

RESEARCH UPDATE

August 2020

RESEARCH UPDATE AUGUST 2020

Publisher:
Edmonton Social Planning Council
Suite 200, Bassani Building
10544-106 Street NW
Edmonton, Alberta, T5H 2X6

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This report is published by the
Edmonton Social Planning Council.
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COVID-19 AND THE FUTURE OF LONG-TERM CARE

Reviewed by Mona Haimour

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable and priority populations, particularly the elderly that are living in long-term care (LTC) facilities, has been eye-opening and challenging. Figures show that 81% of COVID-19 deaths in Canada were recorded in long-term care nursing homes. This is higher than the average for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, at 42%. Not only are the figures staggering, but evidence shows that the physical and social environments where the elderly are left to die are inhumane.

In their high-level and peer-reviewed policy briefing report titled *Restoring Trust: COVID-19 and the Future of Long-Term Care*, experts from reputable Canadian universities (York University, Conestoga College, University of Toronto, Université de Montréal, University of Alberta, University of Ottawa, Mount Saint Vincent University, and University of Calgary) share their research findings on challenges encountered with respect to Canada's response to, and recovery from, COVID-19. These experts form the Royal Society of Canada (RSC) Task Force on COVID-19, chaired by Professor Carole Estabrooks (University of Alberta). The purpose of this initiative is to synthesize and frame evidence that will help policy-makers make informed and shared decisions.

To understand the real story of the LTC COVID-19 deaths and what it will take to solve this enduring crisis, the RSC has adopted a systematic and comprehensive approach to guide their work. This is evident in three focus areas: context and policy status before COVID-19, vulnerabilities exposed as a result of COVID-19, and principles for action and leading options.

Findings from the review of the context and policy status before the pandemic show that the complexity of the health and social profiles of our elderly (e.g., advanced age, dementia, chronic medical conditions, low immunity status, limited access to uninsured services, etc.) that live in the LTC-nursing homes is beyond what the capacity of the current workforce is capable of and trained to provide care for. Other key findings such as the ongoing decline in the ratio of regulated health care professionals to unregulated health care professionals (care aides and personal support workers), heavy workloads, lack of formal training and education, as well as low wages and poor employee benefits have been identified as chronic issues that caused direct negative impacts on patient safety and quality care.

Additionally, the review shows that the LTC facilities had not met the safety regulations related to the prevention and control of communicable diseases. These included lack of visitation policies and practices, shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other essential supplies, and inadequate training on how to use PPE and conduct screenings for COVID-19. These vulnerabilities along with the chronic issues that emerged from the analysis of the context and policy status have hindered LTC capacity to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in preventable deaths.

Moving forward, the RSC has provided recommendations that derive from the collected evidence, targeting all levels of governments (federal, provincial, and territorial). The RSC has called for a reform and redesign of the current LTC sector. The key recommendations focus on adopting a strategic, targeted, and sustainable

approach to solve the enduring LTC workforce crisis. These recommendations include establishing national standards that focus on revamping the LTC infrastructure by providing continued funding support for pandemic resources and beyond, staffing and staffing mix in nursing homes, and establishing appropriate and regulated education and training for the LTC workforce.

The implementation plans for these standards should be taken seriously and start immediately by stakeholders at the provincial and territorial level of government. Meaning, urgent action plans should be put in place with emphasis on enhancing the quality of staff education and training, as well as working conditions of the health care professionals—regardless of their level—including work benefits and mental health support. Moreover, emphasis on the need and value of creating a robust and transparent data collection system that captures and tracks the essential variables and elements related to quality of care and quality of life for both the residents and health care professionals is a crucial step toward a better and safer future for LTCs.

While it is evident from the policy briefing report that Canada’s LTC sector is in dire need of change, many concerning questions begin to arise as a result of uncertainty, like who is going to take initiative and be the voice for fundamental change in the sector? Furthermore, it is unclear how soon this will happen, given that the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over. Another concern lies with the health and well-being of our elderly people and their families. Their voices, along with those of health care professionals and front-line workers, should be heard, expressed, and valued as well.

