

NOVA SCOTIA ASSOCIATION OF  
**Social Workers**

PLAZA 1881

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The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada

The Honourable Tony Clement  
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Open letter to Prime Minister Harper and Minister Clement: Maintain the Long Form Census

Attn: The Right Honourable Stephen Harper and The Honourable Tony Clement:

As the professional association of social workers in Nova Scotia, representing over 1700 members, the Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers understands the importance of the mandatory long-form census questionnaire.

In the past, data from the long-form questionnaire have been used to inform program and policy decisions in our communities. The data allow community organizations to ensure that program investments - often with federal money - are targeted toward the populations who need them the most. Moreover, comparing past data with more recent numbers allows us to see whether programs are working or whether adjustments need to be made, as well as whether shared municipal/federal and municipal/provincial programs make a positive impact and provide the best return on investment.

We recognize that your government is proposing changes that would see the long-form questionnaire distributed to more homes across the country, but completing it becomes voluntary. The voluntary nature of the new form will compromise the quality of the data and will not accurately reflect the socio-economic or population diversity demographics that social workers use to shape their programs. By changing the form, long-term comparisons of census data, which are vital to trend analysis and planning, will no longer be possible.

Replacing the Census with a voluntary survey will leave the most vulnerable in society inaccurately accounted for, since they are among those less likely to complete a voluntary survey.

We have been following the debate of the long form census closely. As previously noted by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Canadian Council on Social Development there have been a number of programs recently cancelled that pose a concern for the most vulnerable in society. Programs such as: the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS); Workplace and Employee Survey ; The Survey of Financial Security; and the longitudinal Survey Of Immigrants To Canada.

We urge you and your government to reconsider the decision to eliminate the mandatory long-term census questionnaire in 2011 and beyond. The quality of municipal policies and programs depends on this data.

Sincerely,

Robert. R. Shepherd, M.S.W., M.Ed., RSW  
Executive Director  
NSASW

**CC:**

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- MPs for Nova Scotia ridings
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- Mayor and Local Councilors
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