



# **Federal Literacy Facts**

*an update on literacy-related developments at the national level*

**Movement for Canadian Literacy**

*December 2002*

*Greetings from Ottawa:*

*These are exciting times for all of us who care about the future of literacy in Canada.*

*In November, the federal government wrapped up its Innovation Agenda consultations at a National Innovation Summit, and the results placed literacy at the top of the skills and learning priority list. In early October, HRDC hosted a "Best Practices Workshop" on Literacy, which developed into an important policy forum. On October 24, MCL sponsored a very successful 9<sup>th</sup> annual Literacy Action Day. In September, MCL launched a national consultation to help the literacy community develop a shared vision and "Literacy Action Agenda" for the future.*

*Read on to learn more about each of these initiatives. You'll see that together we've accomplished a lot this Fall, but there is still much to be done. It would appear that literacy is now solidly on the federal agenda, and we'll be working to ensure that government commitments are backed up with meaningful actions.*

*Wendy DesBrisay  
Executive Director, MCL*

## ***Literacy identified as key learning priority at National Innovation Summit!***

At the November 2002 National Summit on Innovation, participants identified a recommendation calling for a "pan-Canadian literacy development system" as the number one learning priority for the country.

The Summit, held November 18-19 in Toronto, was the culmination of a year and a half of federal efforts and six months of intensive federal consultations feeding into the development of a National Innovation Agenda. The results on the skills and learning front were especially encouraging for the literacy community. Summit participants considered 93 recommendations, 29 of which focused on skills and learning. The following literacy recommendation gained the most support in the area of skills and learning, and was selected as one of the final 16 Innovation Agenda recommendations that will be presented to Cabinet:

***"Establish a pan-Canadian literacy development system, supported by federal, provincial and territorial governments. Establish programs to improve literacy levels and adults' knowledge of basic grammar and vocabulary."***

The wording of the recommendation is not what we would have chosen. However, it was encouraging to have literacy earn such high marks, considering that it was placed in the same category as recommendations on post-secondary education, apprenticeship and skilled trades, and many other areas of national importance.

(more...)

**(Summit continued ...)**

Innovation Summit participants included 450 “leaders” from the private sector, the voluntary sector, non-governmental organizations, academia and various levels of government. The event was by invitation only, and literacy delegates made up only a very small contingent. Nevertheless, our delegates’ voices were obviously heard - in the seminars, in the hallways, at the roundtable group discussions, and when the final votes were tallied. Many delegates from outside of the traditional literacy field added strength to our voices. Representatives from business, from governments, and from other education and volunteer sectors demonstrated that they too were literacy champions.

These Summit findings verify that a wide variety of Canadians recognize the importance of literacy to our nation’s social and economic vitality. They acknowledge that literacy is an issue not only for the few, but for all Canadians. The overwhelming extent of Summit support for a pan-Canadian literacy strategy makes it clear that the time for action is now.

**What’s next?**

HRDC Minister Jane Stewart and Industry Minister Alan Rock pledged to take the final sixteen recommendations back to their Cabinet colleagues. It’s clear that their efforts over the short term will focus on ensuring that the Innovation Agenda receives support from the Prime Minister and the Cabinet as well as prominent attention in the next federal budget (expected in February 2003). MCL and the other national literacy organizations have already written a joint letter to the Ministers expressing encouragement, offering assistance in the development of a meaningful pan-Canadian strategy on literacy and essential skills, and urging that the time for action is now.

**Canadian Learning Institute announced at Innovation Summit**

Federal government officials used the Innovation Summit as an opportunity to launch a new federal Institute. The *Canadian Learning Institute* will be responsible for researching and communicating information about learning at all stages of life, from early childhood through adulthood. A government backgrounder suggests the Institute’s mandate will be to foster “informed decision making” by

- (1) reporting on Canada’s progress in learning outcomes and disseminating key findings on what works; and
- (2) supporting the testing and analysis of innovative approaches to learning and research on best practices, in order to understand and build consensus on what works and what doesn’t.

Currently, there is no information available on funding for the Institute. However, it is clear that the Institute will operate as an independent arm’s-length organization and that it is intended to serve the following stakeholders:

- parents and other individuals making decisions about education, labour market training and skills upgrading;
- employers determining the value of training investments;
- learning institutions needing to adapt curriculum to a changing society;
- communities determining best intervention practices; and
- governments assessing the cost-effectiveness of skills investments.

As information on the Institute becomes available, MCL will stay tuned to discover how literacy issues will be incorporated into the Institute’s mandate, and whether or not the NLS will be affected.

**For more information on the Innovation Summit, go to [www.innovationstrategy.gc.ca](http://www.innovationstrategy.gc.ca)**

## **National literacy organizations join together to call for a pan-Canadian literacy strategy**

This Fall, MCL worked with five other national literacy organizations - la Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF), Frontier College, Laubach Literacy of Canada, ABC Canada, and the National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) - to develop the document *Building a Pan-Canadian Strategy on Literacy and Essential Skills: Recommendations for the Federal Government*. The paper was submitted to the federal Ministers responsible for the Innovation Agenda, HRDC Minister Jane Stewart and Industry Minister Alan Rock.

