

For Information

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DATE: May 28, 2012

REPORT TITLE: **THE CANADIAN INDEX OF WELLBEING (CIW) REPORT**

FROM: Janet Menard, Commissioner of Human Services

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## OBJECTIVE

To provide a summary of a recent report released by the Canadian Index of Wellbeing Network entitled "How are Canadians Really Doing?" that introduces the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) and provides detailed discussions on changes in various indicators of Canadians' quality of life between 1994 and 2008.

### REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been relied upon as the sole indicator of our country's growth.
- Although GDP is an excellent measure of economic health of our nation, it does not measure the wellbeing of our population as a whole.
- The research and development of the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) was undertaken by the CIW Network, which released a summary report entitled, "How are Canadians Really Doing?" in October 2011.
- The CIW report identifies and discusses changes in 64 indicators that are distributed among eight main domains of our life: community vitality, democratic engagement, education, the environment, healthy populations, living standards, leisure and culture, and time use, between 1994 and 2008.
- The CIW is a new indicator that appears to offer future potential. Staff will monitor the CIW reports, the experience of Simcoe County and assess the potential for applicability of the wellbeing index in Peel.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Background

Up until recently, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been relied upon as the sole indicator of our country's growth, i.e., in an economic context. There is an emerging consensus that although the GDP provides an excellent measure of economic health of our nation, it alone cannot measure how well our population is faring as a whole. As robust of a tool that it is, the GDP only tells us about the economy - not about our people, our environment, our democracy and other aspects of life that matter to Canadians. The recently released report entitled, "How are Canadians Really doing?" identifies shortcomings



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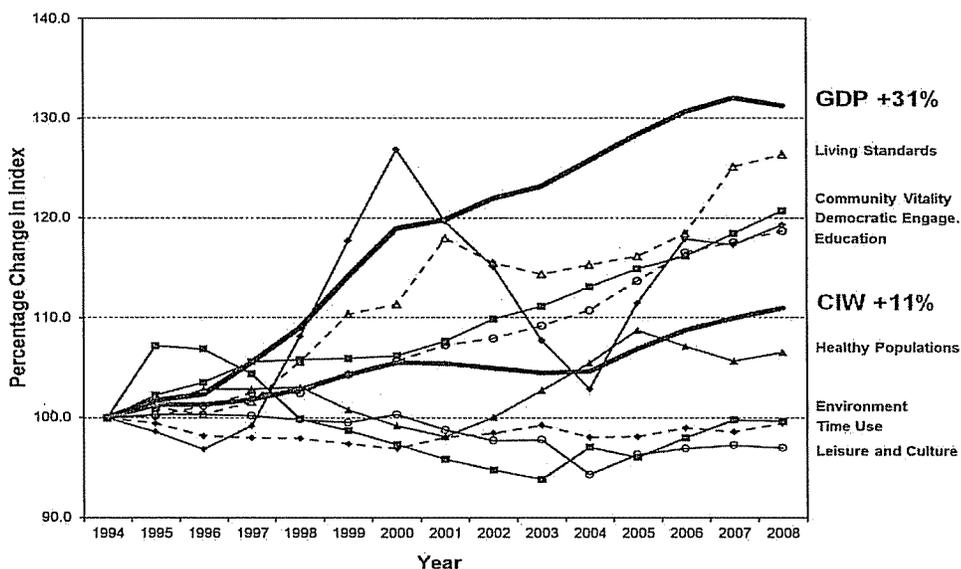


Figure 1: Trends in the CIW, its Eight Domains and Comparison with GDP, 1994-2008

Based on the CIW report and data, our wellbeing improved in five areas: Community Vitality, Democratic Engagement, Education, Healthy Populations and Living Standards. We did less well in areas related to: the Environment, Time Use, and Leisure and Culture. A summary of findings on each of the domain areas, as described in the report, is provided below.

**i) Community Vitality Domain**

The CIW research on the Community Vitality domain focuses on issues of social relationships and networks, and on the conditions that promote these relationships and facilitate community action by residents. The report notes that positive changes were observed in terms of the proportion of Canadians engaging themselves in voluntary groups and organizations and giving social support and assistance to family, friends, and neighbours. In terms of safety in our communities, levels of property crimes in the country dropped from 5,692 to 4,247 per 100,000 people during this time period. The sense of community belonging increased among Canadians, as 65 per cent of Canadians expressed a strong attachment to their local community in 2008, up from 58 per cent in 1994.

