Ontario Social Assistance Data for Research

Ministry of Community and Social Services-Statistics Canada/Research Data Center Pilot Project

November 2015

Outline

- Purpose of the MCSS-Statistics Canada RDC pilot

- MCSS Strategic Priorities and Research Interest

- Ontario Social Assistance Programs and Data

- Key Pilot Project Accomplishments

- Questions

Ontario

Ontario's Open Government Mandate

- Ontario is adopting best practices that have been working in other jurisdictions to inform its approach to Open Government to improve **transparency, effectiveness and accountability**

- As part of the Open Government, we are committed to:
  - Increasing the opportunity for the public to have better access to, learn about and participate in government
  - Working with ministers to develop and advance the Open Government Action Plan, including the ongoing response to the Engagement Team's recommendations

- Priority will be on **"doing open government right"** including a number of specific projects. Examples may include:
  - *Using pilot project with Statistics Canada and their Research Data Centres to inform and support the Poverty Reduction Strategy (pilot project in development)*

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Purpose of the MCSS-Statistics Canada RDC Pilot

- To explore opportunities to improve access to the ministry's social assistance data by the research and academic community, consistent with the Open Government initiative

- To obtain relevant research to support **evidence-based policy decisions and program development**

- To improve engagement with the academic community

- To pilot the process and procedures for bringing provincial ministry data into the Statistics Canada RDC Program for the purpose of research

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Ministry of Community and Social Services' Mandate

Transforming Social Assistance and Developmental Services

- Driving long-term transformation of the social assistance system

  - Improving incomes, encouraging work and enhancing access to core supports outside of the social assistance system

  - Revise key benefits to improve the accountability and integrity of the social assistance system

- Transform the delivery of developmental services in Ontario to help adults with developmental disabilities and their families live as independently as possible

- Seek support and work together with the Federal Government to provide services to vulnerable Ontarians

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MCSS Research Interests

To deliver on the ministry's priorities, MCSS is interested in the following research areas:

- understanding disability (including financial and human impacts)

- understanding impacts/effects of social assistance on demographic sub-groups (e.g. urban/rural clients, Aboriginal/First Nations, immigrants/newcomers, etc.)

- understanding effective, sustainable employment outcomes and motivating people to work

- examining social assistance caseloads and long-term attachment/dependency, including impacts/influence of policy instruments and external factors (i.e. socio-economic and labour market conditions)

- conducting inter-jurisdictional comparisons

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Ontario Social Assistance Programs

- In Ontario, income and employment supports are provided to single adults and families who are in financial need through two social assistance (SA) programs:

  - **Ontario Works** provides financial and employment assistance to help people move towards paid employment and independence

  - **Ontario Disability Support Program** (ODSP) provides financial assistance and employment support to enable people with disabilities and their families to live as independently as possible in their communities

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Ontario Social Assistance Data

- Researchers have access to de-identified microdata for the two social assistance programs for the period 2003 to 2013 which will be provided through 5 separate files:

  - **benefit unit (family) information**

  - **member information**

  - **pay detail (benefit) information**

  - **income/deduction information**

  - **skills information**

- Researchers will also have access to monthly time-series data on the Ontario Works and ODSP provincial caseloads from 1990 to 2013

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Benefit Unit (Family) Information

Benefit Unit Characteristics

- **Family composition** (single individual, single-parent family, couple, two-parent family
- **Family size** (number of dependent children, number of dependent adults)
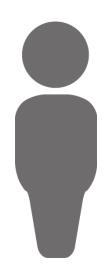- **Living arrangement** (renter, homeowner, etc.)
- **Postal code**

BU Program status

- **Program** (Ontario Works / ODSP)
- **Program Status** (ongoing / terminated)
- **Reason for Termination**
- **Amount of Financial Assistance (FA) received**
- **Amount of Employment Assistance (EA) received**
- **Number of consecutive months on assistance**

- Almost 61 million records
- 1.4 million distinct benefit units

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Member Information

Individual Characteristics

- **Date of Birth**
- **Gender**
- **Role in Benefit Unit** (primary applicant, spouse, dependent adult, dependent child)
- **Type of Disability** [for ODSP only]
- **Immigration Status** (foreign born, landing date, arrival date)
- **Participation in Ontario Works Employment Assistance Activities** (yes/no for each type of activity)
- **Receipt of ODSP Employment Supports** (yes/no)

