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Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – June 2020

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 government, as well as emerging trends.

This report includes findings from 12 online focus groups which were conducted between June 2nd and 29th, 2020 in multiple locations across the country including in the Atlantic region, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, 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 and reopening stages were progressing. The research explored a wide range of related issues in depth, from perceptions of the federal government's response to date, to behaviour changes of Canadians, discussion around reopening, views on economic impacts of the virus and conversations around a contact tracing app. Throughout the month, various brand and testimonial advertising concepts aimed at communicating with the public about COVID-19 were also tested. Outside of COVID-19, topics around racism, local challenges and other federal government news and issues were discussed in certain locations.

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.

Methodology

Overview of Groups

Target audience

- Canadian residents, 18 and older
- Groups were split primarily by location
- Some groups focussed on specific subgroups of the population including parents, seniors, those receiving the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and newcomers.

Detailed approach

- 12 focus groups across various regions in Canada.
- Groups were conducted with the general population in Ontario mid-sized centres, Northern Prairies, Victoria/Nanaimo, major centres in Atlantic Canada and in rural Quebec.
- Groups were conducted with key subgroups including parents in Toronto/Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Vancouver, seniors in Montreal and major centres in Ontario, those receiving the CERB in Alberta and Quebec and newcomers in the Greater Montreal Area (GMA).
- Groups 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, 81 participants attended, in total. Details on attendance numbers by group can be found below.
- Each participant received a \$90 honorarium in respect of their time

Group Locations and Composition

LOCATION	GROUP	LANGUAGE	DATE	TIME (EST)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Toronto/GTA 905	1	English	June 2	6:00-8:00 pm	Parents (gr.7&up)	8
Alberta	2	English	June 3	7:00-9:00 pm	Receiving CERB	6
Montreal	3	French	June 4	5:30-7:30 pm	Seniors	8
Ontario Major Centres	4	English	June 9	5:30-7:30 pm	Seniors	8
Quebec	5	French	June 10	5:00-7:00 pm	Receiving CERB	7
Vancouver	6	English	June 11	8:30-10:30 pm	Parents (JK-gr.6)	8
Ontario Mid-size Centres	7	English	June 15	5:30-7:30 pm	Gen Pop	6
Northern Manitoba & Saskatchewan	8	English	June 16	7:00-9:00 pm	Mix Gen Pop & Indigenous	6
Victoria/Nanaimo	9	English	June 17	8:00-10:00 pm	Gen Pop	6
Greater Montreal Area	10	French	June 23	6:00-8:00 pm	Immigrants/ Newcomers	6
Atlantic Canada	11	English	June 25	4:30-6:30 pm	Gen Pop	7
Rural Quebec	12	French	June 29	5:00-7:00 pm	Gen Pop	5
Total number of participants						81

Key Findings

Part I: COVID-19 Related Findings

COVID-19 in the News and Government of Canada Response (All Locations)

In June, participants were still following COVID-19 in the news, especially the changing details about reopening in their various jurisdictions. Most were looking forward to the ability to be more active in their lives as a result of reopening measures, but concerns were also expressed about increased risk. It should be noted though that participants in several of the groups reported moderate to low engagement with the news at this point of the pandemic – a couple of individuals even said that they had stopped altogether. A common sentiment was that the risk remained, but that the “government” (referred to generically) was taking steps to open up the economy in order to reduce further economic damage and hardship.

Behaviour Changes (All Locations except Rural Quebec)

Participants reported modifying their behaviours in response to the pandemic, especially as various provinces began phased reopening.

Changes to behaviour were cited by some to a greater extent than others, but overall many participants had begun to wean themselves from strict home isolation and were going outside more. Many had expanded their social circles and began visiting with family and friends, either at their own homes or at cafes or restaurants, while continuing to follow various measures including social distancing, and hand washing/sanitizing. Participants were also wearing masks more, when they felt it was needed (particularly when social distancing was not possible). Due to the summer weather, participants were getting outdoors more, either exercising (e.g. walking), entertaining their children (e.g. at parks), or going on trips (such as camping), within their own province. Participants generally noted these changes in behaviour were made as allowed by changes in directives from government as their provinces moved through stages of reopening.

