



# **THE DATA MATTER.**

## **CRDCN QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER**

**FOURTH QUARTER - DECEMBER 2023**





# A year of learning, connection and growth

As 2023 comes to a close, we often take time to reflect on the year's successes, events and lessons. As editor of this newsletter, I like to look back at the pieces we've published and consider where we'll be headed in the coming year.

Being able to introduce and welcome Natalie Harrower, our Executive Director, in a wonderful Q and A piece was a great highlight of the year, as was being able to honour and acknowledge the contributions of our retiring Executive Director Martin Taylor.

I also relished the opportunity to share more about our Research-Policy Snapshots and launch our Academic Director profile series of articles.

We'll continue that series in this edition, as the newest member of our Communications and Engagement team, Renuka Jacquette, spoke with Benoit Dostie, the Academic Director at QICSS and professor at HEC Montréal. Renuka has been a very welcome and valuable addition to the team this year, bringing a wealth of both communications and engagement knowledge and experience.

In this issue we'll also speak to Gaëlle Simard-Duplain, an Assistant Professor at the University of Ottawa and an active researcher within the CRDCN, about her process and how research connects to policy.

We'll also look at the recent CRDCN 2023 national conference, which returned to an in-person format for the first time since 2019.

Thank you for your readership, I wish you and yours a restful and happy holiday season.

Ryan Murphy  
Editor, *The Data Matter*



Happy Holidays from the CRDCN Central Staff and McMaster RDC staff. (absent from image: Michael Veall and Johanne Provençal).

The Canadian Research Data Centre Network (CRDCN) is a premier research and training platform for over 2,000 researchers in the quantitative social and health sciences in Canada.

The Network provides unique access to Statistics Canada data on 33 campuses across the country to advance knowledge and inform public policy. It is funded by SSHRC, CIHR, CFI, the FRQ, Statistics Canada and our 42 primary and affiliated partner universities. CRDCN is recognized as one of Canada's Major Science Initiatives.

Cover photo: Canva



# A research rendezvous in Steeltown: Three days of discussion, discovery and data at CRDCN 2023

Researchers, policymakers and academics gathered in Hamilton, Ontario recently, to mark the in-person return of the Canadian Research Data Centre Network's (CRDCN) annual national conference.

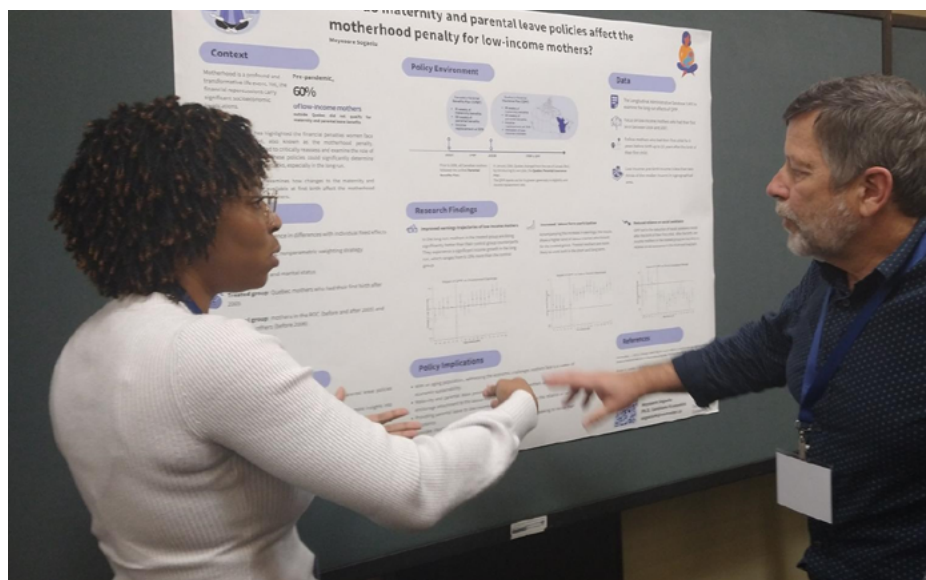
After being virtual for the past three years, the CRDCN community was so pleased to gather people together again for *CRDCN 2023: Leveraging Data, Research, and Policy Collaborations*.

