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Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – April 2022

Executive Summary

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Canada 

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Communications and Consultation Secretariat of the Privy Council Office (PCO) commissioned The Strategic Counsel (TSC) to conduct continuous cycles of focus group research across the country with members of the public on key national issues, events, and policy initiatives related to the Government of Canada.

The broad purpose of this ongoing qualitative research program is three-fold: to explore the dimensions and drivers of public opinion on the most important issues facing the country; to assess perceptions and expectations of the federal government's actions and priorities, and; to inform the development of Government of Canada communications so that they continue to be aligned with the perspectives and information needs of Canadians, while remaining both clear and easy-to-understand.

The research is intended to be used by the Communications and Consultation Secretariat within PCO in order to fulfill its mandate of supporting the Prime Minister's Office in coordinating government communications. Specifically, the research will ensure that PCO has an ongoing understanding of Canadians' opinions on macro-level issues of interest to the federal government, as well as emerging trends.

This report includes findings from 12 online focus groups which were conducted between April 5th and April 28th, 2022 in multiple locations across the country including Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario,

Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are included in the section below.

The research for this cycle of focus groups focused largely on the 2022 federal Budget, including general themes, specific initiatives, and participants' overall impressions. Participants were asked for their perspectives on various housing initiatives announced in the Budget, including those pertaining to the construction of new homes, housing affordability, supporting and protecting Canadians, and home retrofits. Those residing in Quebec City were also asked for their perspectives on several tax initiatives from the federal Budget.

The research explored a wide range of related issues in depth, including what Canadians were hearing about the Government of Canada in the news, the federal government's response to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs), the announcement of the 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan, and priorities related to healthcare.

Ukrainians residing in the Prairies were asked for their views on the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel (CUAET), additional supports that could be provided to Ukrainians upon their arrival to Canada, and steps the federal government could take to help protect the language and culture of Ukrainians living within Canada. Other topics included challenges and priorities facing official language minority communities in Canada as well as issues specifically pertaining to younger Canadians. Those residing in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia (B.C.) were also asked for their perspectives on branding concepts for Pacific Economic Development Canada (PacifiCan).

As a note of caution when interpreting the results from this study, findings of qualitative research are directional in nature only and cannot be attributed quantitatively to the overall population under study with any degree of confidence.

Methodology

Overview of Groups

Target audience

- Canadian residents, 18 and older.
- Groups were split primarily by location.
- Some groups focused on specific subgroups of the population including Ukrainian diaspora, those who are environmentally concerned, Francophones, first-time home buyers, men aged 18-34, seniors aged 55 or older, those earning high incomes, those concerned with cost of living, women aged 18-34, and those earning low/middle incomes.

Detailed Approach

- 12 focus groups across various regions in Canada.
- One group was conducted with the general population in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

- The other eleven groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
 - Ukrainian diaspora residing in major centres across the Prairies;
 - Those who are environmentally concerned residing on Vancouver Island;
 - Francophones residing in New Brunswick;
 - First-time home buyers residing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA);
 - Men, aged 18-34, residing in southwestern Ontario;
 - Seniors, aged 55 or older, residing in the Kitchener and Waterloo region in Ontario;
 - Those earning high incomes residing in Quebec City;
 - Those concerned with cost of living residing in rural Nova Scotia;
 - Women, aged 18-34, residing in the Greater Montreal Area (GMA); and
 - Those earning low/middle incomes residing in Edmonton and the Outaouais region in Quebec.
- All groups in Quebec as well as the group comprising Francophones from New Brunswick were conducted in French. All other groups were conducted in English.
- All groups for this cycle were conducted online.
- A total of 8 participants were recruited for each group, assuming 6 to 8 participants would attend.
- Across all locations, 88 participants attended, in total. Details on attendance numbers by group can be found below.
- Each participant received an honorarium. The incentive ranged from \$100 to \$125 per participant, depending on the location and the composition of the group.

Group Locations and Composition

LOCATION	GROUP	LANGUAGE	DATE	TIME (EST)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Major Centres Prairies	1	English	Apr. 5	8:00-10:00 pm	Ukrainian Diaspora	8
Vancouver Island – British Columbia	2	English	Apr. 6	9:00-11:00 pm	Environmentally Concerned	8
New Brunswick	3	French	Apr. 7	5:00-7:00 pm	Francophones	8
Greater Toronto Area – Ontario	4	English	Apr. 12	6:00-8:00 pm	First-Time Home Buyers	8
Southwestern Ontario	5	English	Apr. 13	6:00-8:00 pm	Men, aged 18-34	8
Lower Mainland – British Columbia	6	English	Apr. 13	9:00-11:00 pm	General Population	7
Kitchener and Waterloo Region – Ontario	7	English	Apr. 19	6:00-8:00 pm	Seniors, aged 55+	8
Quebec City – Quebec	8	French	Apr. 20	6:00-8:00 pm	High Income	6
Rural Nova Scotia	9	English	Apr. 21	5:00-7:00 pm	Cost of Living Concerned	6

Greater Montreal Area – Quebec	10	French	Apr. 26	6:00-8:00 pm	Women, aged 18-34	7
Edmonton – Alberta	11	English	Apr. 27	8:00-10:00 pm	Low/Middle Income	8
Outaouais Region – Quebec	12	French	Apr. 27	6:00-8:00 pm	Low/Middle Income	6
Total number of participants						88

Key Findings

Government of Canada in the News (All Locations)

At the beginning of each group participants were asked what they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days. The ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia remained top of mind among participants, with several closely following the evolving crisis as well as the response from the Government of Canada and other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Specifically related to the conflict, many mentioned the sanctions placed on numerous Russian individuals and entities by the federal government, while others recalled the provision of significant amounts of financial and military assistance to Ukraine as well as efforts by the Government of Canada to bring a large number of Ukrainians fleeing conflict to Canada.

Unrelated to the crisis in Ukraine, participants also recalled a number of other recent actions and announcements from the federal government. These included the tabling of the 2022 federal Budget, the decision by the Bank of Canada to raise interest rates by 0.50%, the loosening of some pandemic-related travel measures for fully-vaccinated travellers, and the anticipated roll-out of an additional booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine for certain groups of vulnerable Canadians.

Environment and Climate Change (Vancouver Island Environmentally Concerned)

A group of environmentally concerned participants from Vancouver Island engaged in a discussion regarding climate change and the environment. To begin, participants were asked a general question regarding which priorities they felt the federal government should be focusing on. Unprompted, several identified the environment and climate change as major priorities, with many expressing the view that this represented the greatest challenge facing the Government of Canada at this time. Discussing specific areas related to the environment about which they were particularly concerned, participants identified issues such as large-scale pollution, a continued reliance on non-renewable energy sources, and the need for greater conservation of existing natural resources such as trees and freshwater. Speaking more generally, a few participants advocated for a more wide-ranging transformation with respect to social and economic practices which would prioritize sustainability and conservation, along with economic growth and prosperity.

