A New Blueprint for Canada's Social Policy

Friday, November 12, 2004 – Canadian Policy Research Networks' Social Architecture Papers will be profiled at a major conference next week in Montreal. The conference, *New Century, New Risks: Challenges for Social Development in Canada***,** organized by Social Development Canada and the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, will examine the implications of new social risks facing Canadians.

CPRN's Social Architecture Papers propose a fundamental redesign of our "social architecture" – the ways and means by which we respond to social risks.

A coherent vision informed Canada's social policies in the post-war period. There was a balance of roles and responsibilities among the four sources of social well-being – the market, the state, families and communities – that was appropriate to the social risks of the time and that reflected social values. But the post-war vision no longer fits current realities.

Since then, changes in the family, the labour market, Canadian demographics, and in what we know about conditions for effective service delivery (governance), have altered the desired balance of responsibilities among the four sources of well-being. The changes leave new social risks in their wake that must be addressed, like:

- *Rising income inequality* – government taxes and transfers are doing less than in the past to even income distribution.
- *A labour market polarized* by globalization into high paid knowledge work and low-paid service work affects health and other forms of well-being.
- *People may be poor even when employed*. There is rising participation in employment, but also growth of precarious work paying inadequate wages.
- *An ageing society and increased lone-parent and two-earner households* leave families unable to provide children and vulnerable adults the care provided in the past.
- *Difficulties in achieving social inclusion* for immigrants and visible minorities and barriers to economic and social integration.
- *Challenges to the advancement of Aboriginal peoples.*

To rebalance the distribution of responsibilities among market, state, family and community, the CPRN research suggests four new directions for an improved social architecture:

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- *Income and Services:* The state sector needs to add effective investments in services for low, modest and middle income Canadians to its current focus on supplementing the income of low-wage workers and their families;
- *Fill the Gaps:* Use the powers of the state and community sectors to fill the gaps in the systems of care for both children and elderly;
- *Living Wage:* Rebalance responsibilities within the market and family sectors by encouraging more employers to take responsibility for the well-being of their workers; and
- *Towards Autonomy*: Ensure Aboriginal communities and families can move from dependency to autonomy by strengthening community capacity and family resiliency, in addition to providing resources from the state sector.

David Hay, Director of the Family Network, summarizes CPRN's findings in a recent presentation to CPRN's Board.

You can access or download a copy of his presentation, ***A New Social Architecture for Canada's 21st Century***, by clicking here.

The *Social Architecture Papers* are available on the main CPRN Web site at http://www.cprn.org/en/theme-docs.cfm?theme=28.

The SDC/McGill conference takes place November 18-19, 2004, Hôtel Omni Mont-Royal, Montreal, Quebec. For more information, visit the conference Web site: http://www.misc-iecm.mcgill.ca/social/socialEN/conferenceEN.html

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