PUBLICATION SOURCE:

Estabrooks, C. A., Straus, S., Flood, C. M., Keefe, J., Armstrong, P., Donner, G., . . . Wolfson, M. (2020). *Restoring trust: COVID-19 and the future of long-term care*. Royal Society of Canada.
https://rscsrc.ca/sites/default/files/LTC%20PB%20%2B%20ES_EN.pdf

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Mona Haimour is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Health Systems and Sustainability at MacEwan University. Her commitment to enhance women’s health and public health started during her work overseas. She specializes in sustainability, priority populations, and health equity. Her personal interests include running, jumping rope, and reading.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

Reviewed by Natty Klimo

The *Economic Implications of Social Distancing: Alternate Canadian Outlook Scenario* is an issue briefing published by the Conference Board of Canada: a research institute focused on topics relating to economic trends and public policy concerns.

The Conference Board of Canada publishes quarterly national economic forecasts that cover issues such as consumer spending, housing, and government. In the spring of 2020, the organization released the *Canadian Outlook Spring 2020* forecast; however, given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic they decided to develop an alternate forecast to capture economic outcomes due to COVID-19. The spring forecast anticipated a six-week shutdown of the economy, whereas the alternate scenario examines the effects that a longer-term shutdown of 24 weeks would have on the Canadian economy.

The alternate forecast assumes that travel bans will continue for both Canada and the United States until the end of August and that global GDP will grow by 1% in 2020, which is down from 3% in 2019 (p. 4). Canada's tourism sector will experience a slow recovery, and it is anticipated that fewer Canadians will travel both abroad and domestically. Household spending on service and entertainment-related industries (like restaurants, entertainment, etc.) is expected to drop by \$20 billion, resulting in lost revenue for these sectors (p. 5). Nevertheless, the decrease in household spending has been somewhat counterbalanced by consumer spending related to durable goods and home improvements.

The decrease in oil demand, combined with a competitive market between Russia and Saudi Arabia has resulted in a significant price drop in oil. If oil prices do not recover, the sector will experience a loss in revenue due to decreased production and investment.

The spring baseline forecast anticipated that the Bank of Canada interest rate would drop to 0.25% (p. 7). In the alternate scenario, the interest rate drops to negative numbers and is -0.25% (p. 7). The federal government has invested \$82 billion to help Canadian businesses and employees, by providing tax deferrals, wage subsidies, increasing Employment Insurance (EI) payments, and helping those who did not qualify for EI.

In the alternate scenario, the Canadian economy is negatively impacted most by a decrease in investments in energy and resources, fewer exports, and a reduction in household spending. Job losses are also very pronounced within the oil and gas industry, construction, and the service industry. Overall, forecasts show that 330,000 jobs may be lost, bringing the unemployment rate to 7.7% (p. 7).

The Bank of Canada and the federal government have developed financial measures to assist Canadian businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this will continue to be crucial in ensuring a quick recovery. Canadian households have also been supported, but consumer spending will continue to be slow, with an anticipated increase in spending by the fourth quarter, resulting in a 2.6% growth rate in 2021 (p. 9). The housing market will also be impacted due to fewer sales; however, lower interest rates will make purchasing a home more affordable, helping the home-building industry. It is anticipated that the Canadian economy will improve in 2021 and will experience a growth of 3.3% (p. 9).

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the current world we live in and has changed the way we socialize, work, and interact with the rest of the world. New and innovative ideas have emerged that will help many sectors and industries, and will have a positive, long-lasting effect on society. However, in other ways, the COVID-19 pandemic will also have a lasting negative impact on globalization and global economies.

This alternate scenario report successfully highlights the economic impacts that an extended shutdown from COVID-19 would have on the Canadian economy. However, the alternate scenario report does not provide a clear breakdown or comparison between the spring outlook report and the alternate scenario, nor does it cover every element presented in the spring forecast. It would be beneficial to the reader if the report provided a table or an appendix that demonstrated how each component has been modified in the alternate scenario.

PUBLICATION SOURCE:

Conference Board of Canada, The. (2020). *Economic implications of social distancing: Alternate Canadian outlook scenario*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada.

<https://www.conferenceboard.ca/research/economic-implications-of-social-distancing?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Natividad (Natty) Klimo holds a Master of Arts in Integrated Studies with a focus in Equity Studies and is currently a freelance writer. She has eight years of previous experience working for the Alberta Government as a policy analyst focused on research, writing, and policy development.

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND COVID-19

Reviewed by Mohamed Mohamed

In *Youth Homelessness & COVID-19: How the Youth-Serving Sector is Coping with the Crisis*, authors Amanda Buchnea, Mary-Jane McKitterick, and David French examine how COVID-19 has affected individuals who are dealing with precarious living situations. Via a survey for youth-serving organizations conducted by A Way Home Canada and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the research looks at some of the struggles that organizations have gone through, while also highlighting innovations in response to the pandemic.

