



The Evolution of Evidence-Based Policy-Making in Canada

Shaun P. Young

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Making policy is what governments do, but there are some fascinating and hotly debated issues associated with how government decisions get made in the interests of the people. The concept and practice of evidence-based policy-making insists that properly developed public policy draws on the best available evidence. This book considers how governments in Canada have historically interacted with research and what directions these interactions may take in the future.

The goal of government making decisions based on information collected in a scientific (or at least methodical and unbiased) manner goes back to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Given recent advances in the accumulation of such evidence, however, creating evidence-based policy has become an increasingly complex process. The ongoing generation of new knowledge continues to increase both the number and variety of potential policy issues and challenges. This process is often juxtaposed with "opinion-based" policy-making—a selective use of evidence or a reflection of the untested views of individuals or groups. In fact, the role of evidence in policy-making takes us to the very heart of the democratic process. Many victims of crime want longer prison sentences for criminals, but research shows that this is expensive and largely ineffective. To what extent should opinion be allowed to undermine the primacy of evidence? And other issues, such as the existing cultural and institutional challenges to evidence-based policy-making, are also considered across a range of disciplines.

This collection considers these issues in the Canadian context, from the path knowledge travels via policy advisory systems and research-brokering organizations like the Fraser Institute, the CD Howe Institute, and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, to specific areas of policy including education, crime, tax, poverty, and environment. Contributors, leading scholars in their fields (a number of whom are also former senior civil servants), explore the evolution and practice of evidence-based policy-making in Canada and look forward to ways in which government decision-making could be improved.

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