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CPRN is a national not-for-profit
research institute whose mission is to
create knowledge and lead public
dialogue and 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.

Policies to Boost the Income, Security and Productivity of Canada's Vulnerable Workers

The final report in CPRN's research series on vulnerable workers presents the most comprehensive analysis of the subject to date. It also proposes measures to overcome this threat to Canada's well-being and competitiveness.

Risk and Opportunity: Creating Options for Vulnerable Workers, by Ron Saunders, Director of CPRN's Work Network, provides a synthesis of the findings of six previous research studies, as well as other recent literature, with an emphasis on their implications for public policy.

Vulnerable workers are those whose participation in the labour market leaves their well-being at risk because of difficulty accessing work that is decently paid and/or that offers conditions of work that meet basic social norms. Two million Canadian workers fit this description.

"Individuals feel the impact most, but the roots are social," says Saunders. "Workers are vulnerable because of external circumstances, not because they lack the capacity or will to better their lot."



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Vulnerable workers typically earn low pay, lack the opportunity to upgrade skills, lack legal protection or are handicapped in terms of defending their rights, don't qualify for programs like Employment Insurance, lack access to non-statutory benefits like medical insurance or dental plans, have difficulty obtaining affordable housing or affordable child care, and rarely belong to unions.

“Our underlying principle,” says Saunders, “is that working people deserve the opportunity to live decently, to realize their potential for personal development, and to contribute to our economy and society.”

Saunders' recommendations address the following objectives:

- *Adequate Income* – market wages, plus any government income supplements for the working poor should ensure no individual working full-time is in poverty.
- *Basic Protections Regarding Conditions of Work* – all employees should have real access to protections like minimum wages, overtime and vacation pay, public holidays and maternity and parental leave.
- *Basic Social Benefits* – all workers should have access to supports like catastrophic drug coverage, affordable housing and quality, affordable child care.

- *Opportunities to Move Up* – low-paid workers or those able only to find part-time work should be able to improve their job prospects by upgrading their skills.

Among immediate priorities for federal and provincial action, Saunders recommends:

- Increased minimum wages and regular increases over time.
- Ensuring compliance with employment standards.
- Support to community organization that support vulnerable workers.
- Improving access to affordable child care and affordable housing.

In the medium- to long-term, he calls for:

- A federal program of modest income supplements for the working poor.
- Expanded access to unemployment benefits under EI, especially for non-standard workers and entrants and re-entrants to the labour market.
- Catastrophic drug coverage and basic dental care on a “progressive universal” basis to ensure low and modest-income workers coverage at reasonable cost.
- Enhancing the high school curriculum to provide occupational qualifications as an option for young people.

- Opportunities for low-paid workers to upgrade their skills.
- Improved programs for immigrants to help them succeed in the labour market.
- Removal or reduction of asset-based clawbacks in government programs so that poor families have a real opportunity to save.
- Measures to improve protections for non-standard workers (e.g. temp agency workers).

“What we propose is a redistribution of the risk inherent in an economy that must be globally competitive, where skills and training are critical to decent work, and where non-standard employment is on the rise,” Saunders says.

The report's proposals would shift some of that risk from vulnerable workers to employers (higher minimum wage, compliance with employment standards, access to training opportunities) and governments (earnings supplements for the working poor, a more universal approach to basic social supports, more resources for skills upgrading programs). The recommendations are intended to work together to ensure that they “support competitiveness while giving vulnerable workers a real opportunity to improve their well-being,” says Saunders.



Giving “Place” Its Due

The national importance of communities – in the development of civil society, the economy, environment, culture and political institutions – is not reflected in current approaches to urban issues in Canada.

So argues Judith Maxwell, CPRN Research Fellow, in ***Building Blocks for Place-Making Policy***, a presentation to the 6th National Forum on Public Policy and the Third Sector, Queen’s University, in November of last year. Maxwell identifies the missing ingredients of a place-based approach to policy.

Her goal is sustainable communities. She points out that the current division of responsibilities for urban centres cannot deliver sustainable communities – no single actor has the capacity to act effectively alone. She reviews the requirements for success: local champions, community participation, adequate resources, joined-up government and decentralized delivery.

Of course, this requires, in turn, recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of each level of government and an approach that allocates responsibility in terms of the comparative advantage of each.

