EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) is a national initiative led by the Atkinson Charitable Foundation (ACF) and is supported by a national network of partners. The CIW’s ambition is to create a single, composite index for measuring the wellbeing of Canadians that serves as an alternative to traditional and economic-based measures such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The tendency to focus on a narrow set of economic indicators provides a limited perspective, one that fails to capture many of the things that are important to the wellbeing of Canadians. Instead, the CIW is based on the understanding that a true measure of wellbeing must link economic realities with the social, cultural, and environmental conditions that define the wellbeing of Canada, its people and communities. The CIW is a shared vision for sustainable wellbeing. Initially, it is based on a number of interrelated domains, including: Community Vitality; Democratic Engagement; Education; Environment; Healthy Populations; Leisure and Culture; Living Standards; and Time Use. Collectively, the domains of the CIW provide a foundation for the creation of a coherent national system of indicators for measuring progress toward or movement away from achieving the CIW vision – wellbeing for Canadians. The CIW with all eight domains will be released in the fall of 2010.

The purpose of the Leisure and Culture Domain Final Report is to provide a guiding document describing the creation and inclusion of a set of Leisure and Culture indicators into the CIW. The principal objectives that guided the development of the final report were:

1. To undertake a thorough review of academic and professional (grey) literature: (a) to define leisure and culture in a clear and precise fashion, and (b) to address the contribution that leisure and culture make to enhancing the wellbeing of Canadians and Canadian communities;

2. To identify the most prescient indicators reflecting the principal contribution of leisure and culture to wellbeing;

3. To describe the selected indicators and report on their trends over the identified time period; and

4. To identify areas where further investigation is needed to validate the identified measures and indices.

Conceptualizing Leisure and Culture

The approach taken to leisure and culture is guided by an overarching conceptual framework focused on leisure that recognizes the institutional and policy-based structures organized around both leisure and culture. As a conceptual guide for the literature review and methods used, the following definitions of leisure and of culture were adopted:

“Leisure is considered primarily as a condition, sometimes referred to as a state of being, an attitude of mind or a quality of experience. It is distinguished by the individual’s perceived freedom to act and distinguished from conditions imposed by necessity. It is assumed to be pleasurable and, although it may appeal because
of certain anticipated benefits, it is intrinsically motivated: it is an end in itself and valuable for its own sake.” (Cushman & Laidler, 1990, p. 1)

“Culture is the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group that encompasses not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs.” (UNESCO, 2009, p. 1)

The conceptual framework provided the overarching structure for linking the leisure and culture definitions and related concepts with our understanding of the wellbeing that Canadians experience as a result of their engagement in this domain of their lives. In essence, leisure and culture were conceptualized as being defined by four aspects: participation in leisure, recreation, arts, and culture activities; perceptions associated with leisure and culture, including motives, benefits sought, and needs attainment; the experience of leisure and culture as a state of mind and the meaning and quality it holds for individuals; and the opportunities provided in support of leisure and culture, such as the variety of recreation facilities, designated open space and parks, and other arts, culture, and recreation sites. These aspects have shown over the years to be the best ways to conceptualize, recognize and measure, and understand leisure and culture in their multifaceted forms and to explore their relationship to wellbeing.

Within the conceptual framework, the perspective taken to wellbeing was based on the World Health Organisation’s (2001) more holistic definition: “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease, or infirmity” (p. 10). This definition recognizes, too, that health and wellbeing does not refer to just the physical wellbeing of individuals, but refers to their social, emotional, spiritual, and cultural wellbeing as well as that of the whole community.

The conceptual framework provided the guidance for the first phase of the project – a comprehensive literature review and initial selection of potential indicators. The second phase of the project focused on the selection of potential indicators to represent the leisure and culture domain, with the ultimate goal of identifying the “best” eight headline indicators to be recommended for the CIW. To ensure validity and reliability, indicator selection was guided primarily by the conceptual framework and the literature review. Four acceptability criteria were identified as most appropriate for the leisure and culture domain indicator selection process: validity, quality, relevance, and feasibility. Each indicator was scored on each criterion, a summary score was calculated for each indicator, and then the indicators were ranked. A two-stage process was subsequently followed to select and evaluate potential indicators. While respecting the overall rankings, the top 35 indicators were scrutinized for their suitability given the goals of the CIW and the desire to include a “mix” of the best indicators based on their criteria scoring, but also on their suitability to represent conceptually the key components of the leisure and culture domain. Based on this process, eight indicators emerged to best represent the leisure and culture domain.
Recommended Leisure and Culture Headline Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participation</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Time Use</td>
<td>Percentage of time spent on the previous day in social leisure activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Use</td>
<td>Percentage of time spent on the previous day in arts and culture activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Use</td>
<td>Average number of hours in past year volunteering for culture and recreation organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Participation</td>
<td>Average monthly frequency of participation in physical activity lasting over 15 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity Participation</td>
<td>Average attendance per performance in past year at all performing arts performances</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity Participation</td>
<td>Average visitation per site in past year to all National Parks and National Historic Sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Participation</td>
<td>Average number of nights away per trip in the past year on vacation trips to destinations over 80 kilometres from home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures</td>
<td>Expenditures in past year on all aspects of culture and recreation as a percentage of total household expenditures</td>
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While these eight recommended headline indicators are judged to be the best representatives for the Leisure and Culture Domain, several other indicators also could be considered as suitable substitutes for these headline indicators. These alternative indicators also had comparatively high overall scores on the acceptability criteria and reasonable feasibility that the necessary data will be gathered on a regular basis.

