



Government  
of Canada

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# Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – May 2022

## Executive Summary

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

The word "Canada" in a serif font, with a small red maple leaf icon above the letter "a".

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

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

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

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

This report includes findings from 12 online focus groups which were conducted between May 3<sup>rd</sup> and May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022 in multiple locations across the country including Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario,

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

The research for this cycle of focus groups focused largely on the Government of Canada's priorities and performance on issues important to a wide range of subgroups and regions. These included young Canadians, Chinese Canadians, Atlantic Canada, and the Northwest Territories. Additionally, two groups from Quebec discussed recent efforts from the federal government related to the environment and climate change.

The research explored a wide range of related issues in depth, including the Government of Canada's activities related to reducing carbon emissions and promoting a shift towards zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs), economic issues, the public mood among Canadians at present, and firearms. Participants were also asked for their views regarding various announcements related to housing that were included as part of the recent 2022 federal Budget. These included federal initiatives related to the construction of a significant number of new homes, actions to address housing affordability, and measures to better support and protect Canadians in the housing market.

Other topics discussed included fisheries in Atlantic Canada, the federal government's relationship with China, official language priorities, persons living with disabilities, public health ad testing, and local issues in the Eastern Townships region of Quebec, the City of Vancouver, and Manitoba. Participants of Métis heritage residing in mid-size and major centres in Manitoba also engaged in a discussion regarding issues related to Métis people.

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 cohorts of the population including disabled persons, low-income workers, heavy social media users aged 18-24, those concerned about the environment, members of the Chinese diaspora within Canada, Métis Nation, and renters.

### Detailed Approach

- Twelve focus groups across various regions in Canada.
- Five groups were conducted with the general population in rural Ontario, mid-size centres in the Prairies, Atlantic Canada, the Northwest Territories, and the North and South Shore regions of Montreal (excluding Montreal).

- The other seven groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
  - Persons living with disabilities residing in Windsor;
  - Low-income workers residing in the Eastern Townships region of Quebec;
  - Heavy social media users, aged 18-24, residing in Calgary;
  - Those who are environmentally concerned residing in mid-size centres in Quebec;
  - Members of the Chinese diaspora residing in the Greater Vancouver Area (GVA), excluding the City of Vancouver;
  - Métis Nation residing in mid-size and major centres Manitoba; and
  - Renters residing in the City of Vancouver.
- 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, 81 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
Rural Ontario	1	English	May 3	6:00-8:00 pm	General Population	7
Windsor – Ontario	2	English	May 4	6:00-8:00 pm	Disabled Persons	7
Mid-size Centres Prairies	3	English	May 5	8:00-10:00 pm	General Population	7
Quebec Eastern Townships	4	French	May 10	6:00-8:00 pm	Low-Income Workers	6
Calgary	5	English	May 11	8:00-10:00 pm	Heavy Social Media Users, aged 18-24	7
Atlantic Canada	6	English	May 12	5:00-7:00 pm	General Population	8
Mid-size Centres Quebec	7	French	May 17	6:00-8:00 pm	Environmentally Concerned	7
Greater Vancouver Area (excl. City of Vancouver)	8	English	May 18	9:00-11:00 pm	Chinese Diaspora	7
Mid-size and Major Centres Manitoba	9	English	May 24	7:00-9:00 pm	Métis Nation	7
North/South Shore, (excl. Montreal) – Quebec	10	French	May 25	6:00-8:00 pm	General Population	6
City of Vancouver	11	English	May 26	9:00-11:00 pm	Renters	7
Northwest Territories	12	English	May 31	8:00-10:00 pm	General Population	5

## Key Findings

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

At the outset of each group participants were asked what they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days. The conflict between Ukraine and Russia was top of mind for many, with participants recalling a wide range of items related to the crisis. These included ongoing financial and military assistance from the Government of Canada to Ukraine, a visit by several federal officials (including the Prime Minister) to Ukraine on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and the fast-tracking and prioritization of temporary residency applications for Ukrainians via the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel (CUAET).

