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# Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – July & August 2021

## Executive Summary

### **Prepared for the Privy Council Office**

Supplier name: The Strategic Counsel

Contract number: 35035-182346/001/CY

Contract value: \$1,618,838.00

Award date: December 18, 2020

Delivery date: November 19, 2021

Registration number: POR-005-19

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

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 government, as well as emerging trends.

This report includes findings from 10 online focus groups which were conducted between July 7<sup>th</sup> and August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021 in multiple locations across the country including Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario, Nunavut, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are shown in the section below.

The research for this cycle of focus groups focused primarily on COVID-19, as the pandemic continued in Canada. Related to COVID-19, topics explored included what Canadians were hearing about the Government of Canada in the news, their outlook on COVID-19, their views on the spread of the virus throughout the summer months, and COVID-19 vaccines. On the topic of COVID-19 vaccinations, the discussion included perspectives on how vaccination status was impacting Canada's international travel requirements and regulations, participants own travel plans, and Canada's current and upcoming changes to border restrictions. The research also explored views on proof of vaccination credentials and potential names for a Canada-wide vaccination document.

In addition to the pandemic, non-COVID-19 related discussions were undertaken on a range of topics including Indigenous issues, opioids, branding for Western Economic Diversification, housing, local priorities in Nunavut and electric vehicles.

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 men in their 30s, women aged 18-29, men aged 18-29 who were planning to travel abroad or domestically in the near future, those who were fully vaccinated, women in their 30s planning to travel abroad or domestically in the near future, Anglophones residing in Quebec and those who had travelled either domestically or internationally recently.

### Detailed approach

- 10 focus groups across various regions in Canada.
- Two groups were conducted with the general population in Nunavut and Trois-Rivières, Quebec.
- The other eight groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
  - Men in their 30s residing in Ontario-U.S. border towns;
  - Women, aged 18-29, residing in mid-size and major centres in British Columbia;
  - Men, aged 18-29, who were planning to travel abroad or domestically in the near future residing in the Greater Montreal Area (GMA);
  - Those who were fully vaccinated residing in Atlantic Canada;
  - Women in their 30s who were planning to travel abroad or domestically in the near future residing in Alberta and Saskatchewan;

- Those who were fully vaccinated residing in mid-size and major centres in Quebec;
- Anglophones residing in Quebec; and
- Those who travelled recently residing in Barrie, Ontario.
- Groups in Quebec, with the exception of the group with Anglophones residing in Quebec were conducted in French, while all others 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, 70 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 |
|-------------------------------------|-------|----------|---------|---------------|---|------------------------|
| Ontario-U.S. Border Towns           | 1     | English  | July 7  | 6:00-8:00 pm  | Men in their 30s  | 7                      |
| Mid-size and Major Centres B.C.     | 2     | English  | July 8  | 9:00-11:00 pm | Women, aged 18-29   | 8                      |
| Greater Montreal Area (GMA)         | 3     | French   | July 15 | 6:00-8:00 pm  | Men, aged 18-29 planning to travel abroad or domestically in the near future    | 6                      |
| Atlantic Canada                     | 4     | English  | July 20 | 5:00-7:00 pm  | Fully vaccinated  | 8                      |
| Alberta/Saskatchewan                | 5     | English  | July 22 | 8:00-10:00 pm | Women in their 30s planning to travel abroad or domestically in the near future | 6                      |
| Mid-size and Major Centres Quebec   | 6     | French   | July 27 | 6:00-8:00 pm  | Fully vaccinated  | 8                      |
| Nunavut                             | 7     | English  | July 29 | 6:00-8:00 pm  | Gen pop   | 5                      |
| Quebec                              | 8     | English  | Aug 4   | 6:00-8:00 pm  | Anglophones   | 8                      |
| Barrie                              | 9     | English  | Aug 5   | 6:00-8:00 pm  | Those who travelled recently  | 8                      |
| Trois-Rivières                      | 10    | English  | Aug 10  | 6:00-8:00 pm  | Gen pop   | 7                      |
| <b>Total number of participants</b> |       |          |         |               |   | <b>70</b>              |