Maxwell underlines, especially, the role of the non-profit sector as community broker and service agent, but stresses the need for new funding and accountability regimes to allow the sector to work effectively.

Let's Not Panic Over Wait Times

The Supreme Court’s 2005 *Chaoulli* decision has created quite a stir.

The Court argued that waiting lists are so long in parts of the country that individuals should be able to resort to private insurance to access private health care services outside the public system.

In a commentary, ***Don’t Panic: A Hitchhiker’s Guide to Chaoulli, Wait Times and the Politics of Private Insurance***, Tom McIntosh, Director of CPRN’s Health Network, analyzes the implications of that decision. He argues that the Court:

- ignored the scientific evidence on wait times, and
- in creating the option of a private, parallel system, chose a more intrusive solution, one that could derail progress in key areas of health care reform.

McIntosh, reviews the latest evidence on wait lists and wait times across the country. He demonstrates that significant progress is being made, albeit more in some regions than others. It extends to developing benchmarks and setting maximum wait times for certain procedures that can be applied in other jurisdictions. Progress may seem slow to some, but that reflects the complexity of the problem, he argues, not inaction.

The Court gives the impression there is a “crisis” that merits such a fundamental public policy shift as to create a parallel, private system. He doubts the Court would have reached such a conclusion if it had had the latest evidence on wait times.

McIntosh assesses the potential for private insurance coverage for procedures covered by medicare. He finds it limited, at least in the short to medium term, even were it legal. In the longer term, he argues, the health care debate is not simply about costs, but about the kind of system we want.

The *Chaoulli* decision has added fuel to the debate over public versus private delivery of care, and payment for services. The danger, McIntosh says, is that governments, prone to impatience over the complexities of improving wait lists and wait times, may be tempted to opt for a “big bang” solution. They might embrace some sort of parallel private system, despite the drawbacks, simply to appease public calls for action. But “big bang” solutions in the complex world of health care, he maintains, are no solution at all.



Saskatchewan Moves Forward on Health Human Resources

The Health Accord signed by First Ministers in September 2004 committed each province to report on the development of an integrated health human resources (HHR) action plan by the end of December 2005.

With an eye to the demands of health care reform, the plans would identify gaps in the supply of health professionals, and assessments of each province's ability to recruit, train and fill those gaps.

As of the deadline, only four provinces had complied. One of them was Saskatchewan.

After a consultation of health professionals across that province, the government

engaged CPRN to design and host a conference of stakeholders to help set priorities for the first iteration of a provincial HHR plan.

Sixty-four participants from across Saskatchewan's health care system gathered for a day and a half to discuss and make recommendations in the following areas:

- Advancing primary health care
- Professional development/lifelong learning
- Core curriculum/interprofessional training
- HHR information systems
- Scope of practice
- Clinical placements
- The equitable distribution of health providers
- Aboriginal health providers

Conference participants were asked to endorse proposed solutions and outline action steps to achieve them – who does what and when. These results contributed to the development of an integrated HHR plan for Saskatchewan in time for the December 2005 deadline agreed to by the First Ministers.

Setting Priorities and Getting

Direction: Conference Report, by Tom McIntosh, Director, and Renée Torgerson, Researcher with CPRN's Health Network, summarizes the conference discussions and recommendations.

Social Policy – A Productive Factor

When it comes to social investment, ideology all too often trumps economic common sense. The assumption that social spending is a hindrance to economic growth exhibits great staying power despite evidence to the contrary (public investment in early childhood education being a prime example).

Such simplistic arguments were common in the recent federal election campaign. In a commentary, ***Social Investment: Not a Matter of Either/Or***, published in the *Toronto Star*, Eva Lazar, Senior Researcher makes the case for seeing social investment as not only a matter of distributive justice, but economic logic.



Fostering a Culture of Engagement in Canada

The arguments for engaging Canadians at all stages of the policy process are clear and overwhelming.

Citizens demand a more meaningful role in policy development. Engagement is a powerful antidote to voter disaffection with political institutions. It means greater policy effectiveness and legitimacy, and it fosters inclusion and social cohesion.

So why isn't citizen engagement built into Canada's policy processes? What do we need to do to create a "culture of engagement" among our policy elites – politicians, public servants and stakeholder groups?

Two new papers from CPRN's Public Involvement Network address aspects of these crucial questions.

