized standard and then determine how far it diverts from that indicator. There is no single or commonly accepted baseline, but rather several measures that typically are used for comparative purposes. They fall into one of two groups: poverty measures and income measures.

Poverty measures are considered to be the baseline level below which households are deemed to live in poverty. Two poverty measures are employed in this report: low income cut-offs (LICOs) and the Market Basket Measure (MBM).

Income measures comprise the second group of comparators. This set of measures assesses the adequacy of welfare relative to the income level of other households in the

population. While several different indicators can be used for income comparative purposes, two have been selected for this analysis: after-tax average incomes and after-tax median incomes.

Social Assistance Summaries

The federal and provincial/territorial governments formerly had published the *Social Assistance Statistics Report*. The last report from this series was released in 2010 and employed 2008 data. It presented a picture of social assistance (commonly known as welfare) caseloads throughout the country.

The Caledon Institute decided to undertake a study to replace the missing data and to revive this important work. We faced a number of challenges in this process.

The first involved figuring out how to replace data that were missing from 2009 to the present. Provinces and territories were asked to go back to their records in order to fill in this crucial information.

The second challenge arose from the need to distinguish between cases (i.e., number of *households* on assistance) and numbers of *recipients* on assistance – a figure that includes all the people in a given household. It was essential to ensure the production of comparable data. Cases represent number of households which, in turn, consist of one or more people. The number of welfare recipients will always be greater than the number of households.

Third, some jurisdictions calculate caseload averages by calendar year (end of December) and some by fiscal year (April to March). Still others report figures at a point in time (March 31). Once again, it was crucial in producing these caseload figures to be clear about the year-end dates that provinces and territories were using in their respective jurisdictions.

A final complication had to do with the fact that some jurisdictions count as part of their welfare caseloads the individuals and households that receive special assistance only. The latter refers to the additional help that welfare systems provide in respect of health- and disability-related needs. Some families require both basic financial assistance and special assistance while other households may need only the latter – i.e., extra funds to offset the cost of their special needs. It is important to make this distinction, given that provinces and territories use different methods in their calculations.

The social assistance caseloads were tabulated with all these considerations in mind. A summary was prepared for each province and territory with input and feedback from government representatives in every jurisdiction.

The final compilation includes program descriptions and data on the number of social assistance cases and recipients dating, for most jurisdictions, from 1997 to 2014. Both the individual jurisdictional and overall summaries are posted to the *Canada Social Report* website and will be updated annually.

It is of interest that one user of these data requested that the results be pulled together in composite form as a single pan-Canadian table. As a matter of principle, Caledon has been cautious about presenting comparative social statistics, especially when it comes to provincial and territorial data that are calculated, as noted, in distinctly different ways.

We will not publish comparative data unless we are confident that they represent a relatively similar basis of comparison. We have gone to great lengths and hundreds of footnotes, for example, to ensure the comparability of the information employed in the *Welfare in Canada* report, earlier described.

Minimum Wages

Minimum wages are among Canada's oldest and most important social programs. While the minimum wage is only one tool among several required to combat poverty, it is crucial to the task.

Contrary to what some would have us believe, minimum wages are not on the decline. The most recent edition (2015) of this Caledon Institute report – *Minimum Wage Rates in Canada: 1965- 2015* – found that minimum wage rates have improved significantly in recent years in all provinces and territories – with the exception of Nunavut, which has frozen its rate since 2011 and so caused a small but steady decrease in value.

The recent rise in minimum wages is likely due, in part, to the introduction in most provinces and territories of poverty reduction strategies, which have focused attention on minimum wages.

This annual report tracks minimum wages in each province and territory in real (inflation-adjusted) value from 1965 to 2015. It also compares minimum wages to average earnings, the low income cut-off (LICO) and the low income measure (LIM). This mass of data is illustrated by graphs, which present the trends and patterns.

The report also compares minimum wages in Canada to other countries. Canada ranks in the top one-third of US states and of OECD countries. But we sit in the bottom one-third when comparing minimum wages to average wages.

Poverty Data

This section will present poverty data in terms of its numbers, rate and depth. The poverty rate represents the prevalence of poverty in the country while the poverty gap provides an indication of its depth. We use the terms “poverty” and “low incomes” synonymously.

The poverty rate is calculated by determining the percentage of the population that falls below a designated standard measure – or measures as the case may be. This section will present the poverty rate calculated according to the low income cut-off (LICO) and the Low Income Measure (LIM). The poverty gap refers to the extent to which low-income households fall below the poverty line.

A major challenge in carrying out this work involves the availability of reliable data. Statistics Canada had been forced to implement \$33.9 million worth of cuts in fiscal year 2014-15 through the belt-tightening of 34 of its programs. The invaluable Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID), which tracked changes in individuals’ economic status over time, found itself on the chopping block.

