

Frank, chief of the division of orthopaedics at the University of Calgary in Calgary, Alberta.

It essentially proposes a sort of pick-and-choose approach in which decision-makers select indicators (from a menu of 66) in response to their specific inquiries about the circumstances or types of projects that would yield the greatest return. Some of the indicators are quantitative. They range from citation impact and mortality rates to patient satisfaction, and even more subjectively, such concepts as “happiness” and “loneliness.”

In essence, the framework could serve as a sort of aid to prioritization or a means of quantifying health outcomes relative to dollars invested. But arguably, it is so versatile that, depending on the indicators chosen, it could also be used to prove or disprove virtually any position. As a consequence, comparability between different evaluations could be problematic because of the built-in flexibility in the selection of indicators.

But Frank, Canadian Academy of Health Sciences President Dr. Martin Schechter, past-president Dr. Paul Armstrong and the report itself argue that the comparability problems and flexibility of the evaluation framework point to the need for health-research funders and decision-makers to begin collaborating on standardization of the nomenclature, methodologies, data collection and indicators.

“Canada should immediately initiate a national collaborative effort to begin to measure the impacts of Canadian health research,” the report stated, proposing that government and other organizations fund the creation of a “national council to lead strategic planning and execution of the framework, with a formal secretariat and commissioned data collectors to begin this work.”

Comparability could be a problem without a consensus on the methodologies and indicators by which return on investment should be measured, Frank told reporters at a Jan. 21 press conference. “If everybody picks different questions and different indicators, you would have a hodgepodge of potential answers.” — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

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## Federal listeriosis investigation has limited mandate

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has appointed the former president of the Edmonton Health Authority to investigate last year’s listeriosis outbreak, but she will not be able to subpoena witnesses or compel testimony.

Sheila Weatherill will report to Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz by July 20 with recommendations of ways to avoid future outbreaks of food-borne disease, the Prime Minister’s Office stated in a press release.

But Weatherill — who will not be permitted to talk to reporters until the investigation is complete — will not make findings of criminal or civil liability, as her investigation lacks the scope or authority of a full-scale public inquiry.

The outbreak of listeriosis in August 2008, traced to contaminated processed meat from Maple Leaf Foods, killed 20 people. Maple Leaf Chief Executive Officer Michael McCain accepted responsibility and has since settled claims and compensated the families of those who died and the people who fell ill.

Critics say Harper hasn’t give enough powers to find out whether Canada’s food safety system failed during the outbreak.

As a consequence, Liberal Agricul-

ture Critic Wayne Easter calls the investigation a “farce” because Weatherill can’t examine the actions of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and other levels of government — including the offices of the agriculture minister and the prime minister. Nor do victims and their families have a role and there’s no guarantee the report will be made public, he adds.

Easter also says Weatherill is in conflict of interest as a member of the Prime Minister’s Advisory Committee on the Public Service.

Dr. Kumanan Wilson, Canada Research Chair in Public Health at the University of Ottawa, says improvements in food safety, rather than optics, should have been the government’s objective. Lacking authority to compel testimony, while being limited to reporting to the agriculture ministry rather than the Public Health Agency of Canada, the investigation is unlikely to address general food safety; the effectiveness of the disease surveillance system; or the efficacy of interdepartmental communications during an outbreak, he adds. — Laura Eggertson, *CMAJ*

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Reuters/Mark Blinch

A man sterilizes meat and packaging equipment at the Maple Leaf Foods plant in Toronto, Ontario, site of the August 2008 outbreak of listeriosis that killed 20 people.