

**The Berger Population Health Monitor**  
**Le sondage Berger de la santé publique**

with The Hay Health Care Consulting Group

**Survey #23**  
**January-April 2002**  
**The Internet Report**

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## **Executive Summary**

Overall, use of the Internet for health-related purposes has declined to levels reported in 2000. This decline may be due to the effects of the stock market plunge and high technology disasters which may have soured some people on the Internet.

The lowest levels of use were in Quebec, Manitoba, Northwest Territories and Nunavit.

The highest levels of use were in Ontario, British Columbia and the Yukon, although Atlantic, Saskatchewan and British Columbia were statistically very close.

Groups least likely to use the Internet for health-related purposes in the previous month include those in rural and remote areas, and older Canadians. Higher levels of income and of education also appear to be associated with Internet use for health-related purposes but the differences are not as marked as age and community size.

Government sites are receiving a smaller proportion of Internet visitors than in recent years. While the proportions visiting other health-related sites, especially those of 'health condition organizations' (e.g. cancer societies) are growing substantially.

Most visitors to the CHN site reported that they did not get there by browsing, but went for information. Their responses suggest they place a great deal of faith in the CHN site, although they regard most Internet information as unreliable. This speaks very well for CHN.

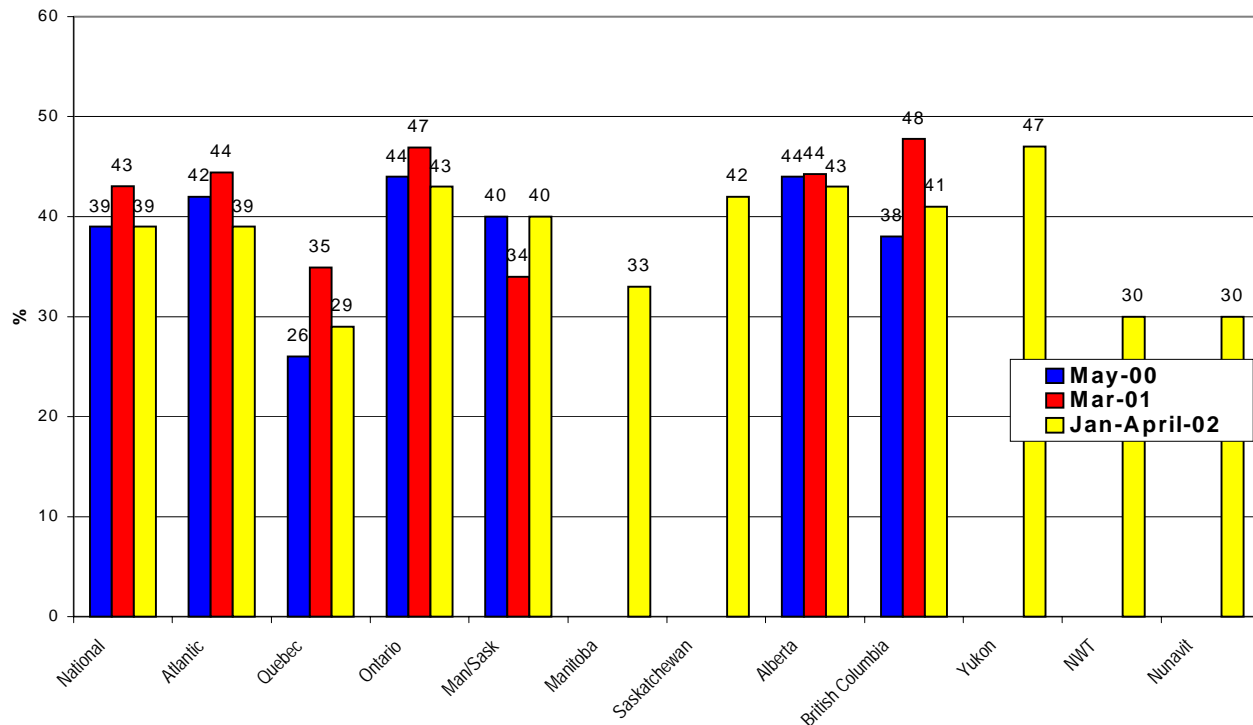
Almost one in five of those who had used the Internet for health-related purposes, but had not been to the CHN site in their last scroll through the Internet, said they were aware of the CHN site. These tended to be older and better educated. But, some of these admitted in later questions that they had never been to the CHN site.