# Key Findings

## Part I: COVID-19 Related Findings

### Government of Canada in the News (All Locations)

Participants had seen, read or heard about a variety of issues and activities pertaining to the federal government, much of which they were picking up via various social media platforms, by word-of-mouth or through traditional channels (e.g., television and radio). Most commonly, participants mentioned having heard about aspects of the federal government's ongoing management of and response to the pandemic as well as its response to the discovery of unmarked gravesites at residential schools. With respect to issues related to COVID-19, many were aware of the expected reopening of the Canada-U.S. land border to fully-vaccinated travelers and several made reference to the impending Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) strike and its potential impact on reopening. Participants also pointed to discussions regarding the introduction of a proof-of-vaccination system, also referred to as vaccine 'passports,' and this topic raised questions among some about the status of those who had received mixed doses of the vaccine. On the issue of the unmarked graves of Indigenous children at residential school sites, participants expressed shock and concern regarding the size and scale of these discoveries. In addition to these two topics, participants commented on the appointment of the new Governor General of Canada in a positive manner.

When asked to consider other issues beyond COVID-19 on which the Government of Canada had taken action within the last five years, participants mentioned various initiatives centering on child care, the environment and climate change, pipelines, Internet regulation, and the LGBTQ2 community.

Participants offered generally positive evaluations of the Government of Canada on its environmental initiatives, its focus on equity-seeking groups, and its handling of the pandemic, specifically procurement and distribution of the vaccines as well as financial supports for individuals and businesses. They were somewhat more critical about other aspects of the federal government's response to COVID-19, including what they perceived to be a slower rollout of vaccinations compared to some other developed countries, and concerns about Canada's willingness to donate excess domestic vaccine doses to developing countries. Some also felt that the ongoing recovery benefits were becoming a disincentive to work and that the federal government could be more transparent in sharing information with the public about the state of the pandemic and the current status of public health measures. Beyond this, a perceived lack of progress on Indigenous issues such as clean drinking water, as well as general concerns about rising housing prices across Canada were raised by some participants.

Participants in the group comprised of Anglophones in Quebec were asked about Bill 96 (a proposed amendment to the Constitution to recognize Quebec as a nation and French as its only official and common language). Many were at least minimally familiar with the Bill and reaction to it was mixed – some felt it was important to protect the French language, while others believed that the legislation would pose greater difficulties for new immigrants to Quebec in terms of their ability to fully integrate

into life in the province. While participants thought the federal government could do more to protect minority language rights in Canada, and specifically the rights of English-speaking Quebecers, some also commented on the need to protect and promote the French language as well as Indigenous languages.

In Trois-Rivières, participants discussed the Government of Canada's announcement of a new high speed rail service passing through the city, of which several were aware. Reaction to this announcement was largely positive. Participants commented that the proposed dedicated rail corridor would establish stronger links between the major centres along the route. They also felt that connecting through Trois-Rivières would be beneficial to their community and that the rail service would provide a convenient alternative to traveling by vehicle.

### **COVID-19 Outlook/Vaccines (All Locations)**

Participants were generally optimistic about Canada's progress with respect to COVID-19, with many believing the situation would improve through the summer given what they perceived to be a rapid and reasonably widespread uptake of vaccinations combined with a drop in transmission rates and cases of COVID-19. Those who tended to be more pessimistic expressed concerns about the spread of the Delta variant, the potential for breakthrough cases among vaccinated Canadians, concerns about the unvaccinated population, and worries that reopening the border to international travelers would result in a surge of the virus.

Regardless of their outlook, many participants remained anxious about the possibility of a fourth wave. The sense was that general fatigue with restrictions, a likely uptick in travel, students returning to school and colder weather driving gatherings indoors would create the conditions for increased transmission. Despite this, most participants felt that high rates of vaccinations would preclude the need for another lockdown if cases did spike.

In a select number of groups (Quebec Anglophones, Barrie Recent Travellers, and Trois-Rivières) participants discussed efforts to increase vaccine uptake. The consensus view was that the approach taken by the federal government to encourage vaccinations had been adequate and many were concerned that an additional push could be viewed as coercive. While some suggestions were offered to encourage further uptake (e.g., continued communications emphasizing vaccine efficacy, targeted outreach to individuals who may have less access, and limitations on activities among the unvaccinated), most did not feel that a cash incentive was either necessary or appropriate.