In addition to the conflict in Ukraine, participants also recalled a wide range of unrelated initiatives and announcements. These included increased efforts by the Government of Canada to compel individuals to repay ineligibly received pandemic supports such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), reaction by the federal government to Quebec's recently adopted Bill 96, increased investments towards addressing housing affordability in Canada as part of the 2022 federal Budget, the introduction of a national dental care program, reported delays related to passport applications and renewals at Service Canada locations, and announcements by the federal government of increased investments towards a large-scale transition to zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs).

### **'Rolling Thunder' Protest (Rural Ontario)**

Participants in the group from rural Ontario briefly discussed the 'Rolling Thunder' protest which had taken place in Ottawa from April 29<sup>th</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022. While some recalled having heard about this demonstration, few were able to recall any specific details apart from it being primarily comprised of individuals on motorcycles. Discussing the purported aims of the protest, several were of the impression that it represented a continuation of the 'convoy' protests from February 2022, which claimed to be in response to 'overreach' on the part of the Government of Canada, particularly regarding the implementation of COVID-19 vaccine mandates. Focusing on the response to this protest, participants generally said the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) had been well prepared, successfully avoiding any violent unrest or significant disturbances to the residents of Ottawa. Very few felt these protests would have a long-term impact.

### **Appointment of Chief Accessibility Officer (Windsor Persons Living with Disabilities)**

Few participants in the group comprised of people living with disabilities were aware of the recent appointment of Canada's first Chief Accessibility Officer (CAO), announced on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022. After being provided with additional details regarding this appointment, all participants reacted positively to the announcement, with a number believing the creation of this position to be long overdue. Several

hoped that the appointment of a CAO would lead to an all-encompassing review of the supports currently available to those living with disabilities. Focusing on employment, it was hoped the new CAO could have an impact through the promotion of skills training and other development programs for persons living with disabilities, providing them with greater opportunities to contribute economically to their communities and enjoy more fulfilling careers. In addition, some also hoped the presence of a CAO would foster greater accountability regarding existing legislation, such as the Accessible Canada Act (ACA), which was felt to be enforced too loosely at present. Several also reacted positively upon hearing that the CAO herself lived with a disability, believing this experience to be crucial towards one's ability to effectively fulfill this role.

### **Access to Abortion Services (Quebec Eastern Townships Low-Income Workers, Calgary Heavy Social Media Users, Atlantic Canada)**

Three groups discussed the issue of abortion rights and continued access to abortion services in Canada. Asked if they had recently heard anything about this subject, almost all in the group from Calgary and most in Atlantic Canada indicated that they had, while few in the Eastern Townships region were aware of any recent developments. Among those who were aware, it was recalled that a draft opinion had recently leaked from the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS), which, if made official, would overturn the foundational *Roe v. Wade* decision that presently upholds abortion rights at a national level in the United States. Almost all participants viewed this leaked draft opinion as a negative development, with several feeling strongly that this action would serve to drastically reduce the rights of women in the United States to assert control over their own bodies and reproductive health.

Asked whether this concerned them, a large number of participants indicated that it did. Several adamantly expressed the view that no level of government should be able to dictate the actions of women concerning their own bodies and that this decision could lead to many American women being placed under considerable medical risk going forward. Some were also of the view that if abortion rights could be restricted in the United States, there was no guarantee against a similar development occurring in Canada at some point in the future. With this in mind, it was felt by many that safe access to abortion services needed to be protected by the federal government at all costs. Though not explicitly opposed to abortion, a small number were of a somewhat different view, believing that access to abortion should not be expanded any further in Canada.

Discussing what should be done in response to this development, most felt it was important for the federal government to continue to reassure Canadians regarding its strong commitment to protecting existing abortion rights and access to abortion services in Canada. In addition, many expected the federal government to continue to champion abortion rights on the international stage, acting as a leader on this front among its peers. Apart from this, however, it was generally felt there was little more the Government of Canada could do to influence what was ultimately a domestic issue within the United States.

### **PEI Potatoes (Atlantic Canada)**

Participants in Atlantic Canada briefly discussed recent developments related to the trade of potatoes in Prince Edward Island (PEI). Asked if they had heard anything as of late regarding this matter, while some recalled the United States temporarily halting the import of PEI potatoes in late 2021, no participants were aware of any recent developments. To clarify, participants were informed that in November 2021, the United States instructed its border officials to deny entry of shipments of PEI potatoes, following detection of potato wart in some crops. In March 2022, the United States subsequently announced that imports of PEI potatoes could resume with some conditions. Most participants viewed this as an issue of major importance to PEI, with several believing the potato industry to be a key economic driver for the province. While all felt positively about the resumption of trade, several were concerned this temporary prohibition had served to decrease the market share of PEI potatoes within the sector as well as damaging the brand's international reputation.

