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**IASSIST  
REGIONAL  
REPORT:  
CANADA **

**2013**

**Report for the year ending:  
2013 May 31**  
Respectfully submitted:  
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Regional Secretary for Canada



# REGIONAL REPORT FOR CANADA

For the year ending 2013 May 31

Changes, changes, changes.... there were many changes affecting data in Canada during the past twelve months but is that not normal?

One significant change was the October departure of Michel Séguin, Chief of the Data Liberation Initiative (DLI). As we bid a fond *adieu* to Michel, we thanked him for his tremendous contribution to the provision of public use data in Canada and immediately turned around to warmly welcome David Price to the leadership. David is charged with working the program through a period of transition, while ensuring that all relevant services remain.

Another new face at the DLI is Chantal Ripp, the new Reference & Outreach Coordinator. Chantal is an invaluable member of the team providing technical and reference support to the community. The DLI is the lifeline to the academic data community and the DLI listserv is the vehicle used to communicate data related questions, issues and concerns. Lively and active are two ways to describe this virtual community.

Membership in the DLI remains steady at 75. Between the Data Liberation Initiative [DLI](#) and the Research Data Centres (RDC) program [RDC](#), access is provided to Statistics Canada's public use and confidential microdata.

Training is at the heart of the DLI. Again, amazing training sessions were organized and delivered in each of the four regions. These events are the product of the philosophy 'many hands make light work'. The host institution, the event planners and presenters bring together an enormous wealth of knowledge and experience to share with their peers. These events are both reassuring and overwhelming to newcomers as they enter the data fold (not to mention veteran data librarians, too). The programs are rounded out by the addition of guest experts from Statistics Canada and sometimes a local researcher at the hosting university. Serious hard work (and serious fun) are the hallmarks of DLI training events.

DLI Training events in 2012/2013 occurred across the country. In the west, a.k.a., ACCOLEDS (A COPPUL (Council of Prairie and Pacific University Libraries) Consortium of Library Electronic Data Services) the event was held at the University of Manitoba in November. Noteworthy is this marked the twentieth anniversary of the founding of ACCOLEDS. Ontario training was at Ryerson University, Quebec gathered at *Université Laval* and the Atlantic contingent came together at St. Mary's University. All training in the east (westerner's perspective here) was in April.

The priority for DLI this past year was to move forward with a new electronic communication strategy, including investigating new infrastructure opportunities for the DLI listserv, website and FTP site. The DLI moved to the Electronic File Transfer (EFT) service, a secure managed file transfer solution to host the DLI Collection repository, replacing the DLI FTP site; the EFT is accessible using FTP software. The DLI will also be updating the listserv software that runs the DLI listserv.

A new website strategy for the DLI is in the works. Completion of this will result in enhanced data access services online and offer a better user experience. Through the use of *Nesstar* and *Beyond 20/20* software the DLI will be able to offer access to metadata, public use microdata (PUMFs) and its entire collection of aggregate tables on-line. This is welcomed by the DLI community, but the treatment of all government websites is a real cause for concern. It appears the government is set on a course to make government information more and more difficult to find and access. The reduction of websites from departmentally based to the Prime Minister's Office control is well underway. We have seen evidence that the total number of government sites will be reduced to six and then to one in the near future. Simply stated, there is already a war on data and evidence-based policy making with this government and there are concerns that democracy is at risk if this escalates before the next election.

The [\*Data Documentation Initiative\*](#) (DDI) format continues as the format of choice for publishing on the web.

Another cause for concern is the loss of both the analytic capability of Statistics Canada with the 'voluntary' retirement of much of its workforce and the focus now on keeping up the data collection end. We were told by one observer that the staff who are left are scrambling to merely collect and collate the data and that there is neither time nor personnel to do the analytic work that would make the numbers accessible to the general public. The loss of *Canadian Social Trends* and other analytic publications makes Statistics Canada's data less and less visible. Important stories are simply not being told and with the lack of a public voice, Statistics Canada will appear to be less relevant to the Canadian population. Canadian researchers are looking for innovative alternate solutions in the interim.

The impact of the Harris government's budget cuts in Ontario during the late 1990's continued to have a negative effect on teaching and research. In addition, Harper's government has been shutting down virtually all projects measuring the tar sands effects on the environment is just one example. There appears to be a 'war on science' where government scientists are neither allowed to speak about their findings nor to share their data with others without complete government control. Layoffs at places like Statistics Canada were felt more by the analytic staff than other groups. The impact of cutting the long-form census will be felt over the years to come. It remains to be seen what the quality of the National Household Survey data will be, but early indications are not promising.

