



Expert Panel lays out costly consequences of misinformation

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Misinformation can erode trust in our institutions and distort our policy priorities, delaying action on critical issues such as climate change, according to a new expert panel report from the Council of Canadian Academies (CCA). As science and health misinformation becomes increasingly fused with ideology and identity, it contributes to deepening divisions in our society and is taking a real financial and human toll across Canada's communities and systems.

"Misinformation has become a global problem and a defining issue of our time," said Alex Himelfarb, PhD, Chair of the Expert Panel. "The unchecked spread of science and health misinformation leaves individuals and society vulnerable to exploitation and threatens our ability to work together to address shared challenges."

Considerable and mounting evidence shows that misinformation has led to illness and death from unsafe interventions and products, vaccine preventable diseases, and a lack of adherence to public health measures, with the most vulnerable populations bearing the greatest burden. The Expert Panel on the Socioeconomic Impacts of Science and Health Misinformation estimates that misinformation cost the Canadian healthcare system at least \$300 million during nine months of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021.

While combatting misinformation is a complex and long-term challenge, the report details several measures that have shown promise. Ensuring that accurate health and science information is widely accessible and is communicated honestly, understandably, and by trusted messengers can help insulate people from misinformation. Identifying, labelling, and debunking misinformation can also be effective, as are measures that better equip individuals to sort through the increasingly complex information environment, particularly the promotion of critical thinking and media and science literacy in school curricula.

"The impacts of misinformation are complex and not always easy to quantify directly, but they have the potential to undermine the advances made to date in science and health," said Eric M. Meslin, PhD, FRSC, FCAHS, President and CEO of the CCA. "This report explores some of the leading practices for assessing and responding to misinformation that could help to inform approaches to address it."

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada asked the CCA to examine the socioeconomic impacts of science and health misinformation and disinformation on the public and public policy in Canada.

Fault Lines details how science and health misinformation spreads and its impacts on individuals, communities, and society. It explores what makes people susceptible to



misinformation messaging and how we might use these insights to improve societal resilience. The report includes original modelling work to estimate the health impacts and hospitalization costs associated with COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in Canada, and the role misinformation played in contributing to this hesitancy.

Visit www.cca-reports.ca to download the report.

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About the Council of Canadian Academies

The CCA is a not-for-profit organization that undertakes independent, evidence-based expert panel assessments to inform public policy development in Canada. The CCA was founded by three independent organizations that represent some of the finest minds in Canada — the Royal Society of Canada, the Canadian Academy of Engineering, and the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. Their Fellows and senior decision-makers sit on CCA's Board of Directors and Scientific Advisory Committee, and they are a key source of membership for expert panels. The CCA's founding Academies also provide key guidance and input throughout the assessment process, including expert panel nominations and dissemination processes. For more information about the CCA or its assessments, please visit www.cca-reports.ca.

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