



British Columbia

EYES ON EVIDENCE III

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE
TRANSPARENCY OF EVIDENCE
USAGE ACROSS PROVINCIAL
POLICY ANNOUNCEMENTS

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 Evidence
for
Democracy

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An assessment of the transparency of evidence usage across provincial policy announcements

October 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank all of the individuals who helped support our provincial transparency assessments and report preparation. In particular, we thank Evidence for Democracy's staff, Rachael Maxwell and Nada Salem, for their critical insights and support throughout this project. This work was made possible thanks to generous support from the Trottier Family Foundation.

Evidence for Democracy is the leading fact-driven, non-partisan, not-for-profit organization promoting the transparent use of evidence in government decision-making in Canada. Through research, education, and issue-based campaigns, we engage and empower the science community while cultivating public and political demand for evidence-based decision-making.



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Executive Summary

We all benefit when governments make policy decisions informed by the best available evidence. Data, facts, and science challenge what we consider as common sense, and help distinguish the boundaries between reality and political framing.

Transparency is a prerequisite to enabling evidence-informed decision-making. When the public can find the evidence underlying policy decisions, they have the opportunity to scrutinize the relationship between evidence and public policy. Without transparency, we run the risk of losing the ability for citizens to hold policy-makers accountable, further distancing the public from the policy decisions that impact their lives.

However, putting evidence at the heart of public policy is no easy feat.

Previously, in *Eyes on Evidence II*, we applied a transparency framework (adapted from the United Kingdom) to assess the transparency of evidence usage in a total of 100 policies from the Government of Canada. Our assessment found that policies scored low, meaning that it's very difficult for members of the public to find the evidence behind government policy.

Now, in this study, we applied our transparency framework to assess the transparency of evidence usage in provincial policies issued by the governments of Ontario, British Columbia and Saskatchewan, and compared transparency in policy-making across the Canadian federation.

KEY FINDINGS

- » **We applied a transparency framework to assess the transparency of evidence usage in a total of 133 policies issued by the provincial governments of Ontario, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan.** Simply put, our framework asks: can the evidence behind policy decisions be found by the lay public? The framework consists of four categories:
 - **Diagnosis:** What do policy-makers know about the issue?
 - **Proposal:** What is the government's chosen intervention, and why was it chosen?
 - **Implementation:** How will the chosen intervention be rolled out, and why was this method chosen?
 - **Testing and evaluation:** How and when will we know if the policy has worked?
- » **Overall, our assessment found that provincial policies scored low on the transparency of evidence usage, meaning that it's very difficult for people living in Ontario, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan to find the evidence behind provincial policy.**
 - **There were shared shortcomings across provinces.** Too often, policies would either mention none of the underlying evidence behind the issue or proposed intervention at hand, or would fail to provide a reference or citation for any evidence mentioned. Policies rarely explored the merits of alternative policy options, or acknowledged any absent, weak or contradictory evidence. Lastly, across all provincial governments, an overwhelming majority of policies scored

poorly (i.e., received a 0) in the testing and evaluation section (i.e., to know how and when a policy has worked).

- **In particular, policies from the Government of Saskatchewan scored very poorly.** 15 of the 18 policies assessed in this province received a 0 across all four sections of the transparency framework.
- **The transparency of evidence usage fared slightly better in federal policies, though there were several similar trends in both federal and provincial assessments.** Relative to federal policies, policies from the governments of Ontario and British Columbia scored more poorly in every section, but scored slightly higher in the Testing and Evaluation section. A score of 3 was rare across all levels of government.

- » **We recognize that the transparency framework is not a perfect measure.** Throughout the Eyes on Evidence series, we spoke with public servants, political staffers, and elected representatives to explore what internal challenges or barriers exist when it comes to implementing transparency in policy-making. We look forward to sharing key insights from both our federal and provincial discussions soon, as well as a compilation of best practices for governments within the federation to improve transparency.
- » **Ultimately, our assessment demonstrates that policy-making across the Canadian federation fares poorly when it comes to the transparency of evidence usage.** We find that from the sidelines, it is difficult to discern whether government systems, structures, and resources are in fact delivering on their commitment to implement evidence-informed and transparent policy-making, to its full extent.



Government of British Columbia: Transparency Assessments

For the 11 British Columbian ministries included in this study, there were a total of 747 policies announced between January 1st to June 30th 2021. Upon vetting for eligible policies (see the full *Eyes On Evidence III* report), a total of 437 policies remained. Next, five policies were randomly selected from each ministry, leading to an assessment of the transparency of evidence usage in a total of 55 policies, across 11 ministries, from the Government of British Columbia.