Focusing on recent actions taken by the Government of Canada regarding the environment, several recalled the introduction of a federal price on carbon. Others alluded to initiatives such as the 2030

Emissions Reduction Plan, the Incentives for Zero-Emission Vehicles (iZEV) Program, and the Canada Greener Homes Grant, although they did not reference these programs by name. Discussing the Government of Canada's performance on this front, while several were supportive of what they felt was a greater focus in recent years on environmental issues, it was widely thought that much more could be done. Regarding potential actions that could be taken at the federal level, some expressed a desire to ensure greater accountability for companies that are considered to be major emitters, particularly in the resource extraction sector. It was suggested that the federal government should impose stricter regulations on these companies and their operations.

Dental Care (Kitchener and Waterloo Region Seniors)

Seniors residing in the Kitchener-Waterloo region of Ontario were asked a few additional questions on the subject of dental care. While very few had heard anything as of late about this issue, a small number recalled that the Government of Canada had recently announced plans to establish a national dental care program, including coverage for all children under the age of 12.

Presented with additional information about this plan, all participants felt this to be an important and worthwhile initiative, with several expressing support for the initial strategy of focusing on younger Canadians, seniors, and those with disabilities. It was felt this plan would be particularly helpful for those who were self-employed or did not have dental benefits through an employer. While reactions to this initiative were largely positive, a few questioned what types of dental procedures would be covered under the proposed program and whether the current number of practicing dentists across Canada would be sufficient to address the expected increased demand for dental services once the program is operational.

Quebec City-Lévis Tunnel (Quebec City High Income)

Participants residing in Quebec City were asked about the recent announcement by the Government of Quebec of a plan to construct a tunnel providing an additional connection between the downtown core of Quebec City and the nearby municipality of Lévis. Several had heard about the project, specifically remarking on the cost of construction and ongoing discussions as to whether the project would involve the construction of one or multiple tunnels.

Discussing whether they would be personally affected by the tunnel, while a small number expected this could potentially make their daily commutes easier by reducing congestion and traffic on existing roadways, most did not feel it would greatly impact their lives. While a number of participants said they did not know enough of the details regarding the project to evaluate its impact, most thought it would likely be beneficial in the long-term for those living in the region, creating a third link between Quebec City and Lévis and reducing commute times for those frequently driving in and out of the city centre. At the same time, many also expressed concern about what they perceived to be a high projected cost for the project as well as the potential that construction costs could increase further. All participants felt the federal government had a role to play regarding this project, with some expecting federal funding would be allocated toward its construction as well as for ongoing infrastructure maintenance once the tunnel became operational.

Bay du Nord Development Project (Quebec City High Income, GMA Women, Edmonton Low/Middle Income, Outaouais Region Low/Middle Income)

Four groups discussed the Bay du Nord Development Project proposed to be constructed off the eastern coast of Newfoundland of Labrador. Very few participants had heard about the project and those who had knew little of the details other than that it was related to the oil and gas sector.

After receiving additional information regarding the project, many participants expressed support for the initiative. Several underscored the potential economic benefits of increased domestic oil and gas production for Canadians, especially given the recent rise in the price of gasoline across Canada and disruptions within the global oil and gas sector resulting from the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. While several of these participants remained in favour of a transition to more sustainable energy production and a 'greener' economy, most were of the view that oil and gas remained important in the short-term. For those who were less supportive of the project, it was felt that even if the operation itself did not have a significant adverse environmental impact, any decision to increase the production of non-renewable resources would likely cause significant environmental harm in the long-run.

Discussing the potential impacts of this project, it was felt by most that there would likely be both positive and negative consequences. Focusing on the positive, several felt that by expanding domestic oil and gas production, the Canadian economy would likely experience significant gains associated with increased exports to foreign markets. In addition, some were hopeful that Canadians would also benefit through lower fuel prices domestically. While some reiterated concerns about the environmental impacts of continued investments in the oil and gas sector, many others felt that the results of the environmental assessment provided sufficient justification for the project to proceed.

Focusing on what the Bay du Nord project represented in terms of future oil and gas development in Canada, a number of participants thought it sent a message that the sector would continue to play an important role in the Canadian economy, even amidst a greater overall shift to renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydro. Regarding future projects, it was felt that if the Bay du Nord project confirmed the expectations of the environmental assessment and indeed had minimal ecological impact, it would likely lead to the approval of similar initiatives going forward. Alternatively, if unanticipated damage occurred to nearby ecosystems, many expected the federal government would take greater caution in approving such projects in the future.

CN Rail Board of Directors (GMA Women)

The group from Montreal engaged in a brief discussion regarding the issue of a lack of French-speaking members on the Board of Directors of the Canadian National Railway Company (CN Rail). While all participants had heard of CN Rail, very few were aware of this particular issue. Discussing further, most felt that the lack of French-speaking directors on CN's Board was indicative of an underrepresentation of both the French-language as well as the unique perspectives of Francophone Canadians when it came to corporate decision-making at major organizations such as CN Rail. A small number felt differently, being of the view that so long as the services offered by the company were available in both English and French, they did not see an issue.

Asked whether this was an important issue to them, several indicated that it was. These participants spoke to a larger concern regarding what they felt to be a lack of Francophone representation in many Canadian institutions and organizations. It was generally felt by these participants that for national organizations such as CN Rail, the linguistic composition of the board of directors should reflect both of Canada's official languages.

Public Mood (Edmonton Low/Middle Income, Outaouais Region Low/Middle Income)

Two groups took part in an extended discussion regarding the public mood and perceived societal divisions that have emerged in recent years. To begin, participants were asked about their media consumption habits and which sources they typically rely on for news and information. While some relied primarily on traditional media such as televised news (CBC, CTV, Global News) as well as newspapers and radio, many also reported getting their news from social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and TikTok) as well as blogs, podcasts, and videos posted by a variety of news sources and subject matter experts on platforms such as YouTube.

Most participants were of the view that significant divisions between groups of Canadians had become increasingly apparent. Many believed that while these differences had likely always existed, they had been exacerbated in recent months and years and were now being voiced far more openly. In addition, it was felt by a number of participants that the advent of social media and the 'echo chamber' effect (in which individuals are primarily exposed to only news and information that reinforces an existing point of view or set of beliefs) were combining to create more extreme viewpoints and less common ground.

Asked whether there were any issues on which Canadians were still more or less united, many felt there was a general agreement that more needed to be done to address inflation and the rising cost of living in many parts of the country, particularly focusing on providing higher wages for Canadian workers. In addition, most felt that Canadians were currently on the same page regarding the conflict in Ukraine, believing the Government of Canada should continue to support Ukrainians and the Ukrainian defence effort while avoiding entering into a direct confrontation with Russian forces. Discussing the areas where Canadians were most divided, a number of participants were of the view that there was a growing division among those who prioritized ongoing development of non-renewable energy sources such as oil and gas and others who felt a greater emphasis should be placed on transitioning towards a 'greener', more sustainable economy. In addition to the environment, many participants pointed to the COVID-19 pandemic and related public health measures and vaccine mandates as a major source of division in recent years.

