



Government
of Canada

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Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – March 2022

Executive Summary

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Canada 

Executive Summary

Introduction

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

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

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

This report includes findings from 12 online focus groups which were conducted between March 3rd and 30th, 2022 in multiple locations across the country including Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario,

Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Yukon. 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 prevalent issues within Canada, specifically the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as well as the response by the Government of Canada and allies to the conflict in Ukraine. The research explored a wide range of related issues in depth, including what Canadians were hearing about the Government of Canada in the news, recent developments related to Ukraine and the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel (CUAET), the upcoming federal Budget 2022, and the recent 'Convoy' protests which took place in Ottawa and other locations throughout the country. Participants were also asked for their perspectives on COVID-19, including forecasts regarding the spread of COVID-19 in the near term, attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccine booster doses, and views regarding those who have chosen to remain unvaccinated.

Those residing in northern British Columbia were asked for their views related to the federal government's progress on addressing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Individuals in financially precarious situations residing in the Halton and Peel regions of Ontario also discussed their views on affordable housing in their area. Other topics included net-zero oil, firearms, healthcare, child care, seniors' issues, youth issues, rabies, and various local issues. Specifically, conversations regarding child care were held among parents of children under 12 in Ontario-U.S. border cities, seniors' issues with seniors residing in the Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean region of Quebec, and youth issues with young adults in 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 seniors aged 55 or older, parents of children under 12, young adults aged 18-30, those who are financially precarious, heavy social media users, and racialized Canadians.

Detailed Approach

- 12 focus groups across various regions in Canada.
- Five groups were conducted with the general population in Ottawa, Newfoundland, the Yukon, rural Manitoba, and northern British Columbia.
- The other seven groups were conducted with key subgroups including:

- Seniors, aged 55 or older, residing in Newfoundland;
 - Parents of children under 12 residing in Ontario-United States border cities and Trois-Rivières;
 - Young adults, aged 18-30, residing in Calgary;
 - Those who are financially precarious residing in Halton and Peel regions;
 - Heavy social media users residing in major centres in Saskatchewan; and
 - Racialized Canadians residing in the Greater Montreal Area (GMA).
- Groups in Quebec were conducted in French. All other groups were conducted in English.
 - All groups for this cycle were conducted online.
 - A total of 8 participants were recruited for each group, assuming 6 to 8 participants would attend.
 - Across all locations, 82 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
Ottawa – Ontario	1	English	Mar. 3	6:00-8:00 pm	General Population	8
Newfoundland	2	English	Mar. 8	4:30-6:30 pm	General Population	7
Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean Region – Quebec	3	French	Mar. 9	6:00-8:00 pm	Seniors, aged 55+	7
Ontario/US Border Cities	4	English	Mar. 10	6:00-8:00 pm	Parents of Children under 12	8
Yukon	5	English	Mar. 15	9:00-11:00 pm	General Population	5
Rural Manitoba	6	English	Mar. 16	7:00-9:00 pm	General Population	7
Trois-Rivières – Quebec	7	French	Mar. 17	6:00-8:00 pm	Parents of Children under 12	5
Calgary – Alberta	8	English	Mar. 22	8:00-10:00 pm	Young Adults, aged 18-30	8
Northern British Columbia	9	English	Mar. 23	9:00-11:00 pm	General Population	8
Halton & Peel Regions – Ontario	10	English	Mar. 24	6:00-8:00 pm	Financially Precarious	6
Major Centres Saskatchewan	11	English	Mar. 29	8:00-10:00 pm	Heavy Social Media Users	5
Greater Montreal Area	12	French	Mar. 30	6:00-8:00 pm	Racialized Canadians	8

Key Findings

Government of Canada in the News (All Locations)

Among recent initiatives and announcements related to the federal government, the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia as well as the response from the Government of Canada and other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies was top of mind among participants. Several recalled troubling stories and images emerging from the humanitarian crisis, federal attempts to prepare for the potential influx of displaced Ukrainians into Canada, the announcement of sanctions on various Russian individuals and entities, the provision of financial and military aid to Ukraine by the Government of Canada, and the prime minister's recent trip to several European countries to discuss the coordinated response with NATO allies.

In addition to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, many participants mentioned the Government of Canada's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as anticipated changes to existing COVID-19 public health measures. Several recalled hearing that the federal government had announced it would soon be loosening a number of requirements related to international travel, as well as potentially allowing for a larger number of federal employees to return to the office after almost two years of working from home. A few participants also mentioned the recent implementation (and subsequent removal) of the Emergencies Act by the Government of Canada in response to the protests which took place in Ottawa and other parts of the country throughout February 2022.

Many participants also recalled a wide variety of other recent actions and announcements from the federal government unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included the decision by the Bank of Canada to raise interest rates in response to concerns regarding high inflation, the launch of the Canada Digital Adoption Program (CDAP), the upcoming release of the federal government's Budget 2022, and the announcement of *Delivering for Canadians Now, A Supply and Confidence Agreement*, an agreement between the Liberal Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party that will last until Parliament rises in June 2025.

Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (Major Centres Saskatchewan Heavy Social Media Users, Greater Montreal Area Racialized Canadians)

Two groups engaged in further discussions regarding the Government of Canada, specifically focused on which areas they felt the federal government should prioritize going forward. Discussing the most pressing issues for the Government of Canada to focus on at present, participants mentioned priorities such as expanding and bolstering provincial/territorial healthcare systems, improving the quality of education at all levels, addressing housing affordability, curbing the perceived high rate of inflation,

further emphasis on protecting the environment and mitigating the impacts of climate change, and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Asked what they had seen, read, or heard about recent actions by the Government of Canada regarding any of these priorities, few participants could recall anything. It was felt by many that the COVID-19 pandemic had taken up much of the energy and resources of the federal government over the past two years and, as a result, minimal action had been taken on a number of other important issues. Discussing the overall performance of the federal government towards addressing these identified priorities, while a small number felt the Government of Canada was on the wrong track, most were either uncertain or believed it was difficult to provide a proper evaluation given the ongoing complications of the pandemic. Moving forward, it was felt the response to the COVID-19 pandemic would continue to be a major federal priority, along with other issues such as climate change and the environment, inflation, employment, as well as continued efforts to coordinate a response with NATO allies regarding the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

News Sources and Preferences (Major Centres Saskatchewan Heavy Social Media Users)

One group, comprised of participants identified as prolific social media users, were asked additional questions regarding the sources they typically use to receive daily news. While several participants reported frequently using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to get their news, most also continued to utilize more traditional media such as television (CBC, CTV, Global News), radio, and newspapers (both in print form, as well as via apps). Asked whether they felt social media platforms were generally reliable as a source for news, most felt this was not the case, believing that headlines on social media were often intentionally written to be inflammatory or attention-grabbing. With this in mind, it was generally felt that while social media was beneficial in its ability to spotlight a wide diversity of perspectives, information found on these platforms should be verified through other trusted sources, such as official websites operated by federal or provincial/territorial governments.

Coastal GasLink (Northern British Columbia)

Participants in northern British Columbia (B.C.) engaged in an additional discussion regarding the Coastal GasLink project, a natural gas pipeline currently under construction spanning from Dawson Creek to Kitimat, B.C. While few reported following the matter closely, a number of participants recalled having recently heard about a number of issues related to the project, including criticism in the media regarding potential environmental risks, unresolved land claims with Indigenous peoples regarding the territory upon which the pipeline was being built, as well as reports of a recent armed attack by protestors on employees and security guards working at a project site near Houston, B.C. Several participants expressed frustration at these developments, believing far too many outside voices were currently weighing in on what they felt to be a primarily local issue.

