

# Strengthening the foundation of our National Statistical System



# 2021 Annual Report

Canadian Statistics  
Advisory Council

Information and data are among Canada's most valuable resources. Data derived from a wide range of sectors and areas of interest are essential to informed decision making for pandemic recovery initiatives, for reconciliation and a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples, for tackling the climate crisis, and for addressing key issues the country will face for decades to come.

Leading-edge Canadian public and private sector organizations are driving the use of digital information to better understand the issues we face. There is a wealth of public and private data in this country that is not part of the national statistical system. When they are built upon common concepts and definitions and shared standards, these data can be key to meeting the needs of Canadians. To do this effectively, it means building strong relationships that promote

the value of data and connection of information.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities are each developing a distinctions-based approach to asserting their unique jurisdiction, ownership and control over their data that relates to their identity, their people, language, history, culture and communities. Information, data and capacity development investments are important at the community, regional and national levels to support these efforts.

# Adapting governance and data stewardship to a digital society

It is recommended that the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry and the Chief Statistician:

- 1.1 Take leadership in supporting a national data system that:
  - a) delivers collaborative frameworks that include clearly defined roles and accountabilities for Statistics Canada and partners from public, Indigenous, private, and other sectors.
  - b) establishes Statistics Canada's role as the national data steward, based on a whole of government approach to defining and prioritizing data needs as an integral part of federal program planning; and
  - c) applies legislation and policies to support and incentivise active administration of national data standards and real-time nationwide data flows involving all government jurisdictions.
- 1.2 Through clearly defined and distinctions-based governance partnerships with Indigenous organizations and communities, support the advancement of First Nations, Inuit and Métis led governance capacities, data priorities and active participation in and contribution to the national data system.

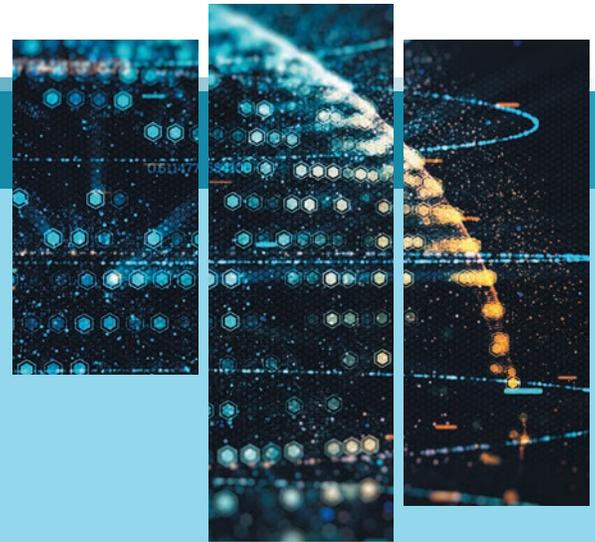


To build truly nation-wide data means that legislation and policy must not only be in place, but also clear on issues of data stewardship and need for data. Working within the national statistical system, Statistics Canada is often constrained in its ability to deliver what Canadians expect

and need to create prosperity and well-being in a world marked by a digital future. Even with digital modernization efforts, the statistical system is hampered by fragmentation, unused data and unmet data needs in critical sectors. These are largely a consequence of the inheritance of

an outdated governance structure between Statistics Canada and federal departments, provinces and territories. The federal government must be a leader and support new governance models that bring broader perspectives and partnerships.

# Adapting statistical legislation to reflect the needs of a modern digital national statistical system



It is recommended that the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry and the Chief Statistician:

- 2.1 update the *Statistics Act* to reflect a modern digital society.
- 2.2 clarify and strengthen in the *Statistics Act*, Statistics Canada's data stewardship role
- 2.3 introduce a new category of accredited users from government, academic and private research institutions, and Indigenous organizations and communities who would be granted access to more disaggregated microdata without having to be deemed employees of Statistics Canada.
- 2.4 update the *Statistics Act* to support participation of Statistics Canada and federal departments in reconciliation efforts and a renewed relationship with First Nations, Inuit and Métis with respect to coordination and governance of data and information, to support planning, building capacity and decision making by all stakeholders to address critical data needs.

For Canada to succeed in an increasingly dynamic digital world, Statistics Canada's role is key. The agency is an independent and trusted source of official statistics and provides a solid foundation for government accountability and evidence-based decision making by both the public and the private sectors, which benefits all Canadians.

Strong, clear and unambiguous statistical legislation is important to support the national data system including its national data strategies. Modern digital technology for collecting, transferring and sharing statistical information is not well reflected in the *Statistics Act*, which affects how the statistical legislation is interpreted. Statistics Canada's

role as data steward in the country's statistical systems needs to be clarified and strengthened in the *Statistics Act*.

# Leveraging opportunities for addressing critical data needs

It is recommended that the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry and the Chief Statistician:

- 3.1 develop and communicate principles for working with multidisciplinary connected datasets as an important component of national data strategies.
- 3.2 broaden and deepen reciprocal relationships with federal departments and agencies, other levels of government, Indigenous jurisdictions and the private sector to enable sharing of data to build truly national and nationwide data infrastructures
  - a) invest in and provide incentives for the effective implementation of advanced real-time software and communications technologies to enable data sharing and connecting of data across jurisdictions and organizations.
  - b) invest in innovative data collection and measures that move beyond econocentric environment models to include elements of quality of life and sustainability.



Issues such as the global COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice, the tragedy of Indigenous residential schools and the climate crisis have heightened a growing recognition among Canadians and decision makers of how important reliable and timely detailed information is to understand many of the issues facing Canadians.

There is a need for nimble, flexible data systems, as pressing problems and critical events are

often unexpected. In general, the pace of change today occurs much more quickly than the change captured in quinquennial census information or data collected from annual surveys. There are new untapped sources of information that can provide more real-time data and accurate portraits of Canadians and their communities.

Data sources on their own generally do not provide the breadth, depth or interconnections required

to examine more complex issues such as socio-economic inequalities and environmental impacts from and on businesses. To support these analyses, datasets need to be constructed from multiple sources under clearly specified confidentiality and security protocols. Increasingly, researchers need to be able to link and connect relevant variables on demand.