**ii) Democratic Engagement Domain**

According to the CIW report, although the overall score for this domain increased by 19.3 per cent points in the 15-year period, the improvement was not same across all indicators in this domain. In particular, civic engagement and participation decreased during this period, as the voter turnout declined from a high of 67 per cent in the 1994 federal election to an all-time low of 59 per cent in the 2008 federal election. The percentage of female members of Parliament increased marginally from 18 per cent in 1994 to 22.4 per cent in 2008, making it evident that it remains low despite the marginal increase.

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**THE CANADIAN INDEX OF WELLBEING (CIW) REPORT****iii) Education Domain**

The CIW report notes that positive changes were observed in terms of the availability of child care spaces and student to teacher ratio. However, these changes varied significantly from province to province. For example, while the student to teacher ratio steadily improved in Ontario (from 15.8 in 1994 to 14.5 in 2008), it strongly fluctuated in British Columbia and did not significantly improve (16.9 in 1997 and 16.6 in 2007).

High-school graduation rates among Canadians (aged between 20-24 years) increased from 86 per cent in 1994 to 91 per cent in 2008, and university graduation rates among those aged 25-64 years went up from 19 per cent in 1994 to 28 per cent in 2008. On an index of tests taken between 1995 and 2006, Canadian basic scores were above the international average of 500. However, Canadian students' overall scores specifically in math, science and reading declined during this period.

**iv) Environment Domain**

Under this domain, the CIW report notes that absolute GHG emissions in Canada increased by 15 per cent between 1994 and 2008, and the main drivers were found to be fossil fuel, transportation and electricity production industries. Primary energy production in Canada increased by 17.7 per cent in the 15-year period, but all of this growth came through the exploitation of non-renewable fossil fuels. Electricity generation from wind, solar, and tidal sources represented less than 0.5 per cent of total energy production in Canada during this period.

**v) Healthy Populations Domain**

Different variables such as the physical and mental wellbeing of the population, life expectancy and the quality of public health services were examined in this domain. According to the CIW report, Canada's life expectancy rates are among the best in the world. On average, a Canadian born in 2006 could expect to live to 80.8 years. Women (83 years) continue to live longer than men (78 years). However, while Canadians are living longer, they are increasingly likely to develop a chronic disease or mental illness during their lifetime. Some examples provided in the CIW report include the increase in the likelihood of depression and diabetes among Canadians of all ages.

**vi) Leisure and Culture Domain**

The CIW report notes that Canadians are spending less time on social leisure activities, as the average time spent on such activities dropped from 15.2 per cent in 1994 to 12.4 per cent in 2008. Despite the fact that overall volunteering in Canada has increased, the percentage of volunteering time for cultural and recreational organizations dropped from 47 per cent in 1994 to 37 per cent in 2008. Overall decline in the engagement of Canadians in social, leisure, and recreation activities is of considerable concern, knowing that such activities make significant contributions to our wellbeing.

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**THE CANADIAN INDEX OF WELLBEING (CIW) REPORT****vii) Living Standards Domain**

The report discusses trends in living standards at a national level, including the distribution of income and wealth, poverty rates, employment rates and housing security. The CIW report notes that the unemployment rate fell from 17.4 per cent in 1994 to 6.7 per cent in 2008. The employment rate reached to 63.5 per cent in 2008, up from 58.4 per cent in 1994 due to the increased participation of women in the labour force. The poverty rate for all persons decreased to 9.4 per cent in 2008 compared to 14 per cent in 1994. However, while there have been notable poverty reductions over time, the ratio of the top 20 per cent to the bottom 20 per cent of income earners worsened over time. This means the rich became richer, but most of the poor stayed poor during this period. Finally, the RBC housing affordability index increased by 7.7 per cent between 1994 and 2008, indicating housing became less affordable.