Overall, our assessment found that policies scored low on the transparency of evidence usage, meaning that it's difficult for British Columbians to find the evidence behind provincial policy.

Our findings indicate:

- » **Transparency scores varied across different ministries.** The ministries which received the highest scores were the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Child Care, and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions. The ministries which received the lowest scores were the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, and the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation.
- » **When we searched for the underlying evidence used to understand a policy issue, half of the policies assessed received very low scores.** The diagnosis section asks: what do policymakers know about the issue? When we assessed what evidence had been used and the role it had played in this section, 53% of policies received a 0, while 31% of policies received a 1. In other words, policies either failed to mention any underlying evidence (a 0), or mentioned evidence but with no citation to track down the source (a 1). Only eight policies received a score of 2, and a single policy received a score of 3.
- » **When we searched for evidence about why an intervention was selected, a majority of policies scored poorly.** The proposal section asks: what is the government's chosen intervention and why was it chosen? 80% of policies received a 0. Only seven policies received a score of 1, and four policies received a score of 2.
- » **When we searched for evidence about how (and why) the chosen intervention would be rolled out, a majority of policies scored poorly.** The implementation section asks: how will the chosen intervention be rolled out, and why was this method chosen? 78% of policies received a 0. Only seven policies received a score of 1, and five policies received a score of 2.
- » **Policies scored poorly in the testing and evaluation section.** The testing and evaluation sections asks: how and when will we know if the policy has worked? 82% of policies received a 0 in this section. Among the ten remaining policies, nine policies received a 1, and a single policy received a score of 2.

- » **There were only two policies which scored at least a 1 at minimum in each section.** The Ministry of Forests' *Christie Mountain fire closes wildlife area* and the Ministry of Health's *B.C. moves to Phase 2 of COVID-19 immunization plan*, protects seniors scored at least a 1 across the diagnosis, proposal, implementation, and testing and evaluation sections.
- » **A total of 19 policies, across nine ministries, scored poorly (i.e., received a 0 for every section of the transparency framework).**
- » **Policies rarely assessed their evidence base critically across the four sections (diagnosis, proposal, implementation, or testing and evaluation).** A 3 indicates that the criteria for a 1 and 2 were met (i.e., evidence is mentioned and properly cited, with an explanation of how it was used), and that there was also consideration of alternate options, uncertainties, and contradictions within the policy. Across all assessments, there was only a single policy which received a score of 3 – the diagnosis section of the Ministry of Forests' *Christie Mountain fire closes wildlife area* policy.

	Diagnosis	Proposal	Implementation	Testing & Evaluation
Ministry of Agriculture and Food				
New food hub to strengthen food security in Fraser Valley	0	0	0	0
Over \$5M in clean tech funding for British Columbia fisheries and aquaculture projects	0	0	1	0
New life to be breathed into Elk and Beaver lakes	1	0	0	0
Minister's statement on Day of the Honey Bee in B.C.	0	0	0	1
Focus on the farm a priority in COVID-19 recovery	1	0	1	0

Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training				
NVIT to train more community mental health workers	0	0	0	0
Financial flexibility supports post-secondary sector	0	0	0	0
Okanagan students to benefit from greener, more affordable housing	1	0	0	1
Protecting students at private training institutions	2	2	2	0
Funding to support Camosun with film studio educational planning	0	0	0	1

Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation	Diagnosis	Proposal	Implementation	Testing & Evaluation
Funding supports businesses to launch online	1	0	0	0
Island Coastal Economic Trust expands to more communities	1	1	0	0
New grant program helps set up B.C. manufacturers for growth, innovation	0	0	0	0
Increased funding, expanded eligibility to help almost 20,000 businesses	0	0	0	0
Board of directors appointed in INBC Investment Corp.	0	0	0	0

Ministry of Education and Child Care

New school, child care spaces coming for Abbotsford families	1	0	0	1
Construction begins on more classrooms for Hammond Bay students	1	0	0	1
Safer school with mental health programs under construction in Saanich	1	0	0	0
Temporary École élémentaire Beausoleil to welcome students in September	0	0	1	1
More seismically safe schools start for Surrey students	1	0	2	0

