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Lifelong Learning Needed to Strengthen Productivity and Prosperity

Ottawa – Canada has an immediate challenge to increase skill levels in its adult population to strengthen productivity and make lifelong learning a reality, says a report issued today by Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN).

“We are entering a sustained period of declining labour force growth. Everyone – including older Canadians and those less educated and less skilled – should have the chance to contribute fully to the economy and to their communities,” says CPRN President Sharon Manson Singer. “Failure to act on adult education and lifelong learning threatens Canada’s productivity and prosperity.”

The report, ***Towards an Effective Adult Learning System: Report on a Series of Regional Roundtables***, calls for more learning opportunities for adult Canadians to improve their skills. It follows up on a 2006 CPRN report, ***Too Many Left Behind: Canada’s Adult Education and Training System***, which found that access to learning opportunities in Canada is generally poor for less-educated adults in Canada and that adult learning systems in most provinces are fragmented and difficult to navigate.

CPRN conducted a series of regional roundtables in Halifax, Toronto, Montreal and Calgary, where people from business, labour, government, educational institutions, and others involved in adult learning developed a vision and recommendations for a more coherent, accessible and effective system. The roundtables were sponsored by the Canadian Council on Learning’s Adult Learning Knowledge Centre.

Roundtable participants called for:

- a policy framework centred on the “right to learn”;
- establishing umbrella organizations in each province to coordinate adult learning;
- better connections between learning organizations, so that adult learners can move seamlessly from one program to another;
- better access to financial aid for adult learners;
- more investment by employers in workplace learning;
- greater flexibility in the scheduling of courses;
- linking learning programs to career opportunities through better links among program providers, employers, and unions;
- sustained support for successful community-led initiatives; and
- programs that foster life skills and not just job skills.

“Accelerating changes to Canada’s workforce and the skills required by a transforming economy require action,” said Ron Saunders, CPRN Vice-President of Research, and author of the roundtable report. “A better-skilled workforce is a more productive workforce, capable of generating the economic growth and personal wealth required to maintain and improve overall living standards.”

To download *Towards an Effective Adult Learning System*, go to www.cprn.org. For a copy of *Too Many Left Behind: Canada’s Adult Education and Training System*, go to www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1479&l=en.

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