**viii) Time-Use Domain**

According to the CIW report, this domain echoes some of the warnings identified in the Leisure and Culture domain of the report. The proportion of Canadians experiencing situations of having less time on hand grew from 16.4 per cent in 1994 to 19.6 per cent in 2008; single individuals with young children were identified having the least available time. Also, a higher proportion of females (22.7 per cent) than males (16.6 per cent) reported time pressures in 2005. As a positive change, the proportion of children, aged 6-9 years, participating in organized extra-curricular activities per week, increased significantly between 1994 and 2008. During this period, the proportion of working-age adults providing unpaid care to seniors grew from 17.4 per cent to 19.5 per cent. The CIW report notes that, in 2009, about one in four employed Canadians had responsibility for the care of an elderly dependent, and one in five had responsibility for both child care and elder care. These trends echo the fact that Canada's aging population will increase the need for seniors' care.

**3. Connecting the Dots: From Research to Policy**

What makes the Canadian Index of Wellbeing stand apart from other indexes, such as "Vital Signs" or the "Federation of Canadian Municipalities" Theme Reports, is that the CIW is the only one that provides a composite index, i.e., it is essentially an average of all indicators. This index is comparable to other indexes such as the GDP, to help educate the general public and policy makers about how well Canada is doing as a nation. Also, since CIW is broad in focus and its domains are interrelated, it provides an opportunity for policy makers to understand the interconnectedness of multiple aspects and domains in our lives.

Based on the findings on each of the 64 indicators in the CIW, the report identifies a need for public policy interventions tailored to address the needs of all Canadians. Specific measures introduced in the report are:

- reduce income inequality;
- enhance intergovernmental cooperation for effective and efficient use of resources and create opportunities;
- promote and deploy better use of the technology;
- provide leisure and culture activities to all income groups;
- co-ordinate Early Childhood Education (ECE) programming at national level;
- reduce our dependence on non-renewable energy reserves; and strengthen institutional capacities.

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In terms of the applicability of this index, the City of Barrie in Simcoe County, Ontario is the first community to apply CIW at the municipal level. The Barrie Community Health Centre has created a local CIW group, known as "The Resilience Collaborative", which gathers local level information and produces similar reports to make suggestions for local policy changes.

**a) Region of Peel Activities**

The Region has recently implemented a number of initiatives to address Peel's residents' needs in an efficient and effective manner. The integration of the Region's Child Care, Ontario Works and Housing programs into the Human Services department is one example of coordinating efforts to improve service and integrate back office supports and strategic policy and planning.

The Region is working in collaboration with United Way of Peel Region (UWPR) towards aligning local data and using national resources such as Vital Signs, Federation of Canadian Municipalities' QOLRS reports and the Canadian Index of Wellbeing work in order to measure what matters and use the information to make informed decisions around policy, practice and investments in Peel. The starting place for this work is the joint Community Investment Strategy: Investing for Resilience, a multi-year initiative, which began in 2007.

The Community Investment Strategy calls for a new way of thinking, one that includes a holistic view of the resiliency of communities as well as informed gathering of relevant data to measure the impact of programming and services on Peel's residents quality of life. The Strategy focuses on nine priority areas: seniors, persons with disabilities, violence and abuse, mental health, newcomers and immigrants, families, children and youth, poverty, and neighbourhoods. The Region and UWPR has adapted the Collective Impact through Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework in order to achieve the vision for the nine priority populations and address the issues identified through the Investing for Resilience Strategy. The results of the Strategy are summarized in a report titled, "Peel Counts 2011", which was released on December 12, 2011. The findings of the Strategy and RBA framework was presented to the Community Investment Committee (CIC) through a separate staff report titled, "Peel Counts 2011: Collective Impact through Results Based Accountability" on May 31, 2012.

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**CONCLUSION**

The CIW report provides a wealth of information on how our nation's wellbeing has changed over a period of time. Measuring our nation's wellbeing using a series of small but important indicators allows us to identify areas in need of improvement and promote the development of evidence-based policies. One of the strengths of CIW is considered to be its ability to provide an understanding of the interconnectedness of multiple aspects and domains of quality of life, which help in identifying how improvement in one area can have positive impacts on other areas of our quality of life.

The CIW is a new indicator that appears to offer future potential. Staff will monitor the CIW reports and Simcoe County's experience to assess its potential application in Peel.



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**Approved for Submission:**



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