At the same time, there were a select few participants who had not changed their behaviour at all, either because they remained uncomfortable with the risks or had simply formed new habits that they wanted to continue.

Parenting through COVID-19

Parents reported feeling challenged in adapting to the changes in their children’s lives throughout the pandemic while still trying to provide some level of normalcy and routine. Challenges came with supervising and entertaining their children while also working, and online home-schooling and/or child care were cited as being particularly difficult. For some parents, their new roles seemed to have put a

strain on their relationship with their children, while others mentioned they grew closer with their children having been able to spend more time together.

Overall, parents found it challenging to keep their children informed so as not to put them at risk for contracting COVID-19. For younger children, parents had difficulty explaining the virus to them in a way they understood. Meanwhile, older children seemed to have more of an attitude of 'invincibility' towards the virus, partly due to early messaging they received about who was at risk, making it more difficult for parents to instill the importance of following practices like social distancing and wearing a mask with their older children. Parents of older children suggested reaching their children through social media and that particularly teachers and other media had more impact on their behaviours than they did.

Impact on seniors

Seniors cited a mix of both positive and negative impacts of the pandemic on their life. While some reported being proud of how they were able to learn and adapt to a new situation and generally found being in isolation easier than they expected, like others, they found being unable to socialize difficult and some commented that waiting times at stores were a challenge.

Generally, the term 'vulnerable population' resonated with some seniors, but did not resonate with most. There was consensus that 55+ was too young to be considered a 'senior,' and they believed that a range of 60+ or 70+ would be more appropriate. Many suggested that their age did not necessarily make them vulnerable to COVID-19, but more importantly a variety of other factors including one's health status.

Reopening (Major Centres Ontario Seniors, Quebec CERB Recipients, Vancouver Parents, Mid-sized Centres Ontario, Northern Prairies, Victoria and Nanaimo, GMA Newcomers)

Throughout the month of June, jurisdictions across Canada were in various stages of reopening, with some much further along than others. Many participants had been looking forward to getting to this point but, at the same time, felt strongly that governments should approach the situation with caution and that reopening should occur at a slow and measured pace.

Participants in BC were the most upbeat about reopening and expressed confidence in how this was being handled in the province. Those in the Atlantic region and the Northern Prairies were equally encouraged by and supportive of reopening, but also somewhat nervous at the potential for a resurgence of the virus as people become more complacent and there is increased movement between provinces. By contrast, those in Ontario were more mixed in their views and this was primarily a factor of perceived ambiguity around the rules or guidance with respect to health and safety protocols for both businesses and individuals. Comments from participants in Quebec suggested that they were generally more apprehensive about the timing of reopening and the risks involved.

There was a common uneasiness expressed by participants in all groups about the possibility of lax compliance with health and safety measures, particularly around gatherings and the ongoing

requirement for social distancing. Others were unclear on the need to wear face masks and were seeking additional guidance in their respective jurisdictions. Several participants noted their discomfort with resuming 'normal' activities and these were often individuals who could be considered 'higher risk,' including seniors, those with children or who were expecting, and those with health conditions.

Economic Impact (GTA Parents, Mid-size and Small Town Alberta CERB Recipients, Montreal Seniors, Major Centres Ontario Seniors, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec CERB Recipients, Vancouver Parents, Mid-sized Centres Ontario, Northern Prairies, Victoria and Nanaimo, GMA Newcomers)

Government of Canada Economic and Financial Incentives

Participants were generally aware of the range of initiatives undertaken by the Government of Canada to address the economic impact of the pandemic. Familiarity with the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) was higher, relative to other programs and benefits, and most knew of this program by name, often using the acronym for it. Confusion about overlap between Employment Insurance (EI) and the CERB was evident, although most participants understood that the CERB had fully replaced EI for the time being.

