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BRIEFING

AI, Risk & Public Trust in Human Services

A practical briefing for public-serving organizations navigating responsible AI adoption, human oversight, privacy, documentation, vendor risk, Indigenous data governance, and public trust.

Prepared by The Public Good Institute

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Executive Brief

AI is already changing how public-serving organizations write, summarize, search, analyze, communicate, triage, document, forecast, and make decisions. For human services, the question is not simply whether AI is efficient. The question is whether AI is governed in a way that protects people, preserves human judgment, respects data rights, and strengthens public trust.

Core Position

AI can support public-serving work, but it should not quietly become the decision-maker. In high-trust environments, governance must be visible before adoption becomes routine.

What makes human services different

- People may be experiencing vulnerability, trauma, crisis, poverty, exclusion, family separation, disability, housing insecurity, or complex service barriers.
- Information is often sensitive, incomplete, contested, contextual, or culturally specific.
- Wrong or opaque decisions can affect safety, access to supports, family relationships, service eligibility, funding, care plans, and trust.
- Frontline staff may use AI informally before an organization has policy, training, or supervision in place.
- Communities may have distinct governance expectations, including Indigenous data sovereignty and community authority over information.

Public Good AI Governance Framework

Principle	What it means in practice
Purpose before tool	Define the service, documentation, administrative, or learning problem before choosing AI.
Human judgment remains central	Identify which decisions require human review, human explanation, or no AI involvement.
Privacy and data protection by design	Prevent sensitive, identifying, confidential, privileged, or community-governed information from being uploaded into inappropriate tools.
Transparency and explainability	People affected by AI-supported processes should understand when AI is used and how human oversight works.
Equity and bias review	Review whether AI outputs could reproduce racism, colonial assumptions, disability bias, gendered harms, language barriers, or socioeconomic bias.
Indigenous data governance	Where Indigenous data or service information is involved, respect Indigenous-led governance, OCAP-informed questions, and community authority.

Principle	What it means in practice
Documentation and auditability	Record what the tool was used for, what was checked by a person, and how final judgment was reached.
Incident learning	Create a process for reporting, reviewing, and learning from AI errors, privacy issues, hallucinations, and unintended harms.

Twelve Governance Questions Before Using AI

- 1 What specific problem are we solving, and why is AI the right tool?
- 2 Who will be affected by the AI-supported process?
- 3 What information will be entered, uploaded, summarized, or processed?
- 4 Could the information identify a person, family, community, Nation, client, staff member, caregiver, or service user?
- 5 What decision, recommendation, risk rating, summary, or output will the AI influence?
- 6 What must a human review before action is taken?
- 7 How will staff know when not to use the tool?
- 8 What bias, error, or hallucination risks are most likely in this context?
- 9 What disclosures are needed for staff, clients, communities, boards, funders, or partners?
- 10 What vendor assurances exist about data storage, training, retention, privacy, audit logs, and deletion?
- 11 How will we document AI use in a way that is clear but not burdensome?
- 12 What is the incident response process if the tool causes harm, misleads staff, exposes data, or produces unreliable output?

Implementation Roadmap

Phase	Action	Output
1. Discover	Map where AI is already being used formally and informally.	AI use inventory
2. Classify	Separate low-risk productivity uses from high-impact uses affecting people.	Risk tiering map
3. Govern	Create or update AI use policy, staff guidance, vendor review, and approval rules.	Governance bundle
4. Train	Train staff on safe prompting, privacy, bias, human review, and documentation.	AI literacy session
5. Test	Pilot with defined boundaries, sample review, and human quality assurance.	Pilot report
6. Monitor	Track errors, user experience, workload impacts, trust concerns, and unintended consequences.	Ongoing review dashboard

Board Briefing Note

Boards and senior oversight bodies do not need to become technical AI experts. They do need to ask the right governance questions.

- Where is AI being used now, including informal staff use?
- Which uses affect people, rights, services, eligibility, safety, privacy, or public trust?
- What policies govern staff use, vendor selection, risk review, and documentation?
- What is the organization doing to protect sensitive and community-governed data?
- How are bias, accessibility, language, Indigenous data governance, and human oversight being addressed?
- How will the board know if AI is creating new risk, burden, inequity, or trust concerns?

Source Notes

These Public Good Institute resources are original educational and implementation materials. They are informed by public policy, governance, workforce, digital government, and Indigenous data governance sources, including the following:

Government of Canada - AI Strategy for the Federal Public Service 2025-2027

<https://www.canada.ca/en/government/system/digital-government/digital-government-innovations/responsible-use-ai/gc-ai-strategy-overview.html>

Canada - National Artificial Intelligence Strategy: AI for All

<https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/ised/en/canadas-national-artificial-intelligence-strategy-ai-all>

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat - Directive on Automated Decision-Making

<https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=32592>

Government of Canada - Guide on the use of generative artificial intelligence

<https://www.canada.ca/en/government/system/digital-government/digital-government-innovations/responsible-use-ai/guide-use-generative-ai.html>

OECD - Governing with Artificial Intelligence

https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/governing-with-artificial-intelligence_795de142-en.html

FNIGC - The First Nations Principles of OCAP

<https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>

Health Canada - Pan-Canadian AI for Health Guiding Principles

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/transparency/health-agreements/pan-canadian-ai-guiding-principles.html>

Health Canada - Reduced administrative burden: Nursing retention toolkit

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-care-system/health-human-resources/nursing-retention-toolkit-improving-working-lives-nurses/reduced-administrative-burden.html>

Imagine Canada - People First: A Portrait of Canada's Nonprofit Workforce

<https://imaginecanada.ca/en/research/people-first-canada-nonprofit-workforce>

Important Use Note

This resource is for learning, planning, governance, and implementation support. It is not legal advice, privacy advice, procurement advice, clinical advice, or a substitute for organization-specific professional review. Organizations should adapt all tools to their legal, regulatory, contractual, cultural, community, and operational context.