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## ***Spring 2019 Focus Groups (Third Cycle)*** **Executive Summary**

Prepared for the Privy Council Office of Canada

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This public opinion research report presents the results of a series of focus groups conducted by Phoenix SPI on behalf of the Privy Council Office. The research study was conducted with Canadians aged 18 and older between June 6 and June 26, 2019. In total, 12 focus groups were conducted in six locations across the country: Surrey, Fredericton, Sorel, Belleville, Edmonton, and Victoria.

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## Executive Summary

The Communications and Consultations Secretariat of the Privy Council Office (PCO) provides advice and support to the Government of Canada, the Clerk of the Privy Council, as well as federal departments and agencies on matters relating to communications and consultations. One tool used by PCO in order to fulfil this mandate is public opinion research. Phoenix Strategic Perspectives (Phoenix SPI) was commissioned by PCO to conduct a series of focus groups to explore the views of Canadians on current events of relevance to the federal government.

### 1. Research Objectives and Purpose

The main objective of the focus groups was to explore the perceptions of Canadians on the state of current events, which included their opinions on the environment, steel, pipelines, fisheries, and vaccines. This input was needed because complex issues are often difficult to communicate to the Canadian public in a manner that is easily and clearly understood. The target population for the focus groups was adult Canadians aged 18 and older. By carrying out this research, PCO was able to ensure a better understanding of the views and concerns of the public. This understanding will be used to develop effective communications strategies and products.

### 2. Methodology

Twelve focus groups were conducted with Canadians, with two groups conducted in each of the following locations: Surrey, Fredericton, Sorel, Belleville, Edmonton, and Victoria. The groups in Sorel were conducted in French and the groups in all other locations were conducted in English. In all locations except Surrey groups were segmented by gender (one group with men and one with women). In Surrey, groups were segmented by home ownership (one group with homeowners and one with renters). All groups included a mix of participants by age, employment status, and education. Groups in Surrey also included a mix by gender.

The following additional specifications applied to this research: eleven individuals were recruited by phone for each two-hour group; participants received an honorarium of \$100 in appreciation of their time. All groups were held in a facility that allowed observation of the sessions, either behind a one-way mirror, or via closed-circuit TV in a room adjacent to the meeting room where the focus groups took place.

In total, 109 Canadians took part in this research:

Location	Language	Audience	Number of Participants	Date and Local Time
Surrey, BC	English	Renters	7	June 6; 5:30 pm
Surrey, BC	English	Homeowners	10	June 6; 7:30 pm
Fredericton, NB	English	Male	9	June 11; 5:30 pm
Fredericton, NB	English	Female	10	June 11; 7:30 pm
Sorel, QC	French	Female	10	June 12; 5:30 pm
Sorel, QC	French	Male	9	June 12; 7:30 pm
Belleville, ON	English	Male	9	June 18; 5:30 pm

Belleville, ON	French	Female	9	June 18; 7:30 pm
Edmonton, AB	English	Female	9	June 25; 5:30 pm
Edmonton, AB	English	Male	9	June 25; 7:30 pm
Victoria, BC	English	Male	9	June 26; 5:30 pm
Victoria, BC	English	Female	9	June 26; 7:30 pm

All steps of the project complied with *The Standards for the Conduct of Government of Canada Public Opinion Research*.

The investigators for this study were Philippe Azzie and Alethea Woods. Philippe moderated the groups in Fredericton and Sorel. Alethea moderated the groups in Surrey, Belleville, Edmonton and Victoria. Both moderators contributed to the final report.

### 3. Limitations and Use of the Research Results

This research was qualitative in nature, not quantitative. 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. As such, the results provide an indication of participants' views about the issues explored, but they cannot be generalized to the full population of Canadians. Specifically, 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.

### 4. Summary of Findings

#### *Government of Canada News*

Participants collectively identified a variety of things they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada recently. The things identified most frequently were pipelines, including issues related to Canada's oil fields and oil production, as well as tension between China and Canada over the possible extradition of a Huawei executive. Other top-of mind issues were identified by smaller numbers. These included the following: the federal government plan to reduce/ban the use of some plastics; the price on carbon; the Phoenix payroll issue; the SNC Lavalin issue; federal government efforts to manage Canada-U.S. relations and federal-provincial relations; Canada's garbage dispute with the Philippines; reconciliation with Indigenous peoples; issues surrounding the resignation of two federal ministers; the creation of over one million jobs since 2015; the report on missing and murdered Indigenous women; lack of additional funding for the office of the auditor general; federal action/assistance related to floods; a national pharmacare program; and the upcoming federal election (Fall 2019).

