

Connecting with Canadians...Shaping Our Future

Since 1994, Canadian Policy Research Networks has been talking to Canadians about the issues of most importance to our nation.

Through a period that spans four federal elections, three prime ministers, and more than four dozen changes in provincial and territorial governments, this dialogue has touched on the major issues of our times – health care, economic competitiveness, the environment, and social justice.

Our approach is thorough, but straight forward – we talk to Canadians, conduct research, and propose policy options. Our goal is to build a better Canada through informed public dialogue on social and economic issues.

Perhaps it is the tremendous scale of our country, or our many diverse backgrounds, but we have found that Canadians like to talk about what it means to be a Canadian. And that they care passionately and deeply about the future of our country.

We have also found that Canadians want to continue this conversation. In our democratic and pluralistic society, a very high value is placed on open, honest and relevant dialogue. In support of this belief, CPRN is introducing *Connecting with Canadians*, a major program of research and national discussion to help frame and support an exchange of ideas on the issues of most importance to our country.

Connecting with Canadians is based on what Canadians have told us they expect from government, business and community organizations, and what they believe we should all, as citizens, give back to society. We have organized these ideas into a series of expectations and citizen obligations.

Expectations held by Canadians of governments, business and community organizations

- A good job that pays a fair wage
- Access to quality education and training from early childhood
- Quality and timely health care
- Social security for families and individuals
- Safe, secure and supportive communities
- Good governance and a voice for citizens
- Clean healthy environment for this and future generations

Obligations Canadians believe they have to their country, community and family

- Providing for one's family
- Paying taxes and respecting the law
- Investing in your own education, employment and health
- Contributing to community and public life
- Using responsibly natural resources and public services
- Respecting Canadian values as they evolve

This framework is meant to foster a discussion about what can be done to ensure that Canadian society moves towards the fair, prosperous and inclusive society that we all support and believe in.

We believe *Connecting with Canadians* is a new approach to socio-economic policy – one that responds to current issues, identifies emerging challenges, remains in synch with public attitudes, and helps find solutions to the most pressing problems of our society.

We welcome partnerships with government, business, foundations and individual Canadians in support of *Connecting with Canadians*. Together, we can shape the future of our great country and help it live up to the collective expectations of all Canadians.



Sharon Manson Singer, PhD
President, CPRN



About Connecting with Canadians

Connecting with Canadians, CPRN's new framework for research and dialogue on social and economic policy issues, is organized into seven expectations that Canadians have for government, business, and community organizations, and six obligations that all citizens have to Canadian society. The expectations are discussed in more detail below.

Discussions are being held across the country in the fall and winter of 2007/08:

- St. John's, NL November 9, 2007
- Toronto November 27, 2007
- Victoria December 3, 2007
- Vancouver December 4, 2007
- Montreal December 2007
- Edmonton January 8, 2008
- Halifax January 2008
- Winnipeg January 2008

The views and opinions expressed at these meetings will be forwarded to a national leadership summit in Ottawa in February 2008. There, participants will help CPRN set out a research and dialogue agenda to build a country that lives up to our collective expectations as just, prosperous, caring and inclusive. Each year CPRN will revisit the agenda and report on progress towards these goals.

Jobs and the Economy

"A good job that pays a fair wage"

Canadians expect the economy to balance the needs of workers – to earn a liveable wage, contribute to society through paid employment, and have the opportunity for personal and career growth – with the needs of business – to be competitive, hire skilled and productive workers, and earn a market-based return. This means:

- An individual who works full-time on a regular basis should be able to live decently.
- People who want full-time work should be able to find it.
- Employers should provide a safe and healthy working environment.
- Workers should have opportunities for learning and advancement, and employers have access to workers with up-to-date skills and training.

Where Do We Go from Here?

To support an open debate on these issues, research is needed on the following questions:

- What are the most cost-effective ways to help low-paid adults acquire new skills?
- How can youth be better prepared to enter the labour market?
- How can employers better utilize their employees' skills?
- What approaches can be taken to integrate under-represented workers in the economy?
- What barriers need to be overcome to improve job quality?

Education and Training

"Access to quality education and training from early childhood forward"

Canadians recognize that a better education leads to a higher standard of living and that access to affordable education is one of the best ways of providing opportunity throughout the country. At the same time, Canadians recognize that our learning systems must be flexible and respond to the changing demands and demographics of the country. This means that they should:

- Give all Canadians an equal opportunity to learn.
- Be easy to participate in regardless of where you live in the country.
- Provide affordable post-secondary education.
- Offers engaging and relevant curriculum, sensitive to different learning styles.
- Offer our youth alternative pathways to getting a good job, such as through vocational education.
- Meet the needs of the economy for up-to-date skills.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Developing a better learning system requires research on:

- How to improve access to early childhood education.
- How to provide more learning opportunities for less-skilled adults.