### **Bay du Nord Development Project (Atlantic Canada, North/South Shore of Montreal [excluding Montreal])**

Two groups discussed the Bay du Nord Development Project proposed to be constructed off the eastern coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. A small number in Atlantic Canada and very few in the group from Quebec were aware of this project. Of the few who had heard of it, only limited details could be recalled, including the project's connection to the oil and gas sector as well as concerns regarding its potential environmental impact.

Provided further information and informed that the federal government had recently decided to approve this project, participants were largely mixed in their reactions. Among those in support of the project, it was thought it would create a significant number of jobs and support the region's economy. In addition, some expected this project would have the added benefit of increasing Canada's domestic oil and gas production capacity, fostering greater national self-sufficiency in this regard. A number of participants mentioned what they viewed as exceedingly high fuel prices at present and were optimistic this project could alleviate these pressures to some extent. For those opposed to the project, it was believed the Government of Canada's approval of this project was somewhat contradictory to its goals to transition to a 'greener' economy centered on renewable energy production. A number of participants were of the view that there was already a sufficient amount of oil and gas production occurring in Canada and that any projects that invested in non-renewable energy rather than renewable sources such as solar, hydro, and wind represented a step in the wrong direction.

Discussing the future of oil and gas projects in Canada, most felt the Bay du Nord project would have a positive impact on the prospects of future developments, so long as it produced the expected economic benefits while causing little damage to the surrounding environment and marine ecosystems.

### **Drug Decriminalization (Greater Vancouver Area [excluding City of Vancouver] Chinese Diaspora, City of Vancouver Renters)**

Both groups from British Columbia (B.C.) discussed the recent request from the Government of British Columbia for the federal government to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of certain 'hard' drugs in the province. While no participants were aware of any recent developments regarding this issue, some believed there had been a rapid increase in addiction and drug overdoses in the province. This was felt to be a major problem at present, and one that had been exacerbated over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Though some participants felt decriminalization might represent a positive development, a larger number were more opposed to the idea. Many were concerned about drug users taking advantage of this initiative, using these dangerous drugs more frequently if concerns over legal consequences were removed. Several also worried about the potential health risks, believing that in the case of substances such as fentanyl, no amount could be considered 'safe'. A significant number felt that rather than decriminalizing these substances, the provincial and federal governments should work to identify and treat what they viewed as the primary drivers of addiction, including poverty, mental illness, and past trauma. Among the small number who felt this plan represented a positive step, it was expressed that similar programs in other jurisdictions (such as Portugal) had been successful in reducing the stigma faced by drug users and encouraging them to seek treatment for their addictions. Some, however, qualified their support, putting forth the view that while decriminalization would likely be a positive development, it would need to be accompanied by a substantial investment into other areas such as mental health resources, addictions treatment, and addressing essential needs such as affordable housing and food insecurity. It was widely felt that decriminalization alone would have minimal impact in solving what was seen as a growing drug problem throughout the province.

### **News Sources and Social Media (Calgary Heavy Social Media Users, Greater Vancouver Area [excluding City of Vancouver] Chinese Diaspora, Mid-size and Major Centres Manitoba Métis Nation)**

Three groups engaged in a discussion regarding the sources they typically consult to receive their news. A wide range of sources were mentioned, with several indicating a continued reliance on traditional media such as television (specifically CBC, CTV, and Global News), radio, and local newspapers. Many also recalled utilizing online sources such as Google News, Yahoo!, and YouTube, as well as social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and TikTok.

Discussing where they would typically go to receive news regarding the Government of Canada, several pointed to sources such as CBC, CTV, Global News, and Maclean's. For news items of specific interest to them, a number of participants also indicated that they would likely visit official Government of Canada websites as a method of verifying what they had previously heard from other sources. Several thought that the Government of Canada needed to do more to engage users on social media platforms, particularly TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram, where some felt the federal government's presence was quite minimal. Asked whether some platforms were generally more reliable than others, most were of the view that reliability was determined more by the sources one chose to follow rather than the specific platforms themselves.



