Ontario Social Assistance Data for Research

Ministry of Community and Social Services-Statistics
Canada/Research Data Center Pilot Project
November 2015
Outline

- Purpose of the MCSS-Statistics Canada RDC pilot
- MCSS Strategic Priorities and Research Interest
- Ontario Social Assistance Programs and Data
- Key Pilot Project Accomplishments
- Questions
Ontario’s Open Government Mandate

• Ontario is adopting best practices that have been working in other jurisdictions to inform its approach to Open Government to improve transparency, effectiveness and accountability.

• As part of the Open Government, we are committed to:
  • Increasing the opportunity for the public to have better access to, learn about and participate in government
  • Working with ministers to develop and advance the Open Government Action Plan, including the ongoing response to the Engagement Team’s recommendations

• Priority will be on “doing open government right” including a number of specific projects. Examples may include:
  • Using pilot project with Statistics Canada and their Research Data Centres to inform and support the Poverty Reduction Strategy (pilot project in development)
Purpose of the MCSS-Statistics Canada RDC Pilot

• To explore opportunities to improve access to the ministry’s social assistance data by the research and academic community, consistent with the Open Government initiative

• To obtain relevant research to support evidence-based policy decisions and program development

• To improve engagement with the academic community

• To pilot the process and procedures for bringing provincial ministry data into the Statistics Canada RDC Program for the purpose of research
Ministry of Community and Social Services’ Mandate

Transforming Social Assistance and Developmental Services

• Driving long-term transformation of the social assistance system
  • Improving incomes, encouraging work and enhancing access to core supports outside of the social assistance system
  • Revise key benefits to improve the accountability and integrity of the social assistance system
• Transform the delivery of developmental services in Ontario to help adults with developmental disabilities and their families live as independently as possible
• Seek support and work together with the Federal Government to provide services to vulnerable Ontarians
MCSS Research Interests

To deliver on the ministry’s priorities, MCSS is interested in the following research areas:

- understanding disability (including financial and human impacts)
- understanding impacts/effects of social assistance on demographic sub-groups (e.g. urban/rural clients, Aboriginal/First Nations, immigrants/newcomers, etc.)
- understanding effective, sustainable employment outcomes and motivating people to work
- examining social assistance caseloads and long-term attachment/dependency, including impacts/influence of policy instruments and external factors (i.e. socio-economic and labour market conditions)
- conducting inter-jurisdictional comparisons
Ontario Social Assistance Programs

• In Ontario, income and employment supports are provided to single adults and families who are in financial need through two social assistance (SA) programs:

  • **Ontario Works** provides financial and employment assistance to help people move towards paid employment and independence

  • **Ontario Disability Support Program** (ODSP) provides financial assistance and employment support to enable people with disabilities and their families to live as independently as possible in their communities
Ontario Social Assistance Data

- Researchers have access to de-identified microdata for the two social assistance programs for the period 2003 to 2013 which will be provided through 5 separate files:
  - benefit unit (family) information
  - member information
  - pay detail (benefit) information
  - income/deduction information
  - skills information

- Researchers will also have access to monthly time-series data on the Ontario Works and ODSP provincial caseloads from 1990 to 2013
Benefit Unit (Family) Information

**Benefit Unit Characteristics**
- Family composition (single individual, single-parent family, couple, two-parent family)
- Family size (number of dependent children, number of dependent adults)
- Living arrangement (renter, homeowner, etc.)
- Postal code

**BU Program status**
- Program (Ontario Works / ODSP)
- Program Status (ongoing / terminated)
- Reason for Termination
- Amount of Financial Assistance (FA) received
- Amount of Employment Assistance (EA) received
- Number of consecutive months on assistance

- Almost 61 million records
- 1.4 million distinct benefit units
Member Information

Individual Characteristics
- Date of Birth
- Gender
- Role in Benefit Unit (primary applicant, spouse, dependent adult, dependent child)
- Type of Disability [for ODSP only]
- Immigration Status (foreign born, landing date, arrival date)
- Participation in Ontario Works Employment Assistance Activities (yes/no for each type of activity)
- Receipt of ODSP Employment Supports (yes/no)

Member Program Status
- Program (Ontario Works / ODSP)
- Member Status (active, non-contributing)

- Almost 98 million records
- 2.3 million distinct individuals
Pay Detail (Benefit) Information

- **Budgetary Requirements**
  - Basic Needs Allowance
  - Shelter Allowance
  - Other Special Purpose Allowances (e.g., Remote Communities Allowance, Special Diet Allowance)

- **Benefits Received**
  - Health-Related Benefits (e.g., Mandatory Special Necessities)
  - Employment-Related Benefits

- **Reductions (Income)**
  - Employment Earnings
  - Other Government Income (CPP-D, OAS/GIS, EI, WSIB)
  - Family Support
  - Other Income

- Over 197 million benefit (payment) records
Income/Deduction Information

Gross Income
- Employment Earnings
- Other Government Income (CPP-D, OAS/GIS, EI, WSIB)
- Family Support
- Other Income

Net Income
- Employment Earnings
- Other Government Income (CPP-D, OAS/GIS, EI, WSIB)
- Family Support
- Other Income

- Almost 31 million income records
Member Skills Information

Type of Skill

- Basic Education
- Certificate/Diploma/License
- Language
- Portable Skills
- On-the-Job Skills Training
- Trades

National Occupation Code (NOC)

- 47.1 million records
Opportunities

• 132 months of information
• Documentation on historical policy changes
• Ability to track individuals, benefit units over time
• Ability to determine dependence (time) on social assistance
• Time series-type analysis
• Panel data-type analysis
• Geographical analysis

Limitations

Data files do not include:

• individuals who apply for SA but are found to be ineligible for SA or who chose to discontinue their application
• asset types and levels
• benefits provided in kind
• information on Emergency Assistance, Temporary Care Assistance and Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities

Data fields on recipient characteristics that are related to eligibility determination are relatively more reliable/accurate
Key Pilot Project Accomplishments

- MCSS and Statistics Canada developed and released a “Request for Proposals” in August 2014
- Seventeen proposals were endorsed and are underway

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- Areas of research covered by the research projects include:
  - Long-term attachment to social assistance, recycling behaviour and employment outcomes
  - Geography of mental health and social assistance in Ontario
  - Does “Ontario Work” for people with disabilities?
Recap

- As part of Open Government we are committed to engage, collaborate and innovate.

- The priority of MCSS is to drive long-term transformation of the social assistance system.

- We will leverage and share data in order to unlock the power of data and help us reach better informed policy decisions and program development.

- The purpose of the pilot is to build relationships and leverage data to help expand research in order to support evidence-based policy decisions and program development.

- We will assess the viability of the pilot and if it’s deemed a success, plan on making this an on-going operational process.