

Information Blackout*

Rolling power outages are not the only worry this summer. An equally devastating information blackout is currently under way. In *Ottawa should come to its census* (July 8), André Picard identifies three national surveys that have been cut in addition to the Census long form. Unfortunately, his list of changes is only partial.

In 2011, the federal government will not be mounting the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, the major source of national information on persons with disabilities. Ottawa claims to be designing a new strategy for this population, but no one knows whether it will be as information-rich as the existing survey.

Social Security Statistics: Canada and Provinces is another treasure trove that has quietly bit the dust: It has not been updated since 2002-03. Data on program beneficiaries and expenditures is essential for policy planning and cost estimates.

Cuts to national sources of information are a form of social policy by stealth. They are made quietly under the radar screen but their impact can be irreparable. For example, only a shocking 40 percent of First Nations students on reserve complete high school and the results are slightly better off reserve. Without the Census long form, there is no way to determine whether Aboriginal education results are improving. So much for evidence-based policy.

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