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Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – June 2021

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, 2021 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 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 and how that has influenced their behaviours, their views on local public health restrictions, border closures and other COVID-19 related travel restrictions. The research also explored perspectives on the Government of Canada's performance throughout the pandemic, and thoughts on the extent of the spread of COVID-19 in coming months. Certain subgroups were also asked for their views on a variety of vaccination-related topics. Nova Scotia and Calgary parents of children aged 12-17 discussed their views on the vaccination of youth aged 12 – 17 and messaging related to youth vaccination was explored with parents residing in the City of Toronto and York Region as well as Calgary. Winnipeg participants experiencing COVID fatigue and exhibiting riskier behaviours also shared their views on what public health restrictions they had the most issues with.

In addition to the pandemic, non-COVID-19 related discussions were undertaken on a range of topics including Indigenous Issues, housing, zero-emission vehicles and local issues. Creative testing related to Western Economic Diversification Canada was also undertaken with participants from Calgary.

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 those who were experiencing COVID-19 fatigue and exhibiting riskier behaviours, non-homeowners looking to purchase in the next five years, parents of children aged 12-17, those who were vaccine hesitant, those who were vaccine rejecters and young adults aged 18-30.

Detailed approach

- 12 focus groups across various regions in Canada.
- Two groups were conducted with the general population in Windsor and Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean Region Quebec.
- The other ten groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
 - Those experiencing COVID-19 fatigue and exhibiting riskier behaviours residing in Winnipeg;

- Non-homeowners looking to purchase in the next five years residing in Hamilton, the Lower Mainland B.C. and the Greater Montreal Area (GMA);
 - Parents of children, aged 12-17, residing in Nova Scotia, the City of Toronto and York Region and Calgary;
 - Vaccine hesitant people residing in the Outaouais Region Quebec;
 - Those who rejected COVID-19 vaccines residing in mid-size centres in the Prairies; and
 - Young adults, aged 18-30, residing in Atlantic Canada.
- 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, 85 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
Winnipeg	1	English	June 2	7:00-9:00 pm	People Experiencing COVID Fatigue/Exhibiting Riskier Behaviours/COVID-19 Hot Spot	7
Hamilton	2	English	June 3	6:00-8:00 pm	Non-homeowners looking to purchase in next 5 years	8
Nova Scotia	3	English	June 8	5:00-7:00 pm	Parents of Children aged 12-17	7
Lower Mainland B.C.	4	English	June 9	9:00-11:00 pm	Non-homeowners looking to purchase in next 5 years	8
Outaouais Region Quebec	5	French	June 10	6:00-8:00 pm	Vaccine Hesitant	4
Windsor	6	English	June 15	6:00-8:00 pm	Gen Pop	8
Greater Montreal Area (GMA)	7	French	June 16	6:00-8:00 pm	Non-homeowners looking to purchase in next 5 years	6
Mid-size Centres Prairies	8	English	June 17	7:00-9:00 pm	Vaccine Rejecters	8

Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean Region Quebec	9	French	June 22	6:00-8:00 pm	Gen Pop	8
City of Toronto and York Region	10	English	June 23	6:00-8:00 pm	Parents of children aged 12-17	6
Atlantic Canada	11	English	June 24	5:00-7:00 pm	Young Adults aged 18-30	8
Calgary	12	English	June 29	8:00-10:00 pm	Parents of Children aged 12-17	7
Total number of participants						85

Key Findings

Part I: COVID-19 Related Findings

Government of Canada in the News (All Locations)

When asked to identify Government of Canada issues in the news, participants most widely commented on the recent discovery of unmarked graves of Indigenous children at the site of a former residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia, which was top of mind across the groups. There was limited awareness of specific actions taken by the federal government in response to this discovery, but some recalled that public statements had been made. Some also mentioned the recent passage of legislation to make September 30th a federal statutory holiday and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

COVID-19-related issues were also widely top of mind. Recollection of specific news items focused on vaccines, in particular, including official announcements regarding instances of myocarditis associated with the Pfizer vaccine, and various accounts of media coverage about second dose delays, more doses being ordered by the federal government, and Canadian assistance for developing countries in acquiring vaccine doses.

News about new border restrictions being eased was also mentioned, both before and especially after the June 21 announcement of the first phase of the federal government's reopening plan. Participants were generally aware that fully vaccinated travellers would soon be permitted to enter Canada without the need to quarantine or stay at a government-authorized hotel, and many felt that land travel between Canada and the United States, in particular, would become easier.

A smattering of other issues was mentioned related, variously, to the strengthening of the mortgage stress test, regulation of online expression (Bill C-10), the Prime Minister's attendance at the G7 summit, concerns about the growing federal deficit, the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline, strains in the Canada-China relationship, and the possibility of an imminent federal election call.

