

A large iceberg floats in a blue ocean under a cloudy sky. The iceberg is split horizontally, with a small portion above the water and a much larger, jagged portion submerged below. The text is overlaid on the image.

Saskatchewan

# EYES ON EVIDENCE III

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

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# Eyes On Evidence III

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

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**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

**W**e 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 Saskatchewan: Transparency Assessments

For the six Saskatchewan ministries included in this study, there were a total of 383 policies announced between January 1st to June 30<sup>th</sup> 2021. Upon vetting for eligible policies and ministries (see the full *Eyes On Evidence III* report), a total of 148 policies remained. Next, three policies were randomly selected from each eligible ministry, leading to an assessment of the transparency of evidence usage in a total of 18 policies, across 6 ministries, from the Government of Saskatchewan.

**Overall, our assessment found that policies scored very poorly on the transparency of evidence usage, meaning that it's very difficult for those in Saskatchewan to find the evidence behind provincial policies.**

Our findings indicate:

- » **Transparency scores were consistently poor across different ministries.**
- » **When we searched for the underlying evidence used to understand a policy issue, a majority of policies scored very poorly.** 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, 88.9% of policies received a 0 (i.e. no evidence was mentioned), while 11% of policies received a 1. In other words, a majority of policies either failed to mention any underlying evidence (a 0), while the remaining few mentioned evidence but with no citation to track down the source (a 1). No policies received a score of 2 or 3.
- » **When we searched for evidence about why an intervention was selected, all policies scored very poorly.** The proposal section asks: what is the government's chosen intervention and why was it chosen? In this section, all policies received a 0.
- » **When we searched for evidence about how (and why) the chosen intervention would be rolled out, all policies scored poorly.** The implementation section asks: how will the chosen intervention be rolled out, and why was this method chosen? Here, all policies received a 0.
- » **Policies scored very poorly in the testing and evaluation section.** The testing and evaluation sections asks: how and when will we know if the policy has worked? 94% of policies received a 0 in this section. The remaining policies received a 1.
- » **15 of the 18 policies, across all six ministries, scored poorly (i.e., received a 0 for every section of the transparency framework).**
- » **Policies did not assess their evidence base critically across the four sections (diagnosis, proposal, implementation, or testing and evaluation).** Across all assessments, there was no policy which received a score of 3. 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.

	Diagnosis	Proposal	Implementation	Testing & Evaluation
<b>Ministry of Agriculture</b>				
Food Centre Expansion Will Support Saskatchewan's Value-Added Agriculture Sector	0	0	0	0
Additional Funding Supports Immediate Irrigation Expansion in Saskatchewan	0	0	0	0
Governments of Canada and Saskatchewan Invest in Pulse Starch Research	0	0	0	0
<b>Ministry of Education</b>				
Province Proclaims Agriculture Literacy Month	0	0	0	0
Safe Schools Plan: Nearly \$29 Million Allocated In Third Round Of Contingency Funding For Schools	0	0	0	0
Government of Saskatchewan Growing Access to Family Resources in Saskatchewan With New Centres in Estevan and Humboldt	0	0	0	1
<b>Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport</b>				
Parks, Culture and Sport Budget Builds on Government's Commitment to Families, Veterans and Park Infrastructure	0	0	0	0
Government Grows Support For Veterans	0	0	0	0
Saskatchewan Kids Return To Play	0	0	0	0
<b>Ministry of Health</b>				
Minister Announces New eHealth Board Of Directors, Independent Review Of Governance, Management And Program Operations	0	0	0	0
Ombudsman Formally Requested to Investigate Extencicare Parkside Outbreak	1	0	0	0
Construction of New Hemodialysis Unit at Meadow Lake Hospital Set to Begin	0	0	0	0

	Diagnosis	Proposal	Implementation	Testing & Evaluation
<b>Ministry of Highways</b>				
Additional Stimulus Dollars Will Improve Rural Roads And Bridges While Contributing To Economic Recovery	0	0	0	0
North Dakota and Saskatchewan Sign Agreement to Vaccinate Essential Workers	0	0	0	0
Municipalities To Receive \$25.7 Million In Support Through Rural Integrated Roads For Growth Program	0	0	0	0
<b>Ministry of Trade and Export Development</b>				
Government Announces Caps on Food Delivery Fees	0	0	0	0
Innovation Saskatchewan Supporting the Growth of Agricultural Technology	0	0	0	0
Increased Funding to Support Saskatchewan's Female Founders	1	0	0	0