#### *Health Care<sup>1</sup>*

Asked to identify the biggest health care challenge in their community, participants routinely pointed to a shortage of physicians/difficulty finding general practitioners, a shortage of specialists, and long wait times for procedures, operations or treatments. A number of participants also

<sup>1</sup> Health care issues were explored with participants in all locations except Surrey.

identified issues related to older Canadians/seniors as a big health challenge in their community. This included an aging population, lack of home care services, and lack of retirement homes/wait times for senior' homes.

Awareness of federal initiatives in health care was relatively limited. A majority of participants said they were unaware or did not know of anything the federal government had done regarding health care over the past few years. Some participants added or specified that health care is predominantly a provincial jurisdiction and/or that the federal government's role is primarily to provide funding to the provinces.

Participants were given a handout identifying some possible priorities the federal government could address regarding health care. They were asked to rank the items they believe should be the first, second, and third priorities of the government. The item most often identified as the top priority was addressing doctor and nurse shortages, followed at a distance by making it easier for Canadians to eat healthy by making healthy food more affordable and providing all Canadians with fair/equal access to affordable prescription medications.

Drawing their attention to the item, 'providing all Canadians with fair and equal access to affordable prescription medications', participants were asked what they thought 'fair and equal access' would entail. In the minds of participants, this expression tended to be associated with one of three things: universal/uniform access (i.e. access applies to everyone, everywhere); basic coverage/minimum standards (i.e. a 'basic minimum' covered in terms of public funding of prescription medications); and means-tested coverage (i.e. coverage would be determined and provided according to one's income).

Participants were given a second handout identifying some possible names that could be used for a government strategy to improve access to affordable prescription medications. Two names led the way in terms of preferences: 'Canada Prescription Plan' and 'National Pharmacare Plan'. Both were preferred by similar numbers of participants and each was identified twice as often as their nearest competitor, 'Universal Prescription Plan'. Reasons for preferring these two names tended to be similar, namely their inclusiveness.

### *Environment*

Participants collectively identified a variety of things they have seen, read or heard about the environment lately. Issues most often identified related to changes in the environment and/or their impact, including, for example, global warming proceeding at a faster rate in Canada than elsewhere, rising average temperatures, glaciers melting at a faster rate than before, and an increase in the number of species at risk of extinction.

Awareness of the issue of plastics pollution was widespread. Positive reaction to the government of Canada taking action to ban single use plastics and perceptions that such action is important were also widespread, though support was sometimes qualified by reference to the need to have effective and convenient alternatives in place in order for the ban to work effectively. Impressions of what such a ban would apply to included the following: water bottles, plastic grocery bags, re-sealable zipper storage bags, plastic wrap, disposable coffee cups, packaging wrap/bubble wrap, milk jugs, straws, plastic utensils, and agricultural plastics (e.g. plastic baling twine).

### *Food Safety*

Participants were asked what benefits they see and concerns they might have with the Government of Canada relying more on technology in the future when it comes to monitoring low-risk food facilities. Participants had no difficulty identifying potential benefits to such an approach. Routinely identified benefits included more vigilant staff (because of the constant surveillance), cost-savings, data capture on a continuous basis, and the ability to track over time/long-term analysis, among others. Concerns about such an approach included cameras not being able to capture everything (e.g. smells/odors), unscrupulous operators finding ways to avoid cameras' field of vision, technical problems with cameras, potential privacy concerns, and redundancy issues, specifically the need for someone to review video footage.

Most participants were divided when asked what impact using technology in this way would have on their level of trust in Canada's food system. Some said they would have less trust and others said this would have no impact on their level of trust. A small number of participants felt that they would have more trust in Canada's food safety system if cameras were used in low-risk facilities.

Participants were informed that another potential future scenario could involve the Government of Canada using a third-party to review data captured by cameras installed in low-risk food facilities instead of Government of Canada analysts doing this. Here as well, participants were divided when asked what impact it would have on their level of trust in Canada's food system. Once again, nearly all participants were divided between ones who said they would have less trust and ones who said it would have no impact on their level of trust.

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The contract value was \$249,535.19 (including HST).

### *Political Neutrality Certification*

I hereby certify, as a Senior Officer of Phoenix Strategic Perspectives, that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not contain any reference to electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leader.

Signed:



Alethea Woods, President  
Phoenix Strategic Perspectives