In the past, SLID had provided a solid foundation of data for the calculation of poverty numbers, rates and gaps. Now a new instrument – the Canadian Income Survey – has been created, based on a voluntary survey. With the newly-elected Liberal government in Ottawa, it is possible that SLID will be revived or some other comparable source will be made available. In the meantime, we will use the Canadian Income Survey.

The working poor component of the Poverty Data section showcases the research findings of partners engaged in gathering this information. So far, two reports have been posted to the *Canada Social Report* website. *The Working Poor in the Toronto Region: Mapping working poverty in Canada’s richest city* compares Toronto to other regions across Canada, for the years 2006 to 2012. *The Precarity Penalty: Poverty and employment precarity in Southern Ontario* explores the impact of rising precarious, or insecure, employment in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton.

Poverty Reduction Strategies

The *Canada Social Report* currently includes a section that summarizes provincial and territorial poverty strategies. We also have linked to relevant work being undertaken elsewhere in the country. The national organization Canada Without Poverty, for example, has prepared provincial and territorial summaries that can be readily accessed from the *Canada Social Report* portal.

Users of the *Canada Social Report* have suggested to us that local poverty reduction strategies, where available, be incorporated in this section. Edmonton and Toronto represent two cities with municipal strategies formulated by local government.

A wide range of other communities, including Saint John, Montréal and Calgary, have developed poverty reduction strategies that involve several sectors. Most of these communities are members of the Vibrant Canada network. Future plans for growth of the *Canada Social Report* will include these summaries.

Social Policy Record

This section presents a chronological record of major social policy developments at the federal level. It is organized by category and lists all the key changes that were made in a given area over time. Its purpose is to create a clear chronological record that captures the history and evolution in selected social policy domains.

The first completed component focuses on child benefits. The historical record starts in 1918 and continues up until 2015. The section provides dates and associated brief descriptions of major initiatives over the years related to child benefits. It is virtually impossible to follow all the relevant policy changes in a given area over time without a strategic and systematic account of this evolution.

Preparing a chronology is no easy task. It is made more difficult by politics. Sometimes measures are announced and do not get implemented in the way they were promised. At other times, a measure that appears new is simply a re-introduction of something that was already in effect. It is the same measure brought in earlier but given a different name. For example, the Universal Child Care Benefit created in 2006 was essentially the same as Family Allowances introduced in 1945.

The Social Policy Record section also links to the 50-year timeline produced by the Vanier Institute of the Family. It tracks major developments in family policy in the country over the past 50 years. Vanier is currently working on extending this timeline back 150 years.

Future components of the *Social Policy Record* will focus on various dimensions of social policy, including federal transfers for health and social services.

Canadian Tax and Credit Simulator (CTaCS)

One user suggested that we include a section in the *Canada Social Report* on the Canadian Tax and Credit Simulator. The CTaCS is a package that simulates the Canadian personal income tax and transfer system. In addition to the simulator, the CTaCS incorporates a database of tax and transfer parameters dating from 1962 to 2012.

Developed by UBC Economics Professor Kevin Milligan, the CTaCS allows users to calculate the tax burden on various family types and at different income levels in diverse jurisdictions and in selected years. It can be used to look up specific tax parameters, such as the level of income taxation or the value of a federal or provincial tax credit in a given year. The data embedded in the program provide a wealth of information that can be tapped by policy-makers, researchers and community groups. Finally, the simulator can test the impact of a proposed tax change on households at varying levels of income and in selected jurisdictions.

Indigenous Peoples

While there is a substantial evidence base on indigenous Canadians, its component parts are scattered widely among diverse government departments, universities and community organizations.

This section on Indigenous Peoples will present demographic data through the First Nations Profiles produced by the former Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. Links will also be made to the Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research 2006.

Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Statistics Canada have all published important studies related to health status of indigenous Canadians. The section also includes references to key data on educational attainment, poverty and labour market participation. The Centre for the Study of Living Standards is an invaluable information source.

To assist the development of this section, we have been seeking advice from a community developer and indigenous strategist.

Quality-of-Life Indicators

This section provides links to relevant quality-of-life indicators that have been developed and published by other organizations. They represent evaluative data that have been produced 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 hosted by the University of Waterloo 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. Links will also be made to relevant data published by the International Institute on Sustainable Development based in Winnipeg.

Life satisfaction measures and happiness indices are presented in reports written by the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research and the Centre for the Study of Living Standards. Links to selected international sources of data that provide international comparative data, such as UNICEF's Child Well-being Index and the World Statistics Report, will be included as well.

B. Future Content

During a webinar on the *Canada Social Report*, participants proposed several new sections related to community, demography, disability and housing/homelessness. Participants in workshops held at the conference of the National Poverty Summit in Ottawa (May 2015) and the Philanthropic Foundations of Canada in Toronto (October 2015) suggested that we include data on children and youth, education, employment and health.