Further discussing the subject of social media, heavy social media users from Calgary were asked to describe what they viewed as the main positive and negative impacts of social media. Several identified the ability to keep in touch and communicate with others regardless of geographic distance as a key benefit, as well as the ability to be exposed to a multitude of different perspectives. Some also mentioned the impact of being able to receive information and updates instantaneously via these platforms. Discussing the negative aspects, many in the group felt social media often presented an unrealistic portrayal of reality, with users typically only posting updates which painted them in the best light possible. It was thought this often led to others comparing themselves to these ideals rather than more realistic standards, potentially leading to feelings of inadequacy, depression, and anxiety.

Asked about the prevalence of 'fake news', all participants in the group were aware of this growing issue, with most believing it to be a major problem. A few were of the opinion that this was primarily an issue effecting older generations, believing that younger Canadians may be more adept at identifying legitimate sources from those spreading misinformation. Discussing what should be done regarding misinformation and/or disinformation online, most believed it to primarily be the responsibility of the individual to determine whether the information they consume is legitimate, and to verify any details they may be uncertain about. While a few mentioned efforts by platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to identify posts as misinformation, several viewed this as a flawed process, believing it to primarily be based on algorithms rather than objective analysis of the content. Asked whether social media platforms had a responsibility to ensure the accuracy of the news on their platforms, while a small number felt they did, most believed these platforms should primarily focus on remaining neutral and only remove content that was hateful and/or explicit. Very few participants felt the federal government had a role to play in combatting misinformation.

### **Royal Tour (Northwest Territories)**

Participants in the Northwest Territories (NT) briefly discussed the tour of Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall to the region, which took place on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022. While only a few participants indicated having been aware of this tour, several felt this had been an exciting event for many in communities such as Yellowknife and Dettah, particularly those who had the opportunity to participate in the festivities. While most reacted positively to this tour, several expressed disappointment that there had not been an official apology directed towards survivors of Canada's historic residential school system. This was felt by a number of participants to be a critical component of the reconciliation process and one that was not currently being satisfied.

### **Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (Calgary Heavy Social Media Users, Atlantic Canada, Mid-size Centres Quebec Environmentally Concerned, Greater Vancouver Area [excluding City of Vancouver] Chinese Diaspora, North/South Shore of Montreal [excluding Montreal], Northwest Territories)**

Six groups engaged in discussions focusing on issues specific to their respective age groups, backgrounds, local regions, or specific concerns, such as climate change and the environment. Participants shared their perspectives regarding what they believed to be the key factors driving these

issues, as well as the degree to which the Government of Canada had been successful in addressing them.

### **Youth Issues (Calgary Heavy Social Media Users)**

Participants in this group (comprised of individuals aged 18 to 34 years old) discussed a number of issues of specific concern to younger Canadians. To begin this conversation, participants were asked to identify which issues facing young people the federal government should be prioritizing. A range of responses were provided. These included mental health and addiction, housing affordability and the rising cost of living, increasing post-secondary costs, and growing divisiveness among Canadians. Very few participants were aware of any recent actions or initiatives by the Government of Canada related to any of these issues. Discussing whether the federal government was currently on the right or wrong track related to these issues, most were hesitant to say one way or the other, believing they did not know enough about any recent federal actions on these fronts.

Asked to evaluate the degree of success to which the Government of Canada was currently engaging with younger Canadians, most felt there to be considerable room for improvement on this front. Several said that more should be done to leverage social media as a method of reaching out to young people, viewing the federal government as falling behind in this regard. With this in mind, several suggested TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat as particularly useful tools to engage with young people.

### **Atlantic Canada (Atlantic Canada)**

The group based in Atlantic Canada discussed a number of pressing issues currently affecting their region. Asked which areas were in greatest need of attention from the federal government, a number of responses were provided. These included healthcare worker shortages, a perceived lack of support for small businesses, housing affordability, and the forestry and lumber sector.