Most were of the view that Canadians are more divided at present than was the case in previous eras. Many again emphasized the role of social media, believing that growing numbers of Canadians were engaging in more inflammatory conversations online than they otherwise would in a face-to-face context. In addition, it was thought by some that there was a great deal of pressure at present to 'choose a side' on a number of highly contentious issues, further preventing Canadians from attempts to find common ground with one another. Asked if they were concerned about these perceived divisions, many indicated that they were, feeling it contributed to a level of distrust and lack of cohesion that was unhealthy for a society. Discussing the role of the Government of Canada on this

front, it was felt more could be done at the federal level to improve education regarding online information, including the ability to recognize so-called 'fake news' sources. Participants generally believed that this would significantly reduce the impact of misinformation and disinformation.

Budget 2022 (New Brunswick Francophones, GTA First-Time Home Buyers, Lower Mainland British Columbia, Southwestern Ontario Men, Kitchener and Waterloo Region Seniors, Quebec City High Income, Rural Nova Scotia Concerned with Cost of Living, GMA Women, Edmonton Low/Middle Income, Outaouais Region Low/Middle Income)

Ten groups discussed the federal government's 2022 Budget, which was tabled on April 7th, 2022. Discussions focused on Budget initiatives regarding housing affordability, economic concerns, climate change and the environment, and innovation, among other issues. All groups were held in the days and weeks following the release of Budget, with the exception of the group from New Brunswick which was conducted on the day of its release.

Budget Expectations (New Brunswick Francophones)

Few participants in the group from New Brunswick were aware of the Budget's release or of any specific announcements or initiatives contained within. Asked to identify which areas they felt the Government of Canada should primarily be focusing on, a number of participants mentioned healthcare and related personnel shortages in this sector. Additional suggested areas of focus included the environment and climate change, increased defence spending, and a greater effort towards reducing the federal debt.

Initial Impressions (GTA First-Time Home Buyers, Southwestern Ontario Men, Lower Mainland British Columbia, Kitchener and Waterloo Region Seniors, Quebec City High Income, Rural Nova Scotia Cost of Living Concerned, GMA Women, Edmonton Low/Middle Income, Outaouais Region Low/Middle Income)

The nine groups conducted after the tabling of the Budget shared their initial impressions regarding the priorities and announcements set out by the federal government. Across all groups, relatively few were aware the Budget had been released, with almost no participants reporting having watched the announcement live. Among those who were at least somewhat aware of the Budget, a wide range of focus areas and specific initiatives were recalled. These included housing affordability, healthcare, the introduction of a national dental care program, initiatives related to the environment and climate change, increased defence spending, greater supports for LGBTQ2 Canadians, and anti-racism initiatives.

Discussing what they felt to be the overall theme and focus of the Budget, many participants characterized the priorities and initiatives set out by the federal government as proactive and future-minded, with a significant emphasis on innovation and economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous participants also mentioned what they felt to be the Budget's 'back to basics' approach, with several commenting positively on what they felt to be a major focus on every day issues such as rising inflation and the perceived high cost of living. Focusing on specific areas or

initiatives they felt particularly positively about, many participants cited actions related to housing affordability, as well as the emphasis placed on climate change and the environment.

While most were largely positive in their initial views towards the Budget, some participants also identified areas they thought had been underrepresented and required greater attention from the federal government. Several had expected to see more on reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, as well as an even greater focus on the environment and climate change. A few were also of the opinion that greater actions could be taken to manage and reduce fuel costs for Canadians, with some having remarked that the federal government should seek to continue developing Canada's non-renewable energy sources, in addition to developing more sustainable alternatives.

Asked to share their overall initial impressions surrounding the Budget, most felt it to be comprehensive, balanced, and liked that it covered a multitude of important issues facing Canadians. While a few said the Budget focused on too many different areas, more participants felt positively about this aspect, believing that the Government of Canada had placed a great deal of effort in addressing a wide range of issues, all of which they believed required attention. While some thought more would still need to be done regarding key areas such as housing affordability and the cost of living, it was generally believed the Budget represented a strong first step and the announcements and initiatives contained within would likely have a tangible impact on the lives of many Canadians.

Housing Affordability (GTA First-Time Home Buyers, Southwestern Ontario Men, Lower Mainland British Columbia, Kitchener and Waterloo Region Seniors, Quebec City High Income, Rural Nova Scotia Cost of Living Concerned, GMA Women, Edmonton Low/Middle Income, Outaouais Region Low/Middle Income)

Nine groups engaged in an extended discussion regarding housing affordability and the various Budget initiatives and announcements targeted to address this issue. Asked how important they felt housing affordability was, almost all participants felt it to be an issue of the highest importance, with many of the view that it was the number one concern facing Canadians at present. Many expressed the impression that housing had become increasingly unaffordable in recent years and that many Canadians were currently struggling to find housing within their means, both in the homeownership and rental markets. A number of participants expressed that housing was an essential human right, and that at present this need was not being adequately addressed by the federal and provincial/territorial governments.

Speaking more broadly, a number of participants were of the impression that a significant portion of many Canadians' income was often devoted towards housing-related expenses. It was felt that this had a negative impact on the overall economy, as this decrease in disposable income often led to a reduction in spending in other sectors such as retail and restaurants/hospitality. Housing affordability was said to be a growing issue even among those participants who were long-term homeowners. While some expressed the desire to see their property continue to increase in value, many also mentioned the difficulty this presented, in that even if they sold their current home they would then need to find new housing, which had itself become increasingly expensive. This had led to some participants feeling somewhat 'stuck' in their current housing situation.

Discussing whether they felt the Government of Canada was currently on the right or wrong track regarding housing affordability, participants were largely mixed in their opinions. On balance, while more said the federal government was currently on the wrong track in terms of affordable housing, a large number thought differently, feeling there had been a significant amount of recent progress at the federal level towards addressing this problem. For those who felt the Government of Canada had been performing better on housing affordability in recent years, Budget announcements such as the new Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA) for first-time home buyers, increased tax credits (such as First-Time Home Buyers' Tax Credit), and the two-year ban on foreign investment in residential housing in Canada were all identified as signs of encouragement. Among the participants who said the federal government was currently on the wrong track, it was felt that even though more attention was now being paid towards the issue, it would not likely be enough to fully address the challenges Canadians were currently facing. Though many acknowledged recent Budget measures related to housing as a step in the right direction, several expressed frustration that such actions had not been taken earlier. Speaking more generally, some participants thought housing to also be a provincial/territorial and municipal responsibility, and wanted to see the development of a multi-level approach on this front.

Participants next engaged in a number of exercises discussing recent announcements and initiatives from the Budget, and were asked to identify which they felt would be most effective towards addressing this issue. The first set of initiatives dealt with the issue of increasing the supply of available housing in many regions across the country.

Among the initiatives shown to participants, the announcement of an additional \$2.9 billion (over four years) for the National Housing Co-Investment fund received a high amount of praise across a number of groups. A number of participants said that this initiative represented the most significant investment towards housing within the Budget and they believed that it would likely help the greatest number of people, especially lower and middle-income Canadians. Several also commented positively on the aspect of this initiative related to repairing existing housing units. Some believed this represented a more sustainable option in terms of focusing on what has already been built rather than brand new developments.

