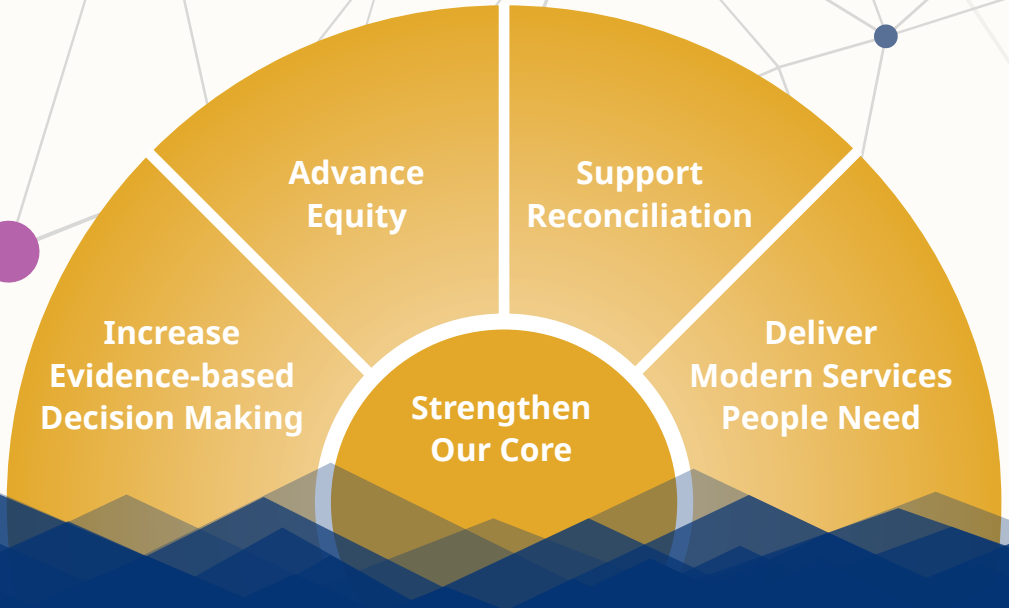
Provincial Data Plan

Better Data, Better B.C.



BRITISH COLUMBIA | Ministry of Citizens' Services

November 2023
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Minister's Message

Expectations of government have changed, and the need for data to meet those expectations has never been more paramount than it is today. We are modernizing how data is used to help make life better for people in British Columbia.

Data helps us learn about and act on the issues that matter most in our communities. For example, data is essential to streamlining payments for emergency funding during floods and fires, to better understanding how people transition in and out of housing, and ensuring Indigenous Peoples can use their languages when they interact with us. This is a small sample of why a whole-of-government approach to data is crucial.

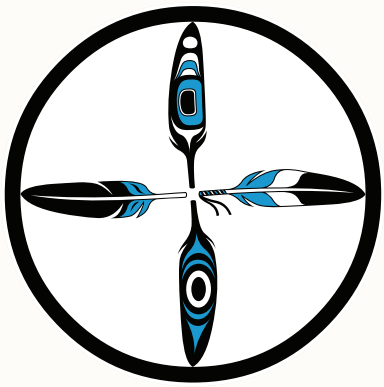
It is my pleasure to introduce the Provincial Data Plan, so that together we can see our diverse needs reflected in our data, and in government's programs and services.

The Provincial Data Plan identifies data initiatives that will:

- Advance equity across government services.
- Support reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.
- Increase evidence-based decision-making.
- Deliver modern digital services.
- Strengthen the public service's ability to support this important work.

The Provincial Data Plan is a pathway to focus our efforts on initiatives that matter most. It supports implementation of the Anti-Racism Data Act, and commitments 3.14 and 3.15 in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act action plan. Ultimately, it creates a stronger B.C. by addressing our systemic data challenges, and taking innovative approaches to how we use data as the building blocks for modernizing government services.

Honourable Lisa Beare
Minister of Citizens' Services



Acknowledgements

The Ministry of Citizens' Services acknowledges the territories of First Nations around B.C. and is grateful to carry out our work on these lands. We acknowledge the rights, interests, priorities, and concerns of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples - respecting and acknowledging their distinct cultures, histories, rights, laws, and governments.