Purchases of prescription and non-prescription medication, and herbal and natural health products, over the Internet declined slightly from 2001 to 2002; however the 2002 figures are higher than in 2000.

Although fewer health-related Internet users reported making purchases in the previous month, compared to 2001, those who did make purchases purchased more products than in 2001.

The data suggest that more people are becoming accustomed to buying prescription medication over the Internet, even though in Canada this is not legal.

**Internet and Health: Among Internet Users, Use Of Internet for Health-Related Purposes Declines To 2000 Levels**



INT1MON In the past month, have you used the Internet for anything to do with health, including finding information on health, medical conditions, alternative, remedies, or buying something health related?

Survey #23  
 January-April 2004

Sample: those using Internet in past six months  
 N=2,733

**Overall:**

Internet use in the previous month for health-related purposes has declined by several points (statistically significant) since 2001 on a national basis.

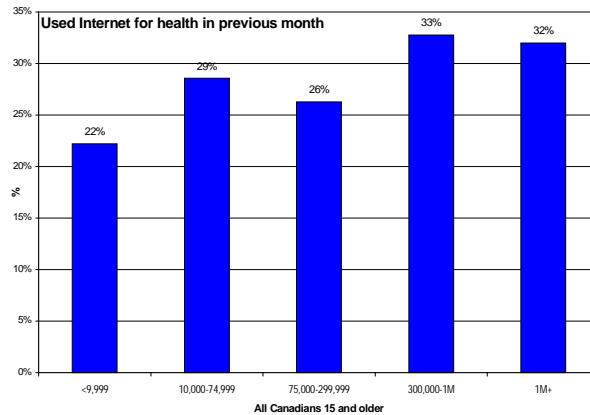
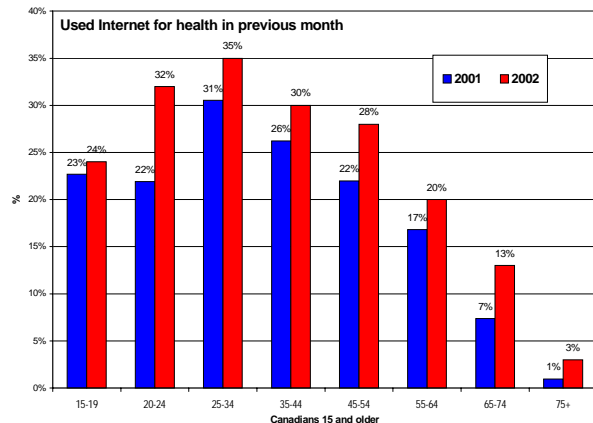
**Region:**

Quebec, along with Northwest Territories and Nunavut and Manitoba have the lowest levels of Internet use for health-related purposes.

**Gender:**

Men are more likely than women to have used the Internet in the previous six months - 72% to 64%. But women Internet users are much more likely to have used the Internet for health purposes in the previous month: 44% of women Internet users compared to 34% of male Internet users. Overall, 24% of all men used the Internet in the previous month for health-related purposes, compared to 28% of all women.

**Internet: Older And Rural Canadians Least Likely To Use Internet For Health Related Purposes; Use Increasing In All Age Groups**



INTERNET Have you personally used the Internet in the past 6 months? INT1MON. In the past month, have you used the Internet for anything to do with health, including finding information on health, medical conditions, alternative remedies, or buying something health related?

Survey #23  
 January-February 2002

Sample: all respondents  
 N=4,208

**Overall:**

Use of the Internet for health-related purposes is strongly associated with age.

**Age:**

- Use of Internet for health-related purposes drops dramatically for those older than 34.
- However, use in all age groups is increasing.
- The larger proportionate increases for health-related purposes are in the older age groups.