In nine of the ten groups undertaken during July and August, participants discussed changes to existing quarantine requirements for returning Canadian travelers. Many recalled that the new rules would no longer require a mandatory hotel quarantine and that restrictions, in general, would be loosened for fully vaccinated Canadians, permanent residents, and essential travelers. Reaction was positive to these changes as participants felt that the quarantine had been costly for travelers and was difficult to enforce. They also believed that more latitude should be provided to fully-vaccinated Canadian travelers returning home. Nevertheless, a few participants were uneasy about relaxing existing travel restrictions expressing concerns about the transmission of the new variants among the

traveling public. Still others advocated for full removal of restrictions on the basis that they perceived them to be overly strict, intrusive and discriminatory to those who are unable to be vaccinated for medical or other reasons.

Participants were informed that the joint border agreement between Canada and the United States, renewed on a month-by-month basis since March 2020, was once again up for renewal on July 21<sup>st</sup>. Asked if they believed the agreement should be renewed for another month, many urged the Government of Canada to be cautious and avoid rushing into reopening the border too quickly. Concerns focused on the level of vaccinations in Canada and a desire to increase uptake before reopening, as well as continued high rates of transmission of the COVID-19 in some areas of the United States. At the same time, participants felt that the federal government's approach to reopening the border, and specifically it being dependent on reaching a target of 75% of Canadians being fully vaccinated, was reasonable and achievable within the next few months.

Several specific scenarios regarding reopening Canada-U.S. borders were discussed with participants. Of the five scenarios presented, only one was strongly favoured by participants. This involved the U.S. Government opening the border to non-essential Canadian travel, even if Canada kept its borders closed to non-essential U.S. travel into Canada. This scenario was deemed reasonable from both an economic and safety perspective given high vaccination rates in Canada and wide access to vaccines in the United States. Participants were less comfortable with the other scenarios discussed. Reactions were mixed to the announcement that the Government of Canada would begin allowing all fully vaccinated U.S. citizens into Canada as soon as August 9<sup>th</sup>, and then extending to fully vaccinated travellers from other countries by September 7<sup>th</sup>. Participants were concerned about the spread of the variants with increased international travel and lower vaccine uptake in the United States. Many also expressed concern about opening the border to all fully vaccinated Americans, rather than just essential travellers as well as the scenario of fully reopening to all travellers, in addition to those from the United States for the same reasons as noted earlier. Finally, most participants were opposed to any scenario which permitted unvaccinated travellers be allowed to enter Canada for non-essential travel. They did not see any urgent or compelling reason to open up Canada's borders to unvaccinated, non-essential travelers.

### **COVID-19 Proof of Vaccination (Atlantic Canada Fully Vaccinated, Alberta and Saskatchewan Planning to Travel Women in their 30's, Mid-size and Major Centres Quebec Fully Vaccinated, Nunavut, Quebec Anglophones, Barrie Recent Travelers, Trois-Rivières)**

Most participants had heard at least something about the introduction of proof of vaccination credentials, often referred to as vaccine 'passports.' In discussing their initial opinions on this matter, participants raised issues around privacy, concerns about other countries not recognizing those who received mixed doses, the possible extension of a vaccine 'passport' domestically for restaurants, bars, and other venues, and the fact that it was thought to be a controversial issue in the United States.

It was explained to participants that the Government of Canada was working with the provinces and territories to provide Canadians with a document that demonstrates their COVID-19 vaccination history and that a series of possible names for this program were being considered – *Proof of*

*vaccination status, Canadian proof of vaccination, Canadian vaccine certificate, Proof of vaccination credential, Canadian vaccine passport, and Vax Pass.* Of the various options, participants tended to prefer *Proof of vaccination status* and *Canadian vaccine certificate*. There was a modest level of support for *Canadian vaccine passport, Vax Pass, and Proof of vaccination credential* while relatively few chose *Canadian proof of vaccination*.