Asked whether the federal government had a role to play in this project, all participants felt that it did, believing the management of Canada's energy resources and the ability to export them to global markets was an issue of national importance. It was widely felt the project had been portrayed unfairly in a negative light both by its opponents as well as in the media at large and that the federal government should devote greater efforts towards dispelling what several felt to be 'disinformation'

regarding the project. A few also thought the federal government should work to engage in greater collaboration with the Government of British Columbia, believing the establishment of a cohesive strategy on this issue at both the provincial and federal levels would help to ease tensions regarding the construction of this pipeline. Discussing what they would like to see happen regarding the Coastal GasLink project, most participants expressed support for the project, focusing on the potential positive benefits it could bring to their local communities as well as to Canada as a whole. For the few who were more skeptical or opposed to the project, it was felt the potential environmental risks needed to be balanced with the projected economic benefits, and that greater assurances needed to be provided that the construction and operation of the pipeline would not cause long-term damage to the coastal environment and marine ecosystem.

Prince Rupert Port Expansion (Northern British Columbia)

The group composed of participants living in Northern British Columbia also briefly discussed a recent plan by the Prince Rupert Port Authority (PRPA) to double its capacity by constructing a second container terminal, a move which would significantly increase the PRPA's volume of trade with Asia-Pacific markets. Asked for their thoughts on the project, all participants thought it sounded like a strong initiative, though a few felt they did not know enough about the subject to provide a proper evaluation. Many felt the expansion of the Port of Prince Rupert would be beneficial in that it would likely remove congestion from other busy ports such as the Port of Vancouver, while also driving higher employment and economic growth in Prince Rupert and other nearby communities. While many said the federal government should support this project going forward, some believed this assistance should be accompanied by well-articulated regulations regarding safety protocols and ways to mitigate any potential negative impacts on the environment and to local communities.

Ukraine (Ontario-U.S. Border Cities Parents of Children under 12, Rural Manitoba, Trois-Rivières Parents of Children under 12, Calgary Young Adults, Northern British Columbia, Halton and Peel Regions Financially Precarious, Greater Montreal Area Racialized Canadians)

Seven groups engaged in extended discussions regarding the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which began following the Russian invasion of Ukrainian territory on February 24th, 2022. These conversations focused primarily on awareness of recent developments related to the conflict, perceptions of the Government of Canada's response to the crisis, as well as efforts by the federal government to assist and accommodate Ukrainian citizens displaced by the conflict.

Government of Canada Response (Ontario-U.S. Border Cities Parents of Children under 12, Rural Manitoba, Trois-Rivières Parents of Children under 12, Calgary Young Adults, Northern British Columbia, Halton and Peel Regions Financially Precarious)

Participants in six groups discussed the Government of Canada's ongoing response to this crisis. Asked what they had recently seen, read, or heard regarding federal actions related to the situation in Ukraine, participants mentioned collaboration by the Government of Canada with North Atlantic Treaty Organizations (NATO) allies to coordinate a comprehensive response, the provision of financial and military aid to assist Ukraine and its defence forces in their efforts to repel the Russian incursion, and

humanitarian efforts to assist and provide safe haven to Ukrainian citizens displaced by the conflict. Several recalled hearing that the Government of Canada had accelerated the temporary resident pathway for those fleeing the conflict in efforts to bring these individuals to Canada and assist them in reuniting with family members wherever possible.

Perspectives and Forecast (Rural Manitoba, Trois-Rivières Parents of Children under 12, Calgary Young Adults, Northern British Columbia, Halton and Peel Regions Financially Precarious)

Five groups continued these discussions further, sharing their opinions regarding the crisis, its personal impact on them, as well as how they expected the conflict may unfold in the weeks and months to come. Discussing the response from the Government of Ukraine, participants were asked if they were aware of any specific actions Ukraine had requested of the Government of Canada in recent days. A wide range of responses were offered, including calls for NATO to implement a 'no-fly zone' above Ukraine, requests for additional financial assistance and military support, as well as stricter sanctions on Russian individuals and entities. Almost all participants felt these requests, while possibly placing the Government of Canada in a difficult situation, were understandable given the devastation the Ukrainian people had suffered to date as a result of the Russian invasion. While participants reiterated a desire for Canada to assist in any way it could, most remained hesitant about the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) or NATO taking a more direct role in defending Ukraine, expressing concern that this could escalate the conflict further and potentially put Canadian lives at risk.

Asked if they felt personally impacted by the conflict, while few reported being directly affected, several felt the crisis in Ukraine had negatively impacted their mental health. This was particularly felt to be the case for those who had personal connections to Ukraine and were witnessing the effects of the conflict on a far more visceral level. Discussing the potential long-term ramifications of this crisis, several were of the view that it would take decades for Ukraine to rebuild its nation and recover economically and socially in the wake of the destruction that had already taken place. It was felt by some this conflict would cause generational trauma among Ukrainian people and their loved ones and that many of these individuals would need ongoing mental health support. A number of participants shared concerns that if nothing was done to halt Russia's advance into Ukraine, it was possible that other neighbouring countries could also fall under attack.

Focusing on Canada more specifically, a few thought it likely that calls for greater federal defence spending may become more prominent, particularly if the CAF were to take a more direct role in the conflict. Some also expected there to be a larger focus on increasing the capacity for producing goods and services domestically within Canada, with a greater emphasis on self-sustainability and less dependency on imports. A few also expressed concerns regarding the mental health of younger Canadians, feeling the outbreak of conflict combined with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic could be overwhelming for those coming of age during this period. Asked how they felt the conflict may unfold going forward, most felt it was difficult to predict what may happen, feeling there were a multitude of interrelated factors to consider. This being said, few felt the conflict would end soon, with many reiterating concerns regarding potential escalation into a larger conflict and the possible deployment of nuclear weapons by Russia. Discussing whether there was more they felt the federal government could be doing in response to the crisis, several said the Government of Canada should work with its

allies to continue to put diplomatic pressure on Russia to end the conflict. While a few were not necessarily opposed to increasing the CAF presence in the region, they felt this would have to be done very cautiously and with clear guidelines regarding the specific role of Canada's military personnel. Rather than increase its physical presence in the region, several thought the Government of Canada should prioritize welcoming as many Ukrainians fleeing the conflict as possible, believing Canada could take on a leadership role on this front.

Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (Calgary Young Adults, Northern British Columbia, Halton and Peel Regions Financially Precarious, Greater Montreal Area Racialized Canadians)

Four groups were asked a series of questions specifically focusing on the Government of Canada's readiness to accommodate a potential influx of Ukrainians fleeing conflict. To begin, participants were asked if they felt their own communities (and Canada more generally) were sufficiently prepared to receive a large number of Ukrainians. In response, about as many participants felt their communities were prepared as those who expressed concern they may not have the resources to accommodate these individuals. Among those more uncertain regarding their community's readiness to accept Ukrainians fleeing the conflict, housing was the most commonly mentioned concern. It was felt that given the perceived lack of housing in many regions throughout the country, a sudden influx of individuals in need of safe and affordable housing could serve to exacerbate this problem further. A few were also uncertain as to whether there was enough capacity to provide essential services such as healthcare for these individuals, given the perceived strain on provincial/territorial healthcare systems due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By contrast, many of those who felt their communities were well-prepared to accommodate those fleeing the conflict took the view that this influx of individuals represented a vital opportunity for Canada, providing the Canadian economy with a boost of talented workers who could immediately contribute in a number of industries and sectors. Irrespective of whether they felt their communities were prepared to accommodate this influx, many participants reiterated the view that assisting these individuals and providing them with a safe haven was of critical importance.

Asked what would need to happen for the Government of Canada to be better prepared to accommodate those displaced by the conflict, participants provided a number of responses. These included the creation of a long-term plan to address this temporary increase in immigration, the development of programming (such as language classes) designed to assist these individuals in building a life in their new communities, bolstering provincial/territorial healthcare systems to accommodate increased demand, and ensuring the provision of mental health services for any individuals requiring treatment upon arrival in Canada. Discussing what they felt success would look like when it came to accommodating Ukrainians fleeing the conflict, a number of participants were of the view that success would be represented by the safe return of these individuals to their homeland at some point after the conflict had ended. Others looked at the issue somewhat differently, believing the most successful outcome would be the seamless integration and long-term settlement of these individuals within Canada.

