ADDRESSING HARMFUL CONTENT AND DISINFORMATION

INTRODUCTORY BRIEFING ON THE DIGITAL CITIZEN INITIATIVE

August 2022

1

THE DIGITAL CITIZEN INITIATIVE (DCI)

Program and policy centre for disinformation and online harms.

1. Understand and combat online disinformation: programming and outreach

2. Promote diversity of content online: international engagement

3. Develop new rules and legislation for social media platforms: policy development

2

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INCEPTION AND PURPOSE

RAISON D'ETRE:

- Social media is ubiquitous, and so are the harms it creates: hate, disinformation, violence, intolerance, polarization and more
- Government needs to better understand these dynamics, and develop evidence-based solutions

2019: PROTECTING DEMOCRACY

- Initiative led by Privy Council Office – Democratic Institutions to safeguard the 2019 general election
- DCI is created to bolster citizen resilience to disinformation during the election
- DCI administers $7M in funding for digital media and civic literacy in the lead up to the election

2020: RESEARCH FOCUS

- Need to understand what digital media and civic literacy activities work best
- Budget 2019 provides $19.4M over 4 years to DCI for research, knowledge dissemination, and Diversity of Content Online

2021: ONLINE HARMS LEGISLATION

- DCI leads on the development of new legislation and regulation for social media platforms

THE FUTURE OF THE DCI

- **DCI currently set to sunset in 2022-23**

3

94%
of Canadian adults have an account on at least one social media platform
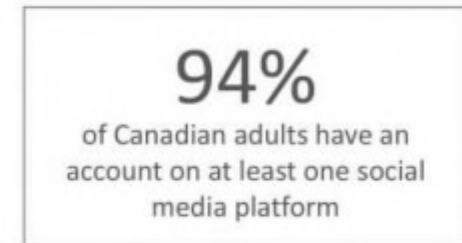
1. UNDERSTAND AND COMBAT ONLINE DISINFORMATION

*"Disinformation is a **fundamental threat** to the rights that enable democracy to thrive. It **undermines freedom of expression**, by making it more difficult to access timely, relevant and accurate information. It **undermines civil and political rights**, blurring the line between activism and manufactured deception. It helps propping up authoritarian leaders, fuelling polarisation on wrong information."*

-OECD

*"The ability to cause large scale disinformation and undermine facts is an **existential risk to humanity**"*

- UN Secretary General António Guterres

CANADIAN CONTEXT

- ① Disinformation is not well understood, particularly as it relates to specific populations

- ① The research and civil society community surrounding disinformation is not fully matured

- ① Citizens and Canadian democracy may be vulnerable - COVID-19 has highlighted and exacerbated the impact of disinformation

1. UNDERSTAND AND COMBAT ONLINE DISINFORMATION

The Digital Citizen Contribution Program (DCCP)

Digital media and civic literacy

✓ Strengthen citizen resilience to disinformation
✓ Promote critical consumption of information
✓ Reinforce foundations for democratic engagement

❖ $7 million in advance of the 2019 federal election (Vote 5);
❖ $225,000 (over 3 years) Media Literacy Week (Vote 5);
❖ $4.3 million to address COVID-19 related disinformation (ESF).

Research and knowledge dissemination

✓ Understand disinformation in the Canadian context
✓ Cultivate a vibrant disinformation research community
✓ Develop evidence for new program and policy activities

❖ $4.1 million to support research activities (Vote 5)
❖ Annual conferences bringing together researchers and practitioners

DIGITAL DEMOCRACY PROJECT

Contribution Agreement with the Public Policy Forum

- Rally academics, thinkers, and civil society organizations to launch research projects
- Four programs of work: monitoring, applied research, civic infrastructure and market responses, and policy development lab
- DCI: $2.5 million in support over 4 years (Vote 5)

PCH-SSHRC JOINT INITIATIVE

Partnership with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

- Build Canada's capacity to conduct research on and related to countering online disinformation
- Help foster a community of research in the digital citizenship and online disinformation space in Canada
- DCI: $2.4 million in support over 4 years (Vote 5)

1. UNDERSTAND AND COMBAT ONLINE DISINFORMATION

Committees

Steering Committee

✓ Frame the agenda of the funding components
✓ Includes civil society, academia, funders/foundations
✓ Co-chaired by senior officials at Canadian Heritage and Privy Council Office-Democratic Institutions

❖ Consider pressing research needs related to online disinformation in the Canadian context in order to provide strategic guidance for the DCCP and Joint Initiative with SSHRC;
❖ Evaluate and advise on proposals received through the DCCP and Joint Initiative with SSHRC; and
❖ Provide strategic input into matters pertaining to the operation of the DCCP and IDCR, and the Digital Citizen Initiative at large, as needed

Interdepartmental Consultative Body

✓ Facilitate a whole-of-government approach
✓ Includes no less than seven members at any time
✓ Chaired by the DCI

❖ Review applications to the DCCP to ensure that recommended applications original, promising, and are in line with relevant government interests;
❖ Evaluate and advise on proposals received through the DCCP and Joint Initiative with SSHRC;
❖ Inform the continued development of the DCCP and Joint Initiative with SSHRC; and,
❖ Explore and collaborate on horizontal policy issues.