Perspectives on Local Restrictions (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours, Nova Scotia Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Calgary Parents of Children Aged 12-17)

Views on Regional Restrictions (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours, Calgary Parents of Children Aged 12-17)

Winnipeg (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours)

Participants residing in Winnipeg were generally skeptical about the value of the increased restrictions recently implemented across the province. Many blamed a lack of compliance and enforcement, and some believed only more targeted restrictions would be useful. Others questioned the restrictions, arguing that the virus would spread regardless so people should be free to live their lives. A number of participants also felt that the high uptake of vaccines was the best defence against COVID-19, even in the absence of restrictions. As a result of these views, most felt that the current restrictions should be lifted.

As a second point of discussion, participants were told that the Government of Canada would be providing more pandemic-related help to Manitoba in response to the province's request for assistance; most participants expressed ambivalence. While some did express appreciation for the federal government's offer, they were exasperated that the provincial government required this assistance from the Government of Canada.

Calgary (Calgary Parents of Children Aged 12-17)

Parents in Calgary generally felt that restrictions across the city and province were lifted too quickly. While many felt unsafe, some conceded that the reopening was needed to get the economy up and running again. That said, many felt that more communications were needed to reinforce the need for people to take precautions.

Asked if they would feel safe attending the upcoming Calgary Stampede, most said that they would not, and planned to skip the event to limit their exposure to crowds.

When asked if they were worried about a possible fourth wave of COVID-19, many said they were, although several participants noted they had been vaccinated and felt safer. Beyond health concerns, some worried about the impact that a fourth wave and new restrictions would have on the economy and small businesses in particular, as well as the financial and mental health of workers whose jobs would be affected. Conversely, some felt that it was unlikely that new closures and lockdowns would be imposed because of public push back.

Personal Impact of Restrictions

Participants in these groups were asked how COVID-19 restrictions had impacted them and their families. Across the two groups, some common themes and issues emerged:

- **Mental health:** The impact that isolation and lack of social interaction had on the mental health of participants and family members was a concern for many.

- Inability to see family: Many mentioned the difficulties of being unable to see family, missing out on important events, such as weddings and funerals, and worrying about vulnerable family members who were struggling from isolation.
- Online learning: Parents whose children had attended virtual school felt that it had been a struggle for their children to adapt because of the social isolation.
- Job loss: Some mentioned they had lost their jobs or had businesses go under as a result of shut downs associated with the pandemic.

COVID Fatigue (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours)

In one group, participants who were fatigued by COVID-19 and exhibiting riskier behaviours, were asked what had made them decide to have contact with individuals outside of their household. Many said that they were frustrated with the situation in Manitoba and felt they were behind other provinces in managing the pandemic and plans for reopening. Many felt the restrictions in their province had been ineffective and the provincial government was failing to learn from past mistakes. Some questioned the rationale for current restrictions, arguing that the data and science did not justify it. There were some who also believed that the virus was going to run its course regardless of restrictions and that Canadians should be able to make their own decisions about how much risk they wanted to take.

COVID-19 Restrictions (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours, Hamilton Non Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Nova Scotia Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Lower Mainland B.C. Non Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Outaouais Region Quebec Vaccine Hesitant, Windsor, GMA Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Mid-size Centres Prairies Vaccine Rejecters, Saguenay & Lac-St-Jean Region Quebec, City of Toronto/York Region Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Atlantic Canada Young Adults)

Throughout the month, participants were asked to comment on a variety of COVID-19 travel restrictions. They also discussed their views on the need for additional restrictions or whether they felt that things should be opening up more. At various points in the discussions, participants in most groups were provided with information about forthcoming travel restriction changes and asked for their thoughts.

Awareness of International Travel Restrictions (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours, Hamilton Non Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Nova Scotia Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Lower Mainland B.C. Non Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Outaouais Region Quebec Vaccine Hesitant, Windsor, GMA Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Mid-size Centres Prairies Vaccine Rejecters, Saguenay & Lac-St-Jean Region Quebec)

When asked what they knew about Canada's current international travel restrictions, most were aware that several quarantine and travel restrictions were in place. Attitudes towards the restrictions varied greatly by region – some were supportive while others were convinced that restrictions were

ineffective and an invasion of privacy. The following international travel restrictions were top of mind for many, but there was a lot of confusion about the restrictions:

- A three-day stay in a designated quarantine hotel at the traveller's own expense upon entering Canada;
- Testing for COVID-19 before arrival in Canada;
- Only essential travel recommended/allowed;
- Restrictions dependant on vaccination status; and
- Flying into Canada resulted in a longer quarantine and a three-night mandatory hotel quarantine, whereas driving across the Canadian-U.S. border was more flexible.

