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Families Striving for Balance: A Reality Check

Ottawa– The findings of a new report suggest that to help families balance work and home responsibilities, as well as cope more effectively with time and money pressures, public policy has to support new family relationships and economic arrangements. *How Families Cope and Why Policymakers Need to Know* is the title of a compilation of three papers released today by Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN). Together, the papers review existing research literature and suggest future directions for research on the ways in which families today cope with competing demands of paid work, domestic responsibilities and income sharing.

"Public policy has an important role to support the ever-increasing demands placed on families," says Judith Maxwell, CPRN President. "That role begins with an understanding of how our world is changing and what families are doing to maintain balance and support one another. This series of papers sets an agenda for essential future research."

In the first paper, David Cheal, a professor of Sociology at the University of Winnipeg, focuses on the choices families have made to make ends meet in the face of important changes in public policy, family structures, and employment trends. Cheal pays particular attention to setting a policy research agenda on the income requirements of diverse families where partners may cohabit, live in separate households, share their incomes between household members or between generations, prepare for entry into the paid labour force, or care for sick or elderly dependants.

Frances Woolley reveals who is really doing the housework in Canada and compares the hours that men and women clock for paid versus unpaid work. An economist at Carleton University in Ottawa, the author zeros in on what research tells us, and what it doesn't, about the flexible arrangements that men and women have to make to deal with work, household chores, relationships and children's needs, especially in separated and divorced families.

Meg Luxton, a professor of Women's Studies and Social Science at York University, brings it all together by highlighting social reproduction – the activities needed to sustain everyday life and to ensure the survival of future generations – as the key to managing tensions between families and the labour market. Changes in government policy have meant that more of the work of social reproduction has been imposed on families and especially on women. How we will cope, she

points out, depends on the success of new social policies that will mediate between the need for healthy, rested workers and unpaid persons expected to keep households in order and to produce workers for future generations.

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CPRN is a national not-for-profit research institute whose mission is to create knowledge and lead public debate on social and economic issues important to the well-being of Canadians, in order to help build a more just, prosperous and caring society.

For more information on the publication, please contact:

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