**Community Size:**

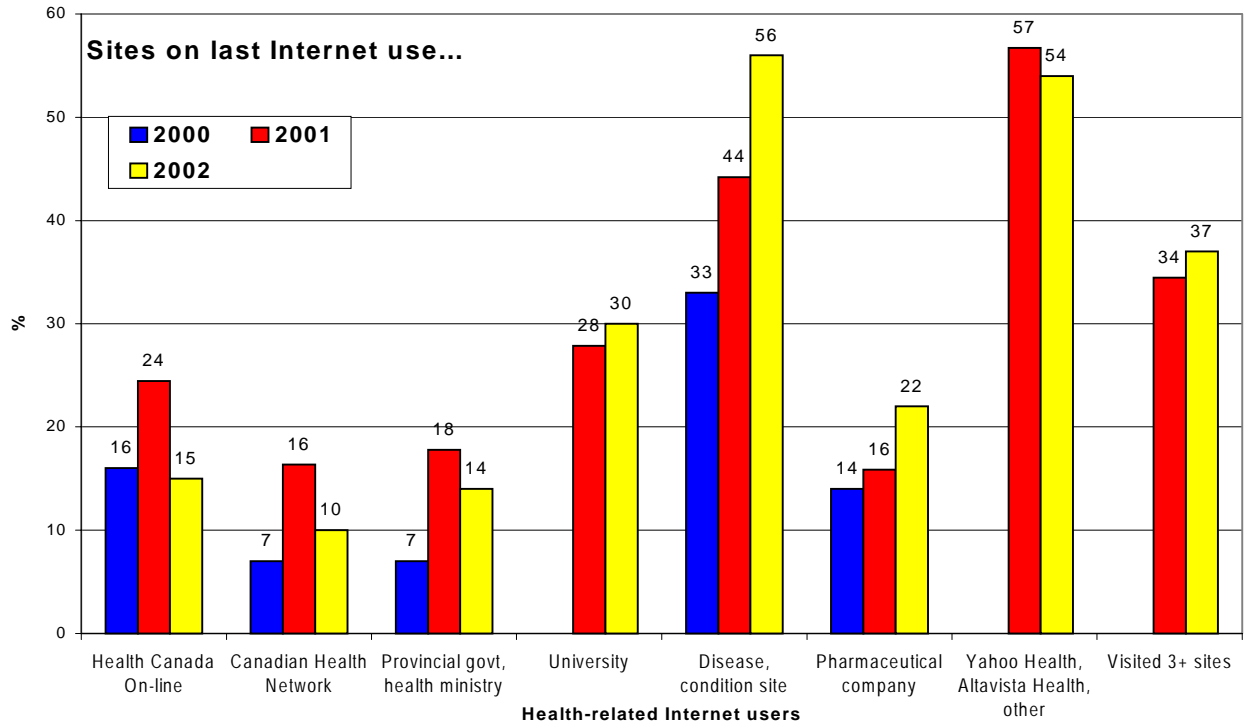
Use of the Internet for health-related purposes in the previous month is also associated with community size, although the association is not as clear as with age:

- Use of the Internet for health-related purposes is lowest in rural and remote communities and highest in the larger cities.

**Education:**

Similarly, as one would expect, there is a strong association with education level. Those with university and post-graduate degrees much more likely to use the Internet, and to use it for health-related purposes than are those with lower levels of education (who are also more likely to be younger as well as older, and to have lower incomes).

**Internet Site Visits: Visits to Government Sites Declining; Disease Organisations and Pharmaceutical Companies Growing**



INST2 The last time you used the Internet for health-related purposes did you visit any of the following health-related sites?  
 1. First Health Canada on-line, 2. Canadian Health Network, 3. Provincial government or health ministry, 4. a University site, 5. A site for a specific disease or condition, association or organisation site (for example, the Cancer Society site), 6. A pharmaceutical company site, 7. A site such as Yahoo Health, Altavista Health, WebMD or other such sites

Survey 23

January - April, 2002

Sample: Respondents using the Internet for health-related purposes in the past month.

N=1,005

**Overview:**

The proportions of health-related Internet users visiting federal or provincial government sites have declined by a statistically significant amount since 2001.

**Canadian Health Network and Health Canada On-line**

- Those who report visiting the site has declined by almost 40% since 2001.
- As we shall see in the satisfaction question, a significant proportion of those who reported in this question that they visited the Canadian Health Network did not actually go there.

