

CRDCN Research Syntheses: Background Information and Guidelines

Since 2000, the Canadian Research Data Centre Network (CRDCN), in partnership with Statistics Canada's Research Data Centre Program, has transformed quantitative social science research in Canada. In secure computer laboratories on university campuses across Canada, university, government and other approved researchers are able to analyse a vast array of social, economic and health data.

Researchers use these data to investigate a wide range of social, economic and health-related issues, from child poverty to eldercare, from school success to workplace stress, from Aboriginal health to immigrant integration, from family-life balance to health service and policy.

CRDCN syntheses overall goal is to assess the strength and value of research undertaken through research data centres and analyze their implications relative to key policy issues. Their specific objectives are to:

- ensure that research results are absorbed by policy-makers and the public;
- contribute to the development and adoption of knowledge-informed policy;
- identify key evidence gaps in order to encourage policy-relevant research.

CRDCN syntheses are written by an expert in the field surveyed in a language suitable for a general audience. They are peer-reviewed and available in both English and French.

In order to achieve these objectives, a research synthesis should:

- state the policy question of interest and outline it as clearly and specifically as possible with respect to relevant Canadian programs and legislation and to current public debate;
- identify the empirical literature that is likely to shed light on this question and explain its relevance;
- provide a succinct summary of this literature, focusing on influential studies or studies that use particularly convincing methodologies or especially informative data, rather than aiming to be exhaustive;

- highlight the role of Canadian data and RDC research within this literature; i.e., how have these studies contributed to advancing the literature or to informing public policy in Canada?
- discuss, in lay terms, the methodological challenges that researchers face in generating evidence relevant to this question;
- assess the overall strength of the literature. Which questions have been answered fairly definitively? Where is the evidence sufficiently weak or uninformative that policy-makers should interpret it with caution? What are the important evidence gaps?
- provide a full discussion of the implications of this evidence for the key policy questions identified in (1).

Other editorial guidelines are as follows:

- length should be between 7,000 and 10,000 words;
- criteria for selecting and excluding studies should be clearly stated;
- figures should be included, as appropriate;
- the surveys and data sets used should be acknowledged;
- jargon should be minimized, definitions provided as needed and concepts explained;
- a 500 word summary should be included;
- a complete list of references should be compiled;
- studies in both French and English should be considered;
- a brief description (sample, methods, and results) of all relevant published studies should be included as an Appendix. This list should include studies that may not have been directly discussed in the research synthesis but which continue to be cited in the relevant literatures.