Relatively few participants recalled having heard anything about a recent announcement from the Government of Canada regarding the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel (CUAET). Provided with some details regarding the plan, most commented that it appeared to be a strong initiative, with many feeling the three-year term was sufficient to determine whether these individuals would be able to return to their homeland or would need to be provided with a formalized pathway to permanent residency and citizenship in order to remain in Canada over the long-term. It was strongly felt by many that this was the right thing to do and that local communities would benefit immensely from the skills, expertise, and culture these people would bring. A number of participants mentioned they would be willing to offer up housing in the form of unused suites or additional rooms in their homes, while others were open to assisting with language classes, logistical planning, sourcing food, clothing and other supplies, or volunteering their time as a social contact for these individuals, helping them acclimatize themselves to their new surroundings.

COVID-19 Outlook (Newfoundland, Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean Seniors, Rural Manitoba, Trois-Rivières Parents of Children under 12, Major Centres Saskatchewan Heavy Social Media Users, Greater Montreal Area Racialized Canadians)

Participants in six groups discussed a wide range of issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included evaluations of the Government of Canada's response to the pandemic, perspectives on public health measures and other pandemic-related initiatives, COVID-19 vaccinations for children, and the continued encouragement of Canadians to get their third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

COVID-19 Performance Evaluation (Newfoundland, Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean Seniors, Rural Manitoba, Trois-Rivières Parents of Children under 12)

To begin, participants were asked to recall anything they thought the Government of Canada had done well in its response to the pandemic. Participants recalled a number of federal actions and initiatives, including consistent and transparent communication throughout the pandemic, the provision of financial supports such as the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), the implementation of safe and effective federal public health measures and travel requirements, and the widespread and effective distribution of COVID-19 vaccines throughout the country.

Asked to identify areas where the Government of Canada's response could have been improved, participants also put forward a number of suggestions. These included perceived inefficient management of the CERB and other financial supports, the need for further targeted measures towards assisting small-business owners and self-employed Canadians, as well as the continued implementation of federal vaccine mandates and other pandemic-related public health requirements which some felt to represent significant 'overreach' by the federal government.

Discussing whether the Government of Canada's management of the pandemic at present was better, the same, or worse when compared to earlier stages of the pandemic, participants expressed a variety of opinions. While, on balance, more participants felt the federal government was performing worse as of late when compared to earlier in the pandemic, a smaller yet significant number felt differently, believing federal performance had either improved over time or remained relatively the same

throughout. For those participants who thought the federal government's handling of the virus was better at present compared to the initial months of the pandemic, most believed federal public health officials now knew much more about the virus and had gained a greater understanding regarding which measures were most effective at limiting and managing the transmission of COVID-19. Others spoke positively about what they perceived as a high degree of adaptability on the part of the federal government, believing it had done an effective job at evolving its approach in response to the ever-changing circumstances of the pandemic. Among the larger number who believed the Government of Canada's management of the virus had worsened as the pandemic went on, several felt the federal approach at present lacked direction, as public health officials continued to maintain public health measures and requirements these participants felt were no longer effective in curbing the spread of COVID-19.

Participants from rural Manitoba and Trois-Rivières were asked an additional question regarding the overall impact of public health measures such as hand-washing, mask-wearing, and social distancing during the pandemic. Most in the group from Manitoba were of the view that these measures had little impact overall, with some feeling that in many cases they had done more harm than good. It was felt that younger Canadians in particular had struggled with mental health issues throughout the pandemic, and that measures such as mask-wearing and social distancing had only exacerbated the issue. While generally more supportive of these public health measures and their impact, some participants in the group from Trois-Rivières also recalled suffering anxiety related to following these measures.

The two groups from Quebec as well as the group from Newfoundland were also asked whether they felt the spread of COVID-19 might get worse in the near future. Almost all participants felt the worst of the pandemic had passed. Among these participants, it was felt the additional protection provided by the COVID-19 vaccine had served to drastically reduce more serious outcomes associated with the virus and, due to the high national rate of vaccination among Canadians, many believed it was now safe for communities to return to a state of greater normalcy. In addition, some also expected that even without restrictions many Canadians would continue to practice certain public safety measures such as wearing face masks, frequent hand washing, and social distancing when ill and that this would contribute towards limiting the potential spread of the virus. For the small number who thought the pandemic could still get worse in the months to come, it was felt the removal of restrictions such as mask mandates and proof-of-vaccination systems in numerous provinces and territories may bring about a temporary spike in cases, leading to increased strain on the healthcare system in the short-term.

The group from Newfoundland were asked an additional question regarding vaccine mandates, and whether they felt these had been helpful or harmful tools throughout the pandemic. All participants were of the view that vaccine requirements had been largely harmful, believing they had been divisive, ineffective, and unfairly targeted those who had made the personal decision to not get vaccinated.

COVID-19 Perspectives and Behaviours (Major Centres Saskatchewan Heavy Social Media Users, Greater Montreal Area Racialized Canadians)

Two groups were asked a selection of questions regarding their attitudes and behaviours regarding COVID-19. Discussing whether they were presently worried about the continued spread of COVID-19, most said the pandemic was no longer a front of mind issue for them, with many stating that they were trying to move on from the pandemic as best as possible. Expanding upon this, a number of participants reported having experienced the virus first hand in recent months, either by contracting it themselves or knowing friends or loved ones who had. Among these individuals, it was felt this experience had generally served to provide greater reassurance that the virus was manageable in most situations. A small number reported remaining at least somewhat concerned regarding the spread of COVID-19, believing the virus may continue to mutate, while a few others were primarily worried about the fallout of the pandemic, particularly the economic and mental health issues they perceived as currently impacting a large number of Canadians.

While most felt daily life was gradually returning to normal, particularly following the removal of public health measures such as mask mandates and proof-of-vaccination systems in many provinces and territories, a large number of participants indicated that they would likely continue to practice some new behaviours in the wake of the pandemic. Discussing whether they would be uncomfortable being around someone who had chosen not to get vaccinated, no participants in the group from Saskatchewan saw this as an issue, while those in the group from Montreal were roughly split on the matter. Among those who were comfortable with being around non-vaccinated individuals, it was primarily felt the decision to get vaccinated was a personal one and, given the perception that vaccinated and non-vaccinated individuals can both transmit the virus, it was felt this did not make much of a difference regarding the level of safety of those who were fully vaccinated. Among those who did express some discomfort, it was felt that non-vaccinated individuals presented an increased health risk to others and for that reason they would rather not associate with them.

COVID-19 Vaccines for Children (Trois-Rivières Parents of Children under 12)

The group from Trois-Rivières, comprised of parents with children under the age of 12, briefly discussed COVID-19 vaccines approved by Health Canada in late 2021 for use in children ages 5 to 11. Most participants reported having gotten their children vaccinated and having previously discussed the matter with their children who themselves had then made the decision to receive their vaccines. A number of parents recalled taking time to explain the vaccines to their children, with some using additional resources, such as videos from public health experts on YouTube, to demonstrate the reasoning behind why one should get vaccinated. For the small number who had chosen not to get their children vaccinated, it was recalled that while they had discussed the matter with their children, they did not believe there to be an urgent need for them to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and had decided as a family to remain unvaccinated for the time being.

COVID-19 Booster Dose (Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean Seniors, Rural Manitoba, Trois-Rivières Parents of Children under 12)

Discussing whether they had received their third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, otherwise known as the 'booster dose', participants in these three groups had mixed responses, particularly by region. While all participants in the group comprised of seniors from Quebec's Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean region had received their third dose, only half of those from Trois-Rivières had done so. No participants in the group from rural Manitoba had received their booster dose, with only a few having gotten their initial COVID-19 vaccinations. Asked whether they had any questions regarding the booster dose, no participants in the group from Manitoba wished to discuss the matter, with many staunchly opposed to the booster as well as the COVID-19 vaccine more generally. Among the two groups in Quebec, while most were fairly comfortable regarding the booster, some had questions as to the long-term efficacy of the booster, whether annual or semi-annual doses would be required going forward, and whether the vaccine would be updated to account for newly emerging variants in the future. A small number also questioned whether the Canadian-produced Medicargo vaccine would soon be more widely available and whether it would be presented as a booster dose option moving forward.

