



COVID-19
Canada



THE END OF THE WORLD
AS WE KNOW IT?

RESEARCH REPORT NO. 1

THE ROLE OF CLEAR AND COHERENT GOVERNMENT MEASURES TO
REDUCE THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

THIS RESEARCH REPORT IS INTENDED FOR
POLICY MAKERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC

THE PROJECT IS FINANCED BY THE CANADIAN
INSTITUTES OF HEALTH RESEARCH (CIHR)

Recommendations

To effectively promote adherence to demanding government measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and save lives, it is crucial that governments:

1) Communicate clear and coherent measures: Making sure that measures are well-defined and that there are no contradictions among the measures or those communicating the measures.

2) Communicate normative support: Focus communication on the majority that adheres with government measures and NOT on the minority who does not follow the rules.

Definitions of key concepts

Concepts	Definitions
Clarity of provincial government measures	The degree to which people view COVID-19 provincial government measures as well-defined and well explained.
Coherence of provincial government measures	The extent to which people view different COVID-19 provincial measures as compatible and not conflicting with each other.
Social norm	What one believes the majority of residents of his/her province do/think about the government measures.
Personal attitude	The extent to which a person is favourably disposed to comply with provincial government measures.
Adherence	The extent to which a person reports actually following provincial government measures.



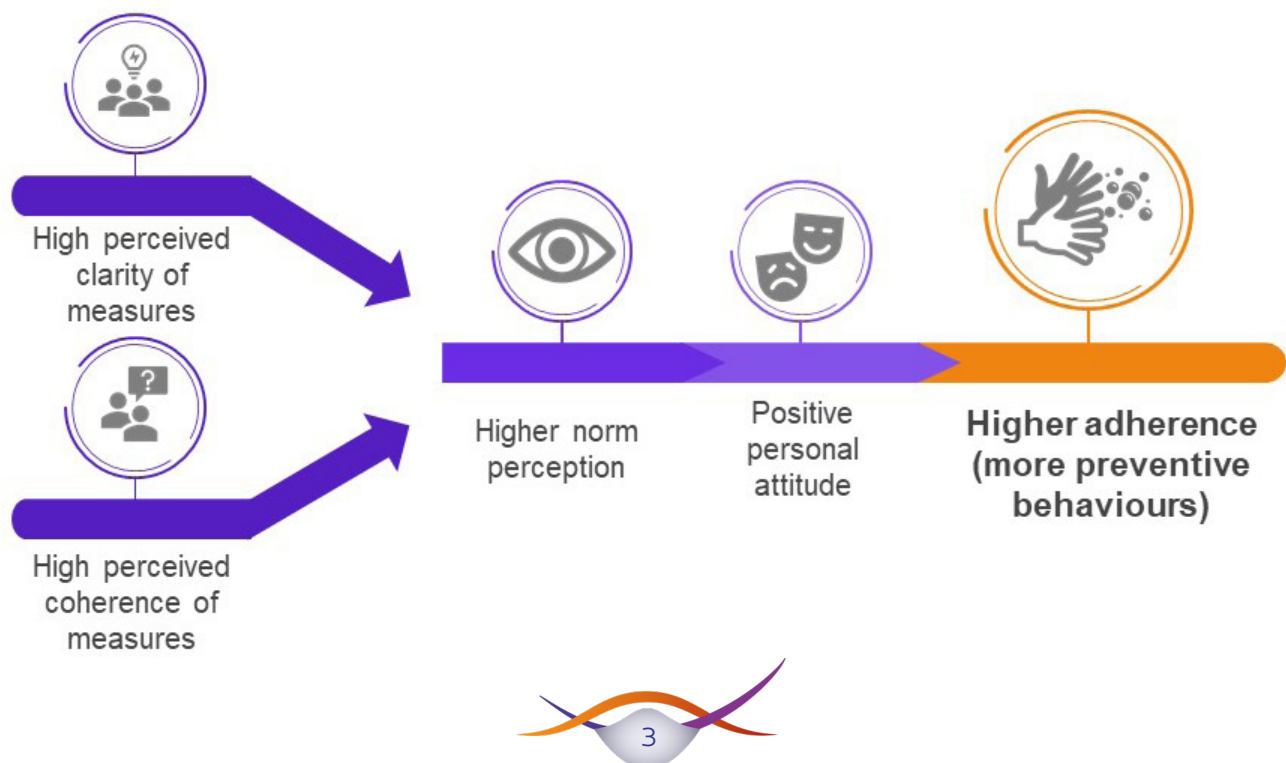
Research question

For the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, governments have been compelled to require their constituents to adhere to very challenging measures. These measures include staying at home, maintaining physical distancing and wearing a face mask. Canadian residents have been asked to dramatically change their behaviour in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19. How can governments maximize the effectiveness of their message?