Community Data

We received an inquiry about whether we plan to include in the *Canada Social Report* a section on community-based socioeconomic indicators, such as a catalogue of neighbourhood incomes, material deprivation and social deprivation. The CommunityView Collaboration in Saskatoon was cited as an example. Caledon intends to link to the community data produced by Statistics Canada – though the last figures are from 2011.

We will be exploring other sources of data as well. Our plan is to work with existing groups currently engaged in the collection of community data to create links, where possible, to the *Canada Social Report*. These include Data Consortium Projects throughout Canada.

Demographic Data

Several webinar participants suggested that the *Canada Social Report* develop a section on demographics. It would provide information on the Canadian population by age, gender and

marital status, among other variables. This work will be easier when the long-form Census becomes operational once again. In the meantime, figures will be compiled from diverse sources and various organizations that produce data on selected dimensions of this broad subject.

A participant in the Philanthropic Foundations of Canada workshop asked whether we had any plans to include sub-sections on specific components of the population. She was especially interested in children and youth, and thought it would be a good idea to incorporate child welfare statistics, which are particularly difficult to obtain. This sub-section would be an appropriate place to present data on early childhood development and care.

One workshop attendee noted that demographic sub-groups could also include seniors. The section would provide a place where relevant socioeconomic data on that particular sub-population were available in one place.

At the current time, we are not planning separate demographic sections, other than for Indigenous Peoples. However, we certainly will note it for future consideration. In the meantime, we may be able to pull together key data for users through the *Canada Social Report's* search function, which would identify relevant materials on and links to the specific population group of interest.

Disability Data

The dismantling of the long-form Census resulted in the withdrawal of the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), the major national source of data on disability. PALS employed the Census as a sampling frame to identify its target population. The 2006 Census questionnaire included two general questions on activity limitations. Respondents were selected through use of the Census information on age, geography and the responses to these general questions.

Ottawa has subsequently introduced a new Canadian Survey on Disability. It is difficult to know at this point what information will be gained and what will be lost in future until more numbers are produced. However, the government itself cautions against comparisons between the Canadian Survey on Disability and the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey because the newer survey employs a different definition of disability.

The section will also include figures gathered and analyzed by academics, disability-related groups and research organizations.

Education Data

One user suggested that the *Canada Social Report* include a section on education. It could present statistical data on high school graduation, educational attainment, literacy proficiency and, where available, technological literacy proficiency. There are a number of measures currently in use, such as test results from the EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office) in Ontario and the internationally-based PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which could be incorporated here.

Employment Data

A participant in the Philanthropic Foundations of Canada workshop proposed that the *Canada Social Report* include a separate section on employment. While employment data will be presented with the materials on Key Indicators, the participant noted that it may not be immediately obvious to users that the information they require would be located there.

Health Data

Several individuals who participated in the Philanthropic Foundations of Canada workshop represented the health sector. They noted that their sector already has a wealth of information and data to which the *Canada Social Report* might link. Relevant organizations include the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement and Wellesley Institute. Another participant pointed to the importance of incorporating mental health data within a broader section on health.

Housing and Homelessness Data

Affordable housing and homelessness represent another area to be developed. We will explore connections to current work in the country, including the Homeless Hub, in order to track data on both affordable housing and homelessness.

C. Challenges

We have already described some of the challenges involved in shaping the *Canada Social Report*. However, several additional issues should be noted that do not necessarily pertain to a specific section but rather to the entire effort.

Regular updates

As a living, breathing initiative, the *Canada Social Report* will be updated regularly. This continual process raises the challenge of ensuring that current and potential users are kept informed on an ongoing basis of any additions and/or modifications to the content. We will be issuing bulletins that summarize all the relevant changes.

We will also note directly in the appropriate section when any modifications are made. For example, the municipal monitor in the Policy Monitor section has been set up as a template with established categories. Additions to the template are highlighted in yellow so that users can see any new material at a glance. That information will remain in yellow until subsequent edits are made – at which point the most recent material will be highlighted.

User feedback

As an initiative intended to serve the social sector, Caledon has asked for – and received – feedback on how we are doing so far.

In general, most users are pleased with the *Canada Social Report*. They know how important good evidence is to making their case. They need high-quality data in order to tell a compelling story. Solid evidence is the only way that they can truly measure progress toward achieving important social goals. Good evidence is the basis for formulating intelligent and practicable policy solutions.

As noted, we held a workshop on the *Canada Social Report* at the National Poverty Reduction Conference in May 2015. A few months later in August, we conducted a national webinar that was hosted by the Tamarack Institute. In October 2015, we led three workshops on the *Canada Social Report* at the national conference of the Philanthropic Foundations of Canada. We have also included several comment areas within the *Canada Social Report* itself so that readers can let us know how we can improve a particular section or the overall initiative.

