



Resilient Institutions

Learning from Canada's COVID-19 Pandemic

There has been no official pan-Canadian “lessons-learned” commission or study post-COVID. This was the motivation for the IRPP and the IOG to partner and convene a two-day national conference in June 2023 in Ottawa.

The goal: bring together key decision-makers, practitioners and civil society actors closely involved in the pandemic response to share experiences and ideas on how to make Canada's institutions more resilient for the future.

The result is this report on what worked during the pandemic – and what didn't – to assist governments in planning and delivering public services to Canadians in future crises.

THE INSTITUTIONS WE LOOKED AT



Public health

- Decision-making
- Data sharing



Federalism

- Intergovernmental relations during the pandemic
- Federalism moving forward



Public service

- Delivery and governance
- Skills



Democracy

- Canadians and institutions
- Communication and trust

HOW DID INSTITUTIONS FARE?

The consensus was clear: Our institutions did not succeed completely, nor did they fail completely.

These three perspectives shown below are not mutually exclusive. Some institutions were described in successful terms at one moment during the pandemic and in less successful terms at another.



Performed Well

- Institutional response was able and agile
- Successes across all four institutions
- Public servants created innovative solutions and showed individual heroism



Performed Adequately

- Institutional performance needed to be reinforced at community and local level
- Culturally sensitive approaches existed but were largely carried out outside the government
- Pre-existing capacity and performance challenges hampered response



Performed Poorly

- Poor institutional response fostered mistrust toward governments
- Political discourse marred by polarization, fuelled by mis/disinformation
- Municipal and Indigenous governments facing particular post-pandemic financial and social challenges

Lessons and Recommendations



Lesson 1 Institutional Capacity Cannot Be Taken for Granted

Recommendations

- 1 Retool and reinvest in the public service's digital and IT infrastructure
- 2 Create more integrated and efficient data-sharing pathways
- 3 Systematically examine processes and structures activated during the pandemic

Lesson 2 The Institutions of Federalism Work, Until They Don't

Recommendations

- 4 Identify intergovernmental structures that worked
- 5 Make intergovernmental relations more inclusive
- 6 Co-develop and formalize intergovernmental relations with Indigenous governments

Lesson 3 Learning to Navigate and Communicate Risk and Uncertainty Is a Public Service Necessity

Recommendations

- 7 Incorporate positive risk-taking into public service processes
- 8 Invest in new leadership and operational skills development training
- 9 Learn how to communicate policy uncertainty and complexity to Canadians

Lesson 4 Public Institutions Cannot Work Without Public Trust

Recommendations

- 10 Create a pan-Canadian task force to tackle misinformation and disinformation
- 11 Build inclusive and meaningful relationships with civil society leaders before the crisis hits
- 12 The federal government should initiate a pan-Canadian comprehensive, collaborative lessons-learned examination to systematically examine how our public institutions performed

Read the full report