

FAULT LINES

Misinformation threatens the individual and collective well-being of people in Canada and around the world, and now proliferates at previously unseen rates. Its consequences can range from the benign to the deadly. **Fault Lines** details the socioeconomic impacts of science and health misinformation in Canada, and the practices most critical to disrupting it.



misinformation

mis-in-fər-mā-shən · noun
false or misleading information, shared deliberately or inadvertently



IMPACTS OF MISINFORMATION

SOCIETAL:

- Political polarization
- Diminished public trust
- Inaction on climate change

COMMUNITY:

- Lower compliance with public health advice
- Outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases
- Increased healthcare-system use and costs

INDIVIDUAL:

- Illness and death from harmful products and preventable diseases
- Wasted money on disproven products and services

COSTS OF COVID-19 MISINFORMATION

Between March and November 2021, **misinformation contributed to vaccine hesitancy for an estimated 2.35 million people in Canada**. If those people who believed COVID-19 to be a hoax or exaggerated had not delayed or refused vaccination, then, by the end of November 2021, there could have been:



198,000

fewer COVID-19 cases

13,000

fewer hospitalizations



3,500

fewer ICU patients

2,800

fewer deaths



\$299 million

saved in hospital costs

Estimates are conservative; cost-savings estimate does not account for costs associated with physician fees, outpatient treatment, or long-COVID cases, nor does it consider broader societal costs, such as lost wages. The panel's methodology is available at cca-reports.ca.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MISINFORMATION

Simple, emotional,
and repetitive

Designed to mimic
credible sources

Visual and shareable

MISINFORMATION AND SOCIETAL DAMAGE

Science and health misinformation can arise from and contribute to:



In times of crisis, our vulnerability to misinformation is heightened. So are the consequences.

DISRUPTING THE FLOW OF MISINFORMATION

There will always be science and health misinformation. Legal and systemic responses—from regulating the information environment to expanding digital literacy to rebuilding institutional trust—carry significant ethical implications and logistical challenges. **However, individuals can take steps to help disrupt the flow of misinformation.**



Labeling inaccurate information

Seeking out trusted messengers

Inoculating others

Framing corrections via the appropriate medium

Debunking falsehoods with evidence