In addition, participants demonstrated varying levels of awareness of financial assistance from the government that was being targeted to many groups affected by COVID-19, including students, seniors, commercial property owners and other landlords, as well as businesses and employers. While short on some of the details, participants mentioned specific initiatives such as wage subsidies for employers, grants to students, loans for business, rental assistance for small businesses and commercial landlords and an extension of the deadline for filing tax returns.

On balance, participants were supportive of the Government of Canada's response, noting that in launching these programs expeditiously, it had prevented more serious wide-scale bankruptcies and job loss. However, participants also expressed some concerns about the long-term financial implications.

Participants who were receiving the CERB were asked more detailed questions about their experience and their views of the Benefit. They were immensely grateful, in the face of job loss and economic uncertainty resulting from the pandemic, both for the level of the financial support and the efficient distribution of payments to recipients. The issue as to whether it was fair that everyone receives the same amount, regardless of their circumstances, was viewed as secondary to the need to get money out promptly to Canadian households. The Benefit was seen as offering relief to many who were adversely affected by the lockdown, although some participants were anxious about how long the program may last, assuming it may come to an end before they are able to return to work and/or find other paid employment. The majority view was that the Benefit should continue into the fall or winter, which generally aligned with views on the point at which they felt economic recovery may begin to pick up some speed. Most participants receiving the CERB believed they qualified under the stated

eligibility requirements and relatively few indicated that the payment had in any way affected their motivation to return to work or find a job.

Without additional details, it was more difficult for participants to comment on whether or not the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), at 75%, was fair or how long this benefit should stay in place. Some did question how effective the subsidy would be in encouraging employers to retain staff in situations where there was absolutely no work for employees to return to.

Participants were familiar, to varying degrees, with funding to seniors during COVID-10. There were distinct points of view in regard to the perceived fairness of the current program, which offers seniors who are eligible for the Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) one-time payments of \$300 and \$200 respectively, for a total of \$500 for those receiving both the OAS and the GIS. Some felt this financial support fell short of their expectations and that it did not address the needs of many struggling seniors. Others were more positive, believing the financial assistance to be useful in general, specifically in addressing seniors' additional expenses as a result of the pandemic (e.g., having items delivered more frequently to avoid running errands). Participants in each group often debated whether and how seniors had been affected with some believing seniors' expenses to have declined, reflecting fewer purchases overall, while others felt some may have seen an increase, and often this depended on where they resided. For example, some participants were of the view that seniors in larger urban centres were more affected financially, compared to those in smaller towns or more rural areas where they may be able to rely more on family, social networks and local businesses for assistance.

Further information about additional funding already being targeted to low-income seniors in particular (e.g., through OAS, GIS and HST/GST credits) did little to alter participants' opinions about the one-time support payment to seniors. Those who favoured the payments reiterated that low-income seniors struggled financially, and thus needed all of this additional financial support, at a minimum. Others held the view that the broader group of Canadian seniors, and not just those considered to be low income, were also deserving of additional financial assistance at this time.

Managing Budget Deficits (GTA Parents, Mid-Size and Small Town Alberta CERB Recipients)

Participants were asked whether programs like the CERB, the CEWS and support for seniors should be continued, scaled back to reduce spending, or whether the Government of Canada should be doing more even if it meant larger than projected deficits. The consensus view was that these programs should be continued until the economy 'normalizes.' Participants expressed concerns about the financial implications, especially for future generations who would be responsible for paying down the debt, but also felt that the programs were having a positive effect and that running a deficit was unavoidable to prevent businesses from shuttering and families from financial hardship. No one, however, proposed doing more if it meant increasing the deficit further.

