



Canadian Council on
Social Development
Conseil canadien de
développement social

Keeping Canadians in the Dark

Prime Minister Harper's decision to scrap the Long Form Census and replace it with a voluntary National Household Survey whose results will be kept confidential will almost guarantee that Canadians will know less about themselves today than ever before...so much for the information age.

Some Canadians may ask? Does this really matter? Filling out the Census is a burden and really, why does the government need to know so much about me? What about my privacy?

Indeed it does matter. Information in the census along with other Statistics Canada surveys act as a compass, a guide to assist all levels of government, service agencies, planners, universities and policy makers in making important decisions about where to allocate resources, determine how we are progressing as a country, where are we struggling and set our national priorities.

In essence it paints a picture of Canada, helps us determine who we are today and guides us in planning for our future. It is also an invaluable tool that helps us understand the past, are we fairing better or worse than in years before?

Privacy has been cited as the key rationale in making this decision, yet, we all know that there are many provisions for privacy in the census and as a nation have rarely ever heard concerns about our privacy with respect to the census. Canadians understand that sharing their information in a manner that cloaks their identity ultimately is in our best interest which is why we gladly share our most sensitive information, our health information for research and quality improvement, knowing more will only make essential services better. The same can be said about sharing information when we fill out our census the more we know, the better served we will be. And we trust our public institutions to honour their obligations to us.

There is evidence that the voluntary nature of what the government is proposing as an alternative to the Long Form will provide us with skewed data and limit our understanding of specific populations. Lower income earners, new Canadians, Aboriginal Canadians and higher income earners tend to respond less to voluntary surveys. So yes, we will know less, less about the vulnerable groups, less about where to invest resources and measure progress.

Canadians deserve better, and should demand better. If the Prime Minister would have sought inputs, he would have heard from the experts, Canada's Census is one of the best in the world, politicians should not meddle in something that experts have laboriously developed. But then again, he doesn't want to hear from us, even through its about us. A very unCanadian thing to announce the eve of Canada Day.

What is the Long Form Census? It asks 53 additional questions to 20 per cent of Canadian households at census time, mostly focusing on social, economic, cultural questions.



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The Canadian Council on Social Development is Canada's leading authority in social policy. The CCSD leads the **Community Social Data Strategy** a pan Canadian program that enables municipalities and community based organizations to access data from Statistics Canada in order to better understand and respond to understand the social and economic trends within their individual communities.

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