

The Honourable William C. Winegard
Minister for Science
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Dr Winegard:

In accordance with Section 13 of the Science Council of Canada Act, I take pleasure in forwarding to you the Council's Report No. 42, *Genetics in Canadian Health Care*.

This report explores the implications of applying genetic knowledge to improve the health of Canadians. It has been carried out in the framework of the Science Council's mandate:

To assess the scientific and technological resources, requirements, and potentialities of Canada;

To increase public awareness of

- scientific and technological problems and opportunities;
- the interdependence of the public, governments, industries, and universities in the development and use of science and technology.

Many of the issues dealt with in this report go well beyond the technological, as a matter of necessity. The complex ethical and legal issues associated with development and use of genetic technologies raise fundamental questions about our values and attitudes regarding human health.

This report raises profound public policy questions, but it does not pretend to have all the answers. There must be further public debate on the controversial questions surrounding the integration of genetics into the health care system. This report aims to catalyse that debate.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet E. Halliwell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Janet" being more prominent.

Janet E. Halliwell
Chairman
Science Council of Canada

CONTENTS

Preface	xi
1. Overview	1
Role of Genes in Health and Disease	4
Genetic Disease and Its Implications in Canada	4
Strategies for Dealing with Genetic Disease	5
Delivery of Genetic Health Care Services	7
An Ethical Context	8
An Economic Context	10
An Educational Context	10
Research Required	11
The Need for Action: Goals and Initiatives	12
Goals	12
Initiatives	13
2. The Role of Genes in Health and Disease	15
Achieving Health	17
Genetic Disease	19
Occurrence of Genetic Disease	21
From Conception to Birth	21
From Infancy to Young Adulthood	21
In Adulthood	23
Genetic Material, Variation, and Mutation	23
Mapping and Sequencing	29
Status of Knowledge	29
Limitations in Canadian Health Data	31

3. Genetic Technologies and Health Care Applications	35
DNA Technologies for Diagnosis of Genetic Disease	37
Screening and Diagnosis	39
Prevention	41
Gene Therapy	41
Treatment	43
Avoidance	43
Counselling	45
Current Technology Limitations	45
Uncertainty	46
Prerequisites for Use of Technologies	46
Technology Assessment and Economic Implications	47
Long-Term Implications	47
Guidelines for Screening and Testing	49
 4. Genetic Health Care Services in Canada	 53
Integration of Genetic Knowledge into Health Care	55
Genetic Centres	55
Lack of Funds	57
Lack of Trained Personnel	59
Referral	59
Planning	61
Economic Considerations	61
Role of the Private Sector	62
Role of Non-Governmental Organizations	62
 5. Ethical and Legal Concerns	 63
Use of Genetic Technologies	65
Conflicts	66
Accountability and Control	67
Research	69
Genetic Health Services	69
Autonomy	69

Prenatal Diagnosis and Pregnancy Termination	70
Responsibility and Liability	70
Information	71
Confidentiality	72
Full Disclosure	73
DNA Banking and Registries	73
Property Rights	73
Eugenics	75
Non-Medical Applications	77
Workplace Applications	77
Life and Disability Insurance	79
6. Education and Awareness	81
Elementary and Secondary Education	83
University	85
Public Education	85
Health Care Professions	86
Education of Physicians	87
Genetics Associates	90
7. Research	91
"Big" versus "Small" Science	93
Canadian Participation	94
Underfunding	94
Private Sector Biotechnology Research	95
Research Guidelines	96
Afterword	97

Boxes	
1. Genes, Mutation, and Disease	6
2. Examples of Single-Gene Disorders: Frequency and Severity	18
3. Number of Disorders and Traits Associated with Specific Mutations	22
4. Examples of the Genetic Contribution to Multifactorial Disease	22
5. Cancer: A Genetic Disease	26
6. A Story the Brontë Sisters Didn't Tell Us	28
7. Rickets: An Example of the Increasing Significance of Genetic Cause	28
8. Cystic Fibrosis: An Example of the Costs of a Genetic Disease	28
9. Frequencies of Genetic Disorders in Children and Young Adults in British Columbia (1952-83)	30
10. Major Mechanisms for Genetic Diseases	32
11. Examples of Methods Used in Genetic Testing	38
12. Mutant Genes and Genetic Markers	40
13. Phenylketonuria Newborn Screening: An Example of the Effectiveness of Genetic Health Services	40
14. Tay-Sachs Disease: Prenatal Diagnosis and the Choice for Healthy Children	42
15. Thalassaemia: An Example of the Need for Continuing Research into Genetic Disease	44
16. Sensitivity, Specificity, and Predictive Value of Screening Tests	48
17. Guidelines and Regulatory Controls for Genetically Engineered Materials	50
18. Available and Needed Personnel for Delivery of Genetic Health Services	58
19. Health Expenditures in Canada	60
20. Genetic Disease and Health Care Services: Opinions of Non-Governmental Organizations	60
21. Pre-Symptomatic Testing for Huntington Disease: Opinions of Three Individuals at Risk	68
22. Full Disclosure of Sensitive Information	74
23. Historical Examples of Eugenics in Canada	76
24. Teaching Genetics in North American Medical Schools	88

Appendices	
1. Basic Genetic Facts: DNA, Genes, and Chromosomes	99
2. Recombinant DNA Technologies	101
3. Genetic Screening Programs in Canada	103
4. Recommendations on Prenatal Diagnosis and Genetic Screening, The Royal College of Physicians of London	107
Text Notes	109
Box Notes	119
Project Participants	123
Steering Committee	123
Subcommittees	124
Individuals and Organizations Consulted	126
Members of the Science Council of Canada	131

PREFACE

Advances in science and technology are improving our understanding of the many factors affecting health and constantly generating new ways to prevent and treat disease. A major challenge is to ensure these advances are used in a way that maximizes their benefits and minimizes any potential harm.

In 1986 the Science Council of Canada launched a project to review the current and potential role of genetic knowledge and technologies in Canadian health care. The goal was to examine the related policy issues and to stimulate progress in addressing them.

The project's findings, presented in this report, are based on a comprehensive program of policy research and consultation. More than 200 people participated in the project: experts in law, education, medical ethics, health care economics, and science policy, as well as in medicine and medical research. Also consulted were 47 associations representing Canadians with diseases with possible genetic causes.

Genetics in Canadian Health Care focuses on the issues surrounding the development and application of genetic health services. However, the Science Council recognizes that genetic make-up is only one of many factors — biological, environmental, and social — that contribute to disease. Moreover, there are a number of approaches to preventing and treating disease. They include, for example, reducing poverty and improving the work environment as well as new surgical techniques and medications.

The Science Council acknowledges, too, that there is enormous competition for resources in the health care field. Genetics issues merit attention on several counts:

- the importance of genes as a causal factor in disease is increasing as other factors are better controlled;
- genes are being implicated in an increasingly wide range of disorders;
- genetic knowledge and technologies have the potential to profoundly affect the health of Canadians;
- genetic knowledge and technologies also raise complex ethical and technical questions that need to be addressed.

The goals and initiatives presented here provide a framework upon which effective and ethical development of genetic services can proceed. It is up to each reader — policy maker, planner, educator, health provider, or patient — to take the next steps to ensure that health care in Canada continues to evolve as a reflection of a caring society.