



# Administrative data for social impact in Canada

Progress Report

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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Administrative data—data collected by government and nonprofits for operational reasons—can be repurposed as a powerful tool for evidence-based decision making. These data could help evaluate the impact of social interventions, support advocacy efforts, and inform strategic planning of nonprofit programs. Sharing administrative data for nonprofit sector impact is already being explored in the UK. Here in Canada, these data remain difficult to for nonprofits to access, despite their untapped potential.

Powered by Data is exploring the creation of a policy agenda around administrative data use in Canada—and sees an exciting opportunity for diverse members of civil society to lead the creation of this agenda. Over the last year, we have been building towards a multi-stakeholder coalition of Canadian advocacy groups, nonprofit service providers, and funders to explore a potential policy agenda. We have been working towards this goal through stakeholder roundtables, community consultations, and preliminary policy research.

**This document serves as a summary of our activities, progress, and learnings to date.**

## 2018 Activities

**CIVIL SOCIETY COALITION-BUILDING.** We are building towards a multi-stakeholder coalition of funders, nonprofit service providers, and advocacy groups who will work together to design a policy agenda around administrative data reuse. Each group convened through a series of roundtable discussions in early 2018 and provided Powered by Data a mandate on moving forward on this issue.

**COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION.** Through a combination of roundtable discussions, conference workshops, and interviews with participating stakeholders, we collected civil society perspectives on the opportunities and risks of administrative data reuse for social impact.

**PRELIMINARY LANDSCAPE REVIEW.** We reviewed existing infrastructure, resources, and initiatives around accessing, using, and/or sharing administrative data to better understand the momentum for administrative data re-use within Canada. This also helped build an understanding of conditions for success; and identify what policy, infrastructure, or programmatic interventions would be needed to enable nonprofits to benefit from administrative data use.

## Key Learnings

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REUSE

1. **Most nonprofit service providers and advocacy groups we consulted have clear ideas around how they could use administrative data to be more effective in their work.** There is an appetite for making use of this data in new ways, under the right conditions. Use cases vary widely but generally fall under four categories: outcomes evaluation, research and advocacy, program planning, and integrated service delivery.
2. Many groups expressed that simply making existing data more available would not realize the full potential of administrative data to enhance their work. Rather, interventions would be needed to change the way data are collected during service provision. **For example, a number of groups expressed a desire for disaggregated race-based data as an advocacy tool for highlighting systemic inequities** and to better understand the needs of equity-seeking groups in strategic planning.

### RISKS OF ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REUSE

1. Participants at each stakeholder convening expressed concerns around the potential unintended consequences of sharing administrative data in new ways. These included the possibility of: **amplifying systemic inequities, reducing non-profit autonomy, and violating consent around person-level data.**
2. **Many grassroots advocacy groups, in particular, underscored the importance of an inclusive exploration of these risks.** Stakeholders expressed open questions around how to prevent potential negative impacts of data-sharing—with an emphasis on building a diverse coalition, ensuring community involvement in decision-making processes, and centering the interests of marginalized groups.

## CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS AND INTERVENTION POINTS

1. **Initiatives facilitating the reuse of administrative data are emerging at an increasing rate in Canada, at both the federal and provincial levels.** Statistics Canada, through their Social Data Linkage Environment and Research Data Centres, appears to be playing a leading role.
2. Most resources for administrative data reuse target academic researchers and policymakers as core users. There appears to be a gap in designing these resources for use by the nonprofit sector. In addition to infrastructure and policy constraints, the lack of data and research capacity in the sector may be a potentially significant barrier. **Some nonprofit stakeholders have articulated that capacity building will be an important prerequisite for meaningful engagement with administrative data.**
3. **More consultation needs to be done with respect to Indigenous perspectives on data governance and how OCAP principles regarding ownership, control, access, and possession of data can be integrated into a broader administrative data policy agenda.** This would build on existing Indigenous-led initiatives around administrative data sharing for outcomes evaluation and advocacy—such as the Nova Scotia First Nations Client Linkage Registry.

## Next Steps

In 2019, we aim to finalize a coalition governance framework in consultation with our co-convening partners and prospective members. After formally launching mid-year, the coalition will work together to develop a set of shared principles and collaboratively identify next steps for moving this work forward. The initial goal of this coalition is to co-create a shared policy agenda and bring it to government by 2020. The coalition's ultimate goal is to secure whichever policy changes are required to support ethical, equitable, and effective re-use of administrative data for social impact.

**We encourage you to reach out to us at [info@poweredbydata.org](mailto:info@poweredbydata.org) if:**

- You are exploring administrative data reuse from a public policy perspective
- You are a practitioner involved in a project that makes use of administrative data linking for social impact
- You are a member of civil society interested in joining the coalition. When we formally launch the coalition in mid-2019, and have a governance system in place, this will include a mechanism for bringing new members to the coalition