Assessing the Impacts of Public Participation: Concepts, Evidence and Policy Implications, by Julia Abelson and François-Pierre Gauvin, explores what we know about assessing the impact of citizen engagement on both the policy process and on the subsequent political and civic behaviour of the citizen participants.

Fostering Canadians' Role in Public Policy: A Strategy for Institutionalizing Public Involvement in Policy, by Lori Turnbull and Peter Aucoin, looks at the structural, cultural and practical barriers to making citizen engagement a natural and permanent part of our policy processes.

To document the benefits of citizen involvement in the policy process, and for accountability, we need accurate and comparable data. Despite progress in Canada and elsewhere on evaluation frameworks, a commonly accepted set of evaluation criteria has yet to be established. Abelson and Gauvin make suggestions for refining evaluation (evaluating context more rigorously, making use of real world deliberative experiments, and using multidisciplinary perspectives) and propose strategies to move evaluation from a "frill" to an "essential" practice in engagement initiatives.

Turnbull and Aucoin argue it is wrong to assume that low voter turnout for elections and low levels of membership in political parties mean public interest in politics is waning. Citizens are interested in participating in politics, but only if their input will make a difference. What is needed, they say, are opportunities for "meaningful" involvement.

Therein lies the case for institutionalizing public involvement.

To be meaningful, it must include citizens in defining policy objectives, choosing between policy alternatives and developing implementation strategies. And it involves an interactive exchange among citizens and between citizens and decision-makers.



Turnbull and Aucoin set out four criteria as a litmus test of institutionalized public engagement:

- Public involvement is a core element embedded in the policy process
- Public input is given substantial weight in policy development
- The commitment to institutionalized public involvement is government-wide



A Unique Challenge: Children and Adolescents With Special Needs in Rural and Northern Canada

Many children and youth with special needs in rural and northern Canada lack essential services. Where services do exist, they are often culturally or linguistically inappropriate.

The latest data show that health, prevention and early intervention services and special education are in short supply across the North and in parts of rural Canada. What's more, unique cultural and geographic realities in these regions demand distinctive and innovative approaches to serving children and adolescents with special needs.

A new paper from CPRN and the Centre of Excellence for Children & Adolescents with Special Needs (CECASN) addresses these challenges. ***Meeting the Needs of Children and Adolescents with Special Needs in Rural and Northern Canada***, is the summary report of a roundtable for policy-makers co-hosted by CPRN and CECASN in Thunder Bay in September 2005. Roundtable participants reviewed the key findings from the past five years of CECASN's research with an eye to its implications for policy and action.

The report presents policy principles and recommendations for filling the gap in services for children and adolescents with special needs in rural and northern Canada.

According to CECASN research, the current and future well-being of these young people depends on the following policy principles:

- The effective harmonization of policies across federal, provincial/territorial, Aboriginal, regional and local jurisdictions.
- The establishment of culturally sensitive, respectful, collaborative and community-driven approaches to research, policy and practice.
- Community capacity building designed to provide

choice and opportunities for children and families.

- Children and families must be able to access information and communicate, including via technology, in their preferred language.

"If we can't make good on these principles, children with special needs and their families will continue to be at risk and our country will not have delivered on its commitment to be 'A Canada Fit For All Children,'" says Julia O'Sullivan, National Director, CECASN.



The report's evidence-based policy recommendations include:

- ***Equitable access to effective services across rural and northern Canada***, including comprehensive child development screening from birth on, a framework for implementing and sustaining use of communication and information technology throughout rural and northern Canada, and a Special Needs Information Service On-line.

- ***Community involvement in all stages of research and service development, provision and evaluation***, along with sustained funding for that purpose.
- ***Develop and provide appropriate education, training and professional development with the highest standards for community members***, adequately funded, and enhanced by best practice distance learning models. Provide a national framework for establishing competency guidelines for child care providers and educators.