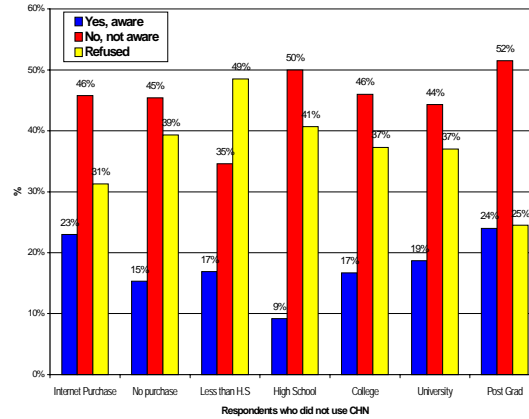
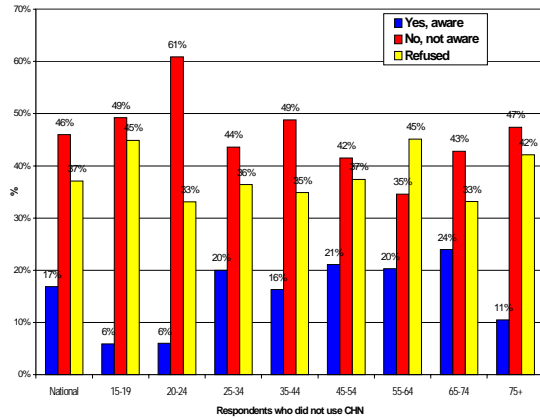
**Disease Organizations:**

Proportions who report visiting the disease organisations and pharmaceutical companies continue to increase.

The high proportions who visit disease organisation sites suggest their importance in the dissemination of information.

Visits to the large, for-profit sites (Yahoo Health etc. seem to have stabilised (the small decline is not significant).

**Awareness of CHN: Among Non-Users Awareness Higher Among Older Canadians, Among Internet Purchasers and Post Graduates**



CHNKNOW Are you aware of the Canadian Health Network, or are you not sure?

Survey #23

January-April 2002

Sample: Health-related Internet users who did not visit CHN during last Internet visit

N = 1,012

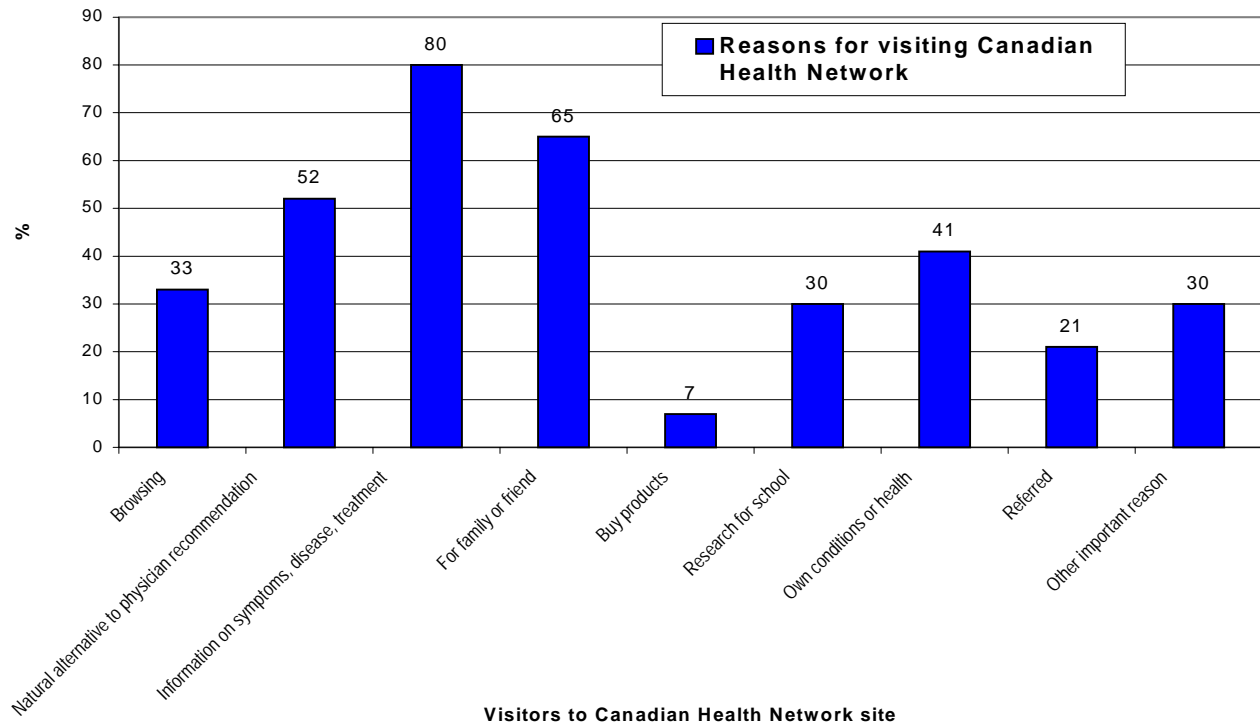
**Overall:**

The high proportions reporting they were not sure, or did not know/refused, suggests substantial marketing opportunities for the Canadian Health Network.