Also related to expanding affordable housing options for low and middle-income Canadians, the initiative to allocate \$216 million towards incentivizing developers to build new rental units that charge less than the average rent in the areas in which they are built was identified by a large number of participants as particularly promising. Several felt this action would serve to take a great deal of pressure off the housing market and provide renters with more affordable options, potentially allowing them to save towards a home of their own. In addition, some thought that by financially incentivizing developers to create affordable rental projects, it was likely these companies would be encouraged to find new and innovative ways to provide affordable housing for Canadians. Participants felt this initiative would be particularly helpful for younger Canadians, who often made up a high proportion of renters and were likely faced with the issue of housing affordability to a far greater degree than older generations.

The new Housing Accelerator Fund, which would provide funding to municipalities to build upwards of 100,000 homes across Canada, was also received positively by a number of participants. Many liked

the significant quantity of new houses being built and felt this would take a great deal of pressure off the housing market in many areas. Several added the opinion that a lack of supply was the key driver behind the present housing crisis, and felt this initiative was a step in the right direction, believing the Government of Canada needed to focus on building as many houses as possible in an expedient timeframe.

More targeted initiatives, such as the provision of an additional \$1.5 billion (over two years) for affordable housing for those experiencing homelessness and/or domestic violence, were also identified as important by a number of participants. Several felt that all Canadians deserved access to affordable housing and that, by lessening the number of people living on the street or in dangerous domestic situations, communities would likely become safer and more equitable places to live. A number of participants felt this to be particularly important for those fleeing domestic violence, especially women, who may otherwise be forced to stay with their abusers if no affordable housing option were available to them.

Some also expressed interest in the announcement of an additional 500 million dollar investment into the expansion of co-operative housing within Canada including the pledge to provide \$1 billion in loans to co-op projects. A number of these participants were personally interested in living in a co-op housing situation, with a few reporting having previously done so. It was believed by a number of participants that a greater prevalence of co-op housing would serve to reduce overall housing costs for many individuals, while also creating stronger community bonds within local neighbourhoods.

While less popular than other initiatives, a number of participants felt the provision of an additional \$750 million in public transit funding to communities which commit their own funding towards building new housing was also an effective component of the federal government's housing strategy. Many expressed the view that simply building new houses was not enough and that vital infrastructure (such as expanded public transit) would also be necessary in order to connect these new homes to the greater community. Some also felt that this would go a long way towards addressing existing congestion on major local roadways and transit corridors, which was said to be a growing issue of concern given the perceived recent rise in population in their communities. Relatively few participants identified the initiative to repurpose existing infrastructure budgets to prioritize the construction of additional new homes as a particularly helpful action. Additionally, almost no participants mentioned the announcement of \$150 million of additional funding over the next two years for housing in the northern territories.

Participants next focused on a second set of priorities, this time specifically concerning the issue of housing affordability and creating additional pathways to homeownership for Canadians.

Of the initiatives shown to participants, those specifically targeted towards first-time home buyers such as the expansion of the First Time Home Buyers' Incentive and the doubling of the existing First-Time Home Buyer's Tax Credit from \$5,000 to \$10,000 received the most support among participants and ranked among the most frequently selected initiatives in almost every group. Discussing the First-Time Home Buyers' Incentive, several participants were of the view that it would be helpful in providing a pathway to homeownership for those who remained single. It was widely felt that one should not have to be in a relationship or have access to two salaries in order to afford a home and that this

increased flexibility would likely assist many Canadians. Regarding the First-Time Home Buyers' Tax Credit, it was thought by many that this would potentially make it easier for prospective home buyers to finalize their purchases and potentially get them closer to affording their own home. Several commented positively regarding the straightforwardness of this initiative, believing it would help a large number of Canadians in an easily understandable way.

A significant number of participants across all groups were largely supportive of the introduction of a Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA) allowing prospective home buyers to save up to \$40,000 tax free to put towards the purchase of their first home. Many felt this would go a long way towards helping prospective home buyers, especially those with longer time horizons, to save up for the purchase of their first home.

The allocation of an additional \$200 million towards increasing rent-to-own housing options was also mentioned by a number of participants. Some thought this represented a helpful and innovative method of providing renters with a pathway to build equity in a property while continuing to rent in the short term. It was believed that this was a more affordable, realistic path towards home ownership for some Canadians who may not be able to afford a significant down payment all at once.

While most felt the investment of \$562 million (over two years) to fund organizations addressing homelessness (as well as an additional \$62 million specifically dedicated to veterans experiencing this issue) to be a worthwhile initiative, few identified this as the most pressing issue surrounding affordable housing at present. Additionally, only a small number of participants thought a one-time \$500 payment to Canadians facing housing affordability challenges would have any tangible impact. Many felt that it would be an inefficient use of financial resources on the part of the federal government.

Participants were next shown a third set of initiatives, this time focused on protecting Canadians in the housing market.

Among these announcements, many participants reacted positively to the creation of new taxation penalties to stop landlords from 'renovicting' tenants. Several were of the impression that this was an increasingly widespread practice among landlords, with a few recalling having seen rent prices in their own neighbourhoods rise significantly after homes had been renovated. It was added by some that this action by the Government of Canada demonstrated that it was serious about protecting the rights of renters, providing them with greater peace of mind regarding the long-term stability of their living situation.

Many participants were also strongly in favour of the decision by the Government of Canada to ban all non-Canadians from buying residential properties in Canada for a period of two years. It was felt by several individuals that foreign buyers represented one of the primary driving forces behind the rise in Canadian housing prices, particularly in cases where units were purchased and left vacant, essentially removing them altogether from the supply of available housing. It was felt that, in many cases, foreign buyers were taking advantage of the Canadian housing market to use these properties as investment vehicles rather than as residential housing. While it was widely felt that Canadians needed be prioritized over foreign buyers, many clarified that they took no issue with prospective immigrants

purchasing Canadian homes, believing that so long as one was planning on working and settling in Canada for the long-term, that there was no reason to deny them the ability to purchase a home. Also related to the practice of housing being purchased and left vacant, a large number of participants expressed support for the initiative of making assignment sales of new and renovated housing taxable, serving to deter speculators from purchasing these homes as investments rather than as residential housing.

The proposal to end 'blind bidding' received a significant level of support in almost every group, with many believing this practice was frequently used by realtors to artificially drive up real estate prices as well as pit prospective home buyers against one another. This was felt to be a growing issue in many regions, with a number of participants recalling seeing properties in their area being sold for far above the initial asking price, driving up housing prices even further. Several were of the view that by taking this action, the federal government would introduce a greater level of transparency to the home buying process.

Though less broadly popular, the initiative to introduce new taxation rules to deter house flipping was also mentioned by some participants. While some were skeptical as to whether increased taxation alone would be enough to deter house flipping, this was widely felt to be a growing issue, particularly in more expensive real estate markets such as Toronto and Vancouver. Though most saw house flipping as a growing contributor behind increasing housing prices throughout Canada, a few participants expressed concern that these new rules may be unfairly punitive, especially towards those who made a living renovating and reselling homes.

