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Canada is falling behind other countries on Social Innovation

Cross-sector collaboration needed to advance social innovation in Canada

Ottawa (October 8, 2009) – Canada is falling behind other countries, such as Australia, the UK and the US in recognizing the value of social innovation (SI) for addressing complex public policy issues. A new report from **Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN)**, ***Social Innovation in Canada: An Update*** by Mark Goldenberg, Wathira Kamoji, Larry Orton and Michael Williamson, highlights the urgency of the social challenges before us, such as climate change, sustainability, poverty and globalization, particularly in the midst of a global economic downturn, and points to the importance of fostering SI as a solution.

The report notes that while governments in Canada have acknowledged the importance of social capital and the social economy, and have been relatively active in these areas in recent years, Canada has missed opportunities to encourage SI by failing to develop adequate models for public support, engagement and funding. The report calls on Canadian leaders to establish a cross-sectoral national strategy to advance SI in this country.

“Most of our public policy issues today are wicked problems,” says Dr. Sharon Manson Singer, President of CPRN. “Collaborative approaches are proving to offer the best solutions everywhere: citizens, their communities, the private and non-profit sectors and governments all need to be involved. And this means that new forms of public support and encouragement for social innovation are needed.”

Social innovation has been defined in many ways, but over the last several years it has been used widely to refer to ideas, strategies, concepts and solutions – often embracing new scientific and technological advancements, as well as new partnerships and new ways of working – to address pressing social problems. SI was once attributed primarily to the non-profit sector, but of late, it has been taken up by governments and for-profit businesses alike, and has spawned vibrant collaborations between sectors.

The CPRN report was commissioned by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) as a comprehensive update to Goldenberg’s highly regarded study, [*Social Innovation in Canada – How the non-profit sector serves Canadians...and how it can serve them better*](#), released by CPRN five years ago. In it, Goldenberg emphasizes the special role that non-profit organizations play in community-based social innovation.

In this newly released study, Goldenberg *et al.* highlights recent trends and models for SI in Canada and internationally, and the creativity and range of the sectors engaged. But the report stresses that the role of the non-profit sector in SI remains critical. Non-profit organizations



continue to be a major source of SI in Canada and are increasingly called on to fill gaps left by recent government devolution of responsibilities. The report recommends new models for public funding to support non-profit organizations who enable SI in myriad ways.

“There has been an explosion of activity and interest in social innovation in the last decade, both in Canada and around the world,” says Mark Goldenberg, author of the study, and Director of Employment, Learning and Social Innovation at CPRN. “New ways of doing things and new models of working together, cutting across sectoral and jurisdictional boundaries are being tried – with success – around the globe. But Canada could do better.”

The report also presents excerpts from interviews with select Canadian leaders from academic, private and non-profit sectors engaged directly in SI initiatives. The authors highlight the many new forms of collaboration that are taking place, and the resulting models for social innovation that are beginning to emerge. The report concludes with a list of recommendations, and notes that how we move forward to embrace and foster SI will be critical for future generations of Canadians.

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For more information, request an advance copy of: *Social Innovation in Canada: An Update* by Mark Goldenberg, Wathira Kamoji, Larry Orton and Michael Williamson.

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