General feedback from participants revealed that many participants did not see the need to include 'Canadian' in the name, feeling it was self-explanatory and somewhat redundant. A few participants mentioned that the term 'passport' could be misleading or misinterpreted in that it gave the impression that the document was intended for use only by travelers when in all likelihood they felt it would be required for a wider array of activities. Many of the longer names (e.g., *Proof of vaccination credential*) were also pointed to as overly wordy. Ultimately, participants leaned more towards those names which they felt intuitively explained the purpose of the document. Several additional suggestions for names were generated from this discussion – *Vaccine Certificate, Vaccine Record, and Record of Vaccination* – based on a desire to link the proof of vaccination for COVID-19 to existing immunization records typically held by Canadians. Others suggested a more personalized option: *My Vaccination Pass* (or MVP as an acronym).

Participants were asked how they felt about employing a proof-of-vaccination system for various circumstances as follows:

- Domestic air travel – Some participants reacted strongly in favour while others were opposed. The former group felt that it would be helpful in keeping Canadians safe and viewed it as a necessary step towards getting back to normal. The latter group felt it was unnecessary to be required to declare one's vaccination status for short flights across the country and saw this as overreach on the part of the Government of Canada.
- Large gatherings, such as concerts or sporting events – Reaction varied within and across groups. Those who favoured implementation of the proof of vaccination program for large gatherings felt it was necessary given the lack of social distancing possible at these types of events. Those who opposed the idea felt it was discriminatory and that the positive mental health impact of being able to attend concerts and sports events outweighed any risk of exposure.

On balance, however, participants generally felt that implementing this type of measure would likely encourage more Canadians to get vaccinated. They had few concerns about privacy issues, although some did express discomfort that a proof of vaccination program would create a two-tiered system in Canada of vaccinated and unvaccinated Canadians.



## Part II: Other Issues

### **Indigenous Issues (Ontario-U.S. Border Town Men in their 30's, Mid-Size and Major Centres B.C. Women Young Adults, GMA Planning to Travel Men Young Adults, Atlantic Canada Fully Vaccinated, Mid-size and Major Centres Quebec Fully Vaccinated, Nunavut, Quebec Anglophones, Barrie Recent Travelers, Trois-Rivières)**

In nine of the ten focus groups conducted through July and August, discussions were held regarding issues affecting Canada's Indigenous Peoples. Overwhelmingly, participants felt Indigenous issues deserved significantly more attention and should be a high priority for the federal government. Several areas were identified as immediate priorities including housing, infrastructure, mental health and education. Other priorities included greater autonomy for Indigenous peoples and revisiting the *Indian Act*.

When presented with a list of specific initiatives targeted towards Indigenous peoples and communities, participants broadly pointed to the removal of long-term boil water advisories as the area in which the most immediate difference could be made. Many also felt that a commitment to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) could have a tangible impact, providing the foundation for improving a wide range of issues currently facing Indigenous communities.

While many felt that the Government of Canada had made some progress in addressing Indigenous issues, they also believed much more needed to be done and looked to the federal government for continued action.

In several groups participants were asked to consider five specific issues affecting Indigenous Canadians and provide their thoughts as to which one the Government of Canada should prioritize. These issues included ensuring clean drinking water on all reserves, getting more Indigenous Canadians into post-secondary education, helping survivors of residential schools cope with their trauma, improving the infrastructure gap on reserves, and improving the quality of primary and secondary education on Indigenous reserves. Overwhelmingly, most participants identified ensuring access to clean drinking as the top priority, describing it as an essential need and a basic human right. Many also viewed access to education as a fundamental right and, as such, improving the quality of primary and secondary education on Indigenous reserves was identified as necessary in order to provide Indigenous youth with the foundation to continue on to the post-secondary level and ensure they develop the skills needed to succeed in the workplace. The remaining three issues were seen as priorities by some participants, but did not resonate to the same extent.

Participants discussed the progress in terms of addressing access to clean water on reserves. While some saw the lifting of 108 boil water advisories as a positive step and evidence of some progress, many were disappointed at the extensive nature of the issue and felt the 32 reserves remaining was still too many. When asked whether they thought the Government of Canada was on the right or the wrong track when it comes to addressing this issue, reaction ranged from positive to neutral or unsure.