Partnerships are key to the DLI's continuing success and have been since its inception in 1996. This past year saw the launch of a pilot project between the DLI and the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) which provides increased access to health care data to a wider academic community. Today, DLI member institutions have access to sample files from CIHI's *Discharge Abstract Database (DAD)*.

In the category of "a few steps forward" there were two noteworthy innovations: 1) access to business microdata on site at Statistics Canada (fee-based) and 2) access to confidential surveys via the Real Time Remote Access (RTRA) service. RTRA is a great culture shift within Statistics Canada in that it allows researchers access to confidential files without human intervention. Licensing and pricing issues are still to be determined.

In the category of "a few steps back", there has been a significant change in the way the *Postal Code Conversion File (PCCF)* is accessed. *PCCF* is now distributed under a strict licence: universities must sign an indemnification against all past, current and future licence violations -- antithetical to the concept of Open Data.

The Microdata Access Division (MAD) at Statistics Canada will be initiating a project to mark-up the confidential files in *DDI* format so the metadata, without marginals, can be compared with the public use files. This should indicate whether access needs to be through a Research Data Centre or by Real Time Remote Access service. The hope is that Scholars Portal will renew its offer to provide access to the metadata via [<odesi>](#) with its superior Mark Logic searching capability. Metadata in [<odesi>](#) is open to the world.

On a positive note, research data management is gaining ground in Canada. The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) sponsored a 4-day workshop in January which involved several IASSIST members as instructors. Graduate students at Carleton University are being gradually introduced to RDM. MANTRA from Edinburgh is an essential component of that workshop.

Statistics Canada opened its Canadian Centre for Data Development and Economic Research (CDER). This provides researchers with on-site (i.e., at Statistics Canada) access to Statistics Canada's business microdata. This is a real breakthrough for researchers and thanks go to Dr. John Baldwin who actively pursued this project for a number of years. Incidentally, John was a major behind-the-scenes inspiration for the Data Liberation Initiative!

Research Data Canada was formed as an outcome of the 2011 Data Summit. Leaders from the National Research Council, granting agencies, CIOs, selected government agencies and others have formed a high-level partnership and have sponsored four webinars over the past year aimed at furthering the cause of data stewardship and management.

Chuck Humphrey (University of Alberta), Wendy Watkins (Carleton University) and Ernie Boyko (formerly of Statistics Canada) remained active in the [CODATA: Canadian National Committee for CODATA](#).

Wendy Watkins and Ernie Boyko (formerly of Statistics Canada) prepared an article for the Springer Reference Live – *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life Research*. Look for it later this year.

February 20-22 were the dates of the seventh [Winter Institute on Statistical Literacy for Librarians \(WISLL\)](#) hosted by the University of Alberta Libraries. This is an excellent event which provides participants with strategies and skills for finding, evaluating, and retrieving published statistics. It is useful to information professionals working in academic, public, and special libraries. The focus of the instruction is on making on-line statistics more accessible to librarians and their patrons.

[Ontario Council of University Libraries](#) (OCUL): Ongoing Collaborations to Improve Access to Data in Ontario

Following the successful release of the ([Scholars GeoPortal](#)) in the spring of 2012, OCUL increased the number of geospatial datasets available through the GeoPortal platform. The portal now boasts almost 500 geospatial datasets, including a variety of vector and raster data, available for users across the province. In addition, the [Scholars GeoPortal User Guide](#) was developed to assist novice and intermediate users with using geospatial data and the GeoPortal. The collection is growing rapidly and efforts are underway to load new data sources daily.

<odesi>, OCUL's social science survey data repository, has entered its fifth year of service! The repository is a wonderful example of OCUL's collaborative strengths and ongoing commitment to improving data access and use in Ontario. The service has now been expanded to allow for institutional subscribers outside of Ontario. The service is available to Canadian academic institutions who are members of the DLI. Subscribers receive access to <odesi>'s extensive collection of microdata, aggregate data, public opinion polls, and other social, political, and economic surveys.

Leanne Trimble [leanne@sholarsportal.info](mailto:leanne@sholarsportal.info) is the person to contact for more information about <odesi>.

This concludes this year's report. My appreciation goes out to all who contributed material for me to include in it. It has been a privilege to be the Regional Secretary for the last four years. Michelle Edwards is the newly elected Regional Secretary and I wish her all the best knowing full well she will do a great job!