A positive sign is that older Canadians, a clear target population, are aware of the CHN.

Another positive sign is that Internet purchasers are more likely to be aware of the CHN. Since this group is growing rapidly, they are likely to lead others to the site. The same may be true of post graduates.

**Reasons For Visiting CHN: CHN Regarded As Reliable and Trustworthy in Unreliable Internet World**



CHNREAS1 Thinking of the last time you looked at or visited the Canadian Health Network, please tell me what was the purpose of your visit to the health-related site or sites. 1 You were just browsing and the site caught your interest 2 You were looking for natural or alternative approaches for a health condition in addition to what your doctor had recommended? 3. You were looking for information on symptoms, disease, treatment or medication? 4. You were looking for a place to buy health-related products? 5. You were gathering health information for a family member or friend? 6. You were doing research for school? 7. This was for your own conditions or health? 8. Because you were referred? 9. Was there another important reason for visiting that site?

Survey 23 January - April, 2002

Sample: Visitors to CHN site during latest Internet visit N=100

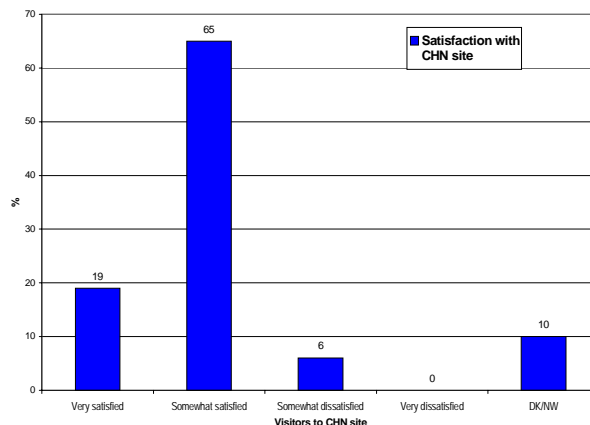
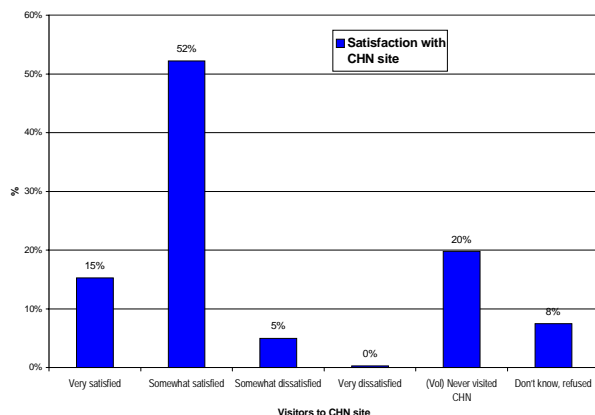
**Overview:**

The single most common reason given for visiting the CHN was the need for information on symptoms, disease, treatment or medication.

- The second most common response was searching for information for family or friends;
- The third choice was seeking natural and alternative choices to physician recommendations - this is significant because Monitor surveys have shown that respondents who use complementary and alternative remedies are likely to have concerns about the safety and efficacy of these products (see *The Monitor*, Survey #21); that they would go to the CHN site for help is an indication of the regard in which the site is held;
- The fourth choice was seeking information for one's own conditions;
- Only a third reported they came across the site by browsing and becoming interested in the site

The responses suggest the CHN site which people go to, rather than come across by browsing, is regarded as trustworthy and reliable. This speaks very well for CHN because Monitor surveys have found that generally information on the Internet is not likely to be regarded as reliable (Survey #20).

**Canadian Health Network: Almost All Visitors Very or Somewhat Satisfied With Quality of CHN Information; Respondents' Reports of Site Visits Unreliable**



CHNSATIS Thinking of the last time you visited the Canadian Health Network, would you say that you were very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?

Survey #23

Sample: visitors to CHN and those aware of CHN

January-April 2002

N=269

*Overview:*

In response to this question, one in five respondents volunteered they had never visited the CHN site, although in the previous question they had said that they had. This response tends to cast doubt on respondents' recall of each of the sites they say they have visited. Respondents may be overstating visits to all sites, or perhaps only to the lesser known ones. There may be a social bias here in that respondents feel obligated to report they visited seemingly 'worthy' sites. All surveys involving recall of site visits should keep this experience in mind.