Additionally, with the current travel restrictions, some expressed frustration at perceived loopholes or inequities. Some mentioned that the restrictions seemed to favour those who had the financial ability to stay in a quarantine hotel or could afford to circumvent restrictions. Some felt that those who were American and Canadian dual citizens had been abusing the ability to freely cross the border.

To aid the discussion of current travel restrictions, participants were provided with various details of restrictions currently in place. After receiving the details, participants in four of the groups (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Nova Scotia and Lower Mainland B.C.) were asked for their reactions. Those in Winnipeg and Hamilton tended to be critical of the restrictions. Some felt that borders should have been shut down when the first COVID-19 case was detected and the additional precautions at this stage were too late. Many were also opposed to the mandatory testing and hotel quarantine requirements because they felt they impinged on personal freedoms. Conversely, those residing in Nova Scotia and Lower Mainland B.C. were generally supportive of the restrictions, with many feeling that they were necessary and would be effective, if they were enforced.

These four groups were additionally asked when, in their view, the Government of Canada should ease these restrictions. Many agreed that this decision should be dependent on the uptake of vaccinations and when the country reaches herd immunity. There were some, however, who felt the restrictions were ineffective or unnecessary and should be lifted immediately to protect the economy.

Participants were asked when the Government of Canada should end the quarantine hotel requirement. On balance, most agreed that quarantine hotels could and should end immediately. It was felt that quarantine hotels were ineffective at curbing the spread of COVID-19 and an unfair expense to travellers. The few who were in favour of quarantine hotels felt it was important to discourage travel in order to contain the spread of the virus and its impact on the health care system.

Changes to Travel Restrictions (Lower Mainland B.C. Non Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Outaouais Region Quebec Vaccine Hesitant, Windsor, GMA Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Mid-size Centres Prairies Vaccine Rejecters, Saguenay & Lac-St-Jean Region Quebec, City of Toronto/York Region Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Atlantic Canada Young Adults)

Most participants in these groups, held after June 9th, were aware that changes to travel restrictions were forthcoming as announced by the federal government. While vague on details, many knew

without prompting, that fully vaccinated Canadian travellers would no longer be required to quarantine upon their return to Canada and some knew that Canadian travellers still needed to be tested upon arrival. And many were under the impression that different rules applied to foreign travellers and/or those not fully vaccinated. Some also recalled hearing different rules would apply to children under the age of twelve who were ineligible for vaccination.

To clarify, participants were provided with the details of the federal government's most recent announcement, and tended to support these changes. Most felt they were safe, given the focus on fully vaccinated travellers, and provided an incentive to enable people to begin to return to a more normal life. A few in these groups expressed concern that it might be a bit too soon to lift quarantine restrictions for fully vaccinated travellers and wanted to know if the data concerning transmission rates among the fully vaccinated supported this decision.

Several participants had questions about how the new rules would apply to travellers with children under the age of 12, who could not be vaccinated, and if they would require quarantine for children only or entire families.

Views on Shortening the Quarantine Period (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours, Hamilton Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Nova Scotia Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Lower Mainland B.C. Non Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Outaouais Region Quebec Vaccine Hesitant, Windsor, GMA Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Mid-size Centres Prairies Vaccine Rejecters)

Participants were divided on the issue of quarantines and whether they should be shortened for all fully-vaccinated travellers. Many felt they should be, some even felt they should be dropped entirely while others felt they needed to stay in place given the possibility of asymptomatic carriers and their ability to spread the virus.

Future of Allowing Non-Essential Travel into Canada (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours, Hamilton Non Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Nova Scotia Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Lower Mainland B.C. Non Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Outaouais Region Vaccine Hesitant, Windsor, GMA Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Mid-size Centres Prairies Vaccine Rejecters, Saguenay & Lac-St-Jean Region Quebec, City of Toronto/York Region Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Atlantic Canada Young Adults)

Allowing non-essential travel into Canada was not viewed as a priority. Many felt this should wait until more Canadians were fully vaccinated and be contingent on incoming travellers being fully vaccinated as well. Further, some also felt that travel within Canada for non-essential reasons should be ramped up prior to allowing international non-essential travel.

Border Exemptions (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours, Hamilton Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Nova Scotia Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Lower Mainland B.C. Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Outaouais Region Vaccine Hesitant, Windsor, GMA Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Mid-size Centres Prairies Vaccine Rejecters)

Asked if border exemptions should be in place for travellers from countries with a high vaccination rate or low case counts, many agreed this made sense. Some, however, felt that exemptions should be based on the individual travelling, and whether they were fully vaccinated, rather than conditions in their country of origin. Still others felt that international travel was essential to get Canada's economy back up and running. Others were more cautious. They worried about lifting restrictions on international travellers regardless of their personal vaccination status or conditions in their home country, given that the virus could still be contracted and spread.