Budget 2022 (Yukon, Rural Manitoba, Trois-Rivières Parents of Children under 12, Calgary Young Adults, Northern British Columbia, Halton and Peel Regions Financially Precarious)

Six groups discussed the upcoming 2022 Budget, scheduled to be unveiled by the federal government on April 7th, 2022.

To begin, participants were asked to identify which areas or initiatives they expected the Budget would primarily focus on. A wide range of responses were provided, including inflation, reducing federal spending, housing affordability, healthcare, reconciliation, climate change and the environment, as well as increased defence spending, particularly given the recent outbreak of conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

Participants were next asked what priorities they personally felt the Government of Canada should focus on in the upcoming Budget. Once again, a number of responses were provided, including affordable housing, climate change, increased development of natural resources such as oil and gas, inflation, education, healthcare, mental health and addictions treatment, infrastructure improvements, increased defence spending, and reconciliation. A large number of participants were particularly focused on issues related to what they felt to be the rapidly rising cost of living within Canada, which several felt was becoming increasingly difficult to manage for many Canadian families.

Asked if they could think of any programs or initiatives that had been announced in previous Budgets by the Government of Canada, very few participants could. Though unable to recall any specific initiatives by name, some participants were of the impression that previous federal Budgets had focused upon key federal priorities such as child care, education, housing, healthcare, Indigenous issues, and environmentally focused initiatives.

Net-Zero Oil (Ottawa, Newfoundland, Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean Seniors, Ontario-U.S. Border Cities Parents of Children under 12)

Four groups discussed the topic of net-zero oil as well as other matters related to resource development within Canada. To begin, participants were asked whether they believed the world was currently facing a climate emergency. Most felt this to be the case, believing the evidence of climate change was clear in terms of what they felt to be consistently rising annual temperatures, as well as the increased prevalence of natural disasters and extreme weather events in recent years. Many recounted having personally observed this gradual warming over the course of their lifetimes, with several specifically mentioning feeling temperatures were generally warmer now than in decades past, with far less snow and ice present in the winter months.

Asked if they had previously heard the term 'net-zero oil', while some indicated awareness of what this might entail, a larger number of participants were mostly unfamiliar with the term. Among those who had heard of it, it was thought net-zero oil referred to the practice of reducing or offsetting emissions produced during the extraction, transportation, and refinement of oil. Several participants thought this was generally done by oil companies by employing more sustainable extraction processes, reducing emissions in other areas, or reinvesting profits from oil and other non-renewable energy sources into 'greener', more sustainable technology.

Discussing whether they felt it was realistic for oil companies to move towards more net-zero projects in the future, while most believed this was likely possible from a technological perspective, participants were widely pessimistic as to whether oil companies would be willing to take on the additional costs and diminished profits such a change may entail. While most were of the view that Canadians generally favoured more sustainable, environmentally-friendly resource development practices, few felt consumers would be willing to accept the significantly higher costs that may accompany them, especially given the perceived high rate of inflation and rising cost of living at present. A small number of participants felt that rather than focusing on and investing in developing net-zero extraction technology, there should be a greater emphasis on transitioning away from oil and non-renewable energy sources, believing there to be no way to safely extract and utilize these resources without incurring some forms of environmental damage.

Asked whether they felt oil companies being able to reach net-zero emissions would make a significant impact towards helping the Government of Canada reach its emissions targets in the future, many participants expressed a significant degree of uncertainty. While most thought it would certainly help, it was generally felt that net-zero extraction practices would not be enough on their own to mitigate the growing issue of climate change. Some also thought that even if Canada were able to meet its emissions targets, climate change remained a global issue and one that required all countries, including major emitters such as China and India, to participate in order for significant progress to be made. While a smaller number of participants were more positive, believing any step towards greater sustainability was a positive one, a few others questioned whether achieving net-zero oil extraction would be worth the economic costs necessary to do so. Several reiterated the view that there needed to be a general transition away from non-renewable energy, and a greater emphasis on investment in alternative sources such as wind, solar, and hydro to meet the energy needs of Canadians.

Focusing on recent gasoline prices in Canada, which were believed to have risen substantially, partially in response to the conflict in Ukraine, participants were asked whether these developments had changed their views on how the Government of Canada should manage oil production within Canada. While a number of participants, particularly in the group from Newfoundland, felt the federal government should focus on developing a greater portion of Canada's oil resources for domestic use and export to international markets, more remained skeptical as to whether this represented the best path forward. For the significant number of participants hesitant about increasing the extraction and development of Canadian oil reserves, it was generally expressed that while Canada should be able to benefit from its non-renewable resources, there should be a greater focus on developing alternative, more sustainable energy sources. Some also felt there needed to be a greater understanding of the true environmental and economic toll of extracting oil from regions such as the oil sands in Alberta and Saskatchewan, believing this process was far more costly and complicated than many perceived it to be. To address these energy challenges going forward, a number of participants suggested the Government of Canada should focus on creating a long-term, holistic strategy with regards to how best to exploit domestic oil and gas while reinvesting revenue from these exports into more sustainable technology and energy production.

Convoy Protests & Emergencies Act (Ottawa, Ontario-U.S. Border Cities Parents of Children under 12, Rural Manitoba, Major Centres Saskatchewan Heavy Social Media Users)

Four groups discussed the 'convoy' protests that took place in Ottawa and other parts of the country throughout February 2022. To begin these conversations, participants were asked to share their initial thoughts when reflecting back on these protests. Across all groups, a roughly similar number of individuals spoke negatively about the protests as those who expressed support, with several others more uncertain as to how they felt about the protests overall.

Among those more opposed to the protests, many felt that in pursuing their proposed goal of ending COVID-19-related mandates and establishing greater personal freedoms for Canadians the protests had unfairly infringed upon the rights of those residing near the protest sites to live in peace. This was felt to be especially the case for those residing in downtown Ottawa, who had been more severely inconvenienced by ongoing noise and other disturbances, including incessant horn honking for weeks on end. Several recalled feeling emotionally drained after following these protests and believed it to be somewhat disturbing that these scenes were unfolding in the nation's capital and elsewhere across the country.

For participants more supportive of these demonstrations, several expressed feeling encouraged and uplifted by what they felt to be a primarily 'grassroots' movement of people coming together from across Canada to protest what they felt to be unfair and unnecessary public health requirements. Among those in favour of the protests, it was generally thought the gatherings had been mostly peaceful and that the protestors had been unfairly treated by law enforcement and public officials. In addition, several participants believed that the coverage of these protests in the media had been almost entirely one-sided and had portrayed the demonstrations in a disproportionately negative light.

Feeling more uncertain as to their views on these protests, a number of participants believed the entire situation had been incredibly divisive and the strong emotions on both sides of the issue left them feeling somewhat uncomfortable. Many of these participants were of the view that while each individual should have the right to free and peaceful protest, these demonstrations in many instances went too far in disrupting and negatively impacting the day-to-day lives of those living nearby.

Discussing what they felt to be the overall impact of the protests, participants were once again mixed in their opinions. Many thought these demonstrations and the groundswell of emotion they evoked amongst Canadians had left the country significantly divided. Participants were roughly divided on whether they felt policy changes would occur as a result of these protests. While a number of participants thought the protests would have little to no lasting tangible impact, several pointed to the expedient removal of mask mandates and proof of vaccination systems in provinces such as Alberta and Saskatchewan (among others), believing the protests had played a major part in encouraging provincial and territorial governments to take this step.

Focusing on the decision by the federal government to invoke the Emergencies Act on February 14th, 2022 in response to the protests, participants were varied in their views. Several of those who felt the Act should not have been invoked were also primarily opposed to the protests and felt the Act would not have been necessary in the first place if more had been done at all levels of government to quell the protests in their initial days. Among those who were more supportive of the protests, it was felt the use of the Act represented significant overreach by the federal government. For participants in support of the use of the Act, it was believed that at the stage it was invoked it represented the best option available for the Government of Canada to put an effective end to the disruption caused by the protests.

