

Stakeholder Summary

Access data in Ontario is incomplete and disconnected, limiting research potential

While Ontario has a high proportion of citizens with postsecondary credentials, there are still certain groups underrepresented in the higher education system. Within the province there is a large pool of information on factors that may be important in developing policies and strategies for equitable access to higher education, but they are disconnected, incomplete and inaccessible to most researchers. A new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) finds that Ontario is behind several other jurisdictions, both internationally and in Canada, on providing data resources to better understand issues affecting equity of access.

The Ontario Education Number (OEN) provides a potential source of data for students from kindergarten through postsecondary education, but access to this information is limited. While data is collected using the OEN, there are limited linkages between the data collected in K-12 and postsecondary education, or between institutions' information on student outcomes and programs or resources. Also, students pursuing an apprenticeship or a private career college are not tracked using the OEN.

Project Description

Data Infrastructure for Studying Equity of Access to Postsecondary Education in Ontario is based on 35 in-depth interviews with stakeholders in government (both K-12 and postsecondary); postsecondary education sector representatives; Statistics Canada; university-based researchers from education, sociology, economics and public policy fields; consultants working on education policy and evaluation; and foundations working on issues of postsecondary access. Experts were from within Ontario and from other Canadian jurisdictions. Interviews discussed the priorities for research to inform policy and what data need to be available to examine those priorities. An extensive literature review was also conducted.

Findings

Currently, the most significant source of data on access to higher education is the Youth in Transition Survey from Statistics Canada, which has not had any data collection since 2010. However, no interviewed expert viewed additional data collection from this survey as a priority.

Despite ongoing calls from the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, there are very little demographic data collected across Ontario. The report recommends that information allowing identification of race, Indigenous identity, disability, sexual orientation/identification, first generation status and immigrant/visible minority status be collected across institutions and throughout all levels, ideally attached to the OEN.

The report also recommends that individual student data be linked to administrative data about programs, currently collected by the Ontario Student Information System, as well as outcomes like graduation and dropout rates, access and persistence. This should allow tracking of student enrolment and program participation as well as examine achievement data like province-wide test results, course completions, grades and/or other program outcome measures.

While all these data sources are critical, there is also a need for targeted survey and qualitative data, particularly for those facing complex barriers to postsecondary education.

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