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- Access to post-secondary education for all who qualify, not just those with the money.
 - Vocational and trade paths, valued and supported by society, beginning in high school, and a more student-centred education.
 - Better work / life balance – governments and business work together to improve job quality.
 - A health system that emphasizes healthy lifestyles and disease prevention rather than treating illness. People taking more responsibility for their physical and mental health, using accessible information to support wise choices.
 - Universal access to coordinated, integrated health care networks. Health disciplines work together to provide patient-oriented care.
 - Canadians, our governments and businesses working together for a sustainable environment, with Canada a global leader in this field.
 - Examining the long-term implications of our choices and doing the right thing for this and future generations in our actions at home and abroad.
- A population of critical thinkers who take responsibility for becoming informed and engage in civic and political life, supported by our political and education institutions.
 - Parliaments and legislatures that mirror the populations they serve.
- The young people recommend actions in each policy area and assign responsibility to themselves and others to realize their vision.
- They recommend:
- A pan-Canadian education system with high quality common standards and accreditation systems that support mobility of learners and workers and improve market efficiencies.
 - A balanced approach to improve low wage work – employers raise minimum wages, governments provide wage supplements and health benefits and support a child care system.
 - Governments, employers, educators collaborate to develop a national accreditation system, including removing barriers facing foreign-trained workers.
- Establishing and enforcing common standards for quality health care services across Canada and increasing accountability for health results.
 - A serious discussion, beginning with a national dialogue, on how best to sustain our health care system and address mounting costs, including the roles of the public and private sectors in health care.
 - Bold action on the environment through a combination of stronger penalties and intelligent incentives. Embrace and invest in renewable energy and green technologies, reduce our consumption and pay more for non-renewable goods, to reflect true costs to society.
 - Taking citizenship and citizens seriously. Governments need to collaborate instead of bicker over jurisdiction and focus on what is best for Canadians.
- “Once again, a group of randomly selected Canadians, this time from the younger generation, have shown a remarkable level of agreement on the kind of country they wish to build together,” says Sharon Manson Singer, President of CPRN. “What we need to do now is to share this vision with those who are in a position to lend support and join with young Canadians to make it a reality.”



On the Net and In the Media – April 2006

As of the end of March 2006, the number of discrete visitors to www.cprn.org has reached 1.1 million visitors a year, up 76% year over the year before. Downloads of CPRN publications hit a new record at 1,455,000, up 36% from a year ago. Visits to our Web site on workplace indicators, www.jobquality.ca, are at an all-time annual high at 173,000, up 41% in the last year.

We now have 131 publications recording more than 5,000 downloads, and 74 with more than 10,000! Our “best-sellers”, include Ross Finnie and Alex Usher (Work Network), *Measuring the Quality of Post-secondary Education* (70,000 downloads!); Julie Ann McMullin and Martin Cooke (Work Network), *Labour Force Ageing and Skill Shortages in Canada*

and Ontario; Cathy Fooks and Lisa Maslove et al. (Health Network), *Data, Data, Everywhere...: Improving Access to Population Health and Health Services Research Data in Canada*; Nola Ries and Timothy Caulfield (Health Network), *Accountability in Health Care and Legal Approaches*; Frances Abele (Family Network), *Urgent Need, Serious Opportunity: Towards a New Social Model for Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples*; Cathy Fooks and Lisa Maslove (Health Network), *Rhetoric, Fallacy or Dream? Examining the Accountability of Canadian Health Care to Citizens*; Richard Chaykowski (Work Network), *Non-standard Work and Economic Vulnerability*; Patrice de Broucker (Work Network), *Without a Paddle: What to do About Canada’s Young Dropouts*; Jane Jenson

(Family Network), *Canada’s New Social Risks: Directions for a New Social Architecture*; Julia Abelson, François-Pierre Gauvin (Health Network) *Engaging Citizens: One Route to Health Care Accountability*; Joseph Michalski (Public Involvement) *Quality of Life in Canada: A Citizens’ Report Card – Background Report*;

As for print coverage, there were articles on CPRN’s work on wait times, caregiving, youth engagement, the minimum wage, low-paid work and poverty, vulnerable workers, diversity and the public-private mix in health care. There has also been better than average electronic coverage on radio and television, especially around health issues, youth engagement and Canadian values. An increasing proportion of our publications are now distributed via third party electronic newsletters and networks. This can only grow.

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People



Nandini Saxena (second from left) has left CPRN to take on a new challenge at Ascentum Inc. Friends (Gisèle Lacelle, Margaret Miedema, Emily Hines and Richard Brisbois) enjoy a last coffee break with Nandini.



Eva Lazar (middle) has also left CPRN to return to the public sector. Also in this photo, Sharon Manson Singer, President (left) and Judi Varga-Toth, Assistant Director, Family Network (right).