Economic Recovery and Stimulus (GTA Parents, Mid-Size and Small Town Alberta CERB Recipients, Montreal Seniors)

Participants were not optimistic that the economy would bounce back at full speed once everything had reopened. Some felt this was unlikely without widespread access to a vaccine, while others spoke about the impact of changes in consumer attitudes and behaviours which may reduce discretionary spending, with negative economic repercussions. Still others commented on the extent of the economic devastation, noting that many businesses may be unable to fully open anytime soon (e.g., tourism and hospitality sectors), and several participants expressed concerns about the effect of a second wave of the virus. Predictions as to how long the economy would take to rebound varied quite widely, ranging from 3 to 6 months, to upwards of 2 to 5 years. Views on continuation of programs such as the CERB and the CEWS paralleled participants' forecast for economic recovery, as noted earlier. At the same time, some posited that these programs should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are being appropriately targeted to those most in need and, specifically in reference to the CERB, are not acting as a disincentive to return to work. The expectation was that, over time, there should be fewer people who would qualify for these benefits.

Most participants believed that some type of economic stimulus would be required to kick-start the economy. While many focused on incentives for businesses (e.g., lower taxes, support start-ups, provide assistance to small businesses in particular, etc.), there was also some support for stimulating the economy through measures targeting consumers (e.g., incentives to purchase Canadian-made products, coupons, etc.). Some favoured traditional stimulus programs such as large infrastructure projects, although they had little to say about the nature and scope of these types of initiatives other than that they were seen as effective job creators.

The Safe Restart Agreement (Major Centres Ontario Seniors, Mid-Size and Small Town Quebec CERB Recipients, Vancouver Parents, Mid-Size Centres, Ontario, Smaller Towns Prairies, Victoria and Nanaimo)

Participants were mostly unaware of the Government of Canada's Safe Restart Agreement. They were told that it would provide \$14 billion to the provinces and territories to help restart their economy. They were also shown the following list outlining potential areas for funding and asked to identify two or three that they deemed to be the most important in the context of assisting regions across Canada with reopening.

- Childcare so that parents can go back to work
- Core services such as public transit
- Guaranteeing all workers at least two weeks of paid sick leave
- Improving testing and tracing capacity
- Improving the state of long-term care
- More personal protective equipment (PPE) for businesses
- More personal protective equipment (PPE) for front-line health care workers

Overall, four areas were identified by participants as being vital: childcare, paid sick leave, testing and tracing and long-term care. Participants saw childcare as a key prerequisite to allowing parents, especially women, to rejoin the workforce, although there were evident concerns expressed by a few participants about providing childcare services in a safe manner. Improving testing and tracing capacity was a priority, particularly for participants living in regions experiencing higher positivity rates and numbers of COVID-19 cases. Recognizing that a vaccine may not be available for many months, participants saw the value of testing and tracing to monitor trends and provide an early warning of a possible re-emergence of the virus. They felt that reopening was contingent on further limiting the spread of the virus. Offering all workers at least two weeks of paid sick leave was also viewed as an important priority. Many felt that people should not feel the pressure of having to come into work when they are ill in order to support their families and risk infecting co-workers and customers. Participants spoke about the systemic nature of the issues in long-term care facilities which, in their view, led to a higher number of cases of the virus and deaths due to COVID-19 among both residents and staff.

Providing personal protective equipment (PPE) for health care workers and businesses also received some support from participants, although it was a lower priority compared to those areas noted in the above paragraph. Participants were aware of shortages of PPE for health care workers and felt this should be a greater priority over PPE for businesses, which some indicated should be a cost borne by businesses rather than by government. There was also a sense that government funding should be targeted to initiatives that will benefit families and people at risk, rather than business owners and operators.

Funding to public transit was not viewed as a particularly high priority. Many believed public transit was already fairly well funded and did not feel there were compelling arguments to invest more in this sector.

In addition to the areas listed, some participants suggested funding for other initiatives as well, including but not limited to services to assist those with mental health issues and addictions as well as funding for homeless shelters.