The three groups from Ontario as well as those residing in Lower Mainland B.C. engaged in a brief additional exercise concerning home retrofitting initiatives announced as part of the Budget. Presented with three different initiatives aimed at assisting Canadians in retrofitting their properties participants reacted largely positively to these actions, believing all could be helpful for homeowners looking to make their homes more accessible or 'greener', but for whom cost was a major barrier. Regarding the introduction of the Canada Green Buildings Strategy as well as the allocation of an additional \$458.6 million towards existing grants and low-interest loan programs for green energy retrofits, many felt these would assist in reducing home energy costs over the long-term while also mitigating the significant upfront costs for homeowners looking to undertake these renovations. A number of participants also liked the idea of a tax credit of up to \$7500 for those looking to make their homes more accessible for seniors or adults with disabilities, with many sharing how this could positively impact their own loved ones, allowing aging or disabled relatives to live with them rather than moving to a long-term care facility.

Asked to reflect on their impressions of this housing plan as a whole, participants were largely positive about the wide range of initiatives set out by the Government of Canada, with many stating they were pleasantly surprised at how large a component housing affordability was within the overall Budget. While some expressed that they would wait until the initiatives began to be implemented before determining whether this plan represented a viable path forward, most were optimistic and believed many of these initiatives would likely have a significant impact on stabilizing housing prices and helping more Canadians gain access to affordable housing in their communities.

While most praised the comprehensiveness of the housing initiatives included in the Budget, a few others felt differently, believing it would be more effective for the Government of Canada to focus on a short list of major priorities rather than trying to address a large number of areas all at once. In discussing whether it was realistic to expect the Government of Canada to be able to accomplish all of these initiatives in the short-term, many participants remained skeptical as to whether this was possible given the sheer number of new initiatives and announcements contained with the Budget. This being said, most were open to seeing the federal government attempt to do whatever it could to address the issue of housing affordability and remained enthusiastic about the new initiatives.

Tax Initiatives (Quebec City High Income)

The group from Quebec City partook in an additional exercise focusing on the various tax initiatives introduced as part of the 2022 Budget. Presented with a list of key actions expected to be taken by the federal government on this front, almost all participants were in favour of the plan to change the financial transaction process as a way of limiting the use of corporate structures in tax havens in order to engage in aggressive tax avoidance. Many were of the opinion that more needed to be done to ensure corporations and wealthy individuals paid their fair share of taxes. Related to this, some were also in favour of the initiative of examining a new minimum tax regime, particularly focusing on high-income Canadians who were felt to be paying disproportionately less in taxes relative to their overall wealth. It was felt that any actions to make this situation more equitable would be a step in the right direction.

Participants were next shown a second set of tax-related initiatives, focusing on areas such as small businesses, the digitalization of money (including cryptocurrencies), and expanded oversight on the part of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). While no initiatives received resounding support, some reacted positively to the announcement of \$1.2 billion (over five years) in funding for the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to expand audits and prosecution of larger entities and non-residents suspected of engaging in criminal tax evasion. While few reacted positively to any of the other initiatives, a small number felt greater regulation of cryptocurrencies may be a prudent measure, especially given concerns surrounding the perceived lack of stability of digital currencies in both the short and long-term.

Economic Issues (GTA First-Time Home Buyers, Southwestern Ontario Men, Lower Mainland British Columbia, Kitchener and Waterloo Region Seniors, Quebec City High Income, Rural Nova Scotia Cost of Living Concerned, GMA Women)

Participants in seven groups discussed a number of issues related to the economy as well as ways to achieve future growth and prosperity going forward. Focusing on specific economic initiatives and announcements, groups were shown a series of quotes taken directly from the tabling of the Budget, and were asked to provide their thoughts on each statement.

To begin, participants were presented with the following information describing the state of the Canadian economy at present:

“Our economy has recovered 112 per cent of the jobs that were lost during those awful first months, compared to just 90 per cent in the United States. Our unemployment rate is down to just 5.5 per cent—close to the 5.4 per cent low in 2019 that was Canada’s best in five decades. Our real GDP is more than a full percentage point above where it was before the pandemic. Think about that: after a devastating recession—after wave after wave and lockdown after lockdown—our economy has not just recovered. It is booming.”

Discussing this statement, very few felt it accurately represented the current state of the Canadian economy. Many took exception to the notion that the economy was ‘booming’, particularly given the perceived economic damage incurred over the past two years as the result of COVID-19 lockdowns and other pandemic-related public health requirements. Expanding upon this, a number pointed to ongoing supply chain issues, increasing fuel costs, high inflation, and a perceived rapid rise in the overall cost of living. Generally, it was felt that even if the rate of unemployment was relatively low, this did not matter if Canadians were not earning enough to get by.

Focusing on the matter of federal spending and the national debt, participants were shown the following:

“We are absolutely determined that our debt-to-GDP ratio must continue to decline. Our deficits must continue to be reduced. The pandemic debt we incurred to keep Canadians safe and solvent must—and will—be paid down. This is our fiscal anchor. This is a line we shall not cross.”

While many participants felt reducing the deficit to be important, several were of the opinion that the high levels of pandemic spending, and the corresponding increased national debt, had been necessary to keep Canadians safe and financially secure over the past two years. This being said, a number of participants expressed concern regarding the potential for higher taxes or cuts to social programs that may result from these increased efforts to reduce the deficit. Discussing whether the federal government should take a gradual or more aggressive strategy towards balancing the budget, almost all participants said it would be a wiser to pursue a more incremental course of action in this regard.

The next statement shown to participants focused on innovation:

“We are falling behind when it comes to economic productivity. Productivity matters because it is what guarantees the dream of every parent—that our children will be more prosperous than we are. This is a well-known Canadian problem—and an insidious one. It is time for Canada to tackle it. We propose to do so, in part, with a new innovation and investment agency—drawing on international best practices from around the world—that will give companies all over the country and across our economy the tools and incentives.”

Participants were mixed in their views regarding the creation of a new innovation and investment agency. Some felt this to be an excellent idea and one that was long overdue. A few participants added the opinion that the economic climate within Canada had been somewhat ‘risk-adverse’ and they were excited at the prospect of finding more creative solutions to the challenges currently facing the country. A few also favoured investments into innovation which focused on encouraging domestic production and manufacturing within Canada, believing it was important for the Government of Canada to focus on fostering greater economic self-reliance. A number of participants felt differently,

believing Canada was already a relatively innovative country and did not see a lack of innovation as an issue at present.

Focusing on the environment and a transition towards a 'greener' economy, participants were shown the following:

"The world economy is going green. Canada can be in the vanguard, or we can be left behind. That is, of course, no choice at all—which is why our government is investing urgently in this shift. Our plan is driven by our national price on pollution—the smartest, most effective incentive for climate action. This budget launches a new Canada Growth Fund which will help crowd in billions of dollars in private capital we need to transform our economy at speed and at scale."

