CRDCN Canadian Research Data
RCCDR Centre Network
Réseau canadien des Centres
de données de recherche

Research for Policy: Responding to COVID-19

Webinar date/time: 14 May 2020 (12:00-1:00 pm EST)

Moderator: Michelle Gauthier (Special Advisor, CRDCN)

Panelists:
- Andrew Bjerring (Chair of the Board, CRDCN)
- Anil Arora (Chief Statistician of Canada, Statistics Canada)
- Rodney Ghali (Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet, Privy Council Office)
- Céline Le Bourdais (Distinguished James McGill Professor of Sociology; Vice-Chair of the Board, CRDCN)

The webinar brought together panelists and more than 400 participants in this kick-off event for CRDCN's COVID-19 webinar series to leverage the collective ingenuity of CRDCN researchers, Statistics Canada and the policy community to respond to COVID-19. Highlights from the discussion in the first webinar are presented below and a recording of the webinar can be found here.

Unprecedented times and measures - Not business as usual and a "Team Canada" approach
- The research community, Statistics Canada and policy colleagues have been bringing their creativity and innovative approaches to address unprecedented challenges.
- Statistics Canada employees -- from coast to coast to coast -- have been providing timely data that policy-makers are using to craft policies and recovery plans, which would not have been possible if Statistics Canada had not already been investing in its Modernization initiative.
- A "Team Canada" approach is being taken across levels of government and across sectors in order to come together to address an unprecedented challenge.
- There are many lessons being learned -- as institutions, as leaders, as researchers, and as a society -- and government is tracking and learning from them. Even with the necessary physical distancing, continuous work is being done with the data collected.
- There is an awareness within government that there are areas in the system that were not strong enough to help us during a crisis and that weaknesses or cracks in the system do not become strengths in a crisis. This emphasizes the importance of taking a long-term view and making investments for the improvements that are needed to benefit society.
- The crisis dictates new ways of doing things. It is not one department's problem, it is a problem for the whole of government. It is important to integrate the research arms of government into policy development, and not just at the federal level, but also, at the provincial level and for public health agencies across the country. CRDCN has also been working closely with Statistics Canada to adapt and move forward.

Real time data and real time policy-making

- Government is engaged in policy-making in real time and although there are imperfections, they are also gaining an understanding in real time of what is working and what isn't, and adjusting in real time, working with Canadians. There is a need to understand what is about to unfold from an economic and social standpoint. COVID is being felt differently across our society, vulnerable groups are even more vulnerable, and policy-makers are aware of that in looking at the recovery phase.

- The longitudinal study that is being done by government is adapted from the World Health Organization. If people are interested, they can go to www.impact.ca and can see the data that are coming in, and can get full data sets from those studies and the data that Statistics Canada is releasing on a regular basis. By trying to triangulate traditional and non-traditional data sets, the aim is to have a representative sample to the greatest extent possible.

- There is a clear need to understand the impact of these policies, looking at medium term policy efforts for the next three, six, 12 and 24 months. CRDCN is well placed to contribute to this effort.

- Real time data collection and drawing on the links with CRDCN researchers are very important, to have as many eyes as possible on this data, looking for trends we have not seen before, the effects of the unconventional measures that we have not taken before and what the data can tell us.

- Government is looking at what we want Canada and the world to look like as we move past the crisis situation. There is an opportunity that we might not otherwise have had for the country to evolve in the most positive way going forward. Working with CRDCN and research networks, there is an opportunity to do that.

The importance of collaboration - Data and expertise across sectors and jurisdictions

- There is already government infrastructure for data sharing that is built on data strategies from Fall 2019 (see https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/corporate/clerk/publications/data-strategy.html). There are networks feeding into various tables across government; chief data officers in each department and agency are feeding into networks, such as assistant deputy ministers responsible for strategic policy, or deputy minister communities that already exist, and committees that have pivoted to COVID crisis management and recovery measures, and that is beyond what is happening with elected officials and cabinet committees.

- All federal departments are putting together data strategies and bringing in data sources from different areas through collaboration. They are bringing their respective strengths to the table, and leveraging their expertise and infrastructure in order to respond in an informed, timely and effective way to the crisis.

- There are opportunities to improve data flow and information sharing and these must continue to improve, keeping in mind that appropriate measures must be taken to ensure that microdata remain secure.

- One thing that is certain is that there needs to be constant dialogue between researchers and decision makers. Researchers can help frame questions to address pressing issues for policy-makers. Research will contribute to policy that will in turn raise new research questions.
- CRDCN is an enabler for the collection, production and analysis for usable information, as well as a facilitator of collaboration for researchers across a broad spectrum of areas and with Statistics Canada and policy-makers.

CRDCN and 20 years of bringing researchers and policy-makers together
- CRDCN started 20 years ago as grass roots communities of researchers who shared a need for electronic access to Statistics Canada microdata. They worked with their home institutions, Statistics Canada and the funding councils and now form a well-established national network. CRCDN continues to facilitate collaboration and to enable research-informed policy-making in an evolving data ecosystem.
- CRDCN brings together a deep reservoir of research capacity, the micro and administrative data provided through Statistics Canada, and decision and policy-makers in government and the nonprofit sector to develop good policy and enable decisions to be made, based on timely and relevant data. CRDCN is very well placed to play this role.

Continuing the conversation and moving forward
- CRDCN will be hosting and recording four follow-up webinars (May 25-28, 2020) in each of the following research areas: (1) income and employment; (2) immigration and settlement; (3) education and social development; and (4) population health and health services. For more information and to register: https://crdcn.org/covid-19-webinar-series
- Consult the CRDCN website for information assembled in recent weeks to support and engage the research community:
  https://crdcn.org/advancing-your-research-during-emergency-measures
  https://crdcn.org/covid-19-resources