Friends and colleagues said farewell to Judith Maxwell at a reception in March. Testimonials were given by Roy Romanow and David Dodge and Margaret Biggs delivered a speech by the Hon. Margaret N. McCain.

Congratulations to Cheri Stewart who raised \$2,612.73 in support of the National Ovarian Cancer Association. Cheri keeps her part of the bargain – giving up her locks!



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- Institutionalized public involvement includes the public service and parliament

They propose that Canada’s current policy structures be overhauled “to make room for the public at the policy table.” They recommend that:

- parliamentary committees be the institutional link between citizen engagement efforts and Parliament;
- the public service be the primary source of the information citizens need to participate knowledgeably;
- the public service also develop the expertise to conduct meaningful deliberative engagement on a regular basis;
- a culture change be instilled in policy elites through public pressure, by political parties that themselves encourage public engagement, and through improved civic education;
- financial and geographical barriers to engagement be addressed.

After a review of experience with public engagement initiatives here and abroad, Turnbull and Aucoin conclude that few, if any, policy areas are “off limits” to public involvement and that the demand for meaningful involvement is an irreversible trend.

“Institutionalization of citizen engagement is an ambitious, but achievable goal.”

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- **Establish a policy network for children and adolescents with special needs in rural and northern Canada,** informed by a national environmental scan of youth with special needs that includes markers for Francophones, Aboriginal status and other cultural specifiers, and funded by government.

Roundtable participants added their own special emphasis to the recommendations.

They argued that the first step in addressing the needs of children and adolescents is increased and sustained collaboration among stakeholders, including community members and government representatives. Key to this, in their view, was better communication at all levels and in all languages of the North.

“What we have here,” says David Hay, Director of CPRN’s Family Network, “is a very good basis for going forward. Acting on these recommendations will make a world of difference to the well-being of children and adolescents with special needs in these regions.”

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Transferring the Reins of Power

On February 6th, 2006 Prime Minister Harper appointed the youngest cabinet ever to take power in Canada. At an average age of 52, it represents a significant shift from the last cabinet's average age of 56 and previous Cabinets of the same age or older. Is Prime Minister Harper making a statement or portending the future?

Across Canada and elsewhere in the western world, governments, private sector corporations and the voluntary sector are consumed with succession issues. Where is the next generation of power, and who will succeed this generation of power mongers? Replacing the cohort of baby boomers occupying the current seats of power isn't the only worry. There is also concern about the level of skills and abilities available to take on challenges which are global, complex and demand transparent and inclusive forms of governance. It is a tall order for a new government, indeed for any new leader, attempting to pull together teams to tackle the issues facing Canadians.

An ageing society, a productivity gap compared to many other nations, access to health care, immigration issues and concerns about accountability in government are just a few of the challenges facing the next generation of leaders. What does this next generation of leaders want for Canada?

CPRN's 10th Anniversary Project, *Engaging Young Canadians on What Matters to Them*, last November in Ottawa, brought together 144 young Canadians aged 18 – 25 from every part of Canada and all walks of life to grapple with the question: What kind of Canada do we want? What do we and others have to do to make our vision a reality?

The Canada envisioned by the young participants in the National Dialogue is a Canada where everyone takes responsibility to contribute to a more equitable, healthy, sustainable and knowledgeable society. It is a Canada where our public services, including health care and education, have common, high quality standards for public services. In the Canada dreamed of by young people there is mobility for education and jobs, bilingualism is a reality, diversity is valued and the common bonds of citizenship are reinforced. Young people are prepared to take responsibility for this vision and, indeed, they expect more of citizens – they want to be involved.

It became clear over the weekend that the desire to engage was frustrated by a lack of knowledge



about the system of governance and a rejection of institutions which were not representative, inclusive and open. Our young Canadians want a more unified country – a country that has an effective federation and protects those most vulnerable in our society.

The vision and values of the next generation of leaders is enlightening. The collaborative and inclusive approach of young Canadians demarcates a change in the approach to governing, and it will be instructive to watch how this next generation takes charge of the reins of power as the baby Boomers vacate. In follow-up to the National Dialogue, CPRN is publishing the results and initiating a National Youth Internship Program. We are inviting young people from across Canada to lend their voice to the work of CPRN. We look forward to sharing the results with you.

Sharon Manson Singer, Ph.D.
President