The feather and drum art included in this document was developed by Andy Everson. Andy is an accomplished artist from the K'omoks First Nation on Vancouver Island. He draws upon his roots amongst the Kwakwaka'wakw, Salish and Tlingit peoples to create artwork that reflects the convergence of ancient traditions with modern society.

The four feathers represent the diversity of the Indigenous Peoples of British Columbia, while the drum symbolizes the heartbeat of ceremonies. The feathers are arranged in four directions to represent the people of the North Coast (North), Interior (East), Salish (South) and those who are disenfranchised or have relocated to western Canada (West).

We would also like to thank our many colleagues across government who took time to provide vital input and contribute to making this document what it is today.

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We need the right data at the right time to understand complex issues and make good decisions.

The following pages outline the five pillars and demonstrate the immense value the Provincial Data Plan will bring to the people of B.C.

Introducing the **Provincial Data Plan**

The Provincial Data Plan maps an all-of-government approach for data to support government in meeting its objectives to:

Advance equity

Support reconciliation

Increase evidence-based decision making

Deliver the modern services people need

Strengthen our data competency and governance

Every public service employee comes to work to make life better for people in B.C.—*data helps us do that.*

We collect data on everything from health services, to housing, to parks, and more. As collection of data has expanded over the years, government's data management practices have evolved.

Today, we know we have to continuously improve our data practices to understand issues, provide equitable services, advance reconciliation, and use data to its fullest to deliver better programs with measurable outcomes.

Advancing equity

B.C. needs accurate, reliable, and representative data to provide the services people need, at the right time, and in the right way. Although we collect substantial amounts of information, current data management practices can be improved to reveal the unique identities and needs of our population. Bias and inequities in our programs and services that cannot be measured may go unchecked.

Crucial changes in the way government collects and uses people's data are needed, starting with developing clear guidance in data policies and standards for data collection that is culturally safe, minimizes harm, and respects the people it is about.

In partnership with Indigenous Peoples and racialized communities and through the Anti-Racism Data Act (ARDA), the Province has begun the work of collecting intersectional demographic data such as age, gender identity, and ethnicity. This data will help break down barriers and better identify interconnected issues such as economic status, employment, gender-based violence, and outcomes in health care.

Key Actions:

- **Develop and publish the Gender and Sex Data Standard and Guidelines**
- **Establish cross-government research projects that use data to reveal systemic inequities and enable better policies, programs and services – there are examples of projects underway in the Data Innovation Program**
- **Field a voluntary survey to better understand the diverse population of B.C through the collection of demographic data**
- **Analyze government program data through an intersectional lens and with population demographics to uncover systemic racism and build stronger services for everyone in B.C.**

PROJECT EXAMPLE

Enhancing equity in how we collect gender and sex data

Since 2016, when the BC Human Rights Code was amended to protect gender identity and expression, the Province has worked to make its systems and services more inclusive. Implementation of the Gender and Sex Data Standard, using the Standard's supporting Guidelines, is a critical step in the right direction.

Gender and Sex refer to two different concepts and are not interchangeable. Sex is most often assigned at birth from a visual examination by a doctor or other health care provider, either as Male, Female, or Intersex. Gender refers to socially and culturally constructed roles, behaviours, and expressions. The current gender of people may or may not align with their sex assigned at birth.

For transgender and non-binary people, access to government-issued identification documents and services displaying their correct gender is significant; it recognizes people for who they truly are and reduces re-traumatization. Additionally, accurate gender and sex data is needed to inform important policy and program decisions and ensure equity in government program delivery for gender-diverse populations.

Supporting reconciliation

In the past, government has not collaborated with Indigenous Peoples on data collection. There are times when data has been collected without input into the approach from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. Improvements are needed to better reflect the diversity, perspectives, and interests of Indigenous Peoples. Given B.C.'s commitments under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act), the Province will co-develop with Indigenous Peoples new approaches to Indigenous data governance that recognize and support their rights.

