

HEALTH AND SOCIAL POLICY

DEVELOPING REAL-WORLD POLICY OPTIONS
SO ALL CANADIANS CAN THRIVE

“Canada is at a crossroads. Its challenges include deep disparities and growing pressures on our health and social systems. Yet within these challenges lies real opportunity: Through evidence, innovation and partnership, we can build more equitable and effective systems focused on the well-being and quality of life for people across Canada.”

— DR. JENNIFER ZWICKER

Canada's health and social systems are the foundation of our country's prosperity, yet too often they fall short of what people need and expect. Our work is dedicated to strengthening these systems so all Canadians can thrive. We take on some of society's most urgent and complex challenges: supporting children, youth and adults with disabilities or mental health needs; addressing poverty and homelessness; improving access to primary care; and ensuring newcomers can fully participate in Canadian social and economic life.

Our mission is simple and ambitious: to improve the lives of Canadians. We apply a transdisciplinary approach to develop effective, fair and sustainable solutions based on rigorous evidence. Our researchers are drawn from across the natural and social sciences but share a common idea: Effective systems are integrated systems – connected, co-ordinated and built around shared goals.

We generate insights that lead to better decisions and scalable reforms by bringing together communities, researchers, governments, patient-advocacy and support organizations. Together, we help build the policies and systems that support a healthier, more inclusive and prosperous Canada.

DR. JENNIFER ZWICKER
Director, Health and Social Policy

Dr. Zwicker is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Kinesiology and the director of a core research area at the School of Public Policy. She is the Canada Research Chair (Tier II) in Disability Policy for Children and Youth and serves as chief scientist for the Kids Brain Health Network. Her research focuses on improving health and social policy for children and youth, with a particular emphasis on those with disabilities and mental health concerns, and on advancing systems that better support their well-being and long-term outcomes. Her contributions to policy innovation have been recognized through the Governor General's Canadian Leadership Conference, Canada's Top 40 Under 40, and the WXXN Top 100 Most Powerful Women.



OUR CORE FOCUS

1. CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

Led by Dr. Jennifer Zwicker and Stephanie Chipeur, Azrieli Accelerator Professorship in Law & Disability Policy

We work to improve health and social outcomes for children and youth, particularly those who are neurodivergent or living with mental health concerns, and the families who support them. Canada's childhood policy landscape is fragmented, leaving families to navigate disconnected disability, mental health, education and family service systems. Our work targets critical gaps by advancing better alignment across systems so all young people can thrive.

ADVANCE: Alliance for Disability Voices, Advocacy, and National Community

Empowerment In partnership with organizations across Canada, ADVANCE co-develops evidence-informed policy solutions to reduce inefficiencies, strengthen disability programs and support long-term transformation in services.

2. IMMIGRATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

Led by Robert Falconer, Research Fellow, School of Public Policy

We examine how Canada's health, social and settlement systems influence newcomers' ability to fully participate in Canadian life. By identifying barriers related to health coverage, housing, income supports and primary care access, we advance practical reforms that strengthen newcomer well-being and long-term success. Our goal is to promote mutual integration ensuring newcomers can contribute to and benefit from Canada's prosperity. Drawing on insights from refugee pathways, sponsorship models, labour market integration, and community-led supports, we help build systems that are more effective, humane and responsive to the needs of newcomers and the communities that welcome them.

3. HOMELESSNESS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND POVERTY

Led by Dr. Ronald Kneebone, Research Fellow, School of Public Policy

We work to transform how social programs are designed and delivered by addressing homelessness, domestic violence and chronic poverty through community-driven research and policy innovation. We identify what works on the ground and bring those insights into policy discussions to spur meaningful change. Our goal is to equip governments and community organizations with the evidence and tools to remove systemic barriers and create pathways to safety, stable housing and long-term opportunity. By strengthening the systems that support people in crisis, we help build communities where everyone has the chance to thrive.

4. TEAM-BASED PRIMARY CARE

Led by Dr. Myles Leslie, Professor, Cumming School of Medicine

Millions of Canadians struggle to access a family doctor or timely primary care. Our research reimagines what primary care can look like by developing practical, scalable solutions that expand access, reduce strain on emergency departments, and improve care for patients. We focus on strengthening team-based care, improving co-ordination among providers and designing models to make it easier for people to get the right care at the right time – whether through family physicians, nurse practitioners, pharmacists or integrated primary care teams. By developing policy recommendations for governments and communities, we aim to build a primary care system that is more accessible, efficient and centred on people's needs in Canada.