One of the Network's key functions is to facilitate the transfer of knowledge between research findings and government policy, so with this at the forefront of conference themes, the first day began with three Research-Policy Nexus sessions, that brought together researchers and presenters from three federal departments: Health Canada; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC); and Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC).

Alan Diener from Health Canada, Chris Hamilton from IRCC and Stéphane Gascon from ESDC spoke about areas of research focus in their departments, and attendees had time to ask questions and provide comments, including exploring how CRDCN's central team could advance efforts for researchers and government colleagues to inform each other's work.

These sessions proved fruitful and CRDCN will be following up on this feedback from the attendees in the coming year, including: connecting CRDCN researchers using specific datasets with appropriate government contacts; identifying government departments where it would benefit all parties for CRDCN to periodically make presentations; and creating a forum for researchers to ask policy questions.

A rich program of adjudicated papers was presented on the second and third days, with 44 papers being presented in total. Additionally, an adjudicated poster



Moyo Sogaolu.  
Photo: Michèle Anderson/CRDCN

session competition was held at the end of the second day, with McMaster University PhD student [Moyo Sogaolu](#) capturing first prize with her presentation, "*Maternity and Parental Leave Benefits: Is More Better? The Experiences of Low-Income Mothers.*"

Two plenary armchair discussions proved a highlight for many, as speakers from federal departments, national agencies and universities within the CRDCN network gathered to discuss two very hot topics: the sharing of health data and the national housing issue from a data perspective.

Some key takeaways from both sessions included gaps in data, such as those related to affordability and vulnerability in housing, and supply data outside of physicians and nurses in the health sector.

The sessions also highlighted that Canada has a rich reserve of data sources to mine for research



Armchair Conversation - Spotlight on Health Partnership.  
Photo: Renuka Jacquette/CRDCN

purposes, but that providing access is a recognized challenge, and that the provision of this access needs attention urgently – to scale it up and coordinate across the country.

There was also discussion on where we were in comparison to international standards, with the point made that shifting the data governance model from one of data custodianship to one of data stewardship would move Canada closer to international best practice.

Additionally, the panels brought up that as an established and trusted research infrastructure, the CRDCN is unique in how it connects microdata sources to researchers of many different disciplines and that CRDCN could play a larger part on the national stage in data stewardship by facilitating access to multiple-domain data for multi-disciplinary researchers.

They also indicated that there is room for CRDCN's training offerings to continue to evolve in response

to researcher and data ecosystem needs, which are seen as very important to the country's capacity building of highly qualified people.

"CRDCN has a hugely valuable role in the training of analysts and the people who are doing analytics locally," said Kathleen Morris, of the Canadian Institute for Health Information. "Some of that will feed a workforce that's used to working with linked data and drawing on everything that's there to answer questions. That will be a very positive thing for the country going forward."

Ted McDonald, of the University of New Brunswick, spoke to the potential for CRDCN to expand its role as a data facilitator: "There has to be a role for CRDCN, it's the main source of microdata on income and labour market activity." McDonald added that the awareness of dataset linkages can be improved upon, but that CRDCN can serve to connect data and other organizations, develop economies of scale and reduce duplication.

"There is a role for these central agencies to be the data facilitator to make things happen in a consistent way that spares the individual jurisdictions so much time and effort."

The full armchair sessions, including all Q&A periods, can be [viewed on our YouTube channel](#).

The CRDCN would like to thank all the attendees, panelists, speakers, presenters and sponsors for making the return to an in-person conference such a resounding success.

