

Renewing Canada's social architecture ^[1]

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Main report ^[2]

Topical reports:

Policies in support of caregivers ^[3]

Access to affordable housing ^[3]

Employment skills training ^[3]

Introduction

Canada's social policies and programs have barely changed since the 1960s, despite major transformations in our economy and society. These policies continue to drift further from their goals and serve fewer Canadians, less effectively. It's time to renew our out-of-date social architecture.

Canada looks very different than it did a generation ago. Our society, economy and labour markets have been reshaped by demographic shifts, new economic realities, globalization, emerging technologies and changing culture and attitudes. Many of the core social programs and policies designed in the middle of the last century have not kept pace with these broader changes.

The federal government, in partnership with the provinces, led the creation of our social architecture — the suite of programs that includes the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Medicare, and Employment Insurance (EI), among others. While there have been numerous adjustments, many of the main pillars of Canada's social architecture have not evolved to appropriately address current economic and demographic realities.

Introduced in the middle of the last century, public pensions, medicare and employment insurance were designed for a particular social and economic context — low rates of female participation in the paid labour force and a labour market where someone with a high school education could get a stable, well-paying job with benefits. The labour market has shifted tremendously, with fewer people in the once "standard" forms of employment with stable hours, registered pensions and extended health benefits. Canada's aging population presents challenges to retirement security, the health care system, and families — now more likely to be dual-earner households — that face additional stress caring for aging relatives.

The purpose of this project is to support a conversation among policymakers and the public about the best ways to update Canada's social architecture. Researchers from the Mowat Centre ^[4], Caledon Institute for Social Policy ^[5], Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity ^[6] and Institute for Research on Public Policy ^[7] have produced a series of papers exploring opportunities to strengthen Canada's social architecture. Each of these contributions provides an overview of a particular policy issue and presents some potential short-term and long-term options for consideration.

Canada's social architecture is at a crossroads: fundamental challenges have been neglected for too long in favour of short-term fixes, resulting in large gaps that now threaten the well-being and economic prosperity of Canadians. The renewal of these programs and policies should be a priority of all Canadians in the coming years, starting with the federal election this fall.

Region: Canada ^[8]

Tags: social policies and programs ^[9]

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