Next, participants were asked for their views on a scenario that involved opening the border for non-essential travel only to those who were fully vaccinated. Many were open to this approach and thought it was reasonable. That said, some were adamant that testing should still be administered prior to admitting travellers into the country to reduce the prospect of travellers spreading the virus. Participants generally felt more comfortable with a two-step approach that required a double vaccination as well as testing.

Participants were then asked if travellers who had been fully vaccinated should continue to be subject to the same testing and quarantine requirements as those who have not been vaccinated. Participants had mixed opinions. Some felt if a traveller could prove their vaccination status, it should be easier for them to enter. On the other hand, some mentioned that those who had been vaccinated could still be carriers of the virus and should, therefore, still be subject to existing restrictions and public health measures.

Asked if the border between Canada and the United States should be opened, most felt it should remain closed for now and that travel should resume only when Canada had lifted all of its public health restrictions. Concerns were raised about continued high rates of infection in the US and the risk this posed to Canadians, as well as the difficulty of contact tracing Americans driving across the border.

Canadians Behaviours (GMA Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Mid-size Centres Prairies Vaccine Rejecters, Saguenay & Lac-St-Jean Region Quebec, Atlantic Canada Young Adults)

As part of the reopening plan, announced in June, the federal government eliminated the 3-day hotel quarantine for fully vaccinated Canadian travellers but still required them to self-isolate while awaiting results of their arrival test. In light of this, participants were asked about their degree of confidence that these Canadian travellers would comply with the instructions. Opinions were mixed. Most were dubious that all travellers would follow the rules and felt many would be tempted to break their quarantine requirements in the absence of any enforcement.

Participants were then asked if fully vaccinated Canadian travelers should still be required to take a COVID-19 test upon their return to Canada. Responses were, again, somewhat mixed. Many felt testing remained important, given the chance that even fully vaccinated travellers could contract and spread the virus. Some felt this decision should be dependent on the number of cases in the country the traveller was returning from, while others thought testing should be removed as a requirement for fully-vaccinated travellers. Finally, a few felt testing should be lifted for all travellers, arguing that test results were not especially reliable.

Those who agreed that testing was still necessary were asked for their opinion whether these tests should be administered at ports of entry or if travelers should be permitted to get their test at a local pharmacy. Most felt they should be administered at a port of entry, arguing that going to a pharmacy undermined the requirement to remain self-isolated and could lead to potential virus spread.

Finally, participants were asked for their views about switching to rapid tests for fully-vaccinated travelers at ports of entry and eliminating quarantines altogether for those with a negative result. Some supported this option as more practical, cheaper to administer and more convenient for travellers. Others were not comfortable with the trade-offs in regard to health and safety.

COVID-19 Outlook/Vaccines (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours, Hamilton Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Nova Scotia Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Outaouais Region Vaccine Hesitant, Windsor, Mid-size Centres Prairies Vaccine Rejecters, Calgary Parents of Children Aged 12-17)

Federal government performance

Perceptions of the federal government's performance to-date in managing the pandemic response were mixed, overall, with most participants tending toward more critical than positive assessments.

Many felt that the federal government had contributed to the extended lockdowns and their adverse effects with half-measures on border closures and a lack of national policies in regard to public health restrictions (which they believed was within the purview of the Government of Canada), as well as a slow vaccine rollout and high COVID-19 related spending that would ultimately lead to significant long-term debt. Many also felt that the federal government's performance had failed to improve over time on many of these issues in some cases because they conflated federal jurisdiction and provincial governance. Some also cited confusion about vaccine messaging, and several participants said that they were concerned about the absence of a concrete reopening plan for the country as a whole.

Those who were more positive, tended to identify many of the same issues above when asked what the government could have done better in its handling of the pandemic. Overall, however, these participants felt that the federal government had done its best to support citizens and the economy throughout a difficult and unprecedented challenge, identifying the Canada Emergency Response Benefit/Canada Recovery Benefit (CERB/CRB), the repatriation of Canadians stuck abroad, and effective ongoing communications about the pandemic with the public as examples of positive actions undertaken.

When asked whether they thought the spread of COVID-19 was going to get worse or improve, most were cautiously optimistic, based on increased rates of vaccinations and dropping case counts, while also expressing concern about possible new waves in the coming, colder months as well as the emergence of more dangerous variants.

Vaccines

Across groups, participants had a number of questions regarding vaccines. Most commonly, they focused on side effects and potential long-term implications of their use. Many wanted to see more data or were concerned about a lack of data, especially in regard to the vaccine's use in children and youth. There were some questions about the speed with which the vaccines had been developed and whether they had been adequately tested, if dissenting points of view from medical professionals about their safety were being adequately aired or considered, and if the vaccines would be as effective on new variants.

