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# Privy Council Office Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – Wave 4 of Focus Groups

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
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Mike Colledge  
President  
Ipsos Public Affairs

# 1. Executive Summary

## Background and Objectives

The Privy Council Office (PCO) is the hub of non-partisan, public service support to the Prime Minister and Cabinet and its decision-making structures. Led by the Clerk of the Privy Council, PCO helps the Government implement its vision and respond effectively and quickly to issues facing the government and the country.

As an advisor to the Prime Minister, PCO brings together quality, objective policy advice and information to support the Prime Minister and Cabinet, including information on the priorities of Canadians. To this end, the Communications and Consultation Secretariat within PCO supports the Prime Minister’s Office in coordinating government communications and setting broad government communications themes and messages, in accordance with government priorities, as determined by the Prime Minister, Cabinet, Cabinet committees and the Clerk of the Privy Council. The Secretariat also works with PCO policy secretariats to advise and support Cabinet and its committees.

In fulfilling its mandate, PCO required an ongoing cycle of qualitative data collection to ensure that it has up-to-date representations of Canadians’ opinions on macro-level issues that are of interest to the government, such as their views on what should be the priorities of the government. Additionally, such research increases the Government of Canada’s understanding of emerging trends, and measures Canadians’ views on key national issues and policy initiatives.

Through the use of an ongoing cycle of focus groups, PCO is gaining a solid understanding of Canadians’ views as they relate to the most important issues facing the country; their perceptions of how the federal government can best address these issues; expectations of actions related to government priorities; and perspectives on how the government can most effectively convey its efforts in dealing with emerging issues. This research helps inform the development of communications messages, products and dissemination tactics to respond to priority issues. Additionally, the research allows the Government of Canada to develop and refine communications activities to meet the specific needs of Canadians with timely, up-to-date, easily understood information based on the current perceptions of Canadians in the requisite areas.

This fourth wave of ongoing qualitative research was meant to gather feedback from Canadians on select issues and policy areas that are important to the Government of Canada. The issues discussed during focus groups differed from one location to the next. Topics covered included:

- Legalization of Marijuana
- Health care funding
- Local Challenges
- Opioids
- Skills Training
- Canada-US relations



- Canadian Food Priorities
- Airlines Passenger Bill of Rights
- Mandatory Minimum Sentencing

## Overview of Methodology

This fourth wave of qualitative research was comprised of a series of sixteen focus groups with Canadians aged 20 years old and above, held between April 5<sup>th</sup> and April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017. All group discussions lasted approximately two hours and were conducted in the evening, with the first session in each city starting at 5:30pm and the second starting at 7:30pm. These sessions were held in the following locations:

- Winnipeg – April 5<sup>th</sup>
- Victoria – April 6<sup>th</sup>
- Windsor – April 11<sup>th</sup>
- Mississauga – April 12<sup>th</sup>
- Edmonton – April 24<sup>th</sup>
- Truro -April 25<sup>th</sup>
- Quebec City - April 26<sup>th</sup>
- Joliette – April 27<sup>th</sup>

A total of 12 participants were recruited for each session to ensure that a minimum of eight to ten participants would attend. In total, 151 participants took part in the discussions. All participants received an honorarium of \$75 for attending the sessions at the focus group facilities. The screening questionnaire helped ensure that participants included a good cross-section of the general population, with good mixes of gender, ages, education and income levels, as well as household composition. Additional methodological details can be found in the appendix of this report.

This second wave of research is part of a continuous qualitative research project that will include a total of 144 focus groups to be held in multiple waves over the 2017 calendar year, with the option of renewing the cycle of research for two additional years. The contracted amount for this research project for calendar year 2017 is \$916,865.05, including HST.



## Key Findings

### *Legalization of Marijuana*

Participants in Edmonton, and Truro easily identified several aspects related to proposed legislation on the legalization of marijuana. Participants were aware of the legal age of possession and amounts of possession per individual. Aspects such as an increase in availability, quality, research and combating organized crime profiting from the illegal production of marijuana were identified as potential benefits of legalization. Several concerns were also discussed including accessibility, and lack of clear regulations for marijuana use while driving or when operating heavy machinery as well as possible impacts of marijuana consumption on the workplace. Those in Joliette were resistant to marijuana legalization and only softened slightly when a participant compared legalization of marijuana to alcohol.

### *Health care Funding*

When prompted on the topic of health care funding during a discussion on government actions, comments were brief, and focused on discussions between the federal and provincial governments. Most participants understood the role of the federal government in provide funding, and only those in Windsor mentioned a potential increase in funding for mental health services. Participants in Victoria believed that the level of health care funding that that their province received was lower than other provinces, which they felt was unfair.

### *Local Challenges*

Local issues varied widely between Victoria, Winnipeg, and Windsor. Concerns in Windsor were mainly about a ‘shrinking middle class’ and ‘availability of jobs’. These two issues were described as interrelated but important to resolve to ensure community cohesiveness and a strong local economy. Participants in Victoria were focused on ‘cost of housing’ ‘homelessness’ and ‘poverty’. Again, these issues were found by participants to be linked. Participants in Winnipeg mentioned a wide range of local challenges including the ‘availability of healthcare services’ ‘crime’ ‘availability of childcare options’ and ‘quality of roads and bridges’. It should be noted however that among those in Winnipeg, discussions related to local challenges largely focused on healthcare services, especially in relation to wait times.