Asked if there was anything the federal government should have done differently in response to the protests, a number of responses were provided. Many of those opposed to the protests felt greater efforts could have been taken to limit the size and scope of the protests in their initial days, rather than allowing them to become entrenched for the longer-term. Among those in support of the movement and its stated goals of ending mandates, it was felt a greater effort should have been taken by the federal government to establish a dialogue with the protestors and listen to their concerns. It was thought that the perceived lack of engagement by the federal government with the protestors only served to intensify these demonstrations.

Local Perspectives (Ottawa, Ontario-U.S. Border Cities Parents of Children under 12)

Participants from Ottawa as well as cities in close proximity to the Ontario-U.S. border engaged in further discussions regarding the Convoy protests, primarily focusing on their personal experiences and perspectives regarding these demonstrations.

While few participants felt personally affected by the protests, apart from experiencing delays and general difficulty in moving about their communities due to the influx of people and traffic, many expressed discomfort at having witnessed them unfold, with those from Ottawa particularly concerned regarding the negative impact they felt these protests had on those residing near Parliament Hill. Asked if they had changed their views regarding these demonstrations as time went on, most

participants recalled being somewhat open to the protests initially, feeling that everyone was entitled the right to peaceful protest. Once the protests began, however, many became more opposed to the demonstrations, believing they represented an unfair imposition on the communities in which they were taking place. Many in the Ottawa group felt their opinion towards the protests had become more negative after they heard first-hand from personal connections living in the downtown core regarding the disturbances caused by those protesting. Discussing how the protests affected their community as a whole, many in the group from Ottawa reiterated the view that the whole situation had been incredibly divisive, and these protests had created what they felt to be a stark separation between those who were 'for' or 'against' the movement. Several reported experiencing this divisiveness first hand in interactions with friends, family, colleagues, and other acquaintances.

Almost all participants in both groups felt the convoy protests were much different in character than other demonstrations they had previously encountered. Several identified the sheer length of the protests as a major differentiator in addition to the presence of large trucks at several protest sites, which increased the difficulty encountered by law enforcement in clearing these individuals and vehicles out. A number of participants also felt these protests were generally handled differently by the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) and other law enforcement officials, believing there was a more 'hands-off' approach taken towards these demonstrators compared to other protests in the past.

Focusing on the removal of the protests, most felt the increased presence of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the invoking of the Emergencies Act had been critical in putting an end to these demonstrations, sending a message that the federal government was taking the matter very seriously. Asked how the implementation of the Act had changed things, it was felt the arrests of key leaders and seizure of vehicles and other equipment by law enforcement had served to demonstrate the potential consequences faced by those who refused to leave the protest sites peacefully.

Discussing the protests in Ottawa in particular, participants were asked which level of government they felt was ultimately responsible for managing these protests. Though some felt the City of Ottawa and OPS should have done more to quell the protests, many reiterated calls for a stronger response from the federal government in the initial days of the protests. It was thought by many that ultimately the management of these protests was a federal responsibility, particularly given the massive protest site at Parliament Hill and the movement's stated goal of ending vaccine requirements for truckers entering Canada. A number of participants felt there should have been a coordinated, multi-jurisdictional effort at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels towards the protests, feeling questions over jurisdiction had only served to delay the response further.

Regarding the City of Ottawa and the OPS more specifically, many felt the municipal response to the protests had been disorganized from the outset. While some felt the OPS was constrained by limited resources and personnel, a number were of the view that more could have been done by municipal leaders and law enforcement officials to request assistance and be more outspoken about the difficulties they were facing in keeping the protests under control. Very few thought the OPS would have been able to resolve the issue on its own without the support of the RCMP and the additional powers provided by the Emergencies Act. Many also expressed disappointment regarding the response from the Government of Ontario and the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), which they felt to

have been delayed and limited in effectiveness. A number of participants felt the provincial government had done little to put an end to the protests and only became involved once cross-border trade had been blocked at numerous protest sites along the Canada/U.S. border.

Participants were generally dissatisfied with the response from the Government of Canada, believing federal officials had been relatively inactive on this front, taking several weeks to make the decision to invoke the Emergencies Act. It was felt by several that the federal government should have taken more immediate action towards addressing protests, particularly due to the (initial) federal focus of the demonstrations, as well as their close proximity to Parliament. Some also felt the Government of Canada could have provided clearer, more transparent communications to Canadians as to how it intended to respond to the protests, believing there had been little in the way of communications in this regard.

Firearms (Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean Seniors, Major Centres Saskatchewan Heavy Social Media Users, Greater Montreal Area Racialized Canadians)

Three groups discussed the issue of firearms in Canada, specifically focusing on the Government of Canada's plan to prohibit the ownership of assault-style rifles as well as offering to buy-back firearms within these categories presently owned by Canadians.

Asked whether they were aware of any recent actions by the federal government related to firearm ownership in Canada or the specific plan to ban assault-style rifles, very few recalled having heard anything. All participants in every group expressed support for this ban, with many strongly believing their ownership by individual Canadians served no practical purpose and that these weapons should never have been available for purchase in the first place. When asked whether they felt firearms purchased before the ban should still be subject to this legislation, all participants believed that they should.

Discussing additional actions the federal government could take in relation to firearm ownership in Canada, many felt more should be done to reduce the number of firearms currently owned by Canadians and strengthen the rules and regulations Canadian gun owners must adhere to. A number of participants specifically mentioned handguns as a category of firearms they felt should no longer be allowed within Canada, believing there to be no valid reason for them to be made available to civilians. It was also felt more could be done to screen prospective gun owners for mental health and other concerns that may potentially impact their ability to responsibly possess a firearm.

Healthcare (Major Centres Saskatchewan Heavy Social Media Users, Greater Montreal Area Racialized Canadians)

Two groups engaged in a discussion regarding healthcare priorities for the Government of Canada as well as challenges currently facing the sector. When asked to identify issues related to healthcare in their local areas, several mentioned a perceived shortage of medical professionals and long wait times as major issues at present. Participants also described a number of additional challenges including a

lack of awareness among many Canadians regarding the healthcare options and services available to them, insufficient focus on mental health supports (particularly for younger Canadians), and a lack of medical specialists in many regions, requiring a large number of those living in rural or remote communities to travel long distances to receive care for certain medical issues.

When asked if they had heard about any recent commitments or announcements made by the Government of Canada regarding healthcare, very few could recall anything. To aid in discussion participants were informed that the federal government had recently announced a number of healthcare-related priorities, including addressing health worker shortages and reducing wait times, increasing access to family health services, improving long-term and in-home care, addressing mental health and substance use, and modernizing health data management and virtual care. All participants felt these priorities were important, specifically focusing on those initiatives related to addressing personnel shortages, family health services, as well as mental health and illicit substance use.

Asked whether the federal government should be able to set priorities for the healthcare transfer payments it sends to provincial/territorial governments, most were of the view that it should primarily be the provinces and territories that determine how healthcare funding is allocated for their specific populations. It was felt by many that public health officials at the provincial and territorial level likely had a more comprehensive understanding than their federal counterparts as to the unique healthcare issues facing their respective jurisdictions.

Child Care (Ontario-U.S. Border Cities Parents of Children under 12)

This group engaged in a discussion around child care, discussing what they felt to be the biggest challenges related to child care in their region. Across the group, two key issues were frequently cited by participants: affordability (specifically the expensive costs associated with child care) and accessibility (in terms of a lack of child care spots available to parents within the province). While no parents currently had children in child care, they recounted mixed experiences in terms of accessing child care in the recent past. While some found it relatively easy to find a spot, others expressed encountering numerous difficulties, including a perceived lack of spots and, in some instances, multi-year waitlists.