Some Trends in Leisure and Culture Participation in Canada

Data on the eight headline indicators of the leisure and culture domain are drawn from a variety of national surveys, provided principally by Statistics Canada, conducted periodically in the years from 1994 to 2009. An examination of the indicators over this time period revealed some important trends, and notably, participation overall in leisure and culture among Canadians has declined. Some of the specific trends are summarized below:

- even though between 45 and 60% of Canadians report participating in social leisure activities on a typical day, participation overall has declined in recent years, especially among females;
• participation in arts and culture activities is comparatively lower, but has remained fairly stable;

• average number of hours spent volunteering for culture and recreation organizations has declined; however, the time volunteering for these organizations as a percentage of all volunteering activity has dropped dramatically, from 32% in 1997 to 22% in 2004, and the decline is most pronounced among Canadians who are 25 to 34 years of age;

• average monthly participation in physical activity has increased somewhat since 1994 and even though there are differences among them, this increase is true for all age groups and both genders;

• both total and average attendance at performing arts performances have declined steadily since 2001, although average attendance rebounded somewhat in 2006, in part due to the fewer number of performances available;

• total visitation to Canada’s National Parks and National Historic Sites has dropped off dramatically, especially since 2001, although the decline in average visitation per site has been less pronounced;

• overall, apart from the two most recent years, the average number of nights away on vacation have declined somewhat even though the total number of nights away has increased slightly. These patterns suggest that Canadians are taking more vacations, but each trip is on average of shorter duration; and

• average total household expenditures on culture and recreation has steadily increased since 1997 for all age groups and both genders. Despite these increases, expenditures on culture and recreation each year as a percentage of all household expenditures has remained stable at about 21% of the total.

Challenges and Recommendations

Considerations as we move forward within the CIW context include an understanding of the challenges and potential opportunities associated with the development and collection of indicator data. Among the challenges to be faced are the following:

• making comparisons across activity types, regions, and over time is difficult given the variety of ways in which different aspects of leisure and culture are measured. Different surveys define leisure and culture participation quite differently, sometimes relying on open, inclusive definitions while other times using closed, exclusive definitions where only certain forms of engagement are included;
• measures of leisure perceptions – typically among the most valid indicators of wellbeing – are rarely included in most large scale surveys, and when they are, they are usually presented as single-item measures; and

• “negative” indicators (e.g., leisure behaviours that are detrimental to wellbeing) present a number of unique challenges, including a lack of consensus on the effect they have on wellbeing and unclear markers of when certain behaviours become negative.

Among the opportunities for the Leisure and Culture Domain to establish a stronger presence, are:

• the need for a dedicated national survey on leisure and culture that incorporates more comprehensive and robust measures of participation and perceptions;

• the need to make data that are available more accessible; and

• the recognition of the common ground that indicators within the Leisure and Culture Domain share with other domains, which would help build integrated visions of those things that most contribute to wellbeing.

In summary, it is clear that leisure and culture make significant contributions to the wellbeing of Canadians and Canadian communities. However, the overall decline in the engagement of Canadians in this important lifestyle domain is of concern. Coupled with the general decline in support for public agencies and non-profit and voluntary organizations responsible for leisure and culture, this trend is even more troubling for the wellbeing of Canadians and their communities.

Hence, regardless of how much progress we make in identifying, collecting, and summarizing the best data for the creation of indicators related to leisure and culture in the lives of Canadians, losses in our capacity to develop and provide meaningful venues and opportunities for leisure and culture threatens the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and society at large. We must strengthen our resolve to ensure that our capacity to sustain and further develop such resources is maintained. The development of the Canadian Index on Wellbeing, with its constituent indicators focused on leisure and culture, is an important step in this direction.
Based in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing Network is an independent, non-partisan group of national and international leaders, researchers, organizations, and grassroots Canadians. Its mission is to report on quality of life at the national level and promote a dialogue on how to improve it through evidence-based policies that are responsive to the needs and values of Canadians.

The Network’s signature product is the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW). The CIW measures Canada’s quality of life and tracks progress in eight interconnected categories. It allows us, as Canadians, to see if we are better off or worse off than we used to be — and why. It helps identify what we need to change to achieve a better outcome and to leave the world a better place for the generations that follow.

The Honourable Roy J. Romanow, Chair
The Honourable Monique Bégin, Deputy Chair