Among parents, opinions were mixed about whether or not to get children vaccinated in light of the recent approval of the Pfizer vaccine for use in children 12 years and older. Some were interested, and either discussing it with their children or had made the decision themselves to go ahead, while others were hesitant and wanted to wait for more data to be made available concerning safety.

Among the vaccine hesitant groups, many were open to changing their views once more data was available or said that they had become more open to the vaccine already after seeing cases and hospitalizations drop. Those who remained opposed were concerned about choice and personal freedom, as well as the safety of the vaccines, with many stating a preference for following restrictions such as mask wearing.

Cross-Border Vaccination between Windsor and Detroit (Windsor)

Several participants in this group were previously familiar with the proposed cross-border vaccination initiative between Windsor and Detroit. Nearly all supported it, once described, and felt that it made sense for local residents to gain expedited access to U.S. doses that might otherwise go to waste. A few had questions about the doses and their safety/similarity relative to those secured by the Canadian government. Several participants were unhappy about what they viewed as the federal government's lack of support for this initiative, feeling that immediate access to vaccines was insufficient.

Health Canada Youth Vaccination Messaging (City of Toronto/York Region Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Calgary Parents of Children Aged 12-17)

Participants in these two parent groups were asked to review and respond to two sets of messaging about COVID-19 vaccinations for youth between the ages of 12 and 17 years.

Message Set A

This set of messages focused on the following themes: the serious consequences of COVID-19, particularly variants, for young people; recommendations by authorities such as the Canadian Pediatric

Society to vaccinate young people; the proven safety and 100 per cent effectiveness of the vaccine among this age group, based on trials, and reassurance of close monitoring and swift action by Health Canada in regard to any emerging safety concerns.

Response to this messaging was largely negative, especially in Alberta, and particularly in regard to the claims about the vaccine's safety and effectiveness, which many felt were overstated and failed to address legitimate concerns about the possible side effects and long-term impact of a drug that, in their view, had been rushed to market for emergency use and remained largely untested in children. While there was some agreement that COVID-19, especially variants, could have serious consequences for people of all ages, and that an endorsement by independent medical authorities was important, few were reassured by the idea of monitoring and action by Health Canada after the fact. Overall, many seemed to be more hesitant about vaccinating their children, not less, after exposure to this set of messages. In Alberta, many felt that these messages provided unsupported facts and were aimed at telling parents what to think.

Message Set B

This set of messages, shown second in both groups, focussed on the following themes: the vaccine as a form of protection for children; a way for parents to help kids get back to life as usual and support their mental health and well-being; an important topic of discussion between parents and children, and; a topic understandably giving rise to questions and concerns that should be discussed with health care providers.

Participants in these two locations reacted differently to these messages. In Toronto/York, participants objected to what they saw as an attempt to make them feel guilty and worried about the wellbeing of their children. In the Calgary group, by contrast, parents liked this set of messages and its focus on the benefits of getting their children vaccinated. They were quite receptive to the values-based appeal to their desire to protect their children. They also liked that this messaging recognized the struggles that their children were facing because of the pandemic, and that it encouraged them to have a conversation with their children and family doctor, and to undertake their own research so they could make an informed decision.

Preference for the Message Sets

In the Toronto/York group, parents disliked both sets of messages. Most declined to choose when asked for their preference. In the Calgary group, all participants chose Message Set B.

Part II: Other Issues

Indigenous Issues (Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean Region Quebec, City of Toronto/York Region Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Atlantic Canada Young Adults)

Participants identified a wide range of Indigenous issues that they felt required attention from the federal government. A few key themes emerged, focused on the following: educating Canadians about Indigenous people and history to create a better public understanding of Indigenous perspectives and concerns; ensuring access to clean drinking water on reserves as an urgent human rights issue; addressing social issues related to poverty and inequality, and; working toward greater self-determination and autonomy for Indigenous communities. Continuing to search for graves at former residential schools was also mentioned as a current issue top of mind.

There was widespread agreement that Indigenous issues should be a high priority for the federal government, and that more needed to be done to work toward the kind of outcomes described above.

No one felt that the federal government was focussing too much on Indigenous issues, when asked, but a few worried about the inherent divisiveness of these matters. More commonly, some expressed a degree of fatigue or disengagement with what they viewed as intractable and overwhelmingly negative issues. There was also some concern about a perceived dynamic of high spending and lack of results on Indigenous issues.

Government of Canada Initiatives to Support Indigenous Peoples

There was limited awareness of recent actions taken by the Government of Canada to address Indigenous issues, especially among the young adult group in Atlantic Canada. The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation was the only initiative that came up unaided, and it was generally well-received but widely viewed as not enough.

To prompt further discussion, participants were shown a list of Government of Canada initiatives recently undertaken in support of Indigenous issues, including:

- Funding and advancements toward lifting long-term drinking water advisories in First Nations communities;
- Actions in response to the findings of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls;
- The introduction of a Bill to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP); and
- Funding and initiatives aimed at searching for and memorializing the children who died at residential schools.

