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New evidence reveals Canadian wellbeing on the decline

TORONTO, Ont. (Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2012) – The recession hit Canadians harder than economic numbers such as GDP have indicated and the decline in our wellbeing continues despite subsequent economic recovery, says the Honourable Roy Romanow, advisory board co-chair for the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW), housed in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo.

With the release of their second composite index, the CIW reports a 24% drop in Canadian wellbeing between 2008 and 2010. Further, from 1994 to 2010, Canada's economy, as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by a robust 28.9%, while improvements in Canadian wellbeing over the same 17-year period saw only a small 5.7% increase.

“The findings uncover some troubling truths about the connection between our economy and our wellbeing,” says Romanow. “When Canada's economy was thriving, Canadians saw only modest improvements in their overall quality of life, but when the economy faltered our wellbeing took a disproportionate step backward. It begs the question: Are our governments truly responding to the needs and values of everyday Canadians?”

The CIW report: *'How are Canadians Really doing?'* tracks 64 separate indicators within eight interconnected domains central to the lives of Canadians: *Community Vitality; Democratic Engagement; Education; Environment; Healthy Populations; Leisure and Culture; Living Standards; and Time Use.*

The report shows that since 2008 we have experienced a significant drop in our standard of living along with further declines in the health of our environment and our ability to participate in leisure and culture activities. Even growth areas such as health and education began to show signs of weakening.

“The recession and sluggish recovery have taken a big toll on Canadians,” says CIW co-chair, the Honourable Monique Bégin. “The deterioration in job quality and economic security, soaring long-term unemployment and persistent income inequality speak to the growing unease felt coast to coast. Our governments must recognize this reality as they make decisions on how to steer us forward, particularly given predictions of an extended period of weak economic growth.”

According to the report, not all is doom and gloom. Violent crime is at its lowest level since 1994, dropping every year since 2001 and property crime, also at its lowest level, is down 48% from 1994. The percentage of Canadians who feel safe walking after dark is at its highest level since that year. Canadians continue to report an increased sense of belonging to their communities.

“Despite the recession, our sense of community vitality continues to grow – this speaks to who we are as Canadians,” says Romanow. “We recognize our survival and progress depend on our ability to come together and remain united around shared values. Understanding how Canadians are really doing is critical for any government making decisions on how we move forward in our recovery.”

Read more about the CIW or to view short video and infographic: www.ciw.ca

About the University of Waterloo

In just half a century, the University of Waterloo, located at the heart of Canada's technology hub, has become one of Canada's leading comprehensive universities with 34,000 full- and part-time students in undergraduate and graduate programs. Waterloo, as home to the world's largest post-secondary co-operative education program, embraces its connections to the world and encourages enterprising partnerships in learning, research and discovery. In the next decade, the university is committed to building a better future for Canada and the world by championing innovation and collaboration to create solutions relevant to the needs of today and tomorrow. For more information about Waterloo, visit www.uwaterloo.ca.

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