



## OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S CHIEF SCIENCE ADVISOR

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### Media Release

#### **Citizen-based analytics a game-changer for informed social sector investment**

Sir Peter Gluckman, the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, today released the first in a series of discussion papers on the use of big data in social policy development – an approach that has been termed social investment in New Zealand. “New Zealand is unique in the world for the quality, depth and integration of administrative datasets from a range of social sector services and interventions over a long period of time. It allows evidence to better inform policy decisions in areas where often evidence has been lacking,” said Sir Peter.

The discussion paper is informed by collaboration, led by Sir Peter, between New Zealand and the European Commission. This novel research collaboration is exploring how big data can assist governments in the complex areas of social policy development and evaluation. The goal is to understand the extent to which data combined with emerging biological, behavioural and social sciences can lead to useful new insights about the multiple interacting causes of poor life outcomes.

Reviewing the scientific, ethical and economic dimensions of citizen-based analytics, the paper provides extensive discussion of the data management and governance provisions needed to ensure responsible use and protection of data. It outlines the implications for collecting and curating data and the skills needed for meaningful analysis. It clarifies how data use in policy research is distinct from other operational uses. The paper discusses both the benefits and limitations of using big data to inform social policy. One particular benefit is the capacity to take a more holistic view of the life-course by merging domains of policy that previously have been treated separately. The paper also discusses how such approaches can have an impact on the policy formation process itself.

“We are using insights from cutting edge social and behavioural sciences to underpin the powerful new tool of citizen-based analytics. This gives us the potential to gain unprecedented understanding of what interventions could work best, with whom and in what context,” said Sir Peter. “This is the essence of scientific advice to inform policy and there is a lot of interest globally in what New Zealand is doing. It can be a game changing tool for governments seeking to better support citizens’ needs.”

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