The brief contains 12 recommendations and outlines more than 30 action steps which we see as necessary to the development of a pan-Canadian strategy for literacy and essential skills development. The recommendations were developed after consulting with dozens of policy experts within the literacy community and reviewing many policy documents related to literacy and adult basic education.

These are some of the key recommendations in the submission:

- The federal government should take the lead in developing a pan-Canadian literacy and essential skills strategy.
- The federal government should expand the mandate and resources of the National Literacy Secretariat.
- HRDC should examine government programs and policies through a “literacy lens” to ensure that support for adult literacy is maximized.
- The federal government should support the development and implementation of a multi-government Aboriginal Literacy Action Plan.

*Building a Pan-Canadian Strategy on Literacy and Essential Skills: Recommendations for the Federal Government* is available online at [www.literacy.ca](http://www.literacy.ca)

## **Literacy Best Practices Workshop: Policy dialogue leads to encouraging remarks from HRDC Minister**

About 150 literacy delegates from across the country met in Toronto on October 2-4 to take part in a government-initiated “Best Practices Workshop on Literacy”. It was the literacy community’s opportunity to position our issue as a key component of the National Innovation Agenda.

What began as “another discussion on practice” developed into an important dialogue on literacy policy. At the end of the conference, delegates delivered key messages directly to HRDC Minister Jane Stewart. These messages included the need to position literacy as more than a labour market development issue; the importance of moving away from the current “patchwork” toward a system of adequate, sustained support for literacy delivery; the need for federal leadership in developing a pan-Canadian literacy strategy based on an intergovernmental accord; and the need to expand the role and resources of the NLS.

In her closing remarks, Minister Stewart pledged to work with the community to explore the potential of a pan-Canadian literacy strategy. She appeared enthusiastic about the possibility of sitting down with her provincial counterparts to hash out a united vision for literacy in Canada.

*“I guess if there is one area that ... is foundational in terms of whether we will be successful as a nation and the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it’s the stuff that you’re doing. I think that with a little bit of agitation and help from you and some continuing energy from the Senator, we might be able to figure this one out and get it onto some federal / provincial Tables in the context of the Skills and Learning Agenda. ... We’ve got the opportunity to figure out how to set a platform, build an architecture that is sustainable and long lasting. ...”*

Over the coming weeks and months, we’ll continue to encourage the Minister to move in this direction.

## **Literacy Action Day 2002: Spreading the word on Parliament Hill**

With the federal government hard at work on its national Innovation Agenda, the timing couldn't have been better for our ninth annual Literacy Action Day. On October 24th, 75 literacy representatives, working in regional teams, met with about 90 MPs, Senators, and Hill staffers.

Providing our elected decision-makers with concrete suggestions for action and personal connections to the literacy issue at such an important time is key to our efforts to advance literacy in Canada. Now we'll be watching to see how this translates into action.

For photos, copies of our Parliamentarian's Toolkit, and other information about LAD 2002, go to [www.literacy.ca](http://www.literacy.ca) and follow the links.

### **These recent MCL policy documents are available on-line or by e-mail (mcl@literacy.ca)**

- *Creating a National Literacy Action Agenda: Discussion Guide*  
[www.literacy.ca/nlaa/](http://www.literacy.ca/nlaa/)
- *Literacy Matters: Why Canada should make Adult Literacy and Essential Skills a Policy and Funding Priority* (MCL's Report to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance)  
[www.literacy.ca/govrel/matters/cover.htm](http://www.literacy.ca/govrel/matters/cover.htm)
- *Building a Pan-Canadian Strategy on Literacy and Essential Skills: Recommendations for the Federal Government*  
[www.literacy.ca/govrel/building/cover.htm](http://www.literacy.ca/govrel/building/cover.htm)
- *Literacy and Health: Making the Connection* (MCL's Brief to the Romonow Commission on Healthcare)  
[www.literacy.ca/](http://www.literacy.ca/)

## **Please help us develop a National Literacy Action Agenda**

One of MCL's key goals this year is to develop a national Literacy Action Agenda in consultation with the literacy community. Once developed and approved, this Agenda can guide our advocacy work, our partnerships, and our development as a field for years to come. That's why last September, in a special issue of MCL's *literacy.ca* newsletter, we released ***Creating a National Literacy Action Agenda: Discussion Guide***.

The Guide outlines five priority areas:

1. Developing policies
2. Building a high-quality adult literacy / basic education system
3. Ensuring access to the system
4. Developing knowledge
5. Developing partnerships.

For each priority area, we've proposed a vision and a set of goals for discussion. When the Agenda is fully developed, it will also include action steps related to each goal. That's where you come in! The Guide includes a tear-out Workbook to help you send us your feedback. You can also respond on-line.

Your input will contribute to a comprehensive framework for literacy action at the federal, provincial and community levels. The consensus that emerges will be useful to the literacy community as well as to our partners, funders and public decision-makers at every level.

***If you haven't yet provided feedback on our National Literacy Action Agenda, please do! The deadline for responses has been extended to January 15, 2003.***

The Discussion Guide and Workbook are available online at [www.literacy.ca/nlaa/](http://www.literacy.ca/nlaa/)