One in 7 CHN visitors (left hand chart) considers themselves very satisfied with the quality of information they find there. Altogether, two-thirds consider themselves very or somewhat satisfied.

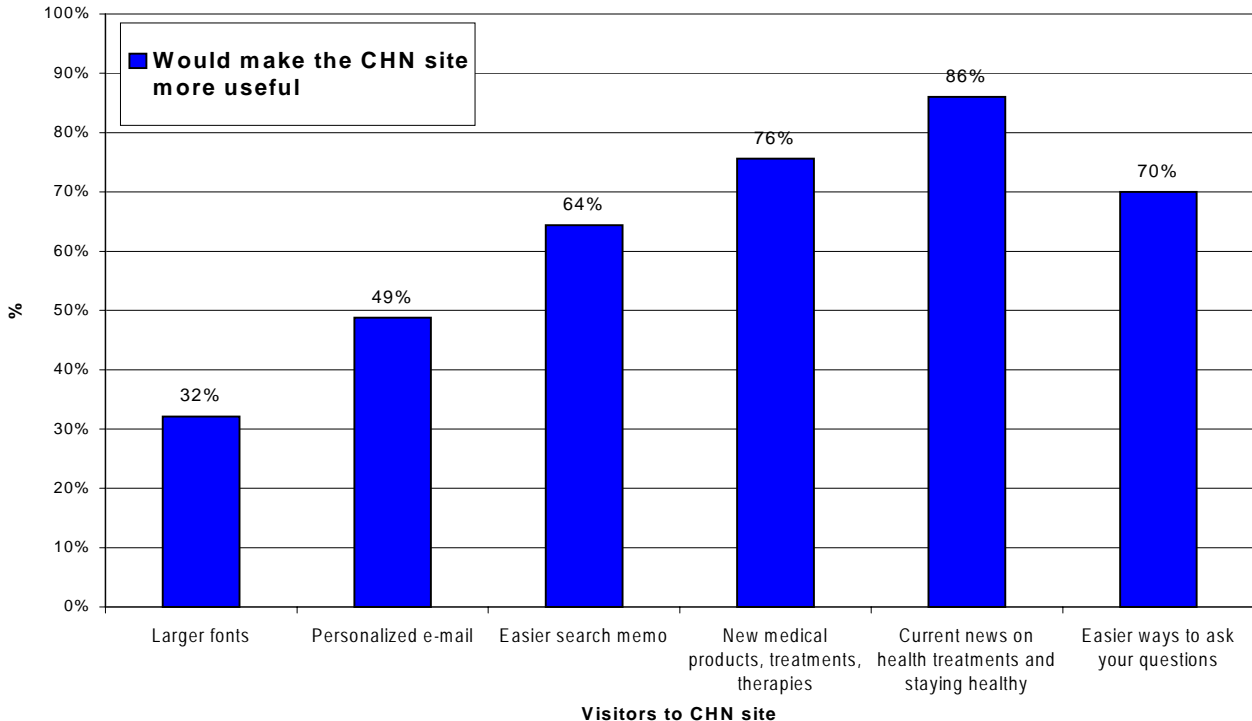
If, however, we remove those who volunteered they had never been to the CHN site, these percentages increase: Almost one in five of actual users are very satisfied, and 84% are very or somewhat satisfied.

The CHN site seems to be well regarded. As we have seen, people come to the site looking for information and choices, and the data here indicates they are not disappointed.

The sample is too small for statistically useful comparisons by socio-demographic variables, although it appears that post graduate respondents are the least likely to be very satisfied (0.40%).



### Canadian Health Network: CHN Visitors Want Current News and Access to Answers



CHNIMPR1. Would the following make the Canadian Health Network site more useful for you? 1. Larger fonts to make the pages easier to read? 2. Personalized information sent to you by e-mail? 3. Easier search menu? 4. News of new medical products, treatments, and therapies? 5. Current news on health treatments and staying healthy? 6. Easier ways to ask your questions?