# Appendix: List of Policies Assessed

## Ministry of Agriculture

- 1 *Food Centre Expansion Will Support Saskatchewan's Value-Added Agriculture Sector.* 4 May 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/may/04/food-centre-expansion-will-support-saskatchewans-value-added-agriculture-sector>
- 2 *Additional Funding Supports Immediate Irrigation Expansion in Saskatchewan.* 2 June 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/june/02/additional-funding-supports-immediate-irrigation-expansion-in-saskatchewan>
- 3 *Governments of Canada and Saskatchewan Invest in Pulse Starch Research.* 22 June 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/june/22/governments-of-canada-and-saskatchewan-invest-in-pulse-starch-research>

## Ministry of Education

- 1 *Province Proclaims Agriculture Literacy Month.* 1 March 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/march/01/province-proclaims-agriculture-literacy-month>
- 2 *Safe Schools Plan: Nearly \$29 Million Allocated In Third Round Of Contingency Funding For Schools.* 11 March 2021. Available at: [https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/march/11/safe-schools-plan-nearly-\\$29-million-allocated-in-third-round-of-contingency-funding-for-schools](https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/march/11/safe-schools-plan-nearly-$29-million-allocated-in-third-round-of-contingency-funding-for-schools)

- 3 *Government of Saskatchewan Growing Access to Family Resources in Saskatchewan With New Centres in Estevan and Humboldt.* 12 April 2021. Available at: [https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/march/11/safe-schools-plan-nearly-\\$29-million-allocated-in-third-round-of-contingency-funding-for-schools](https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/march/11/safe-schools-plan-nearly-$29-million-allocated-in-third-round-of-contingency-funding-for-schools)

## Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport

- 1 *Parks, Culture and Sport Budget Builds on Government's Commitment to Families, Veterans and Park Infrastructure.* 6 April 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/april/06/parks-culture-and-sport-budget-builds-on-governments-commitment-to-families-veterans-and-park-infras>
- 2 *Government Grows Support For Veterans.* 15 April 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/april/15/applications-open-for-grants-to-support-veteran-service-clubs>
- 3 *Saskatchewan Kids Return To Play.* 31 May 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/may/31/saskatchewan-kids-return-to-play>

## Ministry of Health

- 1 *Minister Announces New eHealth Board Of Directors, Independent Review Of Governance, Management And Program Operations.* 12 January 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/january/12/minister-announces-new-ehealth-board-of-directors-independent-review-of-governance-management-and-pr>

- 2 *Ombudsman Formally Requested to Investigate Extendicare Parkside Outbreak.* 29 January 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/january/29/ombudsman-formally-requested-to-investigate-extendicare-parkside-outbreak>
- 3 *Construction of New Hemodialysis Unit at Meadow Lake Hospital Set to Begin.* 16 June 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/june/16/construction-of-new-hemodialysis-unit-at-meadow-lake-hospital-set-to-begin>

## Ministry of Highways

- 1 *Additional Stimulus Dollars Will Improve Rural Roads And Bridges While Contributing To Economic Recovery.* 10 March 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/march/10/additional-stimulus-dollars-will-improve-rural-roads-and-bridges-while-contributing-to-economic-reco>
- 2 *North Dakota and Saskatchewan Sign Agreement to Vaccinate Essential Workers.* 27 April 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/april/27/north-dakota-and-saskatchewan-sign-agreement-to-vaccinate-essential-workers>
- 3 *Municipalities To Receive \$25.7 Million In Support Through Rural Integrated Roads For Growth Program.* 10 May 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/may/10/municipalities-to-receive-257-million-in-support-through-rural-integrated-roads-for-growth-program>

## Ministry of Trade and Export Development

- 1 *Government Announces Caps on Food Delivery Fees.* 24 March 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/march/24/government-announces-caps-on-food-delivery-fees>
- 2 *Innovation Saskatchewan Supporting the Growth of Agricultural Technology.* 19 April 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/april/19/innovation-saskatchewan-supporting-the-growth-of-agricultural-technology>
- 3 *Increased Funding to Support Saskatchewan's Female Founders.* 21 May 2021. Available at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/may/21/increased-funding-to-support-saskatchewans-female-founders>