Participants tended to agree that the initiatives related to drinking water advisories and UNDRIP would have the greatest impact. There was strong agreement about the need to solve the problem with

drinking water, and many felt that implementing UNDRIP would help the federal government and First Nations work together more constructively on all issues.

When asked if these recent initiatives changed how they felt about the federal government's efforts to address Indigenous issues, most were somewhat ambivalent, feeling that these commitments and initiatives were overdue, had been heard before, or were skeptical that these would prove to be effective.

Most supported the goals of these initiatives, however, and felt that constructive and long-lasting positive results could be achieved with the right kind of effort, especially if the federal government ensured that Indigenous people themselves played more of an active leadership role, not only in partnership with government, leading discussion and decisions, but within government as well. In particular, many felt that the federal government should avoid using funding as a one-dimensional solution to issues that they viewed as complex, requiring deep and honest engagement with Indigenous communities to determine the most effective course of action.

Local Issues (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours, Hamilton Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Nova Scotia Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Lower Mainland B.C. Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Calgary Parents of Children Aged 12-17)

Local Sectors and Industries

Across all groups but Hamilton, participants were asked to identify the most important sectors and industries in their areas, as well as those most in need of government support and whether the federal government had recently provided any support, to the best of their knowledge.

In regard to key industries and sectors, tourism and hospitality was, by far, the most commonly mentioned, identified everywhere but Winnipeg. Other key industries and sectors tended to vary by area, and included the following:

- Winnipeg: Hydro, farming, lumber, nickel mines, manufacturing, construction and infrastructure.
- Nova Scotia: Ship building, fisheries, forestry.
- Lower Mainland B.C.: film, real estate/land development, post-secondary education.
- Windsor: automotive, education, healthcare, agriculture, and non-profits.
- Calgary: oil and gas, transportation, food manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare.

When it came to industries and sectors most in need of government support, participants in all locations primarily identified those most affected by COVID-19-related shut downs and restrictions, especially hospitality/tourism, which was the top mention in all groups, including Winnipeg. Small business was the only other common mention, referenced in both Windsor and Winnipeg. Beyond this, the arts and culture sector was identified in Nova Scotia as one already struggling before the pandemic; not-for-profits were identified in Windsor, and; land development was cited in Lower Mainland B.C. Participants in Calgary provided the longest list of sectors in need, including ones

affected by the pandemic, such as health care, education, and supply chain management, as well as the oil and gas sector, in general.

Asked to identify federal government support provided to struggling sectors and industries in their regions, participants commonly identified the range of emergency benefits provided to small business, primarily, in response to the pandemic. These included grants, rent supports and employee subsidies. Most felt that more was needed for businesses to survive the closures. In Calgary, participants also thought that more was needed to help those employed in the oil and gas sector, especially in transitioning to new jobs and industries.

Local Issues (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Nova Scotia, Calgary)

Within these four groups, participants were asked about the local issues of greatest concern in their region. While many responses were region-specific, common issues emerged related to unaffordable housing and homelessness, which came up in all groups but Calgary. Addiction and mental health were mentioned in all groups but Nova Scotia, and concerns for the economy and small business due to COVID-19 restrictions were cited in Hamilton and Nova Scotia.

In addition, participants in Winnipeg identified issues with road infrastructure, crime, inadequate funding/staffing for hospitals, and racism. In Hamilton, participants cited stagnating incomes and the rising cost of living. In Nova Scotia high rates of unemployment and poor road infrastructure were seen as pressing local issues. And in Calgary, participants identified issues with a new education curriculum, rider concerns with the local transit system, and poor communications from local police.

Infrastructure Challenges (Hamilton, Nova Scotia, Winnipeg, Lower Mainland B.C., Windsor)

Infrastructure issues were widely viewed as a top priority for local investment within these groups. Most commonly, participants identified a need for better roads and highways, expansion of mass transit systems, and more affordable housing. In both Winnipeg and Windsor, participants mentioned a need for more investments in clean water systems, and in both Windsor and Nova Scotia participants said that investments were needed to improve Internet service and infrastructure.

In addition, participants in Hamilton spoke about the need to expand the local airport, while in Windsor participants wanted to see investments that would lower the cost of electricity.

Hamilton Rapid Transit Project

Few participants in the Hamilton group were previously aware of the Government of Canada's recent announcement to help fund a Hamilton rapid transit project. Once told about it there was a general consensus that other issues, such as homelessness, were a higher priority and that this investment would primarily benefit only those living at either end of the transit system.

Lower Mainland BC - George Massey Tunnel

Several participants were familiar with plans to replace the George Massey Tunnel. Most were very supportive of this initiative and felt that it was long overdue.