Additionally, working towards reconciling the history of colonization of Indigenous Peoples, we must update our data systems to include Indigenous languages and naming practices so that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples' identities are recognized in their own language and can be used when accessing government services.

Key Actions:

- **Introduce new approaches for data initiatives prioritized by First Nations and Métis Nation BC**
- **Approach Indigenous data governance with a commitment to co-development. This will align with or exceed the Interim Approach to Implementing the Requirements of Section 3 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act**
- **Release an Indigenous language technical readiness assessment framework for IM/IT systems**
- **Develop and deliver data standards and guidelines for including Indigenous language names in data systems and services**

PROJECT EXAMPLE

Including Indigenous Peoples' languages in systems and services

Canada's colonial legacy includes a history of policies and practices that were devastating to Indigenous Peoples causing profound and ongoing harm to their cultures, languages, communities and connections. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan was introduced in March 2022. Along with other important commitments, it includes an action to "adopt an inclusive digital font that allows for Indigenous languages to be included in communication, signage, services and official records."

We are working to ensure Indigenous Peoples can register for government ID and access services using their preferred language that reflects their identity. This work is extremely complex, must include extensive engagement with Indigenous Peoples, and requires collaboration and cooperation across many organizations.

Government is coordinating across program areas, the public sector, and beyond to identify impacts to service areas and related systems, and the dependencies among them. With guidance from Indigenous Peoples on priority areas of focus, we will develop policies, standards, tools, and technology to make the needed changes. Indigenous Peoples will continue to be engaged in decision making to ensure government is implementing options that reflect Indigenous Peoples' needs, while accounting for systems and services dependencies.

Learn more about how government is Including Indigenous languages in government records, systems and services.

Increasing evidence-based decision making

Most data available in government systems has been collected to deliver programs and meet specific operational needs. This program-level data can have tremendous value when made available for others to access and when integrated across ministries and public agencies to enable opportunities for research.

We need to unlock the value of data to understand and solve complex cross-ministry problems such as homelessness, climate change, and economic recovery.

Key Actions:

- **Revitalize BC Stats to increase our ability to provide data for public decisions and trusted, unbiased statistical, and research expertise**
- **Develop indicators to understand outcomes for people in B.C. across many facets of life**
- **Expand the Data Innovation Program and Data Science Partnerships to meet the increased demand for integrated data research and analysis**

PROJECT EXAMPLE

Driving evidence-based decisions in programs to help those experiencing homelessness

The analytical expertise for the integrated data project on preventing and reducing homelessness is provided by the Data Science Partnerships program. Phase one of the project findings refuted a popular belief that most people experiencing homelessness in B.C. are from elsewhere and for the first time provided an annual estimate of individuals who are unhoused in B.C. The project not only identified people's movement between regions, but also where they accessed services throughout the calendar year. This gave the most complete image ever of homelessness in B.C.

With phase two of the project underway, the analysis will focus on service use and opportunities for intervention. The research and analysis in the homelessness project will inform policy decisions to improve the lives of people in B.C. experiencing homelessness.

Delivering the modern services people need

Citizens expect easy access to their data, so they know what has been collected and used. There is a growing expectation that we provide citizens transparent, open, and secure access to their data.

We need to establish verified data sources that are supported by modern technology and strong governance practices. Specifically for high value data that is commonly used such as names of schools, parks, and roadways. This will make data easier to collect, share, and update across government—creating efficiencies, trusted data, and substantial cost savings.

Key Actions:

- **Data registers to quickly share or disseminate data across government and to the public**
- **Improved access to open (non-personal, non-sensitive) data and licensed government data based on the needs of the tech sector, local government, and non-profit organizations**
- **Enhanced BC Data Catalogue with an increased number and variety of datasets available**

PROJECT EXAMPLE

Enhancing the BC Data Catalogue to meet the needs of government and the public

An enhanced BC Data Catalogue has been launched that enables users across government and industries such as the B.C. tech sector, non-profits, and small businesses to access government and public sector data to make decisions and improve programs and services.

