



How the Humanities and Social Sciences drive innovation

Across Canada, the humanities and social sciences (HSS) contribute to social innovation by connecting evidence, lived experience, and community needs. Defined by [the Government of Canada](#) as new ideas which, when adopted, improve a community's well-being, social innovation is advanced through the HSS's core strengths of community engagement and human-centred research. These ideas make sense of complex social issues and are translated into meaningful insights and practical, scalable responses.

We need social innovation for Canada's most pressing challenges

In a time of “permacrisis” or “polycrisis,” our efforts to alleviate challenges such as affordability, discrimination and violence, and misinformation and AI – among many others – must be ethically and socially grounded. An education in the HSS prepares scholars and practitioners with the skills and approaches necessary to elucidate these complexities and guide innovative solutions.

Centring communities

Affordability remains a central concern for many Canadians, shaping everyday experiences of security and well-being. Food insecurity for students, young families, and seniors continues to affect communities in distinct ways. According to data from Statistics Canada, food insecurity reached new record highs in nearly every province, with 25.5% of people in the ten provinces living with food insecurity. The HSS centre these communities in their approach to understanding the root causes of rising rates of household food insecurity and co-developing solutions.

Example: [The Canadian Association for Food Studies](#) promotes community-based approaches to understanding how food systems interact and intersect with social, political, and economic systems. These understandings lead to innovative solutions that help address historical and emergent power structures that impact food accessibility and affordability. Such solutions include [restructuring local food systems](#) and providing communities with improved, diverse access to food systems.

Taking innovative approaches

Many of the challenges facing Canadians involve complex cross-sectoral considerations that are easily missed by narrow solutions. The HSS offer holistic, multifaceted approaches that account for historical, cultural, political, and social factors, supporting more responsive and effective policy development. When tackling complex situations, such as discrimination, persecution, and violence, these approaches are particularly relevant.

Example: The [Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment \(ODARA\)](#) is the first data-driven tool for assessing the risk of future intimate partner violence. ODARA leveraged in-depth human-centred data analysis to establish a new set of tools and guidelines to identify the most at-risk cases for intimate partner violence. As an interdisciplinary, intersectoral innovation, ODARA has enhanced safety planning and resource allocation to improve intimate partner violence risk assessment internationally.



Guiding adoption

Throughout Canada, there remains a general sense of unease and distrust towards artificial intelligence. According to Abacus data, 50% of Canadians remain skeptical about the role of AI in society. HSS experts are examining the social impacts of these technologies to address barriers to trust and support responsible adoption. The HSS offer new solutions to build public trust and ensure the responsible use of technology, enabling a more sustainable and equitable technological future.

Example: L'Observatoire international sur les impacts sociétaux de l'IA et du numérique facilitates responsible technological innovation by promoting cross-sectoral and international collaborations while improving public understanding of emerging technologies and challenges. For example, Obvia currently funds a project exploring the ethical issues that arise in using educational technologies that involve AI. This deepens our understanding of the ethical impacts of AI, helping to promote responsible AI innovation and adoption in education. With this understanding, we can better prepare Canada for its technological future.