Phrases to Describe the Economy (GTA Parents, Mid-Size and Small Town Alberta CERB Recipients, Montreal Seniors, Major Centres Ontario Seniors, Mid-Size and Small Town Quebec CERB Recipients, Vancouver Parents)

Participants were shown some phrases or descriptions of ways in which the Government of Canada could frame its plan for the economy moving forward: Recovery, Restart and New Start. The discussion as to which of these was most apt converged around Restart and Recovery. While Recovery reflected a degree of continuity in terms of economic progress vis-a-vis the pre-COVID-19 economy, Restart connoted some element of rethinking how business operates. Participants tended to vet these terms with respect to their meaning, tone and perceived timing. For some, Restart had neutral to optimistic overtones and suggested a more instantaneous process, while Recovery was viewed as a hopeful term and inferred a longer, and likely more realistic, timeframe.

New Start was the least preferred of the three options in virtually every group mainly because it connoted an entirely new beginning which many felt did not reflect their belief that the fundamentals of Canada's economy prior to the onset of the virus were reasonably solid.

Goals for the Economy (All Locations with the exception of Major Centres Atlantic Canada and Rural Quebec)

When thinking more about specific goals for the economy, participants reviewed and commented on a series of descriptions for the type of economy Canada could be aiming for:

- Future-proof economy (note that this term was removed following the first 6 groups)
- Green/greener economy (note that the term 'greener' was substituted for 'green' for the last 4 of the 10 groups in which this discussion took place)
- Healthy economy
- Modern economy
- Innovative economy (note that this option was shown only to 4 of the 10 groups in which this discussion took place)
- Resilient economy
- Strong economy

There was a general consensus in almost all of the groups around the goal of a 'resilient economy.' This option was selected at least twice as often, or more, as any other option. Resiliency suggested independence (e.g., self-sufficiency and support for 'made in Canada' products), adaptability, including the ability to weather unpredictable events, an agile economy and forward movement. For some, it also incorporated the notion of thinking differently and more creatively, and of ensuring alternate plans and options have been considered and are ready to be implemented, should the need arise. Others considered that resiliency encompassed the idea of diversification, supporting the goal of greater economic independence and self-reliance.

Other Challenges (GTA Parents and Mid-Size and Small Town Alberta CERB Recipients)

Following a conversation focusing primarily on the economic issues resulting from COVID-19, participants were queried about any other societal challenges that have surfaced in the wake of the pandemic. The following were raised, although without any overall consensus within or across groups or much in-depth discussion:

- Mental health, anxiety and stress, addictions, suicide rates
- Domestic violence
- Long-term care
- The environment

COVID-19 Ad Testing (Major Centres Atlantic Canada, Rural Quebec)

COVID-19 Brand Concepts (Major Centres Atlantic Canada, Rural Quebec)

In the last two groups held during the month of June, participants were shown a series of three creative concepts (and two variations within each concept) that could be used by the Government of Canada to inform Canadians about COVID-19 – labeled as Concepts A1 and A2, B1 and B2 and C1 and C2. For each concept, including the original version and an alternate, various illustrations of the “look” were provided across different media, including an example of an ad targeting people who may have an interest in travelling and which would be displayed on Facebook, as well as examples of ads which could be used in print or on billboards (the creative concepts, including the original and the alternate for each, can be found in the Detailed Findings). Participants were always shown the original version first, followed by the alternate version. After each concept was fully reviewed and assessed independently, participants were asked to select which one of the three they felt was most compelling.

Participants had many positive reactions to all three concepts, however, they tended to gravitate toward Concept C, and specifically Concept C1, when asked to select one of the three. This was primarily due to the incorporation of an outline of a maple leaf as a creative element which served to frame various images including men and women wearing masks. Overall, this concept was viewed as the most compelling as it appeared to have the appropriate mix of graphic elements, imagery and colour palette which appealed to participants.