Survey 23

January - April, 2002

Sample: Visitors to the CHN Internet site

N=195

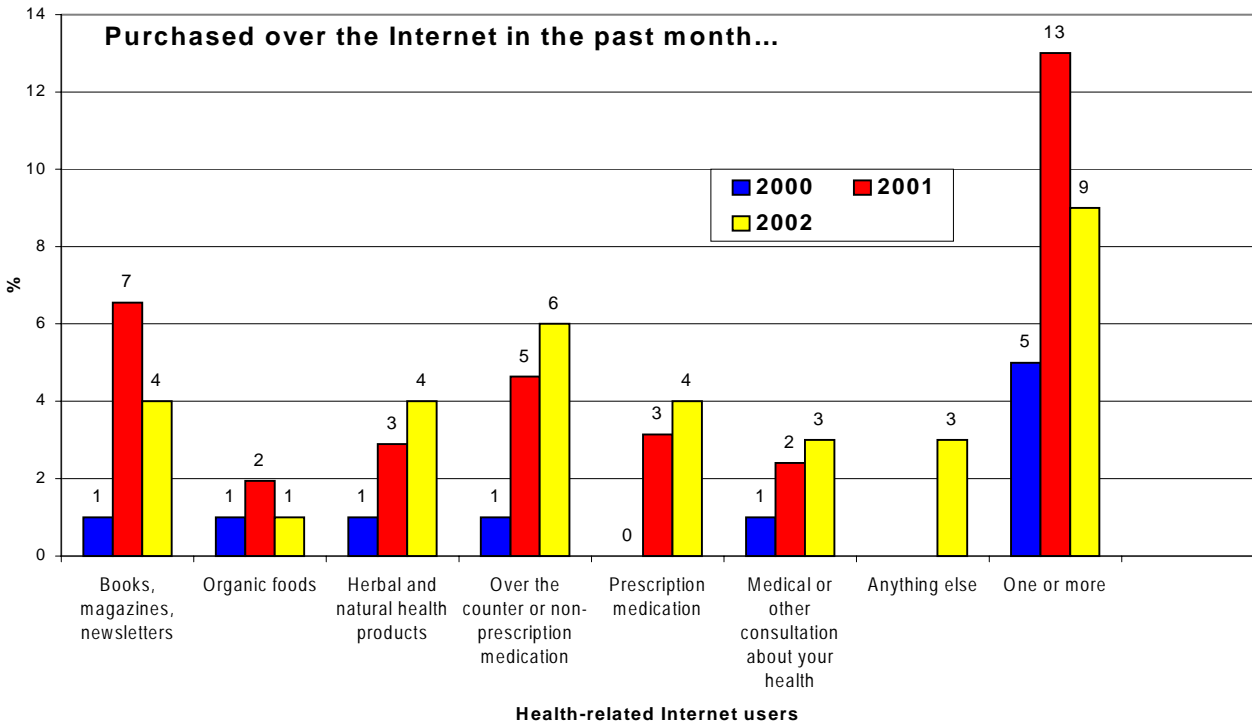
**Overview:**

The most frequently mentioned improvements to make the Canadian Health Network site more useful to users were:

- News items - news of new medical products, etc.;
- Current news on health questions; and
- Access - easier search memo and easier ways to ask questions.

These findings support the earlier assessment that visitors to the CHN site are focused, know what they want - obtaining information rather than just browsing - and are generally satisfied with what they find at the site.

**Internet Purchases: Overall, Purchases Decline, But Medication Purchases Continue To Increase**



INTBUY In the past month have you bought anything over the Internet that was related to health, for example: 1. Books, magazines, newsletters? 2. Organic foods? 3. Herbal and natural health products? 4. Over the counter non-prescription medication? 5. Prescription medication? 6. Medical or other consultation about your health? 7. Anything else?

Survey 23

Sample: Health-related Internet users in past month

January - April, 2002

N=882

*Overview:*

There has been a decline in the proportion of health-related Internet users who reporting making an Internet purchase in the previous month. The proportion making one purchase has declined from 13% in 2001 to 9%.

This is still significantly higher than 5% in 2000, so it is reasonable to assume that the purchasing trend will continue to move upward as Internet use becomes more common along with Internet purchases..

Moreover, among the purchasers in 2002 there appears to be a continuing increase in those purchasing prescription and non-prescription medications and herbal and natural health products. The differences from 2001 to 2002 are not statistically significant, but the increases since 2000 are significant.

One conclusion is that once someone buys health-related products over the Internet they continue to do so, and that those who buy, buy more.

In all, 7% of health-related Internet users purchased two or more products in the previous month.