Ministry of Energy, Mines, and Low Carbon Innovation

Legacy sites restoration program cleans up environment, supports good jobs	1	0	0	1
EV skills training now available at three additional colleges	0	1	0	0
EV skills training to be offered at College of New Caledonia	0	0	0	0
Innovative building technologies to be proven in northern B.C.	0	0	0	0
Province extends bill supports for BC Hydro customers in financial crisis	0	1	0	0

Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy	Diagnosis	Proposal	Implementation	Testing & Evaluation
Working to take care of parks in the Okanagan, Kootenays	1	0	0	0
Working to take care of parks in northern B.C.	1	0	0	0
BC Parks projects support economic recovery	1	0	0	0
New conservancy recognizes cultural significance to First Nations	0	0	0	0
Watershed, wetland projects create jobs, protect environment	0	0	0	0

Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development	Diagnosis	Proposal	Implementation	Testing & Evaluation
Recovery grants support jobs in rural communities	0	0	0	0
'Namgis, Province partner as stewards of lands, resources	0	0	0	0
Forest agreement to benefit First Nation, community	0	0	0	0
Christie Mountain fire closes wildlife area	3	1	1	1
Grants to reduce wildfire risks around northwestern communities	0	0	1	0

Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport	Diagnosis	Proposal	Implementation	Testing & Evaluation
Funding approved for local sports organizations in the Lower Mainland	1	0	0	0
Funding approved for local sports organizations in the North	1	0	0	0
Celebrate Family Day safely with loved ones	0	0	0	0
B.C.'s music industry gets an encore	0	1	0	0
Supporting Indigenous tourism businesses through recovery	2	2	0	0

	Diagnosis	Proposal	Implementation	Testing & Evaluation
Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions				
Funds support access to addictions treatment, recovery services during COVID-19	0	0	0	0
Island's rural, remote Indigenous communities receive grants to address overdose	2	2	2	0
Expanding vital mental health, substance use services to help young people thrive	2	0	0	0
Expanded mental health supports for women affected by trauma, violence	1	0	0	0
New resources to help children, teens cope with anxiety	0	0	0	0
Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure				
Median barriers to boost safety on section of Okanagan Highway	0	0	0	0
New program to help students get moving	2	2	2	0
West Fraser Road construction begins this spring	1	0	1	0
South coast airports to receive essential upgrades	0	0	0	0
Major upgrades to Coquihalla washrooms to benefit travellers	0	0	0	0
Ministry of Health				
Joint statement on B.C.'s COVID-19 response, latest updates	2	0	0	0
B.C. moves to Phase 2 of COVID-19 immunization plan, protects seniors	2	1	1	2
Next steps taken for new Cowichan District Hospital	0	1	0	1
New vaccine schedule invites those 18+ to register this week	2	0	0	0
Joint statement on B.C.'s COVID-19 response, latest updates	0	0	2	0

Appendix: List of Policies Assessed

Ministry of Agriculture and Food

- 1 *New food hub to strengthen food security in Fraser Valley.* 24 February 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AFF0019-000274>
- 2 *Over \$5M in clean tech funding for British Columbia fisheries and aquaculture projects.* 7 April 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/stories/over-5m-in-clean-tech-funding-for-british-columbia-fisheries-and-aquaculture-projects>
- 3 *New life to be breathed into Elk and Beaver lakes.* 4 May 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AFF0034-000801>
- 4 *Minister's statement on Day of the Honey Bee in B.C.* 29 May 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AFF0037-001029>
- 5 *Focus on the farm a priority in COVID-19 recovery.* 14 June 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AFF0039-001145>

Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training

- 1 *NVIT to train more community mental health workers.* 18 January 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AEST0002-000063>
- 2 *Financial flexibility supports post-secondary sector.* 12 February 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AEST0013-000260>
- 3 *Okanagan students to benefit from greener, more affordable housing.* 5 March 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AEST0014-000395>

- 4 *Protecting students at private training institutions.* 10 May 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AEST0036-000809>
- 5 *Funding to support Camosun with film studio educational planning.* 10 April 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AEST0032-000687>

Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation

- 1 *Funding supports businesses to launch online.* 3 February 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021JERI0009-000194>
- 2 *Island Coastal Economic Trust expands to more communities.* 16 February 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021JERI0014-000278>
- 3 *New grant program helps set up B.C. manufacturers for growth, innovation.* 1 April 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021JERI0024-000609>
- 4 *Increased funding, expanded eligibility to help almost 20,000 businesses.* 26 April 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021JERI0031-000770>
- 5 *Board of directors appointed in INBC Investment Corp.* 6 May 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021JERI0032-000854>