Housing (Hamilton Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Lower Mainland B.C. Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Outaouais Region Vaccine Hesitant, Windsor, GMA Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Mid-size Centres Prairies Vaccine Rejecters)

Issues pertaining to housing and the housing market were raised for discussion in these groups, and they came up unprompted, as well, with several participants mentioning unaffordable housing and steeply rising costs for both rentals and purchases as pressing local concerns.

Across all groups and regions, participants agreed that housing prices had risen over the past year, including in smaller centres that had once been more affordable. Most felt that this was having a negative effect on the cost of living and becoming increasingly untenable. While many were looking to buy in the coming years, most agreed it was becoming more difficult to save for the down payment required, given the rise in costs for both purchases and rentals. For some, the costs were seen as prohibitive, and the increasing prospect of never owning a home represented a significant setback and disappointment.

Government of Canada Housing Initiatives

There was limited awareness of Government of Canada housing initiatives beyond the First Time Home Buyer Incentive and, to a lesser extent, the Home Buyers' Plan and the Mortgage Stress Test. Few felt that enough was in place to help people afford a home purchase.

Participants were shown a list of the following housing-related objectives from the 2021 federal budget and asked for their views:

- *Accelerate the creation of new units and the repair of existing units;*
- *Support the construction, repair, and operating costs of an estimated 560 units of transitional housing and shelter spaces for women and children fleeing violence; and*
- *Support the conversion of vacant commercial property (e.g. retail and office space) into rental housing.*

Several participants supported these initiatives but few were convinced that they would have much of an impact. Some, moreover, were opposed to what they viewed as government interference in the housing market. There was also some confusion about how these initiatives would work in practice to bring prices down, and whether they might unintentionally have the opposite effect.

Taxing the Unproductive Use of Canadian Housing

Only some had heard of the Government of Canada's plans to tax the unproductive use of Canadian housing by foreign non-resident owners (which participants were told was sometimes referred to in the media as a "foreign buyers tax"). Once provided with a description, most supported the tax and felt that it was a good idea, provided it was implemented properly and was high enough to influence the decisions of foreign buyers or motivate foreign owners to convert or sell vacant or underused properties. In groups conducted outside major urban centres, most felt that this tax would have a

greater impact on the real estate markets in cities like Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver than it would in their own community.

Mortgage Stress Test

While there was some awareness of the new mortgage stress test, few could recall any specifics. Those who could felt that the new rules were intended to make qualifying for a mortgage more difficult.

Provided with a description, participants were mostly positive about the change and viewed it as needed protection for prospective homeowners that would also help to cool down demand and rising prices for home purchases. Those who disliked the new mortgage rules felt that they would create new barriers to home ownership, making it even more inaccessible than before. Several participants felt that these new rules would negatively impact their own ability to qualify for a mortgage and purchase a home.

Additional Actions on Housing

Asked what else the federal government could or should do to make home ownership more accessible, participants offered several ideas, including the implementation of a universal basic income program, rent controls, the construction of more low-cost housing, increased funding for the First Time Home Buyer Incentive and other similar programs, or regulations that would mandate the construction of smaller, more affordable houses or limit the number of properties owned by landlords.

Western Economic Diversification Canada Branding (Calgary Parents of Children Aged 12-17)

Participants in Calgary were asked to review and evaluate two creative concepts for Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD), presented de-branded and applied to a set of creative mockups. Evaluations of the concepts looked at general likes and dislikes, comprehension, resonance and preferences for one concept over the other.

In terms of comprehension, participants generally understood that these ads were about the federal government promoting the region's economic diversity and strengths. There was some skepticism about this message, however, based on a shared view that the federal government was not doing enough in this regard. The use of the word prairies, moreover, in both concepts created some confusion, as most felt that it did not accurately describe Calgary or most of Alberta, and was incongruously juxtaposed with the mountain imagery used in the creative executions. When told that the concepts had been developed for Western Economic Development Canada, few knew much about the agency or felt that the ads provided much information about it beyond what was suggested by the name.

While neither concept stood out as an obvious winner in terms of appeal or clarity, some common likes and dislikes emerged. Overall, participants liked the bold and vibrant colours used in Concept A, which they found to be more eye-catching and appealing, and better at conveying the idea of a bold vision for the Alberta economy. Conversely, participants tended to prefer the main photographic images used in Concept B and felt that they did a better job at representing Alberta and Calgary and

aligning with what they felt was the main message of the ads regarding the region's diversity and strengths.

In regard to some specific design elements, participants tended to like the arrow used in Concept A and dislike the "p" graphic used in Concept B, which they found ambiguous and/or distracting. Participants generally liked the photographic imagery used in both concepts (especially those unique to concept B), and felt that they projected a positive image of Western Canada and the region's diversity.