## ***What you need to know***

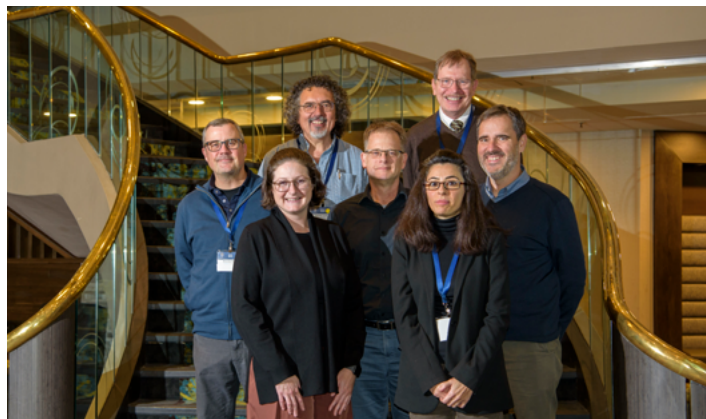
- The CRDCN's national conference returned in person for the first time since 2019.
- The armchair panel discussions focused on the sharing of health data and the national housing issue from a data perspective.
- The armchairs also shed light on where there is room for growth and where the CRDCN fits into the national stage.





CRDCN [Staff](#).

Photo: Jiming Xie



CRDCN Academic Directors in attendance ([click for list of Academic Directors](#)).

Photo: Jiming Xie



CRDCN Board of Directors in attendance ([click for list of Board members](#)).

Photo: Jiming Xie



CRDCN Executive Director Natalie Harrower chats with Kimberlyn McGrail, Professor at UBC School of Population and Public Health and Centre for Health Services and Policy Research.

Photo: Jiming Xie



CRDCN Board chair Janet Halliwell in conversation.

Photo: Jiming Xie



Aled ab Iorwerth, Deputy Chief Economist at CMHC (centre), chats with Chris Hamilton, Director of Research and Knowledge Mobilization at IRCC (left) and Xavier St-Denis, Assistant Professor at INRS.

Photo: Jiming Xie



Richard Mueller, Academic Director of the Research Data Centre at the University of Lethbridge.

Photo: Jiming Xie



# Data research process: inception, publication, and policy impacts

As someone who came to the Canadian Research Data Centre Network (CRDCN) from outside the academic and research world, it was both fascinating and eye-opening to learn all that went into the fantastic research produced at the Research Data Centres (RDCs) using Statistics Canada microdata, and how it finds its way into the hands of policymakers and audiences across the country.

I spoke with an active researcher in the CRDCN, Assistant Professor in Economics from Carleton University, Gaëlle Simard-Duplain, to discuss the process of her research from the idea phase to publication and potential policy impact.

**Ryan Murphy:** How do you decide what area or topic you want to focus on when beginning a new research project? Is it a case of identifying an issue or a problem that could use further research into it, or a policy area that could use research for further policy development?

**Gaëlle Simard-Duplain:** There is certainly a lot of that, and it can take many forms. When I started doing research during my PhD, the topics I selected were often informed by policy issues that seemed important to me. I would then go and read up on it to see what the academic literature had to say about it. My process is still quite similar, but my understanding of what's important is increasingly informed by my knowledge of the literature, my colleagues' work and my own, and my interactions with people who have first-hand experience with these topics, either because they're involved in policy making or because they have lived experience with these issues.

**Ryan:** How do you determine who you work with on a project?

**Gaëlle:** My co-authors are people I did my PhD or



Gaëlle Simard-Duplain.

postdoctoral work with (faculty members and students) and people I met at conferences or seminars. I've also co-authored a few projects with co-authors of co-authors. This is one of the best parts of this job, there are so many brilliant and interesting people to work with!

**Ryan:** What did you have to do to get approved to work in the RDC?

**Gaëlle:** The initial process involves getting security clearance and receiving training about working with confidential data. This helps ensure that every RDC researcher is well equipped to protect the information we're entrusted with. Then, for each individual project, we need to submit a research proposal that outlines the project, its contribution, and the importance of using RDC data to address the research objectives.

**Ryan:** What is the timeframe for a project from inception to publication?

**Gaëlle:** This is a multi-year process, with quite a bit of variation across projects, depending on the nature of the research, the data used and the steps necessary to vet output, the colleagues involved, the publication we send the paper to, etc. For instance, my co-authors and I recently submitted a paper which we started working on in 2020.