Participants’ commented frequently on the colour schemes used in each of the concepts, and the variations within each concept. Their reactions suggested that this element of the creative can play a significant role in the effectiveness of the advertising and specifically the subconscious association of certain colours with specific types of messaging or emotions. For example, participants reacted more strongly to the vibrant yellow and black colour scheme used in Concept B, as it immediately led some to say that it had clear associations with advertising and messaging focusing on the ‘safety’ theme, although some suggested that this concept looked more like an ad for ‘occupational health and safety’ as opposed to ‘public health.’ Moreover, the high contrast colour palette in Concept B drew as much negative as positive reaction. While the colour palette employed in C1 in particular was fairly muted relative to the colour choices used in C2, as well as in Concepts A and B, participants found it had a calming effect that did not detract from or lessen its perceived ability to attract audience attention or motivate participants to read the ad.

The use of the maple leaf in Concept C1 contributed to a uniquely Canadian look and feel and was viewed as a highly recognizable, strong, unifying and continuous element across each of the various mediums.

The photography and imagery used in the concepts also caught participants’ attention. Photoshopped masks overlaid on photographs of adults and children, as in Concept A, received mixed reviews. While some felt they stood out, and underscored the messaging with respect to wearing a face mask when physical distancing is difficult, others felt it detracted from the overall professionalism or quality of the ad.

Additional learning from the concept testing was as follows:

- There was a general dislike for the use or over-use of icons, in addition to photography;
- As per the above point, additional redundant elements such as icons, led to a more cluttered look and feel which a number of participants commented on negatively. The preference was for a cleaner, uncluttered look and feel which generated not only a reassuring tone, but also made it easier for participants to hone in on the message. On balance, participants preferred photography over icons ;
- Bold, official-style font or typeface was favoured as it was seen to lend the ads a more typical 'government' look which also helped reinforce the branding; and
- Most of the concepts were viewed as having a clear continuous element (e.g., white line in Concept A, yellow/black colour palette in Concept B, maple leaf in Concept C1) which reinforced the linkage across mediums for participants. As noted, the maple leaf was most readily identifiable for participants, and stood out both because it was easily recognizable, but also for its symbolism.

COVID-19 Ad Testimonial (Rural Quebec)

In rural Quebec, participants were shown a concept for a television ad that was currently under development for use by the Government of Canada. The ad featured a conversation between a young man and woman – a couple. The scenario presented in the video was that the woman, who also happened to have other underlying health conditions, had developed symptoms of COVID-19. As a result, she was hospitalized for a month. She survived, and the ad featured a short conversation on a park bench about the overall experience for both of them.

Participants' reactions to it were mixed. Some commented positively that the ad reinforced the key precautions to reduce the spread of and susceptibility to COVID-19, and that the message was being delivered by members of a younger demographic. However, the ad was critiqued for a range of reasons, principally that it was not viewed as compelling or impactful in terms of promoting behaviour change. There were also questions about the woman's story, specifically that she was more at risk due compared to other young people due to her other health issues. Some also commented on specific production aspects, specifically the fact that the woman spoke quite softly making it difficult to hear her, and the perception that the young man in the ad was given very little airtime making the ad seem unbalanced.

Contact Tracing App (Major Centres Atlantic Canada, Rural Quebec)

Overall, there was modest awareness of the development of a national contact tracing app and minimal familiarity with the details of how such an app would work. Even after participants were provided with some information about the technology, specifically the fact that the app would not store nor share any location data, most participants remained skeptical that the app would be effective in limiting the spread of COVID-19. Several were concerned that the effectiveness of the app would be heavily dependent on a high level of uptake and, given that infection rates were low (and dropping) in some regions, they did not see this as likely. Others questioned how the information of those who

tested positive would be uploaded and this led to some concerns about the claim that users would remain anonymous. Several felt that the app might cause people to be less vigilant and become more complacent with respect to adhering to social distancing practices, handwashing and wearing a face mask. A number of participants indicated that the app would be a constant reminder of the virus and only serve to raise their anxiety.

Those few participants who said that they would download the app felt that it would prompt people to seek testing more quickly if they were notified that they had come into contact with someone who had tested positive.