While some acknowledged that progress had been made, others questioned how long it had taken to address the issue and whether the work done would provide a permanent solution.

Focusing on primary and secondary education on Indigenous reserves, participants were informed that the Government of Canada had provided funding for 66 new schools and renovations to 86 schools on Indigenous reserves and that, of the 66 new schools, 27 have been completed while the others are in progress. Most responded positively, seeing these investments as encouraging and as evidence of progress. At the same time, several participants thought that this funding needed to extend to recruiting qualified teaching staff as well as to developing a suitable curriculum for Indigenous students. On balance, most believed these initiatives reflected progress and were evidence that the Government of Canada was on the right track in terms of addressing education needs on Indigenous reserves.

### **Opioids (Mid-Size and Major Centres B.C. Women Young Adults)**

Participants in the one group where the topic of opioids was discussed were generally familiar with the issue. For some, the topic was highly personal. Many were of the view that the opioid crisis impacted all segments of society, although they felt that the issue was frequently positioned as one which mainly affected marginalized groups, particularly those with mental health issues. While they felt that the victims of this crisis were predominantly from low income families, they remarked that those with higher household incomes were better able to access needed support services and treatment.

In further conversation, participants were shown a list outlining potentially what or who might be responsible for the current problem. Most pointed to physicians not prescribing properly and to drug companies making unsafe products as root causes. During the discussion participants also noted other issues which they felt contributed to the crisis, including inadequate treatment of those with opioid addictions within the health care system, aggressive marketing by pharmaceutical companies and a general stigma related to drug use which they felt resulted in a lack of public education about the risks. Other factors such as gangs, lack of policing, people making poor decisions, and poor border control were viewed as less consequential by comparison.

Recommendations as to what the Government of Canada should do to respond to the situation centered on increased investments in harm reduction facilities, a greater focus on destigmatizing and decriminalizing illegal drug use, redirecting funding from policing to rehabilitation and treatment for those with addictions, as well as more thorough regulation of the research and approvals processes for pharmaceutical companies.

Participants were mostly unaware of a plan by the City of Vancouver to gain Health Canada approval for the decriminalization of small amounts of illicit drugs. Regardless, many were supportive of the Government of Canada decriminalizing illicit drugs for personal use so that those with a substance use disorder are diverted from the criminal justice system towards a health care approach instead. Responses were mixed when asked if they believed a health care approach to substance use would aid in decreasing stigma and allow those struggling with addiction to more readily seek treatment. Several thought it would result in people seeking more help if they did not have to fear penalties in

the form of charges or a conviction for a criminal offence. Others were less certain that a health care approach would make a significant difference. A few outright disagreed believing that decriminalization might result in increased levels of addiction.

### **Western Economic Diversification Canada Branding (Mid-Size and Major Centres B.C. Women Young Adults, Alberta and Saskatchewan Planning to Travel Women in their 30's)**

In two groups held among those residing in western Canada, participants were shown two creative concepts developed by the Government of Canada. Two different sets of concepts, included in the Detailed Findings and Appendix, were shown to participants in each of the two groups who were told these were in draft format and that they would ultimately be displayed in brochures or signage, on websites or social media. Following exposure to each concept, participants were asked for their reaction and for feedback in terms of their visual appeal and overall impact, including the extent to which the concepts gave them a sense of what Western Economic Diversification does.

Among participants in British Columbia, most preferred Concept A (showing a woman smiling, with a blue and green backdrop and hexagonal shapes) over B (various workers shown, with a dark blue backdrop). The former was viewed as more eye-catching. Participants commented favourably on the colorful approach, attractive images (e.g., smiling woman prominently featured), and the uncluttered look. Overall, the creative technique was viewed as cohesive and appealing. At the same time, participants questioned the extensive use of hexagonal shapes and lines which they found to be distracting and confusing. By comparison, the color palette in Concept B was described as monochromatic. Although Concept B was less preferred, participants did comment positively on the inclusion of images of individuals who appeared to be employed in the skilled trades. They also liked the use of imagery which evoked references to Indigenous culture which they felt was important and somewhat unique to British Columbia.

