
Measured progress: A new National Scorecard provides the framework for smart and inclusive long-term growth for Canada

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This is the third and final article [in a series](#) published as a collaboration between The Philanthropist and Century Initiative.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affirmed an adage often attributed to management guru Peter Drucker: “What gets measured gets managed.” The latest COVID-19 case numbers and vaccination rates are not just frequent topics of discussion – they are a vital input into the decision-making process of policy-makers and public health officials. Without the careful data collection, analysis, and modelling of epidemiologists and public health experts, Canadian policy-makers would lack the necessary context to react, adapt, and plan. Responsive, real-time data has been the lifeblood of the pandemic response.

Canada’s post-COVID recovery requires a similar data-driven approach. Employment rates, income inequality, affordable housing, and accessible childcare are just some of the key indicators we must track to ensure that Canada’s population and economy are poised not just for recovery, but for our long-term success, as I illustrated in my recent *Philanthropist* article, [“Canada at a Crisis Point: Do We Manage Our Growth or Accept Our Decline?”](#) The challenge is to focus our efforts on meaningful *generational change* that extends far beyond a typical political life cycle.

The mission of Century Initiative falls squarely within this frame: to responsibly grow Canada's population to 100 million people by 2100. Population growth is key to Canada's prosperity, resilience, and global influence; it provides us with the demographic horsepower to care for our aging population, contribute to sustainable urbanization, and diversify our economy to withstand global economic uncertainty and transformation.

Century Initiative's mission focuses on *smart, inclusive growth*. Done well, population growth can contribute to a sustainable, inclusive, resilient, and prosperous Canada, both now and in the future. We need population growth to stabilize vital social support programs that all Canadians rely upon, such as employment insurance or the Canada Pension Plan. Canada's aging population relies on a robust social safety net to ensure that seniors retire with dignity and receive high-quality care in their final years. Looking forward, population growth will increase Canada's tax base and economic output and help us pay for ambitious new policies and programs that will benefit us for years to come, such as climate change mitigation and adaptation and working toward reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

While we need to grow our population, to do it right we have to focus on more than just levels of immigration and fertility rates. We need to think about all the other factors that contribute to encouraging and sustaining smart population growth – from planning and investing in infrastructure (including digital infrastructure), to promoting entrepreneurship and job creation, to providing early childhood supports that encourage Canadians to grow their families. Measuring our progress in these domains is essential to achieve smart, inclusive growth that benefits all Canadians.

The measurement challenge

Measuring progress toward an objective with an 80-year time horizon is undoubtedly challenging. Short-term planning is contradicted by rapidly changing realities, so it is not surprising that businesses and policy-makers often align forecasting with fiscal and electoral cycles. Taking a longer-term view is further constrained by a lack of clear, compelling data. Century Initiative board member Dr. Marie Delorme describes the challenge this way: "We cannot afford *not* to think about how future generations are impacted by today's policy choices. A thriving Canada bridges the past with the present and looks generations into the future. Building on today's insights to develop forward-looking data and to reasonably predict future outcomes is the key to facilitate a shift in thinking."

Century Initiative's [inaugural National Scorecard](#), released on March 30, 2021, addresses this gap. The Scorecard provides a macro-level perspective on how Canada is progressing toward the goal of growing Canada's population to 100 million by 2100. The Scorecard doesn't just focus on the population target, however; it also looks at related indicators that measure Canada's readiness to adapt to population growth, such as access to affordable childcare, the ability to attract and retain immigrants, and Canada's capacity to grow well into the future.

The Scorecard compiles numerous data sources to provide an up-to-date and user-friendly tool for policy-makers and sector leaders. It is unique in that it pulls together data points and issues that may seem disconnected on the surface but that have a cumulative impact on what the future of Canada will look like.

While the Scorecard does not provide exhaustive analysis on every social and economic issue,

it provides a clear framework to quickly analyze how Canada is progressing, on an annual basis, on those indicators that are essential to growth.

This work is critical now more than ever. Canadian policy think tanks and academic research institutes are increasingly facing challenges with funding – in some cases, resulting in them [closing their doors](#). The number of independent Canadian policy organizations with sufficient resources to provide detailed, high-quality research and analysis on social and economic issues continues to decline, and this trend comes with a cost. Without clear, focused data, we don't know how far we have come – or where we are going.

How the National Scorecard works

The National Scorecard will be released annually. This first edition focuses on 40 key indicators structured around seven key themes:

- On growing to 100 million (3 indicators): These indicators are directly connected to Century Initiative's objective of achieving a Canadian population of 100 million by 2100: population growth, immigration admissions, and Canada's fertility rate.
- Immigration (6 indicators): These indicators focus on increasing Canada's immigration and improving outcomes for immigrants' well-being and community integration once they arrive. Some examples of indicators include the immigrant income gap and the regional retention rates of immigrants.
- Economy, employment and entrepreneurship (8 indicators): These indicators focus on strengthening Canada's economy and labour market for the future. Some examples of indicators include Canada's productivity and labour-force participation rate.
- Education and training (5 indicators): These indicators focus on education and training as strategies to reduce inequality and diversify Canada's economy with a skilled labour force. Some examples of indicators include Canada's spending on public education and the proportion of the population with post-secondary education.
- Support for children and families (5 indicators): Children and families are a key area for policy development and public investment, especially in the context of Canada's future success. Some of these indicators include the participation in childcare and availability of parental leave.
- Infrastructure and urban development (7 indicators): As Canada's population grows, so too do its urban environments. Infrastructure investments, housing affordability, and access to broadband internet are just some of the indicators in this area that are essential for economic growth and prosperity.
- On growing well (6 indicators): This final category focuses on general indicators that are closely connected with sustainable population growth, including income inequality, life expectancy, and environmental sustainability.