Member Program Status

- **Program** (Ontario Works / ODSP)
- **Member Status** (active, non-contributing)

- Almost 98 million records
- 2.3 million distinct individuals

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Pay Detail (Benefit) Information

Budgetary Requirements
- **Basic Needs Allowance**
- **Shelter Allowance**
- **Other Special Purpose Allowances** (e.g., Remote Communities Allowance, Special Diet Allowance)

Benefits Received
- **Health-Related Benefits** (e.g., Mandatory Special Necessities)
- **Employment-Related Benefits**

Reductions (Income)
- **Employment Earnings**
- **Other Government Income** (CPP-D, OAS/GIS, EI, WSIB)
- **Family Support**
- **Other Income**

- Over 197 million benefit (payment) records

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Income/Deduction Information

Gross Income

- **Employment Earnings**
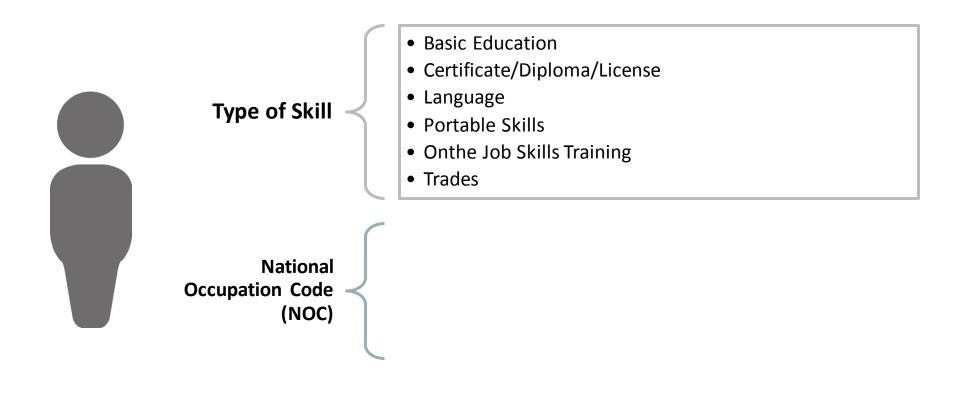- **Other Government Income** (CPP-D, OAS/GIS, EI, WSIB)
- **Family Support**
- **Other Income**

Net Income

- **Employment Earnings**
- **Other Government Income** (CPP-D, OAS/GIS, EI, WSIB)
- **Family Support**
- **Other Income**

- Almost 31 million income records

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Member Skills Information

Type of Skill
- Basic Education
- Certificate/Diploma/License
- Language
- Portable Skills
- Onthe Job Skills Training
- Trades

National Occupation Code (NOC)

- 47.1 million records

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Opportunities

- 132 months of information
- Documentation on historical policy changes
- Ability to track individuals, benefit units over time
- Ability to determine dependence (time) on social assistance

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- Time series-type analysis
- Panel data-type analysis
- Geographical analysis

Limitations

Data files do not include:

- individuals who apply for SA but are found to be ineligible for SA or who chose to discontinue their application
- asset types and levels
- benefits provided in kind
- information on Emergency Assistance, Temporary Care Assistance and Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities

Data fields on recipient characteristics that are related to eligibility determination are relatively more reliable/accurate

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Key Pilot Project Accomplishments

- MCSS and Statistics Canada developed and released a "Request for Proposals" in August 2014

- Seventeen proposals were endorsed and are underway

University	Proposals	University	Proposals
University of Toronto	4	St. Mary's University	1
University of Manitoba	2	Queens University	1
York University	1	McMaster University	5
University of Waterloo	2	Western University	1

- Areas of research covered by the research projects include:

  - Long-term attachment to social assistance, recycling behaviour and employment outcomes

  - Geography of mental health and social assistance in Ontario

  - Does "Ontario Work" for people with disabilities?

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Recap

- As part of Open Government we are committed to engage, collaborate and innovate

- The priority of MCSS is to drive long-term transformation of the social assistance system

- We will leverage and share data in order to unlock the power of data and help us reach better informed policy decisions and program development

- The purpose of the pilot is to build relationships and leverage data to help expand research in order to support evidence-based policy decisions and program development

- We will assess the viability of the pilot and if it's deemed a success, plan on making this an on-going operational process

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