The BC Data Catalogue provides access to over 3,000 sets of data, some sets with open access, and some available for use through licences. It also references applications and web services available for use with each dataset so users can easily find the data and related applications in one place.

In addition to the extensive enhancements completed with the release of the new BC Data Catalogue, research with prospective government and non-government users is planned to identify any remaining barriers to sharing and accessing data through the Catalogue. This research will inform improvements to the Catalogue to increase contribution and use as we continue to prioritize access to licensed and open data.

Strengthening our data competency and governance

To make progress on strategic data initiatives, we need to strengthen our foundation. Our ability to solve problems collaboratively and deliver seamless service experiences to people in B.C. will be streamlined through more consistent data management practices, clarifying roles and responsibilities, increasing opportunities to use common data technology, and improving our ability to attract and retain data professionals with key skillsets.

The Provincial Data Plan will strengthen our foundation by creating cross-government executive support for vital data initiatives, bringing stability to how we manage data as the important asset it is, and getting the right data expertise on board.

Actions:

- **Establish two assistant deputy minister committees to advance data management and evidence-based decision making**
- **Release data policies to drive consistent data management practices across government**
- **Deliver data standards and guidelines to improve data collection, use, sharing, and security**
- **Develop data-focused job profiles and a talent management plan**
- **Create reskilling and training curricula to increase data competency**

A new data governance model to increase alignment of data initiatives across government

Our ability to deliver on government commitments relies on alignment and sharing of data across ministries. The Anti-Racism Data Act and Declaration Act Action Plan are examples of mandates that require substantial cross-government coordination and data sharing to be successful. A new data governance model has been introduced to ensure this coordination across government.

A new governance model, led by assistant deputy ministers, has been introduced to ensure this coordination across government.

The assistant deputy minister committees, overseen by the Deputy Minister Committee on Digital and Data, include:

- ADM Committee on Evidence-Based Decision Making to prioritize and coordinate a whole-of-government approach to research and statistics to inform important policy and program decisions.
- ADM Committee on Data Management to prioritize and coordinate a whole-of-government approach to the collection, sharing, and use of data.

The committees focus on identifying common high priorities and immediate actions. Each ADM committee will be supported by executive director-led working groups involving cross-functional subject matter experts to advance priority data initiatives. This model will increase alignment of data initiatives across government and strengthen executive support for vital data-related activities.

How the Provincial Data Plan was developed

A comprehensive consultation was completed in 2021 to gather input from ministries and the broader public sector about B.C.'s data.

This input identified systemic challenges with how data is collected and used. The root causes centered around governance, policy, technology, and lack of resources and data competency.

The Provincial Data Plan responds to these challenges with actions to strengthen our data foundation and to act on priority data initiatives.

A special thank you to the members of the BC Data Council for creating and delivering the BC Data Roadmap which was leveraged to create the Provincial Data Plan.

2019
BC Data Council Data Roadmap developed

Ministry-specific strategies

Jurisdictional scans

Spring 2021
Research

Watchdog reports

Summer 2021
Consultation with ministries, as well as provincial, territorial, and federal statistical agencies

Fall 2021
First draft of Provincial Data Plan produced

Spring 2022
Deputy Minister Committee on Digital and Data (DMCDD) endorses actions within the Data Plan

June 2, 2022
Anti-Racism Data Act becomes law

Summer 2022
Implementation of foundational activities:

- New data governance model
- Data Management Policy
- New team forms to focus on Declaration Act Action 3.15 (including Indigenous Peoples languages in systems and services) and Indigenous data governance
- Piloting data registers

Fall 2022
Continue delivery of priority items

Summer 2023
Introducing the Provincial Data Plan

Progress to date and what's up next

Complete

- Released the Gender and Sex Data Standard (PDF, 159 KB) and Guidelines (PDF, 336KB), learn more about the Gender and Sex Data Standard
- The Anti-Racism Data Act became law June 2022
- Initiated collaborative discussions with Indigenous Peoples about data governance
- Improved the usability and accessibility of the BC Data Catalogue
- Released a new Metadata Standard (PDF, 160KB) and supporting Guidelines (PDF, 288KB), learn more about the Metadata Standard
- Established a new data governance structure with assistant deputy minister committees and supporting working groups
- Released a Data Management Policy that will align data practices across government, learn more about the Data Management Policy

