



Continuing the Conversation

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NORA SPINKS

In the mid-1960s, Governor General Georges P. Vanier and his wife, Pauline, felt it was important to Canadians' social and economic future to *understand* families in Canada. Part of their interest in families was rooted in their firm commitment to their faith, but it was also in response to the widespread social, economic and cultural changes of the time and a belief that family serves as the essential cornerstone of our society. In order to achieve this understanding, they convened the Families in Canada Conference in 1964, which led to the creation of the Vanier Institute of the Family the next year. The Institute was to act as a "Royal Standing Commission that should never be discharged" because understanding families and family life would always be a societal need.

The mandate of the Institute was to analyze, synthesize and organize data about families from the census, academic studies and community programs across the country and apply a "family lens" to its research - what we would call knowledge mobilization today. The Institute shared its work with researchers, policy-makers and the general public through a series of paper-based publications, including *Transition*, which has been the Institute's signature vehicle for enhancing the national understanding of families in Canada for over four decades.

Over the years, the Institute has built on its research program and expanded the conversation through other means, creating and delivering presentations in communities across the country at academic conferences, community events, speaker panels and workshops focused on families or factors that have an impact on family life, family experiences, expectations and aspirations.

As communications technologies have advanced and proliferated, so too have the kinds of platforms and media through which the Institute has been able to

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engage in conversation with Canadians. This, combined with greater mobility, has increased the ability to connect with a broader audience more than ever before. The Institute has embraced this opportunity, continuing with its publications and presentations but also reaching out through our website, social media and a variety of online networks. This has allowed an even greater number of individuals and communities with similar interests or involvement with families to come together and increase our understanding about families in Canada.

We are continuing this journey as we approach the Institute's 50th anniversary by embarking on our national Families in Canada Listening Tour, which brings together individuals, families and organizations interested or involved with families to reflect on and honour the past, understand and appreciate the present, and anticipate and prepare for the future of family life in Canada. We will document the findings and conversations at these gatherings, which will inform the *next* national conference on families in Canada, to be held in 2015 - an event that will inform and guide our research agenda, our publications and our future conversations.

Just as families have continued to perform the same roles while adapting how they do so in response to ever-evolving contexts, the Institute has also continued to perform its same roles while embracing new means of engaging Canadians, and will continue to do so in the years ahead. The mediums have changed, but the message remains the same. ♡