The feedback has been very helpful and we have made most of the suggested changes – or at least have put them on our ‘to do’ list for the future. Sometimes, however, we do not feel it necessary to make the proposed modifications but rather to clarify for the user the purpose and nature of this work.

One reader told us, for example, that sections of the *Canada Social Report* appear to be quite different from one another. While we agree with this observation, we don’t view these differences as a concern. The *Canada Social Report*, by its very nature, is a compendium of

diverse types and sources of information. It actually would be problematic if all the sections looked the same.

Each component has a well-defined purpose and represents a discrete type of information with a unique data source. Some of the materials written by Caledon have taken several months to compile because they involve the gathering and verification of provincial/territorial data. *Welfare in Canada* and *Social Assistance Summaries* are prime examples. All of the research reports related to the working poor, by contrast, were prepared by other organizations and are available through links. That is the nature of this evolving beast.

Another reader noted that several sections, such as Key Indicators, need to be completed. This is true. The *Canada Social Report* is a work in progress – by design. It will always have sections that are at various stages of readiness or updating.

In fact, if all the components of the *Canada Social Report* were entirely finished, we would not be doing our job. There will always be new data and materials to add. In this case, a finished product actually would be a sign of a job not well done.

Not surprisingly, a work-in-progress means that we need to inform users on an ongoing basis of any changes or new information – a challenge noted earlier.

Other future plans involve the development of user reviews. Individuals who regularly access the *Canada Social Report* will be asked for feedback on the quality and usefulness of the materials. They can provide information, in turn, on what data they required and how they used it.

One user mentioned that he has bookmarked the site because of frequent use. However, he would have found it helpful as an initial user to find a general description of each section very early on – possibly even on the home page.

Quality control

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 organizations.

We try to make links, with their permission, to relevant data and findings. We do not want to duplicate any research that has been completed or is already under way. The purpose of this social portal is to point data users in the right direction.

That said, it is essential to ensure the quality of the material posted to the website. We need to select materials judiciously and will post data and documents only from trusted sources. For example, we know that substantial information is available through CERIS (*Centre Européen de Recherches Internationales et Stratégiques*), the primary international network of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners working in the field of migration and settlement. This network is considered to be a reliable source of information.

While we are aware of the need to ensure the quality of the data, we are also concerned about the capacity of users to interpret data appropriately. One workshop participant asked how much “raw data” we plan to make available from sources such as the (former) Department of Employment and Social Development, Statistics Canada and TD Economics.

The response to that important question is: It depends. Where the source of the data has already placed the information in the public domain, then it will continue to be made available as is. In addition, when the raw data can be readily used and easily applied, then it will be made available as is. However, when extensive interpretation of the data is required, such as the study on welfare incomes, we will provide raw data carefully and ensure that the underlying assumptions employed in their calculation are clear.

Expanded user base

We need to expand the user base of the *Canada Social Report*. Google Analytics reported in the first few months of operation several thousand (5,197) users who have accessed 23,782 pages at last count. We hope to extend this usage through active promotion of this data resource in government, the voluntary sector and universities. We believe that our regular update will help attract new users to the website.

Visual accessibility

Caledon has made a special effort to ensure the accessibility of the *Canada Social Report* website to persons with visual impairments. Staff person Anne Makhoul has participated in accessibility webinars and workshops in order to assure that we conform to disability requirements. She has reached out to representatives from the Canadian Council of the Blind who have tested various materials that comprise the *Canada Social Report*.

While we can modify our own work, Caledon is not in a position to impose these requirements on other organizations. However, we have tried to encourage partners to make available alternate formats of their materials (e.g., in Word) where possible.

Cost considerations

There is no charge for the materials that comprise the *Canada Social Report*. We believe that imposing a user fee would deter many potential users in the social sector who rely on solid evidence in order to tell their story. Cost should never be a barrier to reliable and accessible data, which are vital to the work of policy-makers, academics, organizations and individuals concerned with social issues.

We do, however, welcome financial contributions from users to help offset our costs. We also greatly appreciate the unwavering support we have received over the years from Maytree and the developmental grants provided, to date, by the Metcalf Foundation, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and the Government of Ontario. Additional funds would enable work on new sections as well as the introduction of visuals and infographics.

Conclusion

The newly-elected Liberal government is restoring the long-form Census. This is good news for all researchers and policy-makers. Canada will, once again, have a strong and reliable body of evidence.

Does this mean that the *Canada Social Report* will no longer be necessary? Not at all. The *Canada Social Report* provides information that includes, but goes well beyond, Census-based data. The Welfare Incomes, Social Assistance Summaries, Social Policy Record and Minimum Wage sections are prime examples.

The *Canada Social Report* acts as a major portal for social information. It is a resource for the entire social sector – to give all of us a strong voice and a powerful evidence base for informed policy conversations and the formulation of intelligent policy solutions.