

Contribution to Beyond GDP “Virtual Indicator Expo”

<http://www.beyond-gdp.eu>

Name of the indicator/method: **Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW)**

Summary prepared by: Lynne Slotek, CIW National Project Director

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The Canadian Index of Wellbeing - A Transformational Initiative

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) is a new and transformational initiative that will report on the quality of life of Canadians. The CIW will be officially launched in 2008 and our hope is that it will one day become Canada’s principle means of measuring genuine progress.

The CIW will chart and provide unique insights into how the lives of Canadians are getting better – or worse – in areas that really matter to us: our health, our standard of living, the quality of our environment, the way we use our time, our education and skill levels, the vitality of our communities, our participation in the democratic process, and the state of our arts and culture. Most importantly, the CIW will shine a spotlight on how these important areas are interconnected. How, for example, changes in income are linked to changes in health, or how community engagement and living standards are connected.

The CIW is being built by the CIW Network – a partnership of national indicator experts and practitioners together with business and civic leaders, and representation from government and grass roots organizations across the country in consultation with international experts. Our goal is to stimulate discussion about the types of policies, programs and activities that would move Canada closer and faster toward achieving wellbeing, give Canadians tools to promote wellbeing with policy shapers and decision makers, and pinpoint policy options and solutions that will genuinely improve the quality of life of Canadians.

Why Canada Needs National Indicators

In Canada, as in much of the world, the most commonly cited measurement of progress is the GDP but there is a growing awareness among Canadians that the GDP focuses on a narrow set of economic issues. By relying on such a limited perspective, it fails to capture many of the things that really matter to Canadians. As the natural environment is depleted, the gap between rich and poor grows, chronic diseases skyrocket, life for Canada’s Aboriginal peoples fails to improve, and the pressures of time stress drive people to distraction, it’s no wonder that so many Canadians are feeling that the rosy economic picture presented in the news is at odds with what they know to be our everyday reality.

Even within the limited scope of the economy, the GDP fails to distinguish between economic activities that are beneficial and those that are harmful to our overall wellbeing. The sale of cigarettes and trans-fat-loaded fast foods, for example, causes the GDP to go up, but no one would really argue that this is good for our wellbeing.

The CIW will treat beneficial activities as assets and harmful ones as deficits. It will, for example:

- distinguish between good things like health and clean air, and bad things, like sickness and pollution;
- promote volunteer work and unpaid care-giving as social goods, and overwork and stress as social deficits;
- put a value on educational achievement, early childhood learning, economic and personal security, a clean environment, and social and health equity; and
- encourage a better balance between investment in health promotion and spending on illness treatment.

Description of the CIW Model

The CIW will track changes in eight quality-of-life domains. The development of each domain is under the leadership of world-class experts and backed by rigorous Canadian and international peer review and public consultation.



The following are the working definitions that have been adopted for each of the domains:

Living Standards are defined as the quality and quantity of goods and services, both public and private, available to the population, and the distribution of these goods and services within the population.

Healthy Populations measures the health of a population in its fullest expression – being alive and well, experiencing disease, disability and delaying death, lifestyles we lead, and care we receive.

Educated Populace measures the literacy skills required to function effectively in society, and is aware of contextual situations and systems, social and economic interconnections, current world events, the processes of the natural world, and the influence of current lifestyles on population health and on the choices and quality of life of future generations

Vital Communities are characterized by strong, active and inclusive relationships between residents, private sector, public sector and voluntary organizations that work to foster individual and collective wellbeing. Vital communities are those that are able to cultivate these relationships in order to create, adapt and thrive in the changing world and thus improve wellbeing of citizens.

Ecosystem Health measures the state of wellbeing and integrity of our natural environment. This includes the sustainability of Canada's natural resources and the capacity of our ecosystems and watersheds to provide a sustained level of ecological goods and services for the wellbeing of Canadians and other species in nature. This domain examines both the current state of Canada's ecosystems and changes over time.

Civic Engagement measures the health of our democracy. It addresses three aspects of our public lives and the governance of our society: How engaged are citizens in public life and governance?; Do our governments function in an open, transparent, effective, fair, equitable, and accessible manner?; and Are Canadians, our governments and our corporations good global citizens? Civic engagement includes our electoral processes, and the policy and decision-making processes at all levels of government.

Time Use measures the use of time, how people experience time, what controls its use, and how it affects wellbeing.

Arts and Culture (working concept and not a definition) are difficult to define in the abstract, but easy to illustrate. We think of culture as a quite general term covering all forms of human expression. People's culture is uniquely expressed in their language, and the contours of our multicultural society can be sketched with measures of linguistic usage. What matters to Canadians sometimes matters in different ways to those observing events from different cultural perspectives. Art is a particular type of culture. Art includes performing arts; visual arts; media arts; and facilities like galleries and all kinds of museums, historical and heritage sites.

The domains will be blended into a composite index that will provide a quick snapshot of whether overall Canadian wellbeing is changing for better or for worse. CIW reports will present detailed information on both the composite index and the individual domains. The CIW's 'basket' of domains will be reported regularly with clarity about trends and interrelated stories (e.g., "While X is on the rise, it is interesting to note that Y is flat, and Z is declining. Possible explanations include...").

A Short History

As far back as 1999, The Atkinson Charitable Foundation (ACF), a prominent Canadian foundation, recognized the need for a credible national voice to measure the economic, health, social and environmental progress of Canadians. The ACF convened a group of index experts from across Canada, including Statistics Canada, to discuss what it would take to create such a voice.

Following a number of years of public consultations, research and development, a pan-Canadian National Research and Development Working Group was established in May 2004, and from 2005-2007 held annual two-day working meetings to develop the CIW model. In November 2005, an initial model was presented to a workshop led by composite index experts from the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, and received favourable reviews. The model was further tested through two rounds of cross-Canada stakeholder roundtables in 2006 and 2007, and further modified.

Current Status

The CIW model will shortly be reviewed by independent validation groups consisting of national and international experts who have not been involved with the project. Reports have been prepared on three domains: Living Standards, Healthy Populations, and Community Vitality. These reports will also be reviewed by validation groups and updated for release in 2008. Further development and refinement of the models for Educated Populace, Ecosystem Health and Time Use domains is underway. Work on the Civic Engagement and Arts and Culture domains will begin in the fall of 2007.

The Future

The CIW will be publicly launched at a high-profile event in 2008.

In the meantime, the CIW Network is viewed internationally as a global pioneer in developing a holistic, integrated approach to measuring wellbeing. Because of this position of leadership, we are often invited to partner with experts in other countries and participate in international conferences to help build this important global movement. These connections are important in raising the benchmark of research and data integrity and changing the global dialogue about genuine progress. Our continued contribution on the international scene will not only strengthen the CIW project in Canada, but at the same time, give the project access to the best international minds.