Relatively few were concerned about having to leave Bluetooth on in order for the app to be effective. The issue for most was not necessarily knowing more about how Bluetooth works, but rather how information from those who have tested positive is being gathered and uploaded while protecting personal privacy and anonymity.

At the same time, some did suggest that they may be more inclined to download the app if infection rates worsened.

Two names for the app were tested in Atlantic Canada only – COVID Alert and Stop COVID. While a few participants did not like either option, the balance favoured COVID Alert. This name was thought to be more ‘eye-catching’ and generally more descriptive of the app’s function (e.g., notification).

Part II: Other Issues

Racism (Major Centres Ontario Seniors, Quebec CERB Recipients, Vancouver Parents, Mid-sized Centres Ontario, Northern Prairies, Victoria and Nanaimo, GMA Newcomers)

Most participants had heard of the anti-racism protests that had been occurring during the month of June, with some referring specifically to the Black Lives Matter protest movement south of the border. Overall, most felt that racism does exist in Canada, but the general consensus across most groups was that the issue is more with respect to the treatment of Indigenous people in this country. Moreover, many also felt that race relations in Canada is much less of an issue in Canada compared with the United States.

The extent to which the Government of Canada needs to do more to address the issue of racism in Canada was heavily debated within each group. Many felt there was a role for government in raising awareness of the issue and educating Canadians as a way of addressing aspects of systemic racism which they felt were evident within the law enforcement community as embedded within the Indian Act. When presented with a series of measures which could make things better for visible minorities in Canada, participants focused on measures such as placing body cameras on police officers, funding legal aid programs for vulnerable populations and providing more training to people in the justice system. These were thought to be ways to improve accountability, address root causes of racism

having to do with poverty often experienced by marginalized groups, and bias within the judicial system.

A fairly lengthy discussion was had on the topic of mandatory minimum sentences and specifically whether or not these should be repealed as a way of addressing issues of fairness within Canada's criminal justice system, specifically given that they tend to put too many people in jail, at a significant cost to taxpayers, and tend to predominantly adversely affect visible minority groups. This discussion was challenging for many participants who did not fully understand how and on what basis (e.g., for what types of crimes) mandatory minimums were applied. As a result, views were mixed as to whether repeal would make the system more or less fair. Ultimately, participants did not feel that cost should be a determining factor and many reverted to earlier positions about the root causes of racism in Canada, specifically the need to address issues such as poverty and education.

At the conclusion of this discussion, most participants indicated that changing the laws around mandatory minimums should not be a high priority at this time, given the current situation with COVID-19 and concerns about other issues such as health and education which were deemed to be more important. They did, however, note that they would be more inclined to support doing so if clear evidence was provided that keeping the minimums in place has particularly adverse consequences for Indigenous people, visible minorities and marginalized groups. There was also some support for a system that places increased emphasis on rehabilitation and reintegration of former convicts into society.

Other Federal Government News and Issues (GTA Parents, AB CERB Recipients, Montreal Seniors, Major Centres Ontario, Quebec CERB Recipients, Vancouver Parents, Major Centres Atlantic Canada, Rural Quebec)

When asked about other, non-COVID-19 related, news, it was obvious that COVID-19 issues continued to engross most participants, although for some the repetitive information they were receiving was causing their interest to wane. Few issues were raised on an unprompted basis, but included the ongoing situation between Canada and China related to the detainment of a Chinese business executive and issues regarding RCMP conduct, specifically pertaining to Indigenous people.

Local Challenges (Smaller Towns Northern Prairies)

Participants in the group held among residents of smaller communities within the Northern Prairies saw little evidence of an active presence of the Government of Canada within their community, although some did note funding from government for infrastructure, green spaces and major events. When asked what the government could do for their communities, participants focused on infrastructure, addressing drinking water on Reserves, changes to the system of equalization payments, issues related to the buyback of firearms, income inequality and homelessness.

MORE INFORMATION

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