

# RESEARCH Opportunities

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## Notice of Intent

### Deadlines

#### November 30

Preliminary notice of requests for proposals for programs of research by teams of researchers in policy areas relevant to HRSDC

Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) circulates *Research Opportunities* to the broad research community to increase awareness of the department's Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for policy research. We encourage you to take the time to review the RFPs and submit proposals where the research suits your interests. Information on how to submit a proposal is provided in the RFP. Prospective bidders should ensure they follow the steps outlined in the RFP.

For more information on the research outlined in this publication, please consult the attached RFP document or contact the respective Contracting Authority. If you would like to subscribe to Research Opportunities, please contact [nc-hrsdc-research-gd@hrsdc-rhdscc.gc.ca](mailto:nc-hrsdc-research-gd@hrsdc-rhdscc.gc.ca). Please note that this mailbox is otherwise used for outgoing emails only. Please do not direct questions related to the above research to this mailbox.

Some of the department's RFPs continue to be posted on MERX, an online service for tendering contracts. If you are interested in additional opportunities for research you can visit [www.merx.com](http://www.merx.com) for a list of available opportunities. Access to complete descriptions and requirements of federally issued RFPs are available through basic registration, which is free.

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### Preliminary notice of requests for proposals for programs of research by teams of researchers in policy areas relevant to HRSDC

Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) is committed to building and using partnerships with research communities and key stakeholders to obtain the evidence needed to support policy and program development. By stimulating the use of Canadian data sources, encouraging creative and innovative research, supporting multi-disciplinary connections among experts and capacity building for a new generation of researchers interested in issues consistent with HRSDC's research priorities, the Department can further its work of helping to build a stronger and more competitive Canada, to support Canadians in making choices that help them live productive and rewarding lives, and to improve Canadians' quality of life.

### Announcement

In late November 2008, HRSDC will formally release Requests for Proposals for programs of research to commence in Spring 2009 in five areas relevant to its mandate. These Requests for Proposals will be posted on MERX for a minimum of 40 days. This posting will also be advertised through Research Opportunities, HRSDC's email bulletin.

Below are the five themes for which programs of research are being sought. An overview of potential research topics under each theme-specific research program is provided in the Annex to this notice.

- Measuring the Returns to Adult Learning/ Training in the Context of an Evolving Labour Market
  - Numeracy in human capital and its impact on labour market performance
  - Family Caregiving
  - Canada's Retirement Income System (RIS)
  - Defining and Measuring Elder Abuse
- There may be additional Requests for Proposals of a similar nature, but based on different themes, at a later date.

### Expectations and Opportunities for Researchers

HRSDC is seeking proposals from new and existing multi-disciplinary teams of researchers for a coherent multi-year (up to three years) program of research work that results in a body of evidence on topics listed in the Annex for at least one of the five themes. Each program of research will consist of a number of individual research projects (up to 10), at the discretion of bidder. Within each research program, researchers are encouraged to propose research projects to address complementary topics not specifically identified in the theme descriptions.

Research teams are required to utilize multi-disciplinary approaches and, where possible, to build capacity by engaging new or young researchers in the research program. The research teams have an opportunity to develop ground breaking research through this support for innovative and exploratory inquiry with long-term research benefits. Academic

*Please, circulate to interested colleagues and post in a public place.*



excellence and policy relevance of the research will be ensured through the application of internal and academic peer review. Researchers will retain intellectual property rights over the research.

**Contract Value:** Contract amounts will vary according to proposed size and duration of the research program, and the level of effort required for program completion. The total budget for any particular research program will not exceed \$500,000. Contracts will pay for research deliverables only.

*All questions related to the RPFs for Programs of Research by Teams of Researchers in Policy Areas Relevant to HRSDC will be addressed when the RFPs are posted on MERX (late November 2008)*

*Please refer to the Annex for an overview of research program themes and topics.*

## Annex

### *Measuring the Returns to Adult Learning/Training in the Context of an Evolving Labour Market*

This project will focus on measuring the returns to adult learning and training at the individual, firm and national levels within an analytical framework for an evolving labour market to better understand the effectiveness of learning decisions and investments related to adults. Examples of policy relevant questions include the following:

Adult investments in learning and training are different from initial education. Therefore, what is the most appropriate analytical framework for understanding returns to learning (broadly defined) across the lifecourse and what are the implications of how returns are measured?

What are the most effective ways to measure returns to adult learning and training in a dynamic manner (gains and losses) in relation to changing labour market demands for policy and program purposes?

What are the various methodological and data challenges in appropriately measuring economic and social returns to human capital development in adults?

How can the returns – social, economic, private, public, employer, individual – be examined over time? Are skills enhanced or lost through work choices?