- How to improve participation in post-secondary education, particularly by young people from families where neither parent attended university or college.
- How to improve adult literacy.
- How to meet the skills needs of the economy.

Health Care

“Quality and timely health care”

Support for public health care is a cornerstone value of Canadian society. The basic principle of equal access to anyone in need of medical services is so widely held and strongly believed in that it amounts to a “right” of citizenship. This means:

- Public health insurance offering uniform terms and conditions to all Canadians.
- Access based on need, not ability to pay across a wide range of services.
- Timely and responsive care.
- Patient-centred services responsive to individual needs.
- An accountable system that takes responsibility for the consequences of its actions.

Where Do We Go from Here?

To move forward on health care reform, research is needed on:

- What are the best models and practices for providing a continuum of care from prevention and primary care through to long-term and palliative care?
- What kinds of social supports would ease demands on the health care system?
- What approach to governance is most effective and accountable?
- Which models of inter-professional teams are best able to assure quality and timely care?
- To what extent can private delivery (within a publicly funded system) improve effectiveness?

Social Security

“Social security for families and individuals”

As with health care, Canadians put a high value on a social security system that is comprehensive, fair and accessible. The system, however, is not meant to replace personal responsibility. Rather it is meant to support those with legitimate needs. This means:

- Equal access across the country to social services that meet basic human needs.
- Independent monitoring and evaluation to ensure services are efficiently and effectively delivered, with governments held accountable for the delivery of services.
- Collaborative policy-making across provinces and across ministries within governments to address multiple needs in a coordinated way.

Where Do We Go from Here?

To move forward towards a better social security system, research is needed on:

- Canadians’ priorities for social policy reform.
- How to ensure inter-generational balance in social policy.

Communities

“Safe, secure and supportive communities”

Canadians have a strong attachment to the streets and neighbourhoods where they live, and expect their communities to be safe, inclusive and a good place to live and raise a family. This means:

- Safe and healthy neighbourhoods with low crime rates.
- Learning and recreational opportunities that are available in the community.
- Help for groups who are isolated, such as seniors, immigrants, and newcomers.
- Bottom-up, community-based economic development, with local leaders working
- in partnership with governments and business.
- Collaborative approaches to meeting community needs, with senior governments ensuring that municipalities and community groups have sufficient resources to deliver needed services.

Where Do We Go from Here?

We need research and dialogue on:

- How to develop the “best practices” toolkit outlined above.
- How communities can assess their progress on citizen engagement and respect for diversity.
- How to overcome the financial and human resource challenges which are undermining the capacity of community organizations.
- The appropriate roles and responsibilities of governments and community organizations in service delivery.
- An impact assessment of labour migration on communities.

Government and Democracy

“Good governance and a voice for citizens”

The principles and values of parliamentary democracy are fundamental to Canadian society. Canadians believe strongly that government is accountable to the public, but increasingly feel disconnected from government and political decision-making. Canadians expect:

- A voice in public decision-making with more say in decisions that affect their lives.
- More three-way dialogue (citizen to citizen, and citizens with governments) as a part of the regular way of conducting public business.
- Democratic systems that encourage greater participation and strengthen the role of the Member of Parliament/Legislatures.
- Greater accountability for governments and elected officials.
- Efficient governments that work together for the public good.
- Better civic education that equips people to become active citizens.

Where Do We Go from Here?

To properly assess these options research is needed on:

- How to rebuild trust between citizens and their governments.
- The tradeoffs citizens are prepared to make in order to gain more responsive, representative and legitimate political institutions.
- What Aboriginals need to be able to exercise their Canadian citizenship, even as they continue to develop their traditional identity as Aboriginals.
- How to adapt the civics curriculum to give youth the skills to become full citizens.
- How to use technology to strengthen the relationship between citizen and state.

The Environment

“A clean, healthy environment for this and future generations”

Canadians believe that all citizens of the world share in the stewardship of the environment, and that more needs to be done through responsible actions by consumers, business and government. A healthy environment is considered essential to our quality of life, and all of society should be working to achieve a sustainable environment. This means environmental policies that:

- Ensure clean air, water and soil by reducing pollution and using effective waste management practices.
- Take action on climate change to protect the future health of the environment and the well-being of our communities and future generations.
- Show leadership in the use of green technologies, alternative energy sources, pollution and waste reduction, and help society adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- Hold government and business accountable for their environmental practices.
- Educate the public about the environmental impact of various lifestyle choices.

Where Do We Go from Here?

We need to identify the policy needs for communities, families and businesses to becoming a greener society:

- How do we make energy efficiency and adapting to climate change affordable for all Canadians?
- What is required to support Canadians to deal with the impacts of climate change on communities, livelihoods and physical infrastructure?
- What trade-offs are citizens and businesses willing to make in order to have a cleaner environment?
- How can we support communities, families and businesses in becoming greener and adapting to the social and economic impacts of climate change?