### *Opioids*

In Edmonton, Truro, Quebec, and Joilette participants were shown 4 video treatments. **‘What is fentanyl?’**, was seen as clear, impactful, and informative on both what fentanyl is, and the risks involved with its use. This concept was effective in piquing the interest of many participants, with several stating that this concept would be effective in getting them to visit the website for more information.

**‘Overcoming an opioid addiction’** was described as supportive compared to **‘Opioid overdose’** which, according to several participants, had an effective call to action. However, this latter video led participants to question what the specific signs of an opioid overdose were. Last, **‘Prescribed an Opioid?’** provided clear information and a call to action among those on prescription opioids, but participants questioned why they would not be forewarned by their prescribing physicians of the risks of taking opioids.



### *Skills Training*

Awareness of Innovation and Skills Training initiatives as presented in the most recent federal budget was quite low in all locations. Nonetheless, participants were in favour of several of the listed initiatives, particularly those explicitly mentioning skills training. Making skills and retraining programs available to more Canadians and allowing Canadians on Employment Insurance (EI) who qualify to go back to school to learn new job skills without losing their benefits were of particular interest to participants. These initiatives were deemed to be broad enough to appeal to a wide audience regardless of life stage or career path. Participants often recognized the positive long-term effects of such initiatives such as adapting to changing job markets and obtaining a well-paying job, though some wondered about the associated costs and questioned how these initiatives would be funded (e.g. would this lead to increased taxes for Canadians)?

### *Canada-US relations*

Overall, Canada-US relations could best be described as cordial and respectful. Participants in Windsor, Mississauga, Winnipeg and Victoria discussed this relationship in terms of trade agreements, in particular NAFTA, as well as asylum seekers crossing the Canada-US border into Canada. When discussion was directed to the latter, many participants described Canada as a welcoming country, yet several voiced their concerns about the number of individuals illegally crossing the border. Some participants expressed concerns related to the financial impact associated with the influx of asylum seekers, while others spoke in terms of fairness, specifically as it related to those refugees and immigrants who had taken steps to enter Canada legally. However, overall, participants in all locations agreed with the current Safe Third Country Agreement.

### *Canadian Food Priorities*

Participants in focus groups were first asked to identify, on an unprompted basis, what they felt were key food-related priorities for Canada. Spontaneously, the main priority to emerge across locations was the need to ensure that nutritious foods were available at reasonable prices. Proper identification of GMOs was also raised across multiple locations as a key issue. Proper labeling regarding the origin of food products and encouraging local farming and selling of local food products were also mentioned to a lesser extent. When asked to select top priorities for the Government of Canada from a list of eleven key priorities, three priorities stood out as being most important across all locations:

- Access to affordable, nutritious food;
- The need to protect water, air and soil; and
- The need to ensure the success of farmers and family farms.

When asked to evaluate a series of five possible names for a future Canadian agricultural strategy, “Growing Forward / Cultiver l’avenir” was the most popular across locations. It was seen to be forward looking and positive, while also clearly hinting that this was an agricultural strategy via the clever use of the word growing. It was also viewed as simple and easy to read and pronounce.

Participants in all four locations were asked what they felt should be the main objectives of this national agricultural strategy. They were once again provided with a series of words that could be used to

describe the objectives and asked to select which ones they believed were the most important. Results were similar across all locations.

Four objectives stood out as being the most important: produce, innovate, prosper and grow. These were all seen as positive attributes that conveyed a certain level of optimism about the future, in line with abovementioned discussions regarding the name of the future national strategy.

### *Airlines Passenger Bill of Rights*

Participants in Edmonton and Quebec had mixed reactions when asked about how Canadian passengers are treated by airlines. Several stated that they did not feel that airlines were necessarily customer centric. Many participants were in favour of the development of a bill or rights for and responsibilities, and reacted positively to a series of possible elements that could be included in an eventual airline passenger bill of rights. The establishment of uniform compensation standards for denied boarding, overbooking and lost or damaged baggage were particularly appealing.

### *Mandatory Minimum Sentencing*

Discussed solely in Mississauga, most participants were aware of mandatory minimums, however some were not clear as to whether they existed in Canada. Opinions as to the fairness of mandatory minimums were mixed, as groups had varied opinions as to whether the context of each situation should be considered for sentencing. When presented with an alternative to mandatory minimums where offenders instead completed a treatment program, participants were apprehensive about removing the mandatory minimum all together. When provided with information as to the discretion available to judges during sentencing, most participants felt comfortable with the current situation.

### **Note on Interpretation of Findings**

Qualitative research is designed to reveal a rich range of opinions and interpretations rather than to measure what percentage of the target population holds a given opinion. These results must not be used to estimate the numeric proportion or number of individuals in the population who hold a particular opinion because they are not statistically projectable.

Focus group research on government priorities seeks to provide a deeper understanding of participants’ views, often complementing quantitative findings gathered through survey research. Discussions allow for deep probing on key issues that is not possible with quantitative research. This type of information is essential for the Privy Council Office in its role advising and supporting the Cabinet and its committees.

