Spotlight on Canadian Statistics Advisory Council 2020 Annual Report: Towards a Stronger National Statistical System

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CSAC Mandate

- In 2017, amendments to the *Statistics Act* to strengthen the independence and relevance of the statistical system led to the establishment of a new Canadian Statistics Advisory Council (CSAC).

- CSAC's mandate is to report to Canadians annually on the overall health of the national statistical system and provide advice to the Minister and to the Chief Statistician on issues concerning the relevance, accuracy, accessibility, timeliness, and privacy and confidentiality of the agency's data.

Strengthen the independence of Statistics Canada

Establish the **Canadian Statistics Advisory Council** as an independent body mandated to advise the Minister and the Chief Statistician

Membership

Ms. Jan Kestle
President, Environics Analytics

Ms. Annette Hester
Head of TheHesterView Inc.

Mr. David Chaundy
President and CEO, APEC

Dr. Céline Le Bourdais
Professor, McGill University

Dr. Michael Wolfson
Adjunct Professor, University of Ottawa

Dr. Howard Ramos, Chairperson
Professor, University of Western Ontario

Ms. Gail Mc Donald
Former Executive Director of First Nations Information Governance Centre

Mr. Gurmeet Ahluwalia
Managing Partner, StratExLead

Mr. Anil Arora
Chief Statistician of Canada, ex-officio

CSAC Annual Report – Towards a Stronger National Statistical System

- CSAC's first annual report emphasizes Statistics Canada's central role as an independent national statistical organization, noting that **the agency has never been more critical to meeting the need for timely and high-quality statistics in Canada.**

- The COVID-19 pandemic altered the course of the Council's work, highlighting the broader need for high-quality statistical information to address nationwide health issues and socioeconomic inequities, while protecting the privacy needs of Canadians.

"Statistics Canada's central role as an independent national statistical organization has never been more critical to meeting the need for timely and high-quality statistics in Canada."

Strong recognition of Statistics Canada's modernization efforts leading to tangible results for Canadians

- The report recognizes Statistics Canada's modernization efforts, noting that the agency is providing more detailed, timely and quality statistics for Canadians

"Statistics Canada should be commended for its creativity, innovation and strong leadership during the pandemic. Leveraging a culture of innovation already taking shape within Statistics Canada as it modernizes its operations, the agency was able to quickly set in motion strategies to develop new statistical indicators and analytic product. (...) The agency was able to accelerate development and testing to produce indicators within weeks and months, much more quickly than its usual timeline. While the data were preliminary and subject to revision, they were nevertheless critical to decision makers."

"Statistics Canada is well positioned to lead the various dialogues on national data and information needs. (...) Its expertise in developing high-quality data using standardized concepts and classifications is recognized internationally..."

Recommendations to make the system even stronger and more responsive

Recommendation 1: Including statistical data requirements in planning federal government programs

It is recommended that the Minister of Innovation, Science, and Industry ensure that statistical data requirements and funding are explicitly included in the planning for all federal government programs.

New governance mechanisms are required to formally open new dialogues on national data needs and how to best collect and share this information. This must be led by Statistics Canada, in accordance with its mandate, with the full support and funding of the federal government. It must also include all levels of government and statistical organizations.

Recommendation 2: Addressing critical data gaps

2.1 It is recommended that the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry invest in coordinating data collection across federal, provincial, territorial governments to build a truly national data infrastructure

The rapid rise of the digital economy and the impacts of climate change on the environment are examples of areas where new types of data are required to measure impacts on Canadian society and on the Canadian economy. Understanding the barriers faced by racialized groups and Indigenous peoples also requires more detailed and disaggregated data on employment, income, health and justice.

2.2 implement in the various fiscal arrangements with the provinces and territories adequate and effective mechanisms to ensure nationally consistent data can and do flow to Statistics Canada, pursuant to its mandate.

