

Connecting with Canadians

Since 1994, CPRN has been talking to Canadians about the issues of most importance to our nation. Our approach is thorough, but straight forward – we conduct research, talk to Canadians, and propose policy options. Our goal is to build a better Canada through informed public dialogue on social and economic issues.

Connecting with Canadians is based on what Canadians have told us they expect from government, business and community organizations and what they believe, as citizens, we should give back to society.

We believe *Connecting with Canadians* is a new approach to socio-economic policy – one that responds to current issues, identifies emerging challenges, remains in synch with public attitudes, and helps find solutions to the most pressing problems we face.

CPRN welcomes partnerships with government, business, foundations and individual Canadians in support of *Connecting with Canadians*. Together, we can shape the future of our country and help it live up to the collective expectations of all Canadians.

Expectations and Obligations Canadians Hold

Connecting with Canadians is based on what Canadians have told us they expect from government, business and community organizations and what they believe, as citizens, we should give back to society. We have organized these ideas into a series of expectations and obligations that Canadians hold for their vision of Canada.

Expectations

1. A good job that pays a fair wage
2. Access to quality education and training from early childhood forward
3. Quality and timely health care
4. Social security for families and individuals
5. Safe, secure and supportive communities
6. Good governance and a voice for citizens
7. A clean healthy environment for this and future generations

Obligations

1. Providing for one's family
2. Paying taxes and respecting the law
3. Investing in your own education, employment and health
4. Contributing to community and public life
5. Using responsibly natural resources and public services
6. Respecting Canadian values as they evolve

This framework is meant to foster a discussion about what can be done to ensure that Canada moves towards the fair, prosperous and inclusive society that we all support and believe in.

Public Policy Challenges

Mapping the future requires a starting point and a clear sense of where we want to go. The expectations and obligations that Canadians have articulated define a vision for the country: they express the principles that ought to characterize Canadian society. Taking into consideration extensive research by CPRN and others on where we stand in relation to this vision, CPRN has identified five challenges facing the country today. These challenges include statements designed to question the status quo. They are meant to stimulate discussion and probe for solutions to the issues we face.

1. Citizenship

"Canadians are tuned out and turned off by government."

Canadians want to be able to trust their governments. They are looking for credible information on how governments are living up to their commitments and providing quality services to citizens. Canadians also want to have a meaningful voice in civic affairs and to participate in developing solutions to problems facing the country and their communities. But Canadians, especially our youth, feel disconnected from government and political decision-making.

2. Diversity and Canadian values

"The Canadian mosaic is many hued, but are we sure it can fit together?"

Canada has an increasingly diverse population, especially in our major cities. This rich diversity of Canadians needs to be recognized within a framework of respect for Canadian values. Systems are needed to work through differences that arise in a multi-ethnic, multi-racial democratic society. Ultimately, Canadians expect their communities to remain inclusive and vibrant.

3. Productivity and skills:

“With a more slowly growing labour force, it is more important than ever that everyone have the opportunity to fully develop their skills.”

In the global economy, Canada’s strength lies not primarily in its endowment of natural resources, but in the skills and knowledge of its people, and its capacity to innovate. The key to our continued competitiveness and prosperity, as well as to social inclusion, lies in ensuring that all Canadians are able to realize their full potential to contribute to the economy and to their communities. Canadians expect that we all have access to quality learning opportunities throughout our lives, from early childhood to adulthood.

4. Health and aging population

“There are still gaps in health care and in the integration of health care and support services.”

Canadians have access to “universal” coverage for hospital and medical services, based on their need rather than their ability to pay. But access to quality health care is about access to a full continuum of care that includes preventative services, primary health care, home care, community-based social services, etc. These elements are all interrelated.

Canadians expect that the efforts of families, employers, communities and governments will be combined to build self-reliance and provide the necessary services to those in need. With the aging population, community services and family members will be called upon more. But these resources are already overstretched and unprepared for the increase in demand over the next decade.

5. Environment

“We mainly agree on the problem; we need consensus on the solutions.”

Canadians believe that consumers, business and government need to do more to safeguard the environment: take action on climate change, use green technologies, reduce pollution, and adopt effective waste management practices. Governments also need to help society adapt to the impacts of climate change.

The challenge is to encourage Canadians to go green while taking into account economic and social goals. Throughout Canada, all levels of government are investing to protect the environment and addressing climate change. Innovative initiatives are underway in many jurisdictions. However, there remain significant challenges to address.

Conversations with Canadians

CPRN held a series of conversations with Canadians in cities from coast to coast. These conversations confirmed the importance of the five challenges and identified four overarching themes that affect each of the challenges: the need for leadership; the role of the public sector; the importance of building Canada’s place in the world; and the need to address the plight of Aboriginal peoples in our country. A brief report on these conversations is available at www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1831&l=en.

Leadership Summit 2008 Launches Connecting with Canadians

CPRN launched its new public policy research agenda, *Connecting with Canadians*, in Ottawa on February 13, 2008. More than 100 community, business, government and young leaders from across Canada attended Leadership Summit 2008. The summit featured a series of dialogues on the five challenges identified by CPRN. The workbook used as background for these dialogues is available at www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1830&l=en.

Participants in the Summit identified the most pressing opportunities and barriers to address in developing policies to deal with the challenges put forward and to move Canada forward towards the Canada that Canadians want. CPRN plans to develop a research and dialogue agenda that helps address these challenges so that Canadians' expectations for their country can be realized.

The Summit news release is available at www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1834&l=en.

A report on the Summit will be posted on the CPRN website in a few weeks' time.

Feedback and More Information

CPRN invites your feedback and questions on *Connecting with Canadians* and the issues facing Canada. Email to ConnectingwithCanadians@cprn.org.