How large are the costs of bad outcomes over time and for whom? Do individual poor outcomes have spin-off negative effects for the labour force and industry or employment sectors?

### ***Numeracy in Human Capital and Its Impact on Labour Market Performance***

Proficiency in “foundational skills” such as literacy, numeracy and problem solving enhance the capacity of individuals to participate in lifelong learning, benefit from higher standards of living, and enjoy better social outcomes. Compared to highly skilled adults, those with low skill levels are more likely to

experience unemployment and obtain social assistance. While there has been considerable research on the links between prose/document literacy and social and economic inclusion, the field of adult numeracy is generally viewed as being under-researched, under-theorized and under-developed. Examples of knowledge gaps include the following:

What are the connections between numeracy and important outcome measures such as labour market participation, employment income, level of education, and social participation at the local labour market level?

What are the impacts of high or low numeracy on the labour market in terms of adaptability, adoption of technology and new developments in production in an industry?

What is the relationship between numeracy and productivity?

What is the relationship between numeracy and the future development of skills through training and work experience within the whole labour force and by sector?

How are numeracy skills acquired and how do they deteriorate over time and what are the determinants?

### ***Family Caregiving***

The subject of informal/unpaid adult caregiving is important to the Government of Canada’s research and policy focus regarding the potential effects of the ageing population on Canadian society. Caregiving is defined here as the provision of unpaid care and support to family members and friends needing assistance due to physical, cognitive or mental health conditions. While a foundation of research has been established, there continue to be important gaps in our knowledge on caregiving. These include the following:

- What are the economic costs and employment consequences of caregiving, including effects on short-term wages, out-of-pocket expenses, long-term economic security; job loss, reduced hours of work, opportunity costs from forgoing work, impact on employers, etc.?
- What are the supply and demand projections, including projections of the need for caregivers in the next 10 to 20 years as the proportion of older Canadians continues to rise and that of younger Canadians continues to fall?
- What are the unique needs of specific subgroups, including providers of lifelong care of the disabled or chronically ill; intermittent caregivers who provide intense care; caregivers for the mentally ill, etc.?
- What are the effects of caregiving on individual caregivers, including effects on socio-emotional and physical health and well-being?
- What is known about community supports for caregivers, including the availability, access and efficacy of programs, services, and supports available for caregivers?

## Canada's Retirement Income System (RIS)

Canada's RIS has been evolving in recent years – registered pension plan (RPP) coverage has been declining, coverage has shifted from defined benefit (DB) to defined contribution (DC) plans, and reliance on individual savings has increased. While HRSDC has been undertaking research on Canada's RIS, a number of key knowledge gaps and issues remain. These include the following:

- Understanding the decline in low-income rates among seniors over the past two decades (e.g., due to the maturation of the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and of RPPs).
- Understanding causes of receipt of GIS, including patterns of entry post-age 65.
- Understanding the effects of different types of RPPs on labour mobility and income in retirement (e.g., DB plan portability and vesting).
- Changing cohort patterns in the provision of future retirement income (e.g., declines in DB plan coverage, increased RRSP contributions, lower earnings, and a delayed start to savings by younger cohorts).
- RPPs in the context of employee compensation and human resource strategies. What are the plans/objectives of firms? How do these vary by sector?
- Financing of DB plans – how critical an issue? (e.g., costs of DB plans, management of DB plan surpluses/deficits, the composition of DB plan investments).
- Macro-economic impacts of a pay-as-you-go (PAYG) RIS versus a savings-based RIS. Issues could include: cyclical stability of PAYG systems and the personal saving rate; the role of changing asset prices in both systems; the longer-term implications of claims on future output (notably in a context of population ageing).

## Defining and Measuring Elder Abuse

The June 2008 Expert Roundtable on Elder Abuse, sponsored by HRSDC, identified the collection of data on the prevalence and incidence of, and risk factors underlying, elder abuse as a priority. At the roundtable, possible approaches were discussed for conducting surveys of elder abuse both in the general population and in institutions. However, a number of key knowledge gaps and issues must be resolved in advance of conducting such surveys. These include the following:

- Ethical considerations in surveying a population with high rates of mental incapacity and physical vulnerability (e.g., sensitivity of questions on violence and abuse; strategies to minimize the potential for increased risk of harm; how to respond when abuse has been divulged).
- Conceptual definitions of elder abuse and neglect (e.g., types of abuse and neglect, age cut offs, and settings; theoretical frameworks for addressing elder abuse; gender and cultural differences).
- Questionnaire content development (e.g., objectives, priorities, data requirements, operational constructs; use of proxy responses; respondent relations considerations – seniors, family, caregivers, institutional workers and management).
- Supporting research (e.g., smaller scale qualitative or quantitative research studies on risk and protective factors; studies on victim/family/staff experiences by type of elder abuse).