Discussing the federal government's recent efforts to establish affordable child care agreements (averaging \$10 a day, per child) with all Canadian provinces and territories, some participants unprompted mentioned the lack of such an agreement currently in place between Ontario and the Government of Canada. After being informed that Ontario was now the only province or territory at the time this group was held to have not yet reached an affordable child care agreement with the federal government, many expressed frustration that a deal had yet to be reached. Several believed the provision of affordable child care to be of immense importance to Ontario families and did not understand why an agreement had still yet to be reached by their provincial government when all other provinces/territories across Canada had done so.

Housing Affordability (Halton and Peel Regions Financially Precarious)

The topic of affordable housing was discussed in one group comprised of participants considered to be in a financially precarious situations, based on their responses to a series of questions at the time of recruiting. This group consisted of a mixture of homeowners and renters.

In general, participants were of the view that available rental accommodation in Ontario's Halton and Peel regions was currently prohibitively expensive and out of reach for many. Many felt a lack of supply was currently a key contributor towards the upward pressure they believed was being placed on rental rates in their area. Several commented on the need for additional development of high density housing options within the region. Others mentioned the need for more oversight of rental practices, specifically increases in rental rates, illegal rental units, and discriminatory practices some felt were currently being employed by landlords.

The group also discussed a series of actions the Government of Canada could take to help make housing more affordable. Many felt the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive in particular would be helpful towards assisting more Canadians in gaining entry into the housing market. Participants were also generally supportive of a proposal for a similar branch of this incentive specifically targeted towards young, single Canadians with several of the opinion that everyone should have assistance available to them towards purchasing their first home. At the same time, participants recommended that younger Canadians should be offered additional education and tools to ensure they are able to understand and manage the financial responsibilities that accompany home ownership.

There was also modest support for other initiatives, including rental construction financing, the Affordable Housing Innovation Fund, and the National Housing Co-Investment Fund. More generally, participants expressed a favourable opinion of those activities and programs incentivizing developers to build more affordable units, lower development and construction costs (and presumably rental rates), stimulate and promote more creative approaches to developing affordable housing within Canada, as well as addressing the needs of marginalized groups. Comments also underscored participants' desire for greater oversight of these types of programs to ensure accountability and impact.

Seniors' Issues (Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean Seniors)

The group comprising seniors from the Saguenay and Lac-St-Jean region of Quebec engaged in a brief discussion regarding issues specifically pertaining to seniors in Canada.

Discussing which issue they personally felt should be a top priority for the Government of Canada, many in the group mentioned the increasing cost of living for seniors, which participants felt had risen substantially in recent years. Asked to identify which issues they believed to be most important to seniors in Canada more broadly, participants shared a number of ideas. These included insufficient funding for long-term care (LTC) and other senior-focused facilities, a lack of care options allowing

seniors to remain in their homes longer, as well as the perceived increasing cost of living for seniors on fixed-incomes who relied upon federal pensions such as Old Age Security (OAS), which many felt needed to be raised in order to address the high rate of inflation at present.

Questioned as to whether they had heard of anything the Government of Canada had done recently to support seniors, few could recall any actions. Among the few who could recall a recent federal action, it was mentioned that, as of July 2022, all seniors aged 75 and over would see an automatic 10% increase to their OAS pension. A number of participants reacted positively after having heard this. Asked whether they felt the federal government was currently on the right track regarding seniors' issues, no participants felt that they were. Discussing whether the Government of Canada regularly made an effort to reach out to seniors, few felt that it did, with many believing federal attention devoted towards senior-focused issues had been somewhat inconsistent. Several were of the view that senior-focused issues were rarely top-of-mind and were often prioritized less than other areas. Discussing what the federal government could do to more effectively connect with seniors, some felt greater efforts could be taken to promote the programs and supports currently available to older Canadians. In addition, it was felt the Government of Canada should find ways to work in greater partnership with provincial and territorial governments to develop a cohesive strategy to address seniors' issues and ways to meet their unique medical and financial needs.

Youth Issues (Calgary Young Adults)

The group composed of young adults discussed various issues impacting young people across Canada. To begin, participants were asked whether they were aware of any recent actions taken by the Government of Canada to provide greater support to younger Canadians. Across the group, unaided recall was high, with several mentioning federal subsidies for businesses to hire students during the summer (such as the Canada Summer Jobs program), grants to support those pursuing higher education (e.g., Canada Student Grants and Loans), the temporary suspension of the accumulation of interest on Canada Student Loans until 2023, and the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive. Asked about financial supports from the federal government assisting younger Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic, many recalled the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), while a few also mentioned the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB), though not specifically by name.

Asked about where they typically received their news, most mentioned social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. Expanding upon this, a few participants clarified that for news items that captured their interest on social media, they would tend to seek out further information from a more trusted news source (such as federal websites) to verify the legitimacy of the story. In regards to sources of news and information specifically related to COVID-19, some mentioned having actively avoided the news throughout much of the pandemic, feeling the constant stream of information related to the virus to have been overwhelming at times. When it came to information specifically related to COVID-19, participants tended to rely on more traditional news sources such as the CBC, as well as websites operated by the provincial or federal government.

Recall of Government of Canada advertising was modest among the group, with few recalling encountering recent communications from the federal government. In addition, very few participants

felt the Government of Canada was actively making an effort to reach out to younger Canadians (and students more specifically) and rarely prioritized young people when making decisions. Participants identified numerous challenges facing young people at present, including the perceived high cost of living, increasing inflation, and pandemic related setbacks to their education, social lives, and mental health. It was widely believed the federal government could do more to address these problems going forward.

Asked what the most important issue was to them personally that the Government of Canada should be focusing on, participants identified a number of areas for focus, including ensuring every Canadian has basic necessities, developing more affordable housing options, and protecting Canada's natural resources. Discussing the most important issue currently facing young people more generally, financial concerns were again top of mind for all participants. In particular, the cost of post-secondary education, and resultant large amounts of student debt, were viewed as issues in need of immediate attention from the federal government.

Reconciliation (Northern British Columbia)

Participants in this group engaged in a brief discussion regarding reconciliation between the federal government and Indigenous peoples throughout Canada. When initially asked what came to mind when they heard the term 'reconciliation', several mentioned recent discoveries related to historic residential schools, existing land claims by Indigenous peoples, as well as the potential need to revisit legislation such as the Indian Act.

Discussing actions by the federal government towards addressing reconciliation, it was felt that little in the way of tangible progress had been made in recent years. While some viewed recent settlements between the Government of Canada and Indigenous groups regarding compensation for harms done to Indigenous children in past decades by child and family services (CFS), as well as the appointment of an Inuk Governor General as steps in the right direction, it was widely felt more needed to be done by the Government of Canada regarding Indigenous issues. Asked whether the federal government was moving in the right direction regarding reconciliation, most felt that it was, though were hesitant to give an entirely positive review while fundamental issues such as the perceived lack of clean drinking water in many Indigenous communities persisted.

Asked what actions they would expect to see out of a federal government which prioritized reconciliation, participants mentioned actions such as increased financial supports for provinces/territories and municipalities to address specific Indigenous-related issues in their areas, ensuring all communities had access to clean drinking water, providing greater autonomy to on-reserve Indigenous communities and leadership, and potentially reopening overarching legislation such as the Indian Act and assisting Indigenous communities in becoming more self-sustaining going forward.

Rabies (Ontario-U.S. Border Cities Parents of Children under 12)

Participants in one group discussed the topic of rabies as well as options to control its spread throughout Canada. The group consisted of a mix of those who owned dogs as well as several who did not, including a number of participants who said they had obtained their dog through a rescue organization.

Some context about the issue of canine rabies was provided to participants, including that it causes more than 50,000 human deaths on a yearly basis. The role of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) in protecting against the entry of foreign animal diseases into Canada was also briefly outlined as was the responsibility of those importing animals into Canada to ensure that proper tests had been completed and the submission of necessary paperwork.

