



## Mission

The SPPCND actively and impartially strives to improve the quality of life for all residents of Cambridge and North Dumfries through community-based research, planning and action.

## Census Controversy

THE ISSUE: The Mandatory Long-Form Census has been made voluntary.  
What is the impact and why should we care?

### Background/ History

Census data is collected by the Federal Government through an Order in Council. Since 1971 two questionnaires have been used. Every five years, 80% of Canadian households are required to complete the Short Form Census questionnaire while 20% are required to complete the “Long Form”. Compared to the Short Form, the Long Form collects a much broader range of socio-economic data related to religion, income, education levels, employment, immigration status, dwellings, places of work, modes of transportation and other areas relevant to the lives of Canadians. The information obtained through this data collection is then analyzed and distributed by various means. This information is utilized by countless organizations in diverse sectors. As reported by The Canadian Press (2010), the Long Form Census is “relied on as a tool to respond to the needs and priorities of every Canadian (1)”.

### Who uses the data?

Many groups, such as businesses, non-profit organizations, marketers, economic developers, medical organizations, faith groups, cities, towns, and municipalities, rely on the information captured through the Long Form census. This information helps with planning and is a necessary component when contemplating funding needs for existing projects or assessing the feasibility of creating new projects. The methods that Statistics Canada employs are valid, reliable and recognized worldwide. The demographic and socioeconomic data collected becomes valuable sources of information that help create a greater understanding of the population of Canada as a whole and of its individual communities.



### Who made the decision and why?

In the spring of 2010, against the advice of experts across the country, the Federal Government announced that the Long Form Census would be eliminated for the May 2011 census. The 2011 Short Form (10 questions) will replace the 2006 Short Form (8 questions), and a new 2011 National Household Survey will replace the 2006 Long Form. The Government stated that the rationale for this decision was based on privacy related concerns. It has also been suggested that the data collection process is coercive due to the threat of jail time (while the Census is mandatory, no one has ever been incarcerated for non-completion of the forms).

## The consequences: What will happen as a result of the changes?

Many groups, including the Canadian Medical Association, Ontario Chamber of Commerce, and the Association of Ontario Municipalities have expressed concern regarding the abolishment of the mandatory Long Form, and less reliable than previous census results because of sampling errors. Those who do not speak English, Aboriginals, low-income earners and immigrants are less likely to be represented by a voluntary survey creating the potential for their further marginalization. Because of underrepresentation of this sector of society, results favouring citizens who are English speaking, literate, more highly educated and wealthier will likely be overrepresented in the data.



The government has responded to this concern by indicating they would increase the number of citizens who receive the questionnaire. They claim that this will correct any sampling errors that might result from the lack of mandatory responses. Although the government's solution addresses the potential for decreased responses, it does not attend to the problem that some vulnerable sectors of society are still less likely to complete a voluntary survey.

The change to the Long Form Census has caused concerns related to the comparability aspect of data collected over time. Without the longitudinal statistics, those who utilize census information will be unable to make sound decisions related to programming, education and planning. Without census data, "validity and reliability will be severely weakened.

As a result of the methodological changes, comparability between 2011 income, education and employment levels and census data from other years will be compromised and the ability to do longitudinal analysis will be lost." (2)

"Prior to making changes to the census long form, Statistics Canada conducted a study comparing the real results of the 2006 census to simulated results accounting for selection bias of a voluntary survey. There were many biases in the data". (2)

Statistics Canada is the only source for comprehensive, systematic, consistent, country wide data. The high calibre of information provided through the data collected from the Long Form Census is not currently available anywhere else.



## What effect will this have locally?

The proposed changes to the Statistics Canada data collection will affect many groups locally. The Long Form Census data is used by many divisions within communities for planning purposes.

**Community Program Planners** use the demographic information collected through the Long Form Census to plan their programs according to the needs of various sectors within the population. Without access to the detailed information obtained through this source, effective planning could not take place in any meaningful way. For example, to create opportunities for the aging population, planners need statistics to determine how many seniors live where. This information is only available through the data collected by the Long Form Census. Locally, a community planner stated, “Our health care system requires that we provide more and more supports for people to age at home as they live longer and longer – so we need detailed info about where they live and who their caregivers are (3).”