Asked if they could recall any actions by the federal government regarding any of these issues, few participants were aware of any recent initiatives. Related to affordable housing, a small number recalled hearing about the recent decision by the Government of Canada to prohibit the purchase of residential housing by non-Canadians for two years. A few also had heard about recent efforts by the federal government to recruit and train more doctors and nurses, though were unable to recall any specific details. Discussing whether the Government of Canada was currently on the right track regarding these areas, several said that a greater emphasis needed to be placed on everyday issues such as healthcare worker shortages, housing affordability, and the cost of living, believing these represented essential needs and services that were currently going unmet for a significant number of Atlantic Canadians.

### **Environmental Issues (Mid-size Centres Quebec Environmentally Concerned, North/South Shore of Montreal [excluding Montreal])**

These two groups discussed the Government of Canada's recent efforts towards addressing the issue of climate change, as well as identifying ways in which the environment and sustainability could be prioritized to a greater extent going forward. To begin these conversations, participants were asked, in general, which areas they felt the federal government needed to place a greater focus on. A wide

range of responses were provided, including housing affordability, the cost of living, healthcare, mental health, increased firearms regulations, and ensuring all Indigenous reserves and communities had access to clean drinking water. Unprompted, a large number of participants also mentioned climate change and the environment, with many believing this represented a top priority currently facing Canadians. Several identified specific issues such as pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, rising global temperatures, and a perceived lack of comprehensive recycling programs as major concerns related to long-term sustainability.

Focusing on the efforts taken by the Government of Canada towards combatting climate change, several reported (though not by name) hearing about the Incentives for Zero-Emission Vehicles (iZEV) program, though few could recall any specific details. Speaking more generally, a number of participants were also of the impression that the environment and climate change had been a significant component of the recent 2022 federal Budget. Very few participants felt the Government of Canada was currently on the right track when it came to addressing climate change. Many stated that, even if greater efforts had been taken in recent years, these actions still would likely fall short of what was necessary to mitigate the damage already caused to the environment. A number of participants felt there needed to be an increased emphasis on meeting pledged climate targets, such as those stipulated in the Paris Agreement, as well as increased financial consequences for any large-scale emitters not currently adhering to federal climate policy.

#### **Chinese Canadians (Greater Vancouver Area [excluding City of Vancouver] Chinese Diaspora)**

Participants in the group from the Greater Vancouver Area (GVA), excluding the City of Vancouver, comprised of members of the Chinese diaspora discussed a number of issues related to their community within Canada. Discussing the top issues currently facing Chinese Canadians, many identified what they felt to be a rising prevalence of anti-Asian racism and hate crimes. Several clarified that they viewed this as an issue affecting all Asians in Canada, and not just those of Chinese descent. Some individuals thought this issue had become increasingly heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic, with certain cohorts of society placing the blame on Asians and Asian countries, for the initial spread of the virus. While no participants had personally experienced this type of discrimination, a number recalled having heard accounts from others who had. Many felt more could be done by the federal government to further educate Canadians regarding the history of Asians in Canada, both in terms of celebrating their contributions as well as providing further education regarding the challenges they have historically faced.

Discussing the performance of the Government of Canada towards better supporting Chinese Canadians, few could recall any recent initiatives or announcements related to this issue. A small number mentioned that the federal government had officially declared May 'Asian Heritage Month', creating a time to reflect and recognize the many contributions those of Asian heritage have made and continue to make in Canada. Upon hearing this, several felt this to be beneficial towards the promotion of Asian culture within Canada. Discussing the federal government's performance towards addressing issues related to Asian Canadians, several felt more needed to be done on this front, especially given what was perceived to be the increased rise in anti-Asian sentiment in recent years.

### **Northwest Territories (Northwest Territories)**

The group from the Northwest Territories (NT) discussed a number of issues related to their local region. Asked to share what they felt to be the most pressing challenges facing those in the NT at this time, participants identified a wide range of issues. These included housing affordability and the rising cost of living, fisheries and the issue of overfishing, climate change, and challenges related to mental health and addiction.

