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**Statistics Canada International
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**Symposium 2006 :
Methodological Issues in
Measuring Population Health**



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Opening Remarks

François Maranda¹

Good morning,

On behalf of Statistics Canada, I would like to welcome you all, friends and colleagues, to Symposium 2006. This is the 23rd International Symposium organized by Statistics Canada on survey methodology.

Some of you are familiar with this Symposium, and we are glad to have you back. Others are joining us for the first time, and I would like to extend our most cordial welcome to you.

The title of this year's Symposium is "Methodological Issues in Measuring Population Health". One of the goals of this Symposium is to bring together people from a variety of backgrounds to share their views, experience and expertise on current and emerging methodological issues related to collecting and producing reliable information on population health. It is the first time that the theme of the Symposium focuses on a subject matter area – health – as opposed to a specific methodological aspect such as sample design or small area estimation. Producing reliable information on population health is of great interest and importance not only in Canada but in many countries around the world. Topics to be discussed include the design of health surveys, combining data from different sources, collection and use of physical health measures, production of estimates and their accuracy, methods of analysis and their applications to health data, data confidentiality and disclosure control techniques. With such a variety I am thus confident that decision makers, researchers and statisticians from government agencies, public and private survey organizations, and universities can all feel included and find it useful.

Over the years, Statistics Canada has conducted numerous health surveys, and health related modules in many other surveys. Today, these are central to providing pertinent and timely health information for policy makers and health researchers in Canada. In this way, Statistics Canada has contributed significantly to raising the profile of Canada as a nation at the forefront in the development of innovative health research methods and advanced health policy making. The role of the Methodology Branch of Statistics Canada has always been to ensure that a critical mass of statistical expertise is brought to all phases of data production and health research agendas.

In partnership with the Methodology Branch, the Health Statistics Division has been conducting these health surveys for over 50 years. The 1950-1951 Canadian Health Disease Survey was the first of a long series of health-related sample surveys conducted by Statistics Canada. In 1994 Statistics Canada launched a very thorough longitudinal National Population Health Survey that soon became an invaluable source for many advanced research projects. More recently, the Canadian Community Health Survey program, which was launched in 2000, has been collecting data to address priority health determinant and health outcome data gaps at regional, provincial and national levels. The data from this health survey program has been used extensively by policy makers and health care professionals to establish benchmarks and track progress to better take appropriate action towards addressing the shortcomings of the Canadian health care system. The most recent addition to our system of health surveys is the Canadian Health Measures Survey. It is a new initiative aimed to enrich the health information system through direct physical measures of Canadians' health. It represents a challenge in many aspects of its novelty: the content, the methodology, the field organization, and the abundance of analytic possibilities. We have a session devoted to direct measures surveys.

Bringing together data from different sources will be the subject of several talks at the Symposium. One of the workshops yesterday was focused on record linkage, a technique of combining data. It was as members of the Methodology Division of Statistics Canada, formerly the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, that Drs. Fellegi and Sunter provided the theoretical foundation for probabilistic matching which has made a variety of record linkage techniques scientifically acceptable. The Health Statistics Division has a long history of doing probabilistic record linkages using these techniques and as a result, two large databases are being maintained, the Canadian Cancer Database and the Canadian Mortality Database. Current work in the Health Analysis and Measurement Group at Statistics Canada involves a large-scale linkage study of the Census of Population and the Canadian Mortality database. This linkage

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will yield baseline indicators of mortality patterns in the population for at-risk groups and will contribute to an understanding of the impact of neighbourhood and occupational characteristics on mortality. It will also allow more appropriate comparison groups for a number of studies on occupational health as it will reduce the "healthy worker effect" in the calculation of standardized mortality ratios and in statistical comparisons.

Decision-makers in the public health domain need an up-to-date and in-depth understanding of the complex relationships between social, economic, environmental and health determinants and risks to help them respond not only to today's needs, but to anticipate tomorrow's as well. This need is underlined by a growing demand for analytical output from the rich source of health data collected by Statistics Canada. To respond to the ever increasing demand for pertinent analyses, Statistics Canada has been developing its own analytic capacity, but also has been involved in the Research Data Centres (RDC) program together with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and university consortia. Through the RDC program, the researchers have access to health and other socio-economic microdata from population and household surveys. For example, so far, we have had more than 140 research projects using the Canadian Community Health Survey data and more than 100 based on the National Population Health Survey, just to mention two sources. These initiatives and undertakings allow researchers in a variety of socio-economic research areas, including population health, to build expertise in quantitative methodology and analysis while generating a wide, scientifically founded, perspective on Canada's social landscape, they strengthen Canada's research capacity and support the policy research community.. That is why the analytic methods and their applications play an important part of the program at this Symposium.

At this year's Symposium, we have more than 400 participants from 11 countries: You have come from Albania, Australia, Brazil, Finland, New Zealand, Nigeria, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and, of course, from Canada. This Symposium is truly international. I'm sure we will learn a lot from each other and I hope you will enjoy your stay in Canada. Yesterday there were two well attended full-day workshops: one on record linkage in studies of population health and one on methods for analyzing longitudinal health survey data. Over the next two days, we will hear talks on a wide variety of topics related to the production of reliable information on population health. In addition to the talks, there will be poster presentations during the breaks. I hope you will take the time to view these posters and discuss issues with the authors.

And now, before I declare this 23rd Symposium officially open, I would like to thank the Organizing Committee, the session organizers and chair-person, the presenters, and all the volunteers who have made this event possible. I would like to pay particular tribute to the leaders of yesterday's workshops – Karla Fox from the Department of National Defence, Patricia Whitridge from Elections Canada and Professor Mary Thompson from the University of Waterloo – for their important contribution to this Symposium.

My sincere thanks to each of you.

And now, I would like to open the sessions of this 23rd Methodology Symposium by introducing our keynote speaker. Doctor **Graham Kalton** is a Senior Vice President and senior statistician at Westat, where he has been since 1992. He also holds a title of Research Professor in the Joint Program in Survey Methodology at the University of Maryland. Before joining Westat he was at the University of Michigan, where he was a research scientist at the Survey Research Center, a Professor of Biostatistics and a Professor of Statistics. He moved to the United States in 1979 from the United Kingdom, where he was a Professor of Social Statistics at the University of Southampton and, before that, Reader in Social Statistics at the London School of Economics. He has extensive experience in research on survey methodology, and has published on several aspects of the subject, including sample design, nonresponse and imputation, panel surveys, question wording, and coding. He has had ties to Statistics Canada for many years as an Associate Editor of *Survey Methodology* from 1985 until the end of last year and as a member of the Advisory Committee on Statistical Methods for the past nine years.

Please join me in welcoming Dr. Graham Kalton.