**Ryan:** How many projects would you have going on concurrently?

**Gaëlle:** I usually have multiple projects on the go at any given time, at different stages of completion. For instance, at the moment I have one paper that was just published, one that was recently submitted to a journal, three papers on which I'm working actively, and a few papers that are just in their early stages.

**Ryan:** Who vets your work, and can you briefly explain the peer review process?

**Gaëlle:** There are multiple forms of vetting at different stages of my work. To obtain funding for a project, we typically need to submit a description of the work we intend to do, which is reviewed by other researchers to make sure that the project is sound and viable. For projects that use sensitive data, further review is done by the ethics board at my university

(and the university of any co-authors on the project) and by the data providers, respectively. In addition, results for projects that use confidential data must be vetted before they can be disseminated, typically by the data providers, to make sure that confidentiality is protected. Finally, there is a peer review process at the publication stage that is carried out by other researchers in our field.

**Ryan:** When it is time to publish, how do you identify which journals to submit to for publication?

**Gaëlle:** It's a combination of factors. We generally hope to publish papers in journals that have the broadest audience, so that our research can reach the most people. However, some papers are more niche and better suited for specialized or field-specific journals. There are also some journal idiosyncrasies and similar journals may be more or less interested in publishing different types of papers. Finally, there are some more mundane factors to take into consideration, such as turnover times.

**Ryan:** What other methods do you use to get your research seen? Seminars? Media?

**Gaëlle:** Attending conferences, giving in-person or online seminars, and releasing working papers are all important ways of sharing research within the academic community. I also try to participate in knowledge dissemination activities that reach more diverse audiences. For instance, I recently took part in a lunch and learn hosted by departments within the federal government to talk about a project that was co-funded by WAGE and the CRDCN. This type of event is particularly useful, because it allows us not only to share our research, but also to stay connected to concrete policy needs, and to have these feed back into our work.

## ***What you need to know***

- To work in the RDCs, researchers must go through a security clearance and an approval process to ensure their work requires and respects the sensitive microdata accessed in the RDC.
- Researchers often have multiple projects on the go at any given time, with many projects being a multi-year process.
- Researchers target different journals for possible publication, based on factors such as audience reach, topic specialization and turnover time to publish.

# The French Connection: Quebec's Research Data Centre leaders

Serving a crucial role within our Network, the Academic Directors (ADs) are the leaders at the Research Data Centres (RDCs) found on the grounds of our 33 partner institutions. Here is another article in our Academic Director profile series, this time we're speaking with Benoit Dostie, Academic Director of the RDC at the Quebec Inter-university Centre for Social Statistics (QICSS) and professor at HEC Montréal.

Benoit kindly took time from his busy schedule for this Q and A and shared insights on his path to the AD role as well as the plan of the RDC in supporting research and training. He also emphasises the close collaboration with the CRDCN team and looks forward to the changes brought by the new vRDC in delivering the services to the research community.

**Renuka Jacquette:** What led you to take on the

role of Academic Director?

**Benoit Dostie:** I had (and still have) many research projects at QICSS and was therefore personally invested in the running of the Centre. The previous management team convinced me that I could do my part to ensure that QICSS continued to run smoothly, and I was delighted to accept!

**Renuka:** How many researchers do you generally have with active contracts working out of your RDC?

**Benoit:** There are currently 470 researchers working in the 5 QICSS RDCs. These researchers come mainly from QICSS member institutions such as Laval University, Sherbrooke University, Concordia University, McGill University, Québec University in Montréal (UQAM), the National Institute for Scientific Research (INRS), École des hautes études commerciales (HEC) Montréal, the Québec University network, and of course the QICSS host university, University of Montréal.

**Renuka:** What areas are being focused on the most (i.e. health, economics, specific topics?)

**Benoit:** The most represented disciplines are (in order) economics, demography, sociology, epidemiology and biostatistics, geography, public health, psychology and industrial relations.