Vehicle Emissions/Warning Labels and Zero Emission Vehicles (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours, Hamilton Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Nova Scotia Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Lower Mainland B.C. Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Outaouais Region Vaccine Hesitant, GMA Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years, Mid-size Centres Prairies Vaccine Rejecters, Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean Region Quebec, City of Toronto/York Region Parents of Children Aged 12-17, Atlantic Canada Young Adults)

Familiarity and Knowledge

There was limited familiarity with the term Zero Emissions Vehicles (ZEVs) in most groups, and even less knowledge of what the category included beyond electric vehicles. Based on the term, however, most understood that these vehicles were more environmentally friendly and less reliant on fossil fuels than traditional vehicles, although some felt this might be overstated, given the pollution involved in manufacturing and battery disposal, as well as battery charging, depending on the source of electricity.

To aid the discussion, a definition was provided explaining that these vehicles had the potential to produce no tailpipe emissions and included a variety of vehicle types, including electric models, hybrids, and vehicles powered by hydrogen fuel cells.

Interest, Incentives, and Barriers

Many saw themselves buying a ZEV at some point in the future, at least in the long-term, and were drawn by the desire to reduce their carbon footprint, primarily, and help fight climate change with the promise of greater sustainability. They also liked the idea of owning a car that was built with advanced technology.

Affordability was viewed as a major barrier, however, in regard to purchase price, as were the perceived lack of charging stations, especially in more rural areas, and the time, inconvenience and potential safety issues associated with having to charge a vehicle on the road versus just filling it up with gasoline. Participants also cited concerns with battery lifespan and disposal, reliability and maintenance, and functionality, range and performance (especially in cold weather and for long distances).

Asked what would make them more likely to purchase a ZEV, participants primarily pointed to greater affordability, a wider range of vehicle types and options, broader availability of supporting

infrastructure, and more knowledge of battery and range issues. While most liked the idea of buying Canadian-made ZEVs and components, only those in Quebec said that they would be encouraged to buy a ZEV if it was Canadian made. For most, cost was the most important factor, followed by reliability/performance.

Affordability

There was a strong consensus in all groups that high functioning ZEVs were presently quite expensive to buy, equivalent to luxury brands, and were primarily for wealthier individuals. Issues of affordability were also linked to concerns over maintenance and charging infrastructure. That said, in jurisdictions where electricity was affordable, there was a sense that ZEVs would be cheaper to fuel and could provide cost saving over the longer term. Most also assumed that purchase, maintenance and charging costs would inevitably come down over the next ten years, based on wider adoption, technological advances, and a more mature second-hand market. Most also agreed that costs would go down if manufacturers were forced to make 100 per cent of their vehicles ZEVs, but there was anxiety about that as well, with many believing that costs for consumers would go up initially, potentially forcing consumers to purchase a more expensive vehicle than they could afford. In the Winnipeg group, where participants were asked for their views regarding the idea of making ZEVs mandatory, many were concerned about the impact this would have on consumers in the short term, as they felt that costs would be higher and functionality and performance lower.

Battery Charging

Many participants readily indicated that they knew very little on this topic, although most still had a view that charging could be a lengthy process and that there was little charging infrastructure in place to readily accommodate it. Those with more knowledge, however, viewed the charging process as an easy one to both undergo and describe to others.

Electric Vehicle Target Setting

Participants in most groups were asked how they felt about the possibility of the Government of Canada setting targets requiring some or all of cars sold in Canada to be electric. Overall, there were mixed opinions towards the idea, with opposition in some groups and support in others.

There was general opposition in the Winnipeg, Prairies, Nova Scotia and Toronto/York groups, where participants expressed a wide range of concerns related to consumer costs, vehicle functionality, and personal choice and freedom, primarily, as well as the possibility that this policy could result in unethical business practices or negative impacts on the oil and gas industry in Canada. Support was conditional in the Atlantic Canada young adults group, and strongest among those from Lower Mainland B.C., the Outaouais region, and Greater Montreal. Even here, however, many expressed concern with the same list of issues described above and felt that they would have to be managed carefully and thoughtfully by the federal government.

Vehicle Emission Warning Labels (Winnipeg Experiencing COVID Fatigue and Riskier Behaviours and Hamilton Non-Homeowners Looking to Purchase in Next 5 Years)

Participants in these two groups were asked about the idea of having pollution warning labels for the highest polluting cars, trucks and SUVs, affixed at point of sale. In Winnipeg, all participants were opposed to the idea, as were some in Hamilton. Many thought it was impractical, and unnecessary. Those in favour of the initiative in the Hamilton group, did not raise strong discussion points but simply felt that the labels might be effective in helping to steer purchasers towards less polluting vehicles.

MORE INFORMATION

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