Participants in Alberta and Saskatchewan were exposed to a different set of concepts. In this group, Concept B (images within a letter P shape, with 'plus' symbols and a muted colour tone) was preferred over Concept A (bright colours, including filtered images). The more muted tones employed in Concept B appealed to participants and the colour palette reminded them of a Prairie sunset. On a more critical note, participants felt the use of a 'plus' sign as a creative element throughout Concept B was typically something that was more associated with health care communications, rather than messaging about the economy. Otherwise, the images employed in this creative were thought to be suitable representations of the Prairie region.

None of the concepts were viewed as clearly relaying the mandate of Western Economic Diversification. That said, the images included in Concept B shown to participants in British Columbia more clearly evoked a sense of employment and economic growth, while the color tones and imagery employed in Concept B shown to those in Alberta and Saskatchewan were strongly associated with life on the Prairies.

### **Housing (Atlantic Canada Fully Vaccinated, Mid-size and Major Centres Quebec Fully Vaccinated, Quebec Anglophones, Barrie Recent Travelers, Trois-Rivières)**

Participants in five groups discussed the topic of housing. In all groups, most participants were of the view that housing prices had increased over the past year, with some commenting that prices had risen quite dramatically. Several mentioned that increases in housing prices were similarly affecting the rental market in their region, and that rental rates were also rising. Some participants were more personally affected by this issue than others, specifically younger participants still paying off student loans and unable to save for a down payment. Other long-time homeowners also felt negatively affected by the trend of rising house prices, especially those selling a home and building or purchasing another. Conversely, property owners and landlords viewed themselves as benefiting from the current housing market.

Participants pointed to several factors which they felt were contributing to rising housing prices in Canada: speculators, low housing stock, low mortgage rates, migration from larger to smaller urban centres, and shifting priorities as a result of the pandemic. Many were of the view that provincial governments likely had the most agency or control to address this issue given their influence with respect to property taxes and rental markets. At the same time, several felt housing prices were almost entirely a factor of market forces while a few did feel that the federal government could exert some influence by using monetary policy to adjust the level of interest rates.

When asked what the Government of Canada had done to support individuals seeking to buy a home, many pointed to assistance for first time homebuyers. Participants mentioned specific aspects of the First Time Home Buyers Incentive such as 5% towards the purchase of a newly constructed or resale home. Others noted (referring to the Home Buyers Plan, though not explicitly by name) that the federal government had extended provisions to permit individuals to withdraw funds from their Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) to put towards the purchase of a home, without being taxed on the withdrawal. Asked if there was anything else the Government of Canada should do to make home ownership more feasible, participants underscored the need to make home ownership more accessible for those who aspire to it, particularly renters. They suggested providing low interest loans or grants to assist prospective homebuyers with their initial down payment as well as permitting homeowners to deduct the interest on mortgages on their tax returns.

Homeowners were asked how they would feel if the Government of Canada took actions that resulted in lowering housing prices. Most acknowledged the need to address the issue of affordable housing, but indicated they would be disappointed and worried if the value of their own home declined. Long-time homeowners were less concerned believing they did not stand to lose much when considering the value they had amassed in their respective properties over the long-term.

Participants were shown a list of potential factors contributing to high housing prices and asked to select one or two issues they believed the Government of Canada should change. These included foreign buyers purchasing houses as investment properties and not utilizing them, zoning laws preventing new developments, the practice of house flipping, allowing blind bidding, and criteria for down payments being prohibitively high. Most focused on the issues of foreign buyers and the

bidding process – identifying these as primary drivers of increasing housing prices and areas where the federal government could initiate positive change.

In select groups, participants discussed construction of additional co-op housing units as a potential solution to the issue of housing supply and affordability. They felt that adding to the supply of co-op housing in Canada would create more opportunities for younger homebuyers as a path to home ownership. Additionally, participants believed that federal action in this area was required, feeling that constructing co-op housing units was a less lucrative business line for developers and that, as such, they would be unlikely to invest in this type of housing without an incentive.