While exploring the difficulties that these organizations have faced, Buchnea, McKitterick and French emphasize the increased difficulty that has come with a shift to online platforms. Though it has been necessary to decrease face-to-face interaction to help reduce possible contraction of the virus, this has further emphasized the barriers present for some youths in accessing reliable internet and cellular devices. That inability to have face-to-face interaction has also impacted these organizations in helping youth access housing, food, and other resources.

Basic needs were mentioned by 57% of respondents as the biggest challenge that the COVID-19 pandemic has created for youths. Even for those who do have access to housing, there is an issue of resource needs to cope with social isolation. With the pandemic, communities that already had issues with housing for youths have had an even greater strain on the minimal resources at their disposal.

Buchnea, McKitterick, and French also note that organizations have faced increased pressures with infrastructure and capacity. It has been quite difficult for these organizations to maintain social distancing in the spaces provided to youth. Staff at 43% of the organizations noted a lack of access to personal protective equipment which can hinder both their safety and the safety of youth they encounter. Staffing and funding are two key issues within infrastructure and capacity. Just over one third of the organizations noted concerns in their ability to provide services if staff became ill, as there is already a decrease in staff among a few communities. All this plays into the key issue of funding. Not being able to hold fundraising events is a concern, and federal funding is only available to organizations who have previously received this support.

Though the overall tone of the report is disheartening, Buchnea, McKitterick, and French do a good job in also highlighting the positive innovations that have supported local efforts. These are categorized into three areas: sector coordination & collaboration, innovation & creativity in connecting with youth, and increased connection to the broader public. For sector coordination & collaboration, examples include closer work with community partners, and sharing spaces—like high schools—to help with self isolation. Connecting with youth has involved creativity like using online platforms such as Zoom and Discord, holding online Youth Council meetings, and accessing government-created websites like [Helpnextdoormb.ca](https://helpnextdoormb.ca) to match volunteers with individuals in need. Finally, for increased connection to the broader public, online fundraisers and increased donations are a couple of examples in how the public has helped to support these organizations who focus on helping disadvantaged youth.

Buchnea, McKitterick, and French illustrate the harsh realities that many organizations are facing within the youth sector, as COVID-19 has particularly affected people who do not have access to stable housing. There are grand challenges to deal with when trying to serve the youth, which has advanced necessary innovation to

help organizations cope with the situation. Further research on the link between COVID-19 and youth in precarious living situations could focus even further on marginalized individuals, and how youth who are marginalized through race and/or sexuality must navigate tougher terrain because of institutional discrimination.

PUBLICATION SOURCE:

Buchnea, A., McKitterick, M. J., & French, D. (2020). *Summary Report: Youth homelessness and COVID-19: How the youth serving sector is coping with the crisis*. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press and A Way Home Canada. https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/COVID-19_SUMMARY_REPORT%20%281%29_0.pdf

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Mohamed Mohamed is a recent graduate of MacEwan University with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Sociology. Mohamed has hopes of studying public health through the epidemiology stream, with an interest in health outcomes among ethnicity. In his spare time, Mohamed enjoys outdoor sports, gaming, and reading about healthcare.

A LOOK AT ALBERTA'S OIL AND GAS BAILOUT

Reviewed by Hanna Nash

In *Alberta's Failed Oil and Gas Bailout*, authors Jim Storrie, Duncan Kinney, and Regan Boychuk discuss their dissatisfaction with the Government of Alberta's investments in the oil and gas industry. These authors come from non-profit watch groups established to keep a continuous look on government decisions and protect the interest of Albertans.

Storrie, Kinney, and Boychuk examine the actions of Crown investment manager Alberta Investment Management Corporation (AIMCo), responsible for over \$100 billion of provincial assets. According to the authors, this management company has allocated \$1.1 billion from Alberta's pension funds and the Alberta Heritage Saving Trust Fund to junior and intermediate provincial oil and gas producers and oil field service companies at the direction of the prior and current Alberta governments. The main focus of the report is the contention the authors have with AIMCo's likely loss of millions of the public dollars it invested. Part of this loss is due to falling shares that each of the publicly traded companies it invested in have already experienced, in addition to the bankruptcies of companies that have received millions of dollars in AIMCo investments, the fallout from COVID-19 concerns, Russia and Saudi Arabia's oil price war, and the expected cost of Alberta's oil well environmental clean-up initiative.

