



Innovation, Science and
Economic Development Canada

Innovation, Sciences et
Développement économique Canada

Deputy Minister

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Ottawa, Canada
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APR 03 2020

Mr. Dean Allison, M.P.
Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G6

Dear Mr. Allison:

On behalf of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED), I am pleased to provide additional information as requested in your letter dated 13 March 2020 with respect to the report entitled *Report 1, Connectivity in Rural and Remote Areas, of the 2018 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada*.

The Committee requested clarification on how ISED will ensure we have the proper data to make evidence-based decisions, and in particular for a status update on Statistics Canada's new survey of Internet use, and whether and how it is being used to assess and improve rural broadband Internet connectivity.

ISED uses a number of data sources to assess, and in turn develop policy and programs to improve, the availability of rural broadband Internet connectivity and its adoption.

In terms of measuring availability of broadband and mobile services, ISED, in conjunction with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), maintains comprehensive and precise mapping data describing retail broadband Internet services and wholesale backbone infrastructure in Canada. This data and mapping shows an accurate picture of where there is access to Internet service across Canada, the speed available, and technology in use. This mapping data is used by policy makers to determine where gaps in access to high-speed Internet exist, and to assess how well project proposals aim to fill these gaps when making funding decisions.

ISED and the CRTC use a multi-step process to map broadband coverage in Canada to ensure it captures a global perspective on coverage. This data is assembled through the CRTC's annual survey along with feedback and consultation with key stakeholders, including Internet service providers, federal partners, industry associations, provinces, and others. This detailed coverage information is brought together with the most up-to-date demographics (household and population information from the Census of Canada) and geospatial analytics available. Coverage data is also collected from Canadian Internet service providers (ISPs) based on the location of network infrastructure. ISED and the CRTC have also taken steps to

improve the public availability of this data. In December 2019, more granular National Broadband Data with an accuracy of about 250 metres along roadways was made publicly available on the Open Government portal, and in early 2020, this more granular data was visually integrated into ISED's public National Broadband Internet Services Availability Map.

This more precise public picture of Internet access across the country is expected to help enhance the accuracy and efficiency of targeted broadband expansion projects in rural and remote areas. National and regional statistics regarding coverage continue to be reported annually via the CRTC's *Communications Monitoring Report*.

In terms of adoption of Internet surveys, ISED employs several sources that collect data from different populations of users or Internet Service Providers. This includes the CRTC as an important source of Internet and digital technology adoption information, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) *Media Technology Monitor* survey, which provides data on the adoption of different technologies, trends, activities and demographic groups. ISED evaluates the impacts of its broadband programs, including adoption outcomes, as per the Treasury Board *Policy on Results*. For the Connecting Canadians Program (CCP) and Connect to Innovate (CTI) program, this evaluation process included conducting interviews, surveying applicants and conducting case studies to help assess the impacts and outcomes of improved access to Internet in rural and remote areas as a result of these funding programs.

Furthermore, since 1999, Statistics Canada and ISED have worked together to collect, compile, analyse and disseminate indicators related to the digital economy. The cornerstones of these efforts have been the establishment of two recurring flagship surveys, the Canadian Internet Use Survey (CIUS) and the Survey of Digital Technologies and Internet Use (SDTIU). These surveys provide data on access and adoption of Internet services across the country, by Canadians and businesses, respectively.

The most recent CIUS released in 2019 provided evidence on access to the Internet and on if, how and why individuals use, and did not use, the Internet. Conducting new iterations of the CIUS will provide consistent and reliable data that ISED needs to improve policy and program development and conduct more robust analysis of the impacts of digital technology on Canadian consumers. The survey data also provides key internationally comparable indicators that allows Canada to benchmark and monitor its progress vis-à-vis peer countries.

Budget 2019 announced \$11.5 million for ISED to engage Statistics Canada to conduct surveys on household access and use of the internet and on digital technology adoption and internet use by Canadian businesses. This funding will enable ISED to engage Statistics Canada to conduct two iterations of the CIUS, for reference years 2020 and 2022, and two iterations of the SDTIU for reference years 2021 and 2023. ISED and Statistics Canada are currently undertaking a wide consultation process within ISED and other departments to determine data needs to develop a draft questionnaire of CIUS for testing. Data collection is scheduled for 2020 and data release is scheduled for 2021.

Data on availability and adoption of Internet services and digital technologies from all of these sources has been, and will continue to be, used to inform evidence-based policy making related to *Canada's Connectivity Strategy* and the universal access pillar of ISED's Digital Charter. Getting Canadians online is a performance indicator under several programs that facilitate this access in different ways, such as improving access to connectivity infrastructure in underserved areas (e.g. CCP and CTI), digital skills (e.g. Digital Literacy Exchange Program), affordable services (e.g. Connecting Families initiative), and accessible equipment (e.g. Accessible Technologies Program).

I trust this additional information is useful, and would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Committee for their work and dedication to the work of this study and advancing rural broadband connectivity across Canada. Should you have any further questions on this matter, we would be happy to provide additional context or information.

Sincerely,



Simon Kennedy