

**The Canadian Index of Wellbeing  
and its Successes as a Tool for Planning, Policymaking, and Nation  
Building**

**Speaking notes for**

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Good morning everyone. It's a great pleasure to join you today – albeit electronically.

I'm sorry I can't be there in person, but in just six days we're going to be releasing our second annual Canadian Index of Wellbeing. It will be another "milestone moment" for Canada, so we decided it would be better if my "virtual" image made the trip to New Delhi, while my "physical" one stayed here to prepare.

Let me begin by thanking the OECD and the Government of India for this opportunity to participate in the Fourth World Forum on "Statistics, Knowledge and Policy".

It's hard for me to believe that it's been more than five years since I delivered a keynote speech to the Second World Forum in Istanbul.

And it's almost as difficult to believe how much we've all accomplished in that time.

I'm very pleased that our collective efforts are beginning to bear fruit. I congratulate all of you on your work and successes in going well beyond GDP to create more complete and integrated ways of measuring societal wellbeing.

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When we in Canada first started talking – roughly a decade ago – about measuring and reporting on our progress as a society, we realized that it begged the fundamental question, "progress toward what?"

We made a firm commitment that whatever we came up with, it would have to be rooted in Canadian experience and grounded in the values that have shaped our country – fairness, diversity, equity, inclusion, health, safety, economic security, democracy and sustainability.

We began by bringing together under one umbrella, leading Canadian and international indicator researchers and practitioners; public-policy experts; community groups and wellbeing advocates.

You'll note that our leadership comes not from government as in most of your countries, but from people who work in civil society. Our venture has been entirely conceived and implemented by citizens and citizen-based groups.

We made this choice early on in our developmental process. We felt that to earn the trust of the Canadian people, it was absolutely critical, that we be seen as free from any partisan interest or government influence.

That decision, of course, posed some challenges for us in terms of funding. We had to rely pretty heavily on seed money from several charitable foundations.

We knew that approach would work best in Canada and that's really what every country has to do – decide which path will lead to a better quality of life. We must be willing to embrace all avenues to success.

We do, of course, talk to and engage with government. When we release our second composite index next week we will be setting up briefing sessions with our federal government. And when we release provincial reports early in 2013, we will organize provincial government briefings as well.

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I'm getting a little ahead of myself, so let me go back to an earlier part of our story.

As a citizen-driven organization, our first big step was to engage Canadians through three rounds of coast-to-coast-to coast public consultations – and believe me, in a country the size of Canada there's a lot of land within those coasts.

We asked Canadians to speak candidly about what mattered to their quality of life and what we should be measuring.

Over the next few years, our research experts designed the Canadian Index of Wellbeing framework – or CIW for short.

The CIW includes 64 quality-of-life indicators, grouped into 8 categories or “domains”.

We also distill these numbers into a composite index – with a single number that goes up and down much like a stock market index, and provides a quick snapshot of how our quality of life is changing, for better or worse.

We are strong believers in the composite index approach. The simplicity of it makes it a highly effective communications tool. It's our flagship product and it's a great conversation starter.

Our experts also put together 15 years worth of data with the support of *Statistics Canada*. They wrote detailed technical studies on each of the domains and put us through a rigorous peer and validation process to ensure that our methodology was sound and our data the best available.

To make a long story short, the CIW is now housed at the globally renowned University of Waterloo.

Our work is built around two pillars of activity. The first is leading-edge research. The university has made a commitment to build a better future for Canada and the world by championing innovation and collaboration in new and synergistic ways.

The second pillar is knowledge mobilization. This includes extensive public communications and community engagement. We see these activities as fundamental to the process of transformative change.

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Last October, we released our first composite index of wellbeing. I won't go into all of our findings, though I would encourage you to check them out for yourselves at our website [ciw.ca](http://ciw.ca).

Here is our big-picture finding and I'm sure many of you have or will find something similar:

Between 1994 and 2008, Canada's GDP rose by a very robust 31%. Meanwhile, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing went up by less than one-third of that.

In other words, much of our productivity gain did not translate into improvements in the day-to-day quality of life of typical Canadians. In fact, not a single quality-of-life category kept pace with GDP.

We did see some modest gains in areas such as Living Standards and Community Vitality, but in other areas – the environment, time use, leisure and culture – we actually lost ground. We moved further away from the vision we have of ourselves as a society.

As a relatively rich country, Canada is very fortunate to have choices. Now for the first time we have an evidence-based, integrated picture upon which to base progressive policies that better reflect our needs and values.

Now more than ever Canadians are empowered to advocate for change and hold their governments accountable for the decisions they make.

My hope is that the CIW will open the door to a substantive national dialogue on the kinds of difficult challenges we will be confronted with over the coming decade, and the kinds of choices we have to make to optimize wellbeing for both humans and other species that share our planet.

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At the CIW, we are realistic in our approach. We recognize that paradigms shift slowly. Changing the national dialogue and refocusing public policy decisions will take place over time, not overnight.

But we're going to do our utmost to speed up the timeframe for change within Canada.

On the research front, we're planning to expand our data collection from the national level to provincial and community levels. We'll also be focusing more on wellbeing at the sub-population level, especially for groups most vulnerable to change.

On the communications front, as I indicated earlier we will be releasing our second composite index report on October 23. We hope it will once again spark a national dialogue on how we can improve the things that really matter in people's lives.

On the community engagement front we will be strengthening our links with many other organizations that are striving to improve quality of life at the community, municipal, provincial, and regional levels.

We are finding strong early interest in our work at the local level, where we are working from the "bottom up" with community-based organizations. We've already seen a number of municipalities and local groups use our framework to help bring about local change.

Over the coming years we're going to be expanding our efforts at that level because we believe that's where we'll achieve our greatest initial success.

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My friends, that, in a very large nutshell, is where we're at in our work in Canada.

We hope that you can learn from our experience, as we have learned from yours; and that we can continue to work together to build societies that are sustainable in every way – and that offer a better quality of life for everyone.

Thank you again for giving me this opportunity today. I wish you the best of luck in your deliberations, both this week and in the future.