Hypotheses

Clear and coherent government measures are needed to successfully promote widespread adherence of Canadians from different provinces to government measures. We hypothesize that the clarity and coherence of the measures will influence behaviour through a three-stage process:

- 1) Perceiving clear and coherent provincial government measures is at the root of strong social norms: People who perceive the government measures to be clear and coherent (versus those who do not) are more likely to believe that there is a strong social norm supporting these measures.
- 2) People who perceive a strong social norm (versus those who do not) will tend to have a positive personal attitude towards the provincial government measures.
- 3) Finally, people who have strong personal attitudes toward provincial government measures (versus those who do not) will actually engage in behaviours designed to reduce the spread of the virus (greater adherence to provincial government measures).



Method

Data were extracted from a large survey which asked a representative sample of Canadians (N=3617) to complete an in-depth questionnaire on multiple occasions over several months. For more methodological details, please consult our technical report (de la Sablonnière et al., 2020).

Measurement time	Sample size	% (n) women	Mean age (range)	Survey dates
2	2282	48.5 % (1115)	50 (18-86)	21 April – 13 May 2020

Results

Our hypotheses were confirmed. The more respondents perceived provincial government measures to be clear and coherent, the more respondents perceived the presence of a strong normative support in favour of the demanding provincial government measures. In turn, the perception of strong normative support directly increased actual adherence to provincial government measures. To illustrate, Figures 1 and 2 show that respondents who perceived the governmental measures as very clear (Figure 1) and highly coherent (Figure 2) reported more adherence as compared to those who perceived the governmental measures as not so clear or coherent.

Figure 1

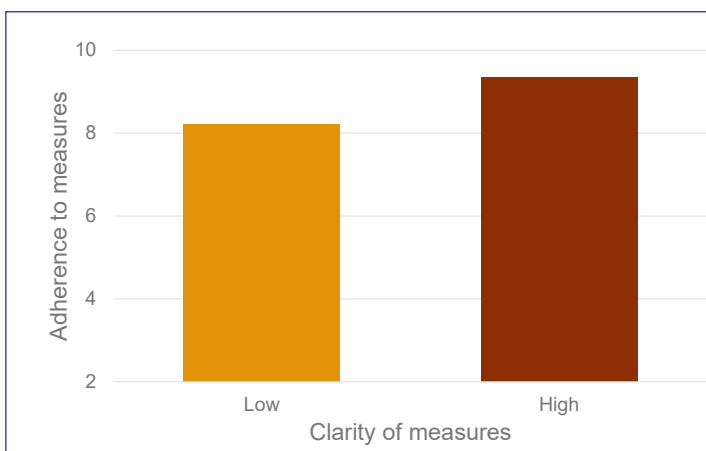
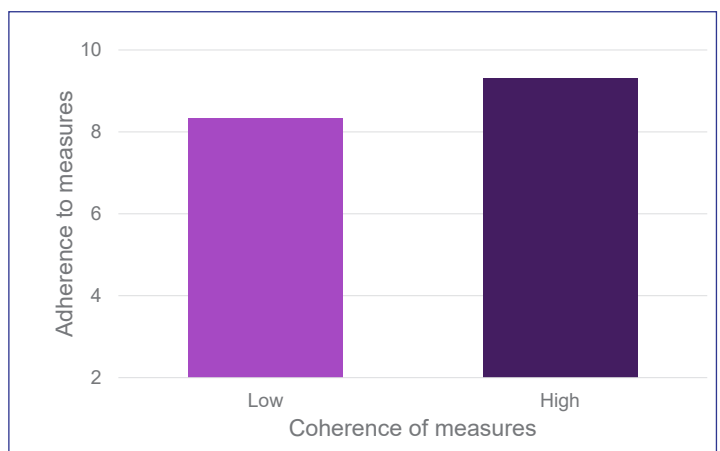


Figure 2



Conclusion

The personal decision to adhere to public health measures depends on the clarity and coherence of governments' guidelines. Unclear and contradictory information undermines individuals' adherence to the measures. Given the importance of norms in the adhesion process, information from the government officials and the media should be framed in terms of the majority's adherence to the measures instead of the minority's refusal to follow the measures.

Despite being centered on provincial governments, we strongly believe that the process at play can be generalized to the federal government measures and even to the measures adopted in other countries.

To cite this research report

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csdc-cecd.wixsite.com/covid19csi?lang=en



RESEARCH TEAM

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Director and founder of the Social Change and Identity Laboratory since 2005, Roxane studies the challenges people face when they are exposed to dramatic social change, such as the colonization that affected Canada's Aboriginal peoples or immigration.

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Dietlind has directed the Centre for the Study of Democratic Citizenship. She is an expert on trust, social capital, ethnic diversity, attitudinal democratic backsliding and new forms of political participation.



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Author of numerous books on social psychology and a specialist in inter-group relations, Don is particularly interested in the plight of disadvantaged populations, such as indigenous communities.

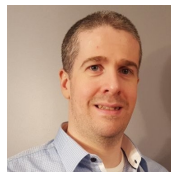
Post-doctoral researchers



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A behavioural researcher interested in decision-making processes, Anna focuses on the interactions between emotions, cognitions and behaviours in order to understand how individuals react when faced with difficult social situations.



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A social psychology researcher in the Social Change and Identity Laboratory, Mathieu is interested in the profound changes that people face (social and personal changes), in identity, and in negative behaviours (discrimination, prejudice, disruptive behaviours in video games).



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