Recommendation 3: Rectifying serious imbalances in funding national statistical programs

It is recommended that the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry consider options to ensure that Statistics Canada core funding includes resources for social, economic, environmental and energy statistics programs, including the long-form census questionnaire, household surveys, administrative data, research and analysis, without having to rely on ad hoc cost-recovery transfers from departments.

Recommendation 4: Ensuring the privacy of Canadians and the need for Canadians to provide data to Statistics Canada

4.1 It is recommended that Statistics Canada and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (...) ensure that federal provincial and territorial data protection laws and policies support sharing data for statistical purposes with no legislative ambiguities

4.2 Statistics Canada and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry start a dialogue with Canadians on the importance of confidentiality and privacy in evidence-based decision making

4.3 Statistics Canada proceed, with the support from the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, with projects to develop new data sources from financial and credit institutions, in accordance with principles of necessity and proportionality, and inform Canadians why these data are needed and how they will be collected and stored

Recommendation 5: Modernizing microdata access

With the wealth of statistical information, data expertise and technical savvy found in public, academic and private institutions across the country, there are tremendous opportunities to transform how data are developed and used in Canada.
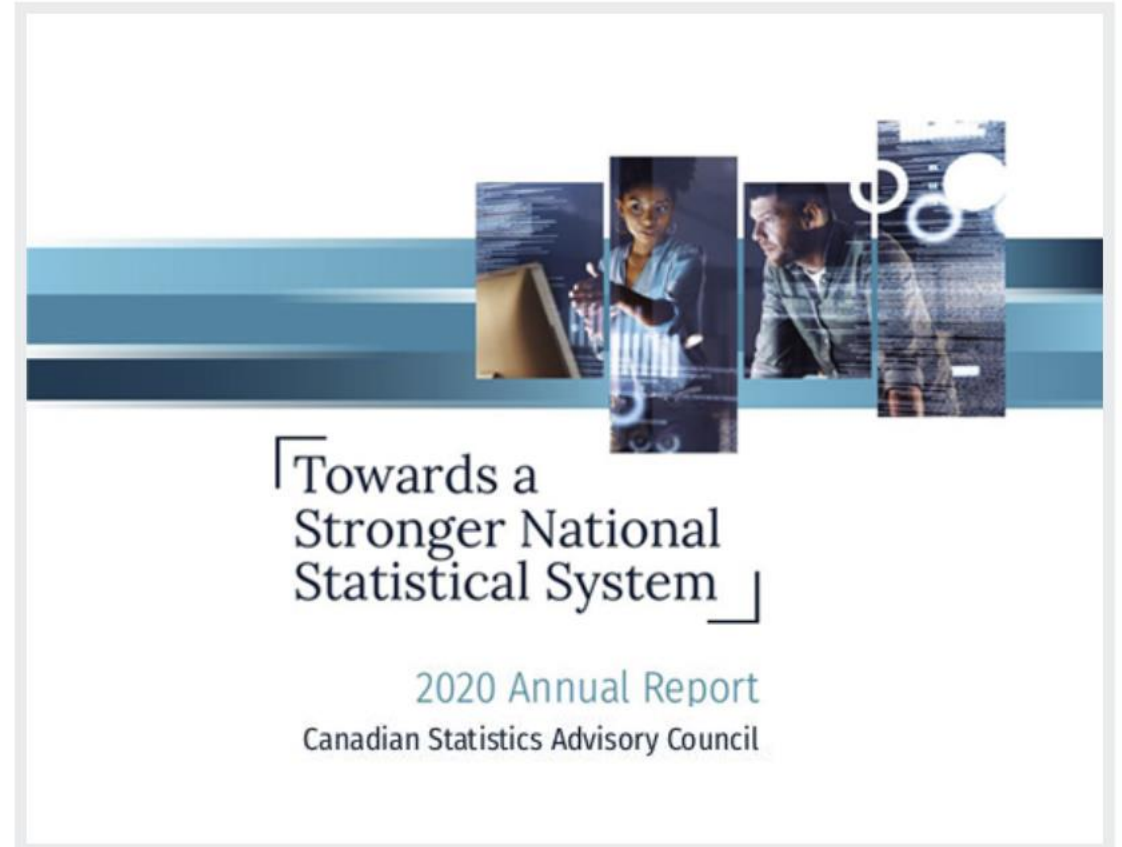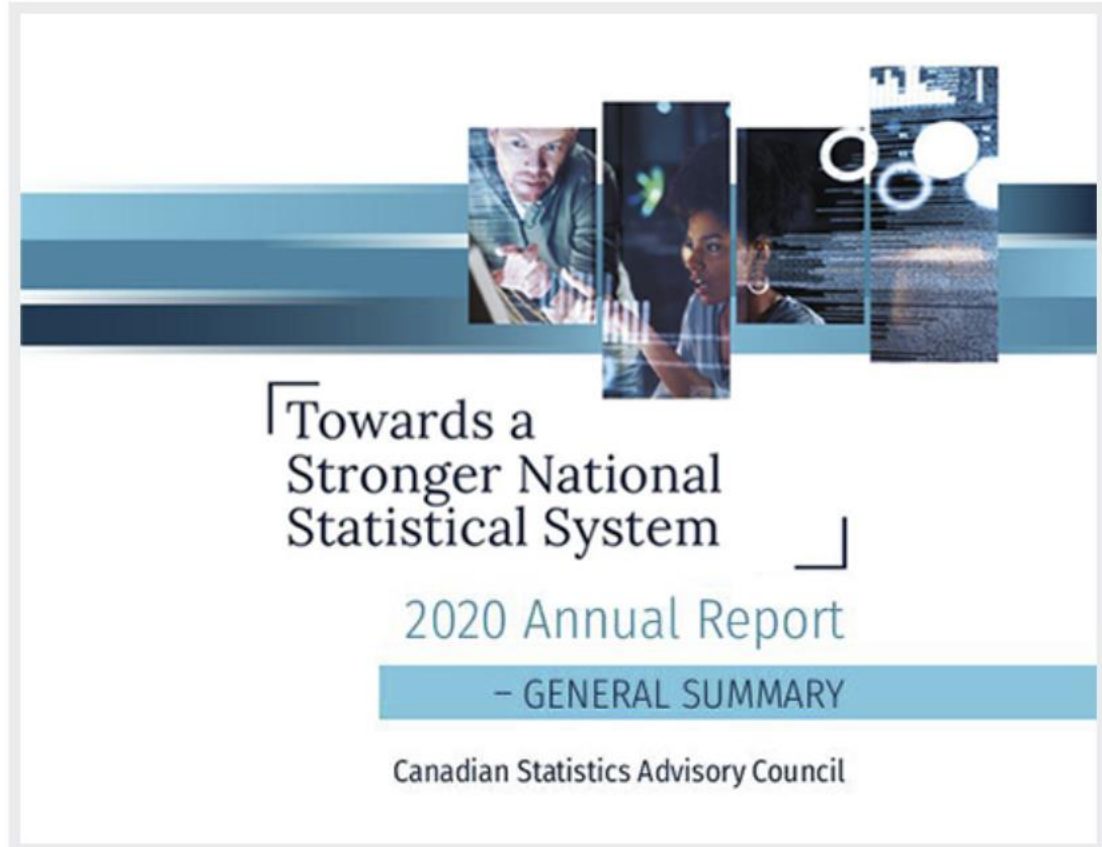

"The modernization of Statistics Canada's microdata access infrastructure is a long-awaited initiative that will greatly improve the quality and depth of research and analysis in Canada across all sectors; however, its timeline for full implementation is too long and should be accelerated."

It is recommended that Statistics Canada accelerate the modernization of the Microdata Access Program, including providing secure remote access by duly authorized researchers to its anonymized microdata and streamlining the current authentication process for granting secure access to Statistics Canada's microdata.

Since the opening of the first RDC in 2000, the Canadian Research Data Centre Network has expanded and now includes over 30 secure data laboratories in which over 2,000 duly authorized researchers across Canada conduct advanced quantitative social science and health research.

Reports

https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/about/relevant/CSAC