The report is a well researched and thorough review of AIMCo's problematic relationship with Alberta's current government, the United Conservative Party (UCP), and the lack of checks and balances in place that have allowed a mismanagement of funds to occur. The authors demonstrate how the UCP used their political influence to push the interests of oil and gas companies into AIMCo's investment profile—largely due to the political donations that the UCP and their third-party advertisers received from oil and gas companies. The authors discuss the conflicts of interest these relationships present as they create an environment of investment focused solely in the oil and gas sector, without any attention given to alternate investment areas. Additionally, the passing of Bill 22, in the fall of 2019, now permits AIMCo to oversee investment management for many essential pension funds in Alberta such as the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund (ATRF). This directive from the province has angered many Albertans as such pension funds and investments are now solely controlled by AIMCo. Despite ATRF's dissatisfaction with AIMCo's performance, they are not permitted to dissolve their relationship as Bill 22 does not provide any alternative methods or options of investment management. These investment protocols coupled with a lack of transparency from AIMCo have given many Albertans rise to feel distrustful where AIMCo is concerned.

Storrie, Kinney, and Boychuk's in-depth review of AIMCo's investment practices presents troubling and worrying indications of how public funds in Alberta are being spent. The authors portray a very distrustful relationship between the UCP and those whose money is being invested in businesses that are operating at a loss rather than a profit. Notably, the money being used by the current provincial government is largely deferred money that Albertans earned and chose to invest in a retirement fund; they have not given permission for their government to invest through such methods.

This report is very well researched and investigated, however, it is obvious that the authors present a very strong bias against investing public funds in non-renewable energy resources. At times, the report produced a more personal opinion of the current UCP government's business practices rather than an unbiased presentation of information.

The non-profit groups on behalf of which the authors are writing are undoubtedly interested in the current political climate of Alberta's government, and how government action will impact future generations of investment and growth. The authors provide insight into the difficulties that Albertans currently face, and promote open and transparent interactions between the provincial government and its Crown corporation for the benefit of Albertans.

PUBLICATION SOURCE:

Storrie, J., Kinney, D., & Boychuk, R. (2020). *Alberta's failed oil and gas bailout*. Progress Alberta. <https://pressprogress.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/AIMCO-report.pdf>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Hanna Nash enjoys ballet performances and other live theatre, as well as outdoor sports, and travelling to new countries. Hanna is interested in sharing information and knowledge to Edmonton's diverse communities.

JOB TRANSFORMATION AND AUTOMATION

Reviewed by Jenn Smyth

Early studies in automation and the workforce have demonstrated changes that suggest a majority of jobs could face automation, leading to potential job loss. Newer studies recognize that jobs are made up of a variety of tasks and that, instead, specific tasks within a job could become automated. This “task-based” approach demonstrates that jobs with a high risk of automation are not necessarily at risk of being lost, but are at risk of job transformation. This job transformation means that humans will be required to work alongside new technologies. Timing and adoption of these new technologies would be based on many factors like financial feasibility, legal constraints, union contracts, and consumer acceptance. However, social and economic factors like the COVID-19 pandemic may quicken the adoption of some automated technologies.

This report looks at the Canadian workforce and considers which groups of workers might face the greatest risk of job transformation due to automation.

Method

The study discussed in this report used a method more in line with the newer “task-based” approach to thinking about automation and job transformation. The authors used the automation risk probabilities from Frey and Osborne (2013) and applied them to the 2016 Longitudinal and International Study of Adults (LISA), based on occupation. To apply the study to a Canadian context they established a concordance between the 2010 US Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) and the Canadian 2011 National Occupational Classification (NOC). The final sample focused on the 25 “task variables” in LISA and was limited to paid workers 18 years of age or over, resulting in a sample size of 2,267 people. Some of the additional characteristics examined included sex, age, education, literacy, immigration, and disability status.

Who is at Risk?

The analysis determines the risk of job transformation for various groups. The occupational group with the highest risk of job transformation is office support workers (clerks and receptionists), at 35.7%—almost twice as high as any other occupation. This is followed by service supervisors and specialized service occupations (chefs, butchers, hairdressers), at 20%. Men and women are equally likely to face job transformation (10.7% and 10.6%, respectively). By age group those who are 18 to 24, and 55 and over are at the highest risk (13.3% and 14.6%, respectively). Figure 4 (below), copied from the report, shows the risk of job transformation based on education levels—those with lower levels of education are more at risk of job transformation. No significant trends in the risk of job transformation based on gender, immigration status, disability, or unionization were found.