2. DIVERSITY OF CONTENT ONLINE

CONTEXT

- Citizens' access and exposure to a diversity of content play a central role in the making of a resilient democracy

- Access to a diversity of content:
  - promotes a healthy public discourse
  - fosters greater social inclusion
  - encourages understanding and tolerance between different cultures and communities
  - builds citizens' resilience to disinformation

- Digital technology brings challenges, such as their impact on the presence and discoverability of diverse content, including Canadian content

  - filter bubbles and disinformation, as well as the business models used by online intermediaries affecting the remuneration of content creators, including journalists, are now mainstream

  - growing concerns that citizens' media diets are less diverse due to content being highly personalized and reflecting fewer, and more polarized, points of view.

7

2. DIVERSITY OF CONTENT ONLINE

Multi-Stakeholder Working Group

- comprised of representatives from governments, the private sector, and civil society

- monthly Working Group meetings have taken place virtually throughout 2020 and 2021 to develop international **Guiding Principles on Diversity of Content Online** that were published in June 2021

Guiding Principles - four key themes

- the creation, access and discoverability of diverse content online
- the fair remuneration and economic viability of content creators
- the promotion of diverse, pluralistic sources of news and information, as well as resilience against disinformation and misinformation
- the transparency of the impacts of algorithmic treatments on online content

Next Steps

- Working Group members will develop 'Actionable Recommendations' for signatories to implement Guiding Principles within the scope of their responsibilities

Members

Civil Society
- ARTICLE19
- International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity
- Society of Authors, Composers, and Publishers of Music
- Coalition française pour la diversité culturelle
- European Audiovisual Observatory

Government	Private Sector
• Canada	• Google
• Australia	• Netflix
• Finland	• Deezer
• France	• Vubble
• Germany	

8

3. NEW LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

CONTEXT

- Social media platforms facilitate the creation and spread of harmful content
- They are not subject to public oversight, and do not operate in the public interest
- Allies and like-minded countries have taken action – and Canada risks falling behind

1 in 5 Canadians have experienced some form of online hate

62% of Canadians think there should be **more regulation of online hate speech**

3x Racialized Canadians are almost **three times** more likely to have experienced harmful behaviour online

2019 Mandate Letter Commitment

"Create new regulations for social media platforms, starting with a requirement that all platforms remove illegal content, including hate speech, within 24 hours or face significant penalties. This should include other online harms such as radicalization, incitement to violence, exploitation of children, or creation or distribution of terrorist propaganda."

2021 Mandate Letter Commitment

"Continue efforts with the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada to develop and introduce legislation as soon as possible to combat serious forms of harmful online content to protect Canadians and hold social media platforms and other online services accountable for the content they host. This legislation should be reflective of the feedback received during the recent consultations."

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For Public Release

3. NEW LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

New legislation to **regulate social media platforms**

- ✓ In summer/fall 2021, consulted on a proposed framework developed with Public Safety, Innovation, Science and Economic Development, and Justice
- ✓ Published a "What We Heard Report" in February 2022
- ✓ Established an expert advisory group on online safety, composed of 12 individuals, who participated in up to ten workshops
- ✓ Engaged with the Public Policy Forum's Citizens' Assembly
- ✓ Engaging with National Indigenous Organizations
- ✓ Hosting Minister-led roundtables and additional engagement

STATUS

- ✓ Continue and finalize engagement
- ✓ Developing proposals for paths forward

10

Slide Notes

<u>**Slide 5:**</u>

In terms of Vote 1 funding, the Research component of the DCI was allocated $121,250 in the first year of its mandate and $129,250 per year in years 2, 3 and 4. The Promoting Diversity of Content Online component was allocated $667,375 in years 1 and 2, and plans to spend $233,500 and $540,000 in years 3 and 4, respectively. Corporate costs for both components combined were $132,351 in year 1 and $140,007 per year in years 2, 3 and 4.