Many participants responded positively to this statement, with almost all of the view that a transition to a greener, more sustainable economy would ultimately be necessary and that it was important for the Government of Canada to continue to work towards mitigating the impacts of climate change. Some felt particularly strongly about this issue, believing climate change to be the most important issue facing Canadians at present and that the federal government should use every tool at its disposal to protect and preserve the environment. A number of participants were especially interested in pursuing a greater shift towards greener technology, expressing excitement over recent rebates for zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs) in particular. Discussing what they felt may be included as part of the newly announced Canada Growth Fund, participants suggested a number of potential areas for investment including further rebates for ZEVs, more comprehensive recycling programs, infrastructure upgrades, and grants or low-interest loans for private homeowners to retrofit and upgrade their dwellings to become more sustainable.

Focusing on skills training and the contributions of new Canadians to the overall economy, participants were presented with the following statement:

"In 2020, Canada had the fastest growing population in the G7. At a time when the world is starved for workers and talent, our country's unique enthusiasm for welcoming new Canadians is a powerful—and particularly Canadian—driver of economic prosperity. This Budget will make it easier for the skilled immigrants that our economy needs to make Canada their home, and to do the jobs they are trained for. We will also invest in the determined and talented workers who are already here."

Most participants reacted positively to this statement, with many viewing this as an opportunity to bolster the Canadian labour force and leverage Canada's position as an attractive destination for prospective immigrants. Several were of the impression that many regions of the country were currently experiencing a labour shortage and felt a greater focus on recruiting non-Canadian workers could go a long way to assist in alleviating this issue. Related to this, a number of participants were of the view that many skilled individuals migrating to Canada encountered immense difficulty in attaining the necessary credentials and qualifications necessary to work in their area of expertise. It was felt more could be done on the part of the federal government to ease the credential recognition process for these individuals and, if necessary, provide financial assistance for any supplemental certification or training that may be required for these individuals to work in their fields in Canada.

Briefly discussing child care, participants in the two groups from Ontario's Kitchener and Waterloo region and rural Nova Scotia were shown the following quote:

"When we promised—less than a year ago—to make high quality, affordable child care a reality for all Canadians, our plan was certainly welcomed. But the cheers were muted by justifiable skepticism. After all, similar promises had been made and broken for decades—five decades, in fact! That's why, as I stand here today, I am so proud to say we have delivered. We have now signed agreements on early learning and child care with every single province and territory. This is women's liberation. It will mean more women no longer need to choose between motherhood and a career. This is feminist economic policy in action. And it will make life more affordable for middle class Canadian families."

Most participants felt the expansion of affordable child care to be an important initiative, particularly in terms of making life more affordable for Canadian families with young children and providing a financially viable pathway for parents, and women in particular, to return to their careers. While a small number were concerned that lowering child care costs to \$10 a day, on average would potentially devalue the work of early childhood educators (ECE), most others felt differently, believing these agreements and the joint support from the federal and provincial/territorial governments would help to ensure affordable child care would be financially beneficial for both parents and ECE workers. Participants were mixed on whether they felt affordable child care represented 'feminist economic policy'. While many were of the view that women would be affected to a higher degree by these child care agreements than men, a number of participants felt differently, putting forward the view that men were playing an increasingly active role in taking on child care responsibilities and were in many instances the parent who remained home with their children if affordable child care was not available.

Overall Impressions (GTA First-Time Home Buyers, Southwestern Ontario Men, Lower Mainland British Columbia, Kitchener and Waterloo Region Seniors, Quebec City High Income, Rural Nova Scotia Cost of Living Concerned, GMA Women, Edmonton Low/Middle Income, Outaouais Region Low/Middle Income)

All nine groups conducted after the tabling of the Budget concluded these conversations by providing their overall impressions after discussing a number of the announcements and initiatives contained within Budget 2022. On balance, participants were largely positive in their views regarding the Budget, feeling the federal government had done an effective job in creating a comprehensive and ambitious plan towards addressing a number of challenges. In addition, several reiterated appreciation for the federal government's focus on pressing issues such as housing affordability and the cost of living which were felt to be affecting a significant portion of Canadians. Discussing what they felt may have been missing or underrepresented in the Budget, participants suggested areas such as a greater focus on reconciliation and Indigenous issues (including clean drinking water and infrastructure upgrades), further research into the viability of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) in Canada, skills training for those whose jobs had not returned following the pandemic, and more affordable tuition and greater financial assistance for those pursuing post-secondary education.

Healthcare (New Brunswick Francophones, GTA First-Time Home Buyers, Southwestern Ontario Men)

Three groups engaged in a discussion regarding healthcare priorities for the Government of Canada, as well as challenges currently facing the sector. To begin these conversations, participants were asked to identify the most pressing issues currently facing healthcare in their respective regions. A number of responses were provided, including personnel shortages, a perceived lack of funding, delayed appointments and surgeries, limited mental health services, and insufficient French-language services for those living in primarily English-speaking communities.

Discussing whether they had recently heard of any actions or initiatives taken by the federal government regarding healthcare, few participants could recall anything. The small number who had heard something alluded to announcements such as the creation of a national dental care program for Canadians as well as efforts by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to hire a greater number of nurses in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants were informed of a number of healthcare priorities recently announced by the Government of Canada. These included addressing healthcare worker shortages and reducing wait times, increasing access to family health services, improving long-term and in-home care, addressing mental health and substance use, and modernizing health data management and virtual care. All groups felt mostly positive regarding these priorities, with many participants specifically identifying addressing healthcare worker shortages and increasing access to mental health and addictions services as issues of particular importance. Among the other priorities, a number of participants felt improvements to long-term and in-home care were long overdue, while several also mentioned the need for increased access to family health services. Few participants mentioned modernizing health data management as a pressing issue, though several were interested in the notion of expanding access to virtual care.

Healthcare Priorities (New Brunswick Francophones)

Participants in the group from New Brunswick engaged in an extended discussion regarding the healthcare priorities discussed above. Asked to identify potential policies or investments that could be implemented by the federal government to address these issues, participants offered a number of ideas regarding each priority.

In terms of addressing health worker shortages and reducing wait times, several suggested creating ways to further encourage and incentivize more individuals to enter the healthcare sector. In addition, it was felt more needed to be done for those currently working in healthcare, believing many in the sector had suffered from extremely long hours and 'burnout' after over two years of working through the COVID-19 pandemic. Related to increasing access to family health services, some suggested possible actions such as financially incentivizing family doctors to practice in rural communities by offering higher wages in exchange for a commitment from healthcare professionals to practice in these communities for a specified period of time. Discussing ways to improve long-term and in-home care, a number of participants felt more needed to be done to keep seniors in their homes as long as possible, believing this would greatly improve the health outcomes for these individuals who were

often more comfortable living at home rather than in a long-term care facility. Focusing on mental health and substance use, it was felt the Government of Canada needed to place a greater emphasis on expanding accessibility for those seeking treatment, as some believed these services were limited in their communities at present. Many participants also felt that efforts should be taken to expand the capacity of virtual care within Canada, believing this could be greatly helpful to those Canadians living in rural or remote communities with limited access to family doctors or specialists.