Near term (6-12 months)

- Advance the research priorities identified under the Anti-Racism Data Act
- Co-develop an approach with Indigenous Peoples for Indigenous data governance
- Draft a framework for updating IM/IT systems to recognize text characters used in Indigenous languages
- Develop policy and guidance to ensure digital services can accommodate Indigenous languages
- Scale the Data Innovation Program and Data Science Partnerships program to better meet the demand for integrated data analysis
- Refocus statistics production and research projects on government priorities
- Increase the number and variety of catalogued datasets in BC Data Catalogue
- Launch a new procurement method to increase access to highly skilled data professionals

Longer term

- New approaches to Indigenous data governance
- Increase access to open and licensed government data
- Pilot the use of authoritative data registers
- Release standards and guidance for authoritative data registers
- Launch a corporate service to support use of data registers across ministries
- Integrate BC Data Catalogue and ministry data catalogues
- Develop additional data standards and guidelines to support consistent data management across government
- Release data job stream profiles and talent management plan
- Launch a training program to reskill and develop data competencies

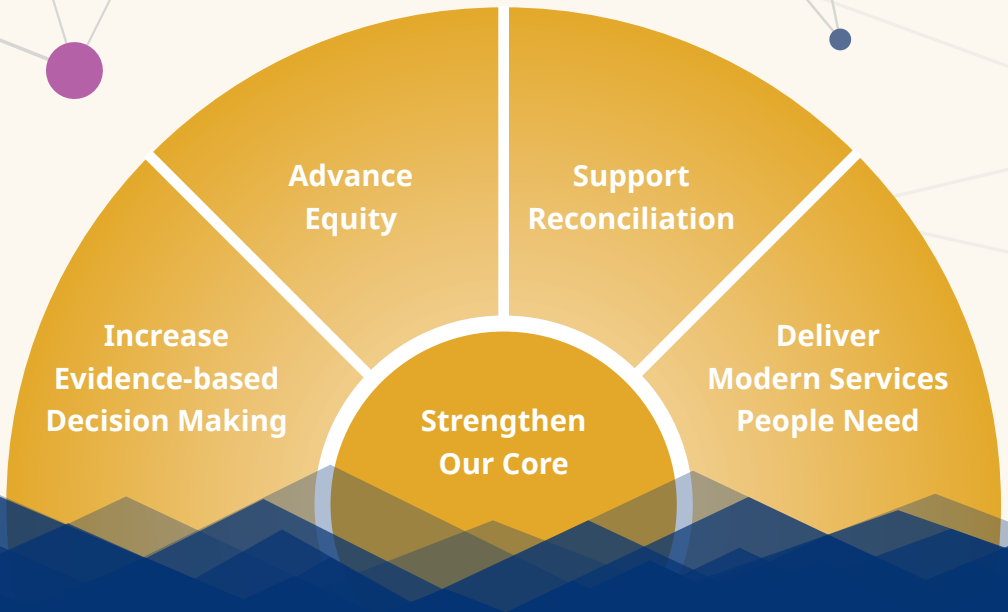
equity **reconciliation** **evidence-based** **modern services** **strengthen our core**

All hands on deck

The actions outlined in this plan will require varying degrees of participation from ministries. BC Data Service will work closely with the Deputy Ministers Committee on Digital and Data and the assistant deputy minister committees to communicate priorities, what is required from ministries, and the supports provided for each action.

For more information about the Provincial Data Plan and how to follow the progress of specific initiatives, please contact BC Data Service at data@gov.bc.ca

For further guidance on how you can move the needle on data management and evidence-based decision making in your area, follow the Data Management teams channel or open a service ticket for help with data policies, standards and guidelines.



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