Ministry of Education and Child Care

- 1 *New school, child care spaces coming for Abbotsford families.* 26 January 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021EDUC0006-000133>

- 2 *Construction begins on more classrooms for Hammond Bay students.* 9 February 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021EDUC0012-000228>
- 3 *Safer school with mental health programs under construction in Saanich.* 10 March 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021EDUC0019-000429>
- 4 *Temporary École élémentaire Beausoleil to welcome students in September.* 23 March 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021EDUC0022-000529>
- 5 *More seismically safe schools start for Surrey students.* 7 June 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021EDUC0037-001083>

Ministry of Energy, Mines, and Low Carbon Innovation

- 1 *Legacy sites restoration program cleans up environment, supports good jobs.* 17 March 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021EMLI0021-000486>
- 2 *EV skills training now available at three additional colleges.* 29 March 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021EMLI0028-000568>
- 3 *EV skills training to be offered at College of New Caledonia.* 29 March 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021EMLI0029-000569>
- 4 *Innovative building technologies to be proven in northern B.C.* 31 May 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021EMLI0037-001015>
- 5 *Province extends bill supports for BC Hydro customers in financial crisis.* 22 June 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021EMLI0043-001196>

Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy

- 1 *Working to take care of parks in the Okanagan, Kootenays.* 22 January 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021ENV0009-000102>
- 2 *Working to take care of parks in northern B.C.* 22 January 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021ENV0008-000101>
- 3 *BC Parks projects support economic recovery.* 22 January 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021ENV0011-000112>
- 4 *New conservancy recognizes cultural significance to First Nations.* 12 February 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021ENV0014-000249>
- 5 *Watershed, wetland projects create jobs, protect environment.* 15 March 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021ENV0020-000463>

Ministry of Forests

- 1 *Recovery grants support jobs in rural communities.* 23 February 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021FLNRO0010-000310>
- 2 *'Namgis, Province partner as stewards of lands, resources.* 25 February 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021FLNRO0014-000323>
- 3 *Forest agreement to benefit First Nation, community.* 11 March 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021FLNRO0017-000431>
- 4 *Christie Mountain fire closes wildlife area.* 12 May 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021FLNRO0033-000893>
- 5 *Grants to reduce wildfire risks around northwestern communities.* 30 June 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021FLNRO0047-001232>

Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport

- 1 *Funding approved for local sports organizations in the Lower Mainland.* 21 January 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TACS0008-000094>
- 2 *Funding approved for local sports organizations in the North.* 21 January 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TACS0004-000090>
- 3 *Celebrate Family Day safely with loved ones.* 9 February 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TACS0011-000229>
- 4 *B.C.'s music industry gets an encore.* 13 April 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TACS0026-000695>
- 5 *Supporting Indigenous tourism businesses through recovery.* 26 May 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TACS0039-000975>

Ministry of Health

1. *Joint statement on B.C.'s COVID-19 response, latest updates.* 18 January 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021HLTH0004-000074>
2. *B.C. moves to Phase 2 of COVID-19 immunization plan, protects seniors.* 1 March 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021PREM0015-000355>
3. *Next steps taken for new Cowichan District Hospital.* 1 April 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021HLTH0024-000627>
4. *New vaccine schedule invites those 18+ to register this week.* 18 April 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021HLTH0077-000736>
5. *Joint statement on B.C.'s COVID-19 response, latest updates.* 27 April 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021HLTH0030-000779>

Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions

- 1 *Funds support access to addictions treatment, recovery services during COVID-19.* 28 January 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021MMHA0002-000144>
- 2 *Island's rural, remote Indigenous communities receive grants to address overdose.* 1 April 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021MMHA0014-000617>
- 3 *Expanding vital mental health, substance use services to help young people thrive.* 26 April 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021MMHA0019-000769>
- 4 *Expanded mental health supports for women affected by trauma, violence.* 22 June 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021MMHA0028-001203>
- 5 *New resources to help children, teens cope with anxiety.* 30 June 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021MMHA0029-001247>

Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure

- 1 *Median barriers to boost safety on section of Okanagan Highway.* 8 February 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TRAN0016-000203>
- 2 *New program to help students get moving.* 11 February 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TRAN0014-000243>
- 3 *West Fraser Road construction begins this spring.* 11 March 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TRAN0020-000435>
- 4 *South coast airports to receive essential upgrades.* 18 March 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TRAN0040-000493>
- 5 *Major upgrades to Coquihalla washrooms to benefit travellers.* 17 June 2021. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TRAN0090-001176>