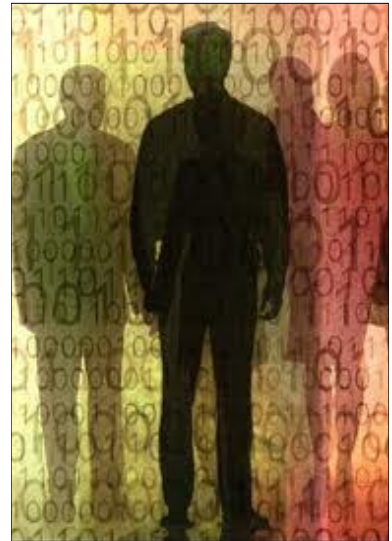
**Educational Institutions** use the Long Form Census data as it relates to the population, social, cultural, socio-economic, and physical aspects of communities. The data related to the ages, languages, and numbers of children help with planning how many classrooms and schools are required to manage changing community demographics. Post secondary institutions also require information for their specific goals and objectives related to various projects.

“Social and community services agencies have lost one of the most valuable tools for advocacy and action”. (2)

A local university administrator stated, “most of the projects and thesis-related work depends on having a deep understanding of the community... the house, the street, the neighbourhood, the district, the ward, the city, and the region... without such information, design and architecture becomes limited and generic - not meeting the specific needs and desires of residents and the community (4)”.

**Funders** use Long Form census data to ensure they have adequate information to make sound funding decisions. In order for organizations to provide financial backing for various projects, they need to have a foundation of information on which to make sound decisions. They need access to information about the needs and requirements of specific

communities and neighbourhoods. Without the information currently obtained through the Long Form Census data, funders will not have the necessary resources to make informed decisions regarding financial support for projects nor will they be able to motivate others to also invest. Locally, a funder indicated that, “the lack of reliable data from the census will hinder our knowledge of the community and our ability to not only grant but inspire donors to learn about the needs in the community and give back to our community (5)”.



## What has been done?

Hundreds of organizations representing most segments of society have written letters to the Minister of Industry to ask that the decision to make the Long Form Census voluntary be rescinded. Articles have been printed in many papers in an effort to bring about public awareness regarding this important issue.

“...understanding the Social Determinants of Health in various communities is largely reliant on the ability to measure income, education and employment levels” (2)

Numerous medical organizations have called on the Government of Canada to bring back the mandatory Long Form Census. The United Way Canada coordinated a letter written to the Minister of Industry signed by twenty-three large organizations who want the decision reversed. Educational institutions, and a list of over thirty municipalities and associations, representing over ninety percent of Canadians, have called on the Government of Canada to bring back the Long Form Census. In an excerpt from a letter sent to Stephen Harper: “It is hard to imagine a decision with a more damaging impact on Canada’s long term health, prosperity, and stability (6)”. All of this has been done and “yet the government refuses to reconsider its decision (7).”



## What Can You do?

- Become informed and take action
- Write letters to the Minister of Industry and contact your Member of Parliament
- Discuss this issue with friends, family and colleagues
- Join the ‘Keep the Canada Census Long Form’ Facebook page or sign an online petition

Find out more at: [www.savethecensus.ca](http://www.savethecensus.ca)  
[www.ccsd.ca](http://www.ccsd.ca) [www.datalibre.ca](http://www.datalibre.ca)

1. Groups launch new court challenge to government's census decision (2010, October, 21). *The Canadian Press*. Retrieved November 10, 2010 from: <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/canada/breakingnews/groups-launch-new-court-challenge-to-governments-census-decision-105468053.html>.
2. Romagnoli, A. (September, 2010) 2011 Census Long Form Briefing Notes YMCA of Cambridge & Kitchener-Waterloo (p. 2).
3. Personal Communication, Community Support Connections, Waterloo, ON
4. Personal Communication, University Administrator at the UW School of Architecture
5. Personal Communication, Cambridge & North Dumfries Community Foundation
6. Campey, J. (2010, July 26, 2010). Social Planning Toronto’s letter to Stephen Harper. Join the fight to save the Long Form Census in Canada! Retrieved November 19th, 2010 from: [http://www.savethecensus.ca/savethecensus.ca/SPTs\\_Letter\\_to\\_Harper.html](http://www.savethecensus.ca/savethecensus.ca/SPTs_Letter_to_Harper.html).

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