**Renuka:** Are there any new developments happening at the RDC?

**Benoit:** We have just put in place a new governance structure, which we will test at the inaugural meeting of the new QICSS Governance Board in early December. At the same time, we're working on a strategic plan that we hope will position the QICSS optimally for its next application to the Fonds de la recherche du Québec in 2026. Finally, in 2024 we will also have a new version of our website and an EDI plan.

**Renuka:** Do you have any plans or goals for the RDC or interacting with CRDCN?

**Benoit:** The above developments come over and



Benoit Dostie.



above our usual work in support of research, training and dissemination: training courses, the QICSS school series of lunchtime webinars, support for the next generation (Emerging Excellence Conference, bursary program), other conferences and symposia, our YouTube channel, newsletter, and so on. I note that all these initiatives are increasingly carried out in close collaboration with the CRDCN team.

All these initiatives will have to be rethought and will have to evolve with the arrival of the new vRDC. For example, we'll need to develop a communications and promotional strategy specifically for regional universities, to raise our profile and publicize the new data access procedures. We will also be reviewing our training offer to better meet their needs, with a view to increasing the number of users from these universities.

**Renuka:** Is there anything else you'd like our readership to know about yourself or the RDC and the work

being done there?

**Benoit:** The QICSS is one of the few RDCs in the network that also has a foothold in confidential provincial microdata, thanks to its collaborative agreement with the Institut de la statistique du Québec and the presence of Research Data Centres that provide specific access to this data.

To get in touch with Benoit or learn more about his work, [visit his profile](#) on the HEC Montreal website. Also be sure to keep an eye on the [QICSS website](#) in the near future as they update their format and continue to post information about training, learning and networking opportunities.

— Renuka Jacquette is the Communications & Engagement Specialist at the CRDCN

## What you need to know

- There are currently 470 researchers working in the 5 QICSS RDCs.
- QICSS is currently putting in place a new governance structure and developing a strategic plan.
- QICSS will have a new website and EDI plan in 2024.

## Research Competition: Diversity in the Economics Profession

Are you passionate about economics, data, and groundbreaking research? [Here's your chance](#) to dive deep into Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) data on economics professionals.

Access data from a Research Data Center (RDC) at a Statistics Canada location and make your mark!

Submit a 2-3 page proposal on how you would use EDI data, and curate research questions to support the understanding of EDI data in the economics profession.

The winner will be paired with an experienced Economics mentor, and will have a chance to present their proposal at the Canadian Economics Association Annual Meetings in Toronto, May



2024. All Expenses included.

For any questions or clarifications, or to submit your proposals please contact [office@economics.ca](mailto:office@economics.ca). Submissions should be made by midnight Pacific Time on January 31, 2024 to [office@economics.ca](mailto:office@economics.ca) with "Research Competition Diversity in the Economics Profession" in the subject line.

# ***StatsCAN Mobile App and Eh Sayers Podcast***

Are you looking for innovative ways to access the latest data and insights? Download Statistics Canada's mobile app, StatsCAN, and listen to the agency's Eh Sayers Podcast!

Stay on top of the country's latest statistical news and download [StatsCAN](#) today! With mobile devices now the main way most Canadians access information and services, Statistics Canada recognized its duty to modernize and adapt to this trend. That's why in January 2022, the agency introduced its mobile app for data users to tap into expert analysis, visuals and the latest statistical news right from the source. Join the thousands of Canadians who are already accessing statistical information directly on their mobile devices. It's free to download from [Google Play](#) and the [App Store](#).

#TLDR (too long didn't read)? Tune into the [Eh Sayers Podcast](#) to meet the people behind the data and explore the stories behind the numbers. Meet experts from Statistics Canada and from



across the nation who answer the questions that matter to Canadians. Recent episodes include: "I Got 99 Problems but Being Misgendered on the Census Isn't One," "Will the 40 Millionth Canadian Please Stand Up?" and "In a Movie About the Economy, Is Inflation the Bad Guy?" Listen to it wherever you get your podcasts, including on Amazon Music, Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

**If you have any feedback or ideas for future articles or themes, please reach out to us at [info@crdcn.ca](mailto:info@crdcn.ca).**