Asked if they could recall any recent initiatives or actions taken by the Government of Canada regarding these issues, some mentioned housing-related assistance such as assistance for elders living in the Inuvialuit settlement region to repair and/or retrofit their homes, as well as additional funding to address homelessness in communities such as Yellowknife. A few also mentioned efforts by the federal government to assist with food insecurity, pointing to programs such as Nutrition North Canada (though not mentioned by name) as being particularly helpful during the pandemic. Many, however, felt this assistance did not go far enough and that greater support needed to be provided by the federal government to address the issues facing NT.

While some felt the Government of Canada had done a better job in recent years in addressing these issues, participants were generally of the view that this assistance had often moved too slowly or been insufficient towards addressing the widespread nature of the problems facing the region. Expanding on this, a number of participants hoped to see a greater emphasis placed by federal officials on assisting more rural and remote communities in the region. It was felt that a significant portion of federal assistance was currently being directed to larger communities (such as Yellowknife), while rural communities continued to struggle with issues of food insecurity and, in some cases, a lack of clean drinking water.

Participants in this group also discussed ongoing issues related to arsenic contamination emanating from the now inactive Giant Mine, located near Yellowknife. Most were aware of the situation, with several expressing significant concern regarding the potential long-term impacts of arsenic trioxide on the health and safety of those living in Yellowknife. Some were particularly worried about the dangers this situation posed to the city's water supply, believing it could become contaminated if preventative action was not taken. A few also expressed concern regarding the effect this situation could have on nearby ecosystems, with some under the impression that wildlife and vegetation near the abandoned mine had already been adversely impacted.

Discussing what the federal government had done (or were planning to do) to address this issue, most were uncertain as to what specific actions had been taken. While some believed there had been ongoing efforts to assist with the clean-up, this was seen as a difficult and time-consuming task given the dangerous substances involved. A few also recalled hearing about the establishment of the Giant Mine Oversight Board (GMOB) to coordinate the clean-up, believing the Government of Canada played a role in managing this. Discussing what more could be done on the part of the federal government to assist with this issue, many expressed the need for increased funding for this project, as well as towards the clean-up of other abandoned mines across the region.

### **Economic Issues (Rural Ontario, Mid-size Centres Prairies, Quebec Eastern Townships Low-Income Workers, Calgary Heavy Social Media Users, Atlantic Canada, North/South Shore of Montreal [excluding Montreal])**

Six groups engaged in discussions focusing on a wide range of economic issues. These included a focus on the local economy in their respective regions, the Canadian economy as a whole, as well as the ongoing transition to a 'greener' economy. To begin these conversations, participants were asked to identify what they viewed as the most important industries to their local economies. Participants in all groups, with the exception of those from Montreal's North and South Shore, identified agriculture as a major economic driver in their region. In addition, oil and gas, manufacturing, technology, and tourism were also mentioned in several groups as important industries to their local economies.

Several participants in Atlantic Canada identified offshore oil and gas development and extraction as a prominent industry in their region. While some expressed the desire for a more expedient transition away from this sector towards renewable energy, many felt the recent approval of initiatives such as the Bay du Nord development project indicated that oil and gas would remain a prominent part of the region's economy for the foreseeable future. Focusing on other areas, a number of participants also mentioned sectors such as fishing, lumber, tourism, and healthcare as important economic contributors. While some also identified agriculture as an important contributor to the regional economy, a number of participants were worried about the impact climate change and extreme weather may have on the future viability of this sector. It was felt more could be done to encourage a wider adoption of technology, such as greenhouses, that would allow for food to be grown in the region all year round.

Many in the group located in the Eastern Townships region of Quebec identified agriculture (fruit, livestock, and sugar shacks) and manufacturing as the most important industries to their region. Related to manufacturing, participants identified companies such as Canatal and DuPont as major employers in their region, producing materials such as steel and chemicals respectively. While most expected these sectors to continue to grow (especially manufacturing for construction, which was viewed as experiencing significant demand), some believed there would need to be infrastructure upgrades to vital material transportation networks, such as railways, for the region to reach its full economic potential.

For those living in the North and South Shore of Montreal, construction was also mentioned as a key economic contributor and many were of the impression that this sector would be in high demand for a considerable time to come. A number of participants also identified tourism and hospitality as being especially important to their local economies. While some felt that small businesses (particularly those geared toward services and hospitality) in their areas had suffered due to the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, others took a different view, believing the transition of many to working from home full-time had led to more people