Asked whether the Government of Canada should implement a policy similar to the United States which effectively prohibits the import of dogs from countries with a high incidence of endemic canine rabies, most felt that such regulations were unnecessary. Many were also broadly opposed to any policy which would reduce or limit the number of dogs available for import into Canada. In general, participants believed that Canada's current border controls and the rules and regulations applying to the importation of canines were sufficient in keeping both animals and Canadians safe. Participants did not view the perceived risk as great enough to warrant such a policy, nor did they see the issue as a high priority for the Government of Canada at this time, especially given that canine variants of the rabies virus were not currently present in Canada. Moreover, some participants felt that implementing a policy of this nature lacked a sense of empathy and compassion towards those dogs in dangerous situations and in need of rescue.

Local Issues (Ottawa, Newfoundland, Yukon, Rural Manitoba, Trois-Rivières Parents of Children under 12, Calgary Young Adults, Northern British Columbia, Halton and Peel Regions Financially Precarious)

Eight groups engaged in discussions regarding local issues facing their municipalities or regions. While each conversation was unique to the respective areas in which these participants reside, a number of commonalities emerged amongst the groups. All groups mentioned affordable housing as an ongoing issue in their communities, with many also identifying additional challenges such as the need for infrastructure upgrades and repairs, increased mental health and addictions treatment services, and the need for increased financial and other supports designed to assist individuals and business owners in recovering following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Newfoundland

Participants in Newfoundland discussed a number of topics, including affordable housing, the fishing and aquaculture sector, as well as the extraction of oil and gas within the province.

Most believed that at present it was becoming increasingly difficult to find affordable housing across the province, attributing this to rising prices (including the cost of building supplies), low supply, rural-urban migration, and an influx of foreign home buyers. Discussing recent actions taken by the federal government to address the housing situation within the province, some recalled programs such as the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive as well as tax credits such as the Home Buyers' Amount (HBA), though not by name. In addition to these programs, it was felt that the federal government could consider offering additional tax breaks for homeowners as well as implementing policies aimed at keeping interest rates relatively low. While supportive of the federal government's proposed tax on foreign-owned homes sitting empty for most of the year, some questioned whether this action would serve as a sufficient enough deterrent to tangibly impact the supply and overall affordability of housing within the province.

Discussing key industries in the province, participants identified sectors such as tourism, fishing, oil and gas, construction, shipbuilding, healthcare, and aviation (air traffic control). The public service was also mentioned as a major employer, specifically in the St. John's area. Issues related to fishing and aquaculture as well as the oil and gas sectors were explored in greater detail. Both sectors were viewed as being of critical importance to the provincial economy, although there was a sense among some that the fishing industry had declined in importance in recent years while the future of the oil and gas sector was more uncertain given what many identified as a global trend towards transitioning to 'greener' economies. That said, some felt the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine may have the effect of bringing about a renewed interest in developing national oil and gas reserves. Discussing the performance of the federal government, it was thought by most participants that the Government of Canada had done little to support either sector.

Most participants were aware of the Bay du Nord project proposed by Equinor, with many being of the general view that Newfoundland and Labrador would stand to greatly benefit if the project went ahead. When asked whether the project should proceed, even in the event that an environmental assessment determined it would pose significant risks to the local environment, participants were somewhat mixed in their views. While some felt the project should not proceed given potential risks to the fisheries, eco-tourism, and other key industries within the Atlantic Canada region, others believed that risk mitigation plans could be developed and that the federal government should work with Equinor to address any potential environmental issues rather than rejecting the project outright.

Trois-Rivières

Participants in Trois-Rivières discussed issues related to their local community, including the ongoing matter of pyrrhotite in the foundations of local homes, perceived labour shortages in the region, and infrastructure more generally.

While few participants in the group had been personally affected, a number were aware of the issue of pyrrhotite being used in the building of numerous houses within the community, causing the foundations of these dwellings becoming cracked and damaged. Some had heard of recent compensation received by local homeowners due to the issues caused by the defective nature of this material when combined with concrete mix.

Discussing perceived labour shortages, most felt this was a growing concern in their community. While generally unaware of anything the federal government had done to address this issue apart from expanding allowances for temporary foreign workers, some participants offered suggestions regarding additional actions the Government of Canada could take. These included reviewing the requirements for certain jobs which made allowances for individuals who may meet some but not all of the skills or experience requirements for certain positions, working with provinces/territories to increase the minimum wage, as well as enforcing stricter eligibility requirements for those applying to financial assistance programs, believing some of these supports to be too widely dispersed at present.

Asked which sectors or industries required more support from the federal government, participants identified health care, education, tourism, and recreation as important areas needing further attention. Investments to improve healthcare and education were viewed by many as being directly linked to improvements in the overall quality of life for residents in the community, particularly for children.

On the topic of infrastructure, some spoke about the necessity for improvements to roadways in the area. Most were relatively unaware of any investments the federal government had made towards infrastructure in Trois-Rivières. Specifically prompted regarding recent federal government funding for High Frequency Rail in the region, few participants recalled having heard about this project. Though some questioned the need for high frequency rail service, others felt it would make travel much easier and was an initiative worth pursuing further.

Ottawa

Local issues of concern were discussed by those in Ottawa, with participants sharing their perspectives regarding a number of key sectors and industries within their region. Discussing important industries in their community, several mentioned information technology (IT) as a growing sector in the Ottawa region. Related to this, it was felt by some that a greater focus on building and using Canadian-made technology (relative to the importation of technology from foreign markets) was important. When further prompted about other sectors and industries in Ottawa, however, participant responses varied, with some identifying areas such as tourism (specifically encouraging travel within Canada), small business supports and revitalization following the pandemic, and greater funding for long-term care and healthcare in the form of increased federal transfer payments to the provinces and territories to assist them in bolstering their respective healthcare systems.

Discussing infrastructure, a large number of participants mentioned light-rail transit (LRT) as one of the most important local projects in Ottawa that the federal government could support. Related to this, several expressed concerns regarding perceived contractual issues related to the project, the lack of reliability in the current transit system, as well as the need for the LRT system to be expanded to provide greater accessibility to those living in suburban communities. Many were of the opinion that the Government of Canada should provide further assistance towards solving these issues in addition to the support it had already provided to this project, both financially and through donated federal lands. In addition to the LRT, a few participants also mentioned the need for upgrades and repairs to aging infrastructure in Ottawa, as well as retrofitting these buildings to become more environmentally friendly.

Halton and Peel Regions

The group based in the Halton and Peel regions of Ontario discussed issues specific to their local communities. Asked to identify the greatest issues or concerns facing the area, many participants mentioned current issues related to infrastructure. More specifically, it was felt that at present there was immense strain on major roads and highways, believed to be due in part to a perceived rapid increase in population within the region in recent years. Several mentioned substantial traffic as well as ongoing construction on several highways, feeling this at times made it incredibly difficult for workers to complete their daily commutes in a timely fashion. Discussing ways the Government of Canada could provide further support related to this issue, many felt the expansion of the 400-series highways should be prioritized, feeling this would serve to decrease the strain several felt was being placed on these major roadways. In addition to infrastructure, several participants also mentioned concerns regarding what they felt to be a significant lack of mental health services in their communities. This was felt to be a particular problem for children and youth who were thought to be dealing with many mental health challenges at present, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Asked what they felt to be the most important sectors in their local community, a number of participants mentioned the automotive industry (including the Ford motor plant in Oakville) as well as the product delivery sector (including major companies such as Amazon and Sysco). Asked more specifically, however, about which areas required the most help or support from the Government of Canada, participants tended to place greater focus on sectors impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Related to this, several felt there needed to be an active effort on the part of the federal government to support and reinvigorate small businesses and restaurants, believing these areas had been disproportionately impacted by public health requirements implemented over the course of the pandemic.