Overall, the study found that 10.6% of Canadian workers face a high risk of job transformation due to automation, and 29.1% face a moderate risk of job transformation.

About the Study

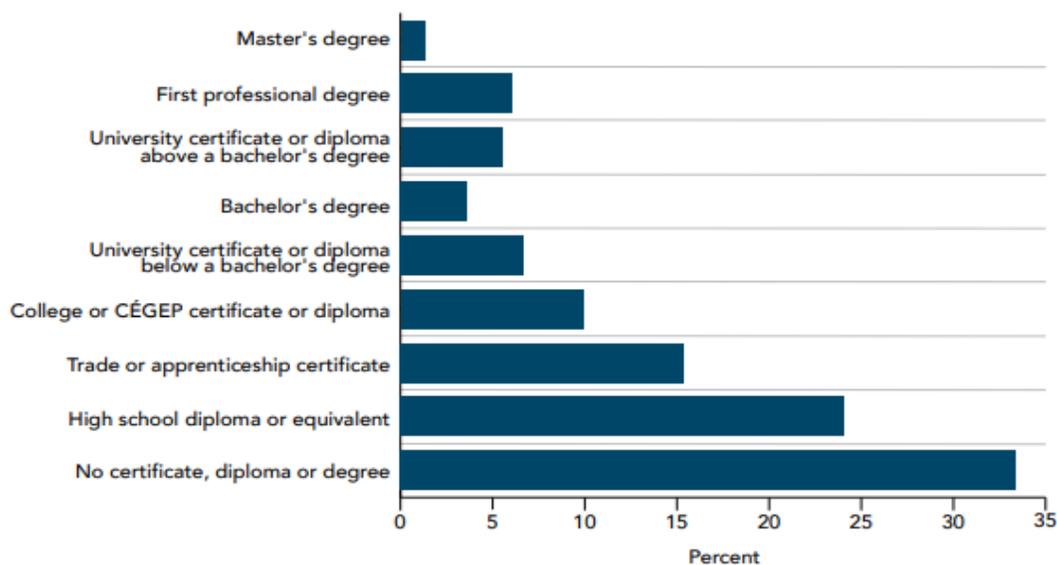
Frenette and Frank are both researchers at Statistics Canada and focus on social and economic topics.

The authors note that a limitation of the study was its focus on the risks of automation and not an examination of the potential job opportunities that could be created through automation in the digital technology industry.

There was also no examination of the combined effects of multiple characteristics on risk factors (e.g. the intersection of age and education level). Also, the authors note that the study only examined the potential for automation, and not the commercial viability or customer acceptance of these technologies. Additionally, the sample size of the study is relatively small.

Evaluation of the study was quite narrow due to these limitations. The study provided the data but did not analyze why certain groups would face higher rates of job transformation due to automation. While the report does provide a Canadian-specific context there is still room for additional research in this area.

Figure 4. Estimated share of workers facing a high risk of job transformation due to automation, by highest level of completed education, Canada 2016



PUBLICATION SOURCE:

Frenette, M., & Frank, K. (2020). *The Demographics of Automation in Canada: Who is at Risk?* IRPP Study 77. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy. <https://irpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Demographics-of-Automation-in-Canada-Who-Is-at-Risk.pdf>

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES:

Frey, C. B., & Osborne, M. A. (2013). *The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation?* Working paper, Oxford Martin School at the University of Oxford. <https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/future-of-employment.pdf>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Jenn Smyth has a master's degree in Urban Planning, and works for the City of Edmonton. She wants to see positive social change in her community and better social policy. When not working Jenn enjoys traveling to exciting places, reading good books, and cooking great food.

Through our research, analysis, and engagement, we hope to create a community in which all people are full and valued participants.

ABOUT

The ESPC is an independent, non-profit, charitable organization. Our focus is social research, particularly in the areas of low-income and poverty.

We are dedicated to encouraging the adoption of equitable social policy, supporting the work of other organizations who are striving to improve the lives of Edmontonians, and educating the public regarding the social issues that impact them on a daily basis.

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RESEARCH UPDATE

The Edmonton Social Planning Council, in collaboration with our volunteers, strives to provide stakeholders and community members with up-to-date reviews on recently published social research reports and publications.

Interested in volunteering? Email jennr@edmontonsocialplanning.ca