These indicators provide a point-in-time benchmark for how Canada compares with its international counterparts and with national targets. The indicators are assessed on a four-point scale: leading (ranking among the best internationally), on track (meeting or expecting to meet the target identified), needs attention (within a range to meet the target), and falling behind (lagging behind comparable countries or national targets). Each category also includes a "snapshot" of how COVID-19 has impacted Canada's progress.

The data for each indicator are drawn from a range of sources, including Statistics Canada, the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and private public-sentiment surveys. Numerous Canadian policy experts contributed to the development of the Scorecard. Century Initiative will continue to seek feedback to strengthen and refine the process over time.

A new tool for the sector

The Scorecard is designed to help Canadian policy-makers, funders, and non-profit sector leaders adopt a longer-term perspective when planning policies and programs that contribute to national growth and prosperity. Mark Wiseman, chair of the Century Initiative board, describes the opportunity this way: “Non-profit and charitable sector organizations in Canada have done an outstanding job at addressing the emergent challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, whether that be homelessness, food insecurity, or isolation among seniors. The National Scorecard is just one tool to help organizations step back momentarily from operating in ‘crisis mode’ and see how their very meaningful work contributes to Canada’s long-term big picture.”

The Scorecard may also help organizations anticipate future policy issues and challenges that are relevant to their work. Being “future-focused” can be a strategic advantage for organizations – it makes them more adaptive, more resilient, and more intentional about how they allocate resources. As Catarina Tully and Louise Pulford describe in their article [“‘Future-Fit’ Philanthropy: Why Philanthropic Organizations Will Need Foresight to Leave a Lasting Legacy of Change”](#): “Whatever systemic challenges the sector feels it is facing at present, you can be sure they will deepen in intensity over the next decade.” Public health crises, climate change, austerity, and increasing inequality are just some of the social and economic challenges the sector will face in the future. In this unpredictable and destabilizing environment, organizations that are future-focused are best positioned to succeed.

Organizations can be more future-focused by integrating the Scorecard into their work in numerous ways. Philanthropic organizations may consider using the Scorecard as a tool to identify funding priority areas for granting. For instance, the Scorecard can help identify a gap that an organization could be well placed to fill through its mandate and work. Non-profit organizations may use the Scorecard to identify areas of potential collaboration with other organizations that are working on adjacent policy issues. The Scorecard indicators may also provide guidance on how to measure less tangible concepts, such as growth, prosperity, or social cohesion. The Scorecard also provides examples of indicators that reflect “readiness” for population growth that may be applied in other contexts (e.g. measuring social well-being). Lastly, the Scorecard may provide a tool for non-profit and philanthropic organizations involved in advocacy to prioritize issues and align their advocacy efforts across the sector.

Where Canada is falling behind

Century Initiative’s inaugural 2021 National Scorecard identified the following key issues as focus areas where Canada is “falling behind” relative to its international counterparts:

- **Productivity:** Canada is currently ranked 18th out of 36 OECD countries for productivity (measured as GDP per hour worked). While Canada’s productivity level has improved modestly over the last 20 years, it remains far below its target.
- **Spending on research and development:** This indicator is closely connected to growth and innovation. Canada is currently ranked 21st out of 34 OECD countries, with business spending on research and development only 0.79% of national GDP in 2019.

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- Household debt: Household debt continues to climb in Canada. In 2019, the percentage of household debt as a proportion of net household disposable income increased to 186%. Household debt is a key indicator of economic vulnerability and fragility, with ripple effects for long-term housing affordability and the sustainability of the financial sector.
 - Public spending on training: Investing in Canada's labour force is essential for a vibrant, diversified economy. Canada's percentage of spending on training has declined in recent decades, reaching an all-time low in 2018. Canada currently ranks 18th out of 32 OECD countries.
 - Availability of childcare: The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses in Canada's patchwork childcare system and the critical need for a national childcare policy. Childcare is essential for increasing rates of labour-force participation, particularly among women.
 - Child and youth well-being: Canada ranked 30th among 38 rich countries for the well-being of children and youth under the age of 18 in UNICEF's 2020 Report Card. Child and youth well-being is an important indicator of quality of life and foreshadows whether children and youth will successfully transition to adulthood.
 - Public spending related to children and families: This indicator reflects the degree to which governments prioritize investing in children and families. Canada is well behind other international counterparts in this area, ranking 29th out of 37 OECD countries.
 - Quality of broadband internet: Higher broadband internet speeds have a direct impact on social connection, economic growth, and access to education at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. Canada currently ranks 27th out of 37 OECD countries.
 - Environmental sustainability: Canada's greenhouse gas emissions have increased in recent years, posing a challenge for the country's transition to a low-carbon economy. Canada currently ranks 29th out of 32 OECD countries in this area and has significant potential for improvement.

These focus areas demonstrate some of the key policy challenges Canada faces in our path to long-term growth and prosperity. The Scorecard's approach to macro-level measurement on key social and economic issues illustrates that we all have a role to play. By measuring our progress, we can manage it and make the strategic decisions we need to make as a country to address gaps and leverage our progress to propel Canada forward.

We invite your feedback on the National Scorecard and how it can be improved to be more relevant to your work. Please comment below or share your feedback directly to info@centuryinitiative.ca.