The idea of rent-to-own programs, where people could pay their rent on a house towards the down payment and eventually own the home, was generally popular. Many felt this reduced a key barrier to home ownership in terms of the need to save a considerable amount for a down payment, while allowing the renter to build equity in their home over time. Asked if they had any other specific suggestions for helping individuals who wished to buy a home, the need for greater education regarding the housing market was advanced by several participants in various groups. Many were of the view that younger people were generally unaware of how to navigate these types of more complex financial decisions.

### **Local Priorities (Nunavut)**

Participants identified a number of issues impacting the region, including a lack of mental health treatment and support services, insufficient access to safe and affordable housing, food insecurity, poor accommodation of the needs of disabled persons, and poverty. When asked if they recalled anything that the Government of Canada had done in Nunavut recently, most were aware of funding commitments to housing and health care, specifically directed at expanding virtual health care services for residents of Nunavut.

There was limited awareness of any supports the Government of Canada had provided to Nunavut during the COVID-19 pandemic other than funding to Inuit organizations which had been intended to assist local food banks. Many felt the federal government could have done more for the region including addressing issues such as rising prices for food and housing, additional support for mental health services, funding for programming directed to youth and seniors, and investments to enhance accessibility.

Participants discussed the availability and cost of purchasing nutritious foods in Nunavut. The consensus view was that the quality of nutritious foods had declined in recent years, coincidental with an increase in the price of many items. Some also commented that the pandemic had adversely affected the supply of fresh foods to the region. When participants were asked if they would prefer to see continued investment in food subsidy programs like Nutrition North or more funds allocated to Inuit-led programs such as the Harvesters Support Grant, participants leaned towards a combination of both. They felt a hybrid approach offered optimal access to both store-bought items as well as traditional, country foods.

Relatively few participants felt the Government of Canada was taking adequate steps to ensure there was sufficient housing to meet the demand in Nunavut. They identified the key barriers which needed to be addressed as: the cost of housing, high occupancy rates by government employees resulting in lower availability of housing to others, and historical or systemic housing shortages among long-time residents of the North. Participants suggested four ways in which the Government of Canada could help to reduce these barriers, including asking residents of the region what kind of housing they need and want, building more houses across the region, releasing properties being held for use by government employees which are currently vacant, and instituting rent controls (e.g., lowering or capping the amount paid in rent).

On the topic of resource development in the North, many participants viewed the sector as critical to improving the standard of living in the region. They favoured an Inuit-led approach to resource development, believing that the sector held the promise of good paying jobs and economic benefits for the region. At the same time, some expressed concerns about environmental degradation. They supported a rigorous planning process and strong oversight.

This discussion briefly touched on participants' fluency in Inuktitut which varied greatly within the group. Most believed the Government of Canada should play a role in protecting the Inuit language and that doing so was an important step towards reconciliation. They favoured Indigenous-led programs offered in schools, reflecting the fact that those participants who spoke Inuktitut had learned it at an early age. Others also suggested that the federal government collaborate with Inuit specialists and experts to develop programs for non-Indigenous people residing and working in Nunavut in order to assist them in learning more about Inuit culture and the language.

### **Electric Vehicles (Trois-Rivières)**

Most participants were aware of the Government of Canada's target for all new cars sold in Canada to be zero emission vehicles (ZEVs) by 2035. While some strongly supported this commitment, noting its positive impact on the environment, several worried about the cost to purchase a ZEV presuming it could be prohibitive for many consumers. Others opposed any government intervention in the marketplace especially if it resulted in reduced choice for consumers.

Participants also discussed a Government of Canada strategy to encourage mining in Canada for the materials used in the production of ZEV batteries, such as copper and nickel. Most were supportive of a strategy that would create jobs for Canadians and support domestic production of a key component of ZEVs. The discussion did generate additional questions about the impact of higher Canadian labour costs on the overall cost of ZEVs and the feasibility of manufacturing the vehicles in Canada. Some also underscored the importance of partnering with Indigenous groups and addressing land claims issues prior to commencing mining operations.

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**MORE INFORMATION**

The Strategic Counsel

Contract number: 35035-182346/001/CY

Contract award date: December 18, 2020

Contract value: \$1,618,838.00

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