Rural Manitoba

Among those in rural Manitoba, many identified agriculture as the most important sector within their region. Asked what the Government of Canada had done to support this area, however, few could recall any recent announcements or initiatives. With this in mind, many suggested the federal government should place a greater emphasis on creating financial incentives to encourage more individuals, particularly younger Canadians, to pursue careers within the agricultural sector. In addition, several felt the federal government could provide further support to farmers through the provision of low interest loans, specifically focusing on those looking to start a new farming business or make improvements to their existing operations. In addition to agriculture, many identified tourism as an important industry in their region, with several expressing that many businesses in this sector had been impacted financially and, in some cases, forced to close permanently due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussing Manitoba more broadly, participants identified ongoing issues such as rising

fuel prices, growing unemployment, as well as the perceived diminished quality of rural healthcare, including what was seen by several as a dearth in mental health and addictions treatment services within the province.

Discussing broadband Internet, a large number identified the quality of high-speed Internet as an ongoing issue impacting their communities. Several were of the impression that broadband service in numerous rural areas was often unreliable and, in some cases, non-existent. Participants also shared a number of concerns related to what they felt to be a growing consolidation of Internet providers within the region, believing this had substantially driven up prices for consumers. Very few were aware of a proposed plan by the Government of Canada to invest \$41 million towards improving Internet speeds in 93 rural communities throughout Manitoba.

Calgary

Participants in the group from Calgary discussed a number of issues specific to their community, including housing affordability, opioid addiction, and infrastructure needs. Focusing on housing in particular, many expressed concerns regarding what they felt to be a growing lack of affordable housing within the city. A number of participants were of the view that large-scale foreign investment had served to drive up housing prices, having the effect of making homeownership prohibitively expensive for many in the community. Several believed the federal government could do more to regulate this issue as well as place a greater emphasis on the issue of affordable housing more generally.

Focusing on issues related to opioids, most felt this issue to be especially prevalent in Calgary and strongly believed more needed to be done to improve the current situation. Participants provided various suggestions regarding potential actions the federal government could take towards addressing the problem, including the provision of additional mental health resources as well as more comprehensive education programs regarding the potential dangers of these substances and addiction more generally. Asked who they felt to be most responsible for the opioid crisis, some attributed it to overprescription on the part of physicians, while others felt the increased ease of access to illicit substances (enhanced by the ability of dealers and users to rapidly communicate via text messaging and social media) had also served to exacerbate the problem.

Discussing important local industries and sectors, participant responses were quite varied. Asked which industries they felt required the most attention from the federal government, areas such as arts and entertainment, healthcare, and transportation (specifically related to perceived supply chain issues) were mentioned among participants. Asked more specifically regarding what the City of Calgary required in terms of infrastructure, some identified the expansion of public transit services as well as the need for greater investments into affordable housing projects by both the provincial and federal governments.

Northern British Columbia

The group comprised of participants from northern British Columbia discussed a number of issues specific to their local region. To begin this conversation, participants were asked to share what they felt to be the biggest local concerns in their local communities at present. A number of responses were provided, including a perceived lack of healthcare personnel and services, the need to repair and revitalize important infrastructure such as roadways, as well as increased economic development, particularly focusing on resource extraction and other natural resources such as lumber.

Focusing on housing, many participants felt that affordable housing was an issue, both within their own communities as well as Canada more broadly. Several were of the opinion that housing options, both for prospective homebuyers as well as renters, were becoming increasingly short in supply and that those which were available were becoming financially out of reach for many. Asked what the federal government had done regarding housing, no participants could recall any recent announcements or initiatives.

Discussing the issue of homelessness, many participants believed this to be a growing concern within their local communities, with some specifically focusing on Prince George, which was thought to have experienced this issue to a greater extent relative to other municipalities in the region. While most felt there to be a multitude of issues contributing to the issue of homelessness in the region, a number of participants believed mental health and addiction to be key drivers behind the perceived recent increase in those experiencing homelessness. All thought the federal government had a role to play regarding this issue, with many feeling there needed to be greater funding allocated towards affordable housing, mental health treatment, and the establishment of addiction rehabilitation facilities throughout the region.

Many also felt opioid addiction to be a major issue in their local communities and in northern British Columbia more generally. While several believed that childhood and intergenerational trauma were key drivers of addiction, a number of participants also felt opioids were too easily accessible and were currently being overprescribed by physicians. In addition, some also were of the view that the criminalization and stigma of addiction had served to further exacerbate this issue for many individuals, discouraging them from seeking treatment out of fear of being prosecuted for illicit substance use.

Asked to identify the most important sectors and industries in their local communities, many focused on the mining and natural resource sector, specifically mentioning coal, oil and gas, and logging as vital industries in their area. Discussing which sectors needed the greatest amount of support from the Government of Canada, participants identified a number of key areas, including forestry, agriculture, and tourism. Discussing infrastructure more specifically, several participants felt that more could be done to better maintain and expand northern roadways, as well as focus on repairing aging public buildings and drainage systems in communities (such as Prince George), which were currently thought to be in poor condition.

Yukon

Participants in the group from the Yukon engaged in a discussion specifically focusing on matters relevant to their local communities and the region more generally. To begin, participants were asked for their views on the current housing situation in their communities. Many pointed to what they felt to be a drastic housing shortage, believing the existing housing supply to be vastly insufficient to support the needs of those living in the territory. For the housing that was available, it was felt that home prices had risen substantially in recent years, both for prospective homebuyers as well as renters. In addition, it was thought that much of the existing housing within the region was currently in poor condition, providing few safe and affordable options, particularly for those with young children. Discussing how the housing situation had changed in recent years, a number of participants pointed to what they felt to be a rapid rise in people moving to the territory. This was believed to have exacerbated housing prices further, placing greater demand on an already limited supply. Asked who they felt was responsible for housing in the territory, most believed that it was primarily the responsibility of the Government of Yukon, along with some cooperation with governments at the municipal level. Discussing the responsibility of the federal government on this matter, many felt the Government of Canada could also play an important role on this front. It was felt by several that housing was a basic human right and that the federal government should do whatever it could to ensure all Canadians had access to safe and affordable housing.

Discussing the most important sectors in their region, participants identified areas such as mining and resource extraction, tourism, and the hospitality industry as major drivers of business in their communities. A few also were of the impression that the public sector at all levels (municipal, provincial, and federal) was a major employer within the territory. Asked to identify the most important issues currently facing the Yukon, a number of responses were provided, including housing affordability, the need for infrastructure improvements, as well as an increased need to incorporate renewable energy sources, particularly for powering and heating individual homes.

Asked specifically if they felt labour shortages were an issue in their region at present, several participants believed that they were. It was thought many businesses and sectors in the region were finding it increasingly difficult to recruit talented workers to come to the territory for work. A key driver of this issue was once again attributed to a lack of affordable housing for those considering a move to the territory, with several believing that had discouraged potential workers.

Discussing the fishing industry in the territory, very few participants recalled having recently heard anything regarding the supply of salmon in the Yukon River. For the small number that heard something, it was recalled that salmon counts had diminished considerably, though few could provide any additional details regarding the matter. After receiving clarification that current salmon levels in the river were at only 20% of typical stock, some felt this to be a major issue of concern, particularly for Indigenous communities dependent on these fish as a primary food source. Discussing potential causes, many felt climate change was a key driver of this issue. While few felt this issue would affect them personally, some expressed concern for those in these communities including Indigenous peoples and elders for whom fishing, both for sustenance and recreationally, was a major component of their lives.

Prompted to identify any recent actions by the federal government which had a positive impact on their communities, some were of the impression that the Government of Canada had devoted a considerable amount of funding to the mining sector within the territory. A few others also praised the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to Yukon communities during the pandemic, feeling this process had been handled in an efficient and equitable manner.

Focusing on climate change, several participants expressed the view that the world was currently experiencing a climate emergency. This was felt to be an issue of immense concern going forward, especially with the resumption of trade and industrial activity following the relative inaction in many sectors over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Asked if the Yukon had been impacted by climate change, many felt that it had. A number of participants identified increased flooding due to snowmelt as well as the greater risk of wildfires in the summer months as especially worrisome concerns regarding the impact of climate change in both the short and long term. While no participants could recall any recent actions by the federal government on this front, several expressed the desire to see greater collaboration between the federal and territorial governments towards devising longer-term strategies to address climate-related concerns.

MORE INFORMATION

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