Ukraine (Major Centres Prairies Ukrainian Diaspora)

The group comprising participants from the Ukrainian diaspora residing in various locations across the Prairies discussed the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022 when Russian forces invaded Ukrainian territory.

Recounting what they had recently seen, read, or heard about the crisis, participants provided a number of responses. These included the ongoing bombings, missile strikes, and ground based attacks by Russian forces in multiple locations across Ukraine, continued efforts by Ukrainian defence forces to repel the Russian invasion, the discovery of horrifying scenes in cities such as Bucha which were felt by many to be tantamount to war crimes, the massive influx of Ukrainians fleeing westward to escape the conflict, and efforts by the Government of Canada to provide safe haven for these individuals.

Questioned as to where they had been receiving news regarding the ongoing conflict, almost all participants recalled getting updates first-hand from relatives and personal connections who continued to reside in Ukraine. Many also reported closely following the news from Canadian broadcasters such as CBC and Global News, as well as international broadcasts emanating from countries closer to the conflict (e.g., Poland).

Focusing on the actions taken by the Government of Canada in response to the conflict, many recalled significant military and financial aid which had been offered by the federal government to Ukraine in the weeks leading up to and following the Russian invasion. In addition to this direct support, some also mentioned sanctions which had been implemented by the Government of Canada under the Special Economic Measures Act and in concert with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies. Several participants also spoke positively regarding what they felt to be the strong diplomatic efforts by the Government of Canada to condemn these actions by Russia, including the decision to prohibit imports of Russian crude oil into Canada, which was felt to have been particularly impactful from both an economic and diplomatic perspective. A number of participants expressed appreciation regarding the efforts to date from the federal government in support of Ukraine.

Despite this praise, however, most were of the view that far more needed to be done to defend Ukraine and protect those currently displaced by the conflict. Discussing additional actions the Government of Canada could take to provide further support to Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, participants put forward a wide array of responses. These included encouraging NATO allies to implement a 'no-fly' zone above Ukraine, implementing further sanctions on Russian as well as Belarusian individuals and entities, and advocating for a thorough investigation into reported war

crimes committed by Russian forces. Focusing on humanitarian aims, all participants felt more could be done by the Government of Canada to assist with the transportation and settlement of the large number of displaced Ukrainians currently seeking safe haven, as well as to develop education and employment strategies to accommodate these incoming individuals. In addition, it was felt the federal government could assist in streamlining the flow of donations from the Canadian public, either through the creation of a federally-run organization or the endorsement of an existing charitable organization with expertise in providing assistance to countries facing a humanitarian crisis.

Focusing on the potential short and long-term implications of this conflict, most participants felt the impact of this invasion by Russia would be felt on a global scale for a long time to come. In terms of immediate impacts, many predicted the reduction and/or complete loss of Ukrainian agricultural exports would lead to food shortages across Europe and elsewhere. Most also thought there would be an increasing humanitarian crisis as countries around the world sought to accommodate the millions of Ukrainians displaced by this conflict and unable to return to their homes in the near future. Looking further ahead, a number of participants were of the view that unless something was done to repel the Russian incursion into Ukraine, other nearby countries such as Moldova and Georgia may soon be at risk of invasion as well. While participants were more split on whether Russia would be willing to risk direct engagement with NATO forces, many expressed concern this situation could give rise to a new 'Cold War' mentality, with a complete withdrawal of Russia and its allies from the international order.

Asked what would need to happen in order for Canada to effectively accommodate a large influx of Ukrainians displaced by the conflict, many reiterated calls for increased financial assistance, including compensation for air travel. It was also suggested that logistical support from the federal and provincial/territorial governments would be required to aid Ukrainians who wished to come to Canada in finding housing and employment as well as completing all the necessary paperwork to start their new lives in Canada. Additionally, many were of the view that the federal government would need to prepare to address the physical and mental health needs of those arriving, expecting that many would need assistance in processing the trauma they had recently experienced.

To aid in discussion and clarify the steps already taken by the Government of Canada regarding those fleeing Ukraine, participants were shown information regarding the creation of the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel (CUAET). While most reacted positively to the creation of the CUAET, many were of the view that the three-year limit should be removed and that these individuals should be allowed to stay in Canada on a more indefinite basis. Adding to this, several thought there should be a more expedient effort by the federal government to create a pathway to permanent residency and Canadian citizenship for any who wished to stay in Canada permanently. Discussing what actions the federal government could take to protect the language and culture of Ukrainians living within Canada, while all felt this to be important, many thought it to be an issue better handled by municipalities and organizations at the local level rather than by the Government of Canada. It was generally thought that while federal funding towards local Ukrainian cultural programming would be greatly appreciated, it was the responsibility of the Ukrainian community to uphold their own language and culture and that this would most likely occur organically as these individuals integrated into their new communities.

Emissions Reduction Plan (Vancouver Island Environmentally Concerned)

A group of environmentally concerned participants residing on Vancouver Island shared their views regarding the Government of Canada's Emissions Reduction Plan. At the outset of this discussion, participants were asked whether they had seen, read, or heard, any recent news or announcements regarding efforts by the Government of Canada related to the environment and climate change. Few participants had heard anything, though a small number recalled the federal government's recent pledge to significantly reduce emissions by 2030 with the goal of reaching 'net-zero' emissions by 2050.

Asked explicitly if they had heard about the Government of Canada's recent announcement of its Emissions Reduction Plan, very few participants were familiar with this initiative by name. Provided with additional details regarding the Plan, participant reactions were generally positive, with most believing it represented a step in the right direction. At the same time, however, several questioned how these various goals and priorities could be achieved in the time-frame given as well as what would be done if by 2030 not all goals had been met. A few also expressed skepticism regarding the implication that Canada would be able to move away from reliance on fossil fuels, such as oil and gas, and shift more predominantly towards the adoption of clean and renewable energy sources and technologies. It was felt this would be challenging given the impression that many Canadian households and industries continued to remain highly dependent on non-renewable energy sources such as coal and natural gas.

Discussing which priorities contained within the Plan they felt to be of the greatest importance, participants converged around initiatives focusing on driving down carbon pollution from the oil and gas sectors while increasing investments towards preserving Canada's natural resources and developing 'natural climate solutions' focused on more sustainable ways of living moving forward. Several participants also prioritized the initiative to assist industries in developing and adapting clean technology in their journey to net-zero emissions, with many viewing larger manufacturers as being among the most significant polluters at present.

Before concluding the discussion, participants were given several minutes to review the Emissions Reduction Plan Backgrounder via a link to the document (<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/news/2022/03/2030-emissions-reduction-plan--canadas-next-steps-for-clean-air-and-a-strong-economy.html>). A number of items caught their attention, including a \$25-million investment in Regional Strategic Initiatives, the allocation of \$9.1 billion towards new investments included in the Plan, the stated goal of net-zero emissions by 2050, and the expansion of incentives encouraging more Canadians to purchase zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs).

Zero-Emission Vehicles (Vancouver Island Environmentally Concerned)

Participants in the group from Vancouver Island also engaged in a brief discussion regarding Zero-Emission Vehicles (ZEVs). While no participants currently owned a ZEV, several expressed interest in purchasing one in the future. Among those interested in ZEVs, many identified the perceived lower fuel and maintenance costs, as well as the positive environmental impact they expected these types of

vehicles would have. For those more hesitant about purchasing a ZEV, a number of participants identified issues such as the relatively higher price of these vehicles, a perceived lack of infrastructure (such as charging stations) in more rural regions, as well as a preference for alternative sustainable transportation options such as public transit, bicycles, or E-bikes.

Discussing their reactions to a proposal from the Government of Canada which would set a target that all new cars sold in Canada were required to be ZEVs by the year 2050, several were of the impression that such a target had already been in place for some time, with some suggesting the timeline could be advanced much earlier than 2050. While most were in favour of this initiative, some also raised concerns regarding the feasibility of this target. These included questions as to whether sufficient infrastructure would be able to be put in place throughout Canada (including rural and remote regions) to accommodate this large-scale transition as well as concerns as to whether ZEVs truly represented a significantly more sustainable option. Related to this latter concern, a number of participants were specifically worried about the ability to safely dispose of ZEV batteries as well as the reliance of these batteries on rare earth metals and minerals, which would need to be extracted through potentially environmentally-damaging mining operations.

In order to address these concerns, some suggested the Government of Canada should undertake a comprehensive due diligence process prior to investing in and/or promoting a wider transition to ZEVs. It was felt this would go a long ways towards ensuring this new technology would indeed be as environmentally beneficial as anticipated. In addition, while price was put forward as a key barrier to achieving this 2050 target, many reiterated that this was not the only reservation they had regarding ZEVs, with some expressing concerns related to battery life, the environmental impact associated with manufacturing and disposing of ZEV batteries, and the need for a greater variety of ZEVs (such as larger trucks and pick-ups) to accommodate the varied lifestyles of Canadians.

Official Language Challenges and Priorities (New Brunswick Francophones)

Participants in the group comprised of Francophones living in New Brunswick, discussed the topic of official languages, including the challenges faced by Francophones in primarily English-speaking communities as well as their views regarding priorities and potential actions from the Government of Canada relating to official languages.

To begin, participants were asked how they felt about the state of the French language in their own communities. Most were of the view that the French language was currently under threat, with many feeling that English was far more universally spoken despite New Brunswick's standing as an officially bilingual province. A number of participants identified the propensity of younger generations to converse in English in their day-to-day lives as well as a perceived drop in enrolment in French immersion education as key drivers behind the perceived diminished presence of the language in their communities. Among the smaller number who did not believe the French language was under threat, it was felt that many traditional French-speakers in the province continued to utilize French as their primary language and that the language continued to be widely spoken both at home as well as during daily interactions in many communities.

Presented with a number of priorities related to Francophones living in primarily English-speaking communities and the challenges these individuals face, participants tended to place the greatest emphasis on those issues related to children and young people, including the challenges experienced in transmitting the French language and culture to the next generation as well as the difficulty for parents to access child care services in French. Other major challenges identified by participants included the need to ensure a strong Francophone presence in primarily French-speaking regions of New Brunswick as well as increased efforts to attract more Francophones from outside the region.

Shown a list of potential priorities from the Government of Canada related to official languages, almost all participants felt more should be done to increase funding for French-language schools in Francophone communities outside Quebec. In addition, many also believed that greater investments could be made towards improving access to French immersion and French second-language programs across Canada. A few also felt that further efforts could be taken to guarantee the equality of the English and French languages in Canada, with many of the opinion that at present the two official languages were not evenly balanced and that English was often prioritized outside of Quebec. Focusing on additional ways the Government of Canada could assist in protecting and promoting the French language, it was felt more could be done to invest in and showcase French-language music and Francophone culture, believing these areas to be somewhat underrepresented at present.

PacifiCan Branding (Lower Mainland British Columbia)

The group residing in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia were shown two branding concepts developed by the Government of Canada for Pacific Economic Development Canada (PacifiCan), a federal development agency focused on supporting economic growth in the province. No participants were aware of the agency prior to attending this group.

Concept A

On balance, reactions towards this concept were more negative than positive among participants. Several specifically commented on the colour scheme, believing it to not be particularly eye-catching and lacking the traditional style and tone they expected from communications from the Government of Canada. In addition, some expressed the view that this design included too much blank white space, feeling this stylistic element had left the concept feeling somewhat 'muted'. Others commented that the layout of the content and the perceived lack of a general focal point had left them confused as to where their attention was meant to be drawn when looking at the concept. While comments regarding this design were primarily negative, a few participants did react positively to stylistic elements such as the font selection and the bolding of certain key words and phrases. Asked specifically about the logo utilized within the concept, most felt it to be somewhat generic and would likely not stand out to them.

Concept B

Participants generally reacted positively to the second concept, feeling the colour palette in particular was far more vivid and attention-grabbing. Several also commented positively on the design elements utilized, with some specifically mentioning the incorporation of geometric shapes, the highlighting of key text, and what they felt to be an overall sleeker and more modern-looking design. A number of participants also reacted positively to the placement of the logo, feeling it was more akin to a watermark and was less distracting as a result. A small number, however, were of the view that the design of the logo too closely resembled a snowflake and could potentially be confusing in this regard. A few others felt the text in some areas to be somewhat dense, feeling efforts could be taken to make the concept feel less cluttered in places.

Having taken in both concepts, participants were asked how they would best describe PacifiCan based on the visuals they had seen. Most were of the impression that the agency primarily focused on promoting the economic interests of those living in B.C., particularly the province's coastal regions. Some assumed the organization also had a natural focus, focusing on sectors related to the province's forests and ocean systems.

Almost all participants felt Concept B would be the most likely to catch their attention on social media or in print. Regarding the question of which concept best represented the essence of the province, however, participants were more mixed in their views, with a roughly equal number selecting each concept, with these opinions mostly based on the colour schemes utilized in the respective designs.

Youth Issues (GMA Women)

One group, comprised of women under the age of 35 residing in the Greater Montreal Area (GMA) engaged in a brief discussion concerning issues relevant to younger Canadians. Discussing what they felt to be the most important issues facing young people at present, participants identified areas such as housing affordability, the need for increased mental health supports, climate change and the environment, and ongoing social issues such as perceived systemic discrimination towards racialized Canadians and other marginalized groups.

Discussing whether the Government of Canada was presently on the right or wrong track regarding addressing those priorities most important to younger Canadians, many felt it had been relatively ineffective in this regard. Several suggested the need for greater outreach to younger Canadians, feeling a significant portion of young people were largely disengaged from society at present, and had little influence when it came to crafting solutions to the challenges currently facing the country. While some were of the view that the federal government had been making some progress as of late towards identifying the issues impacting younger Canadians, it was felt a greater emphasis needed to be placed on devising ways to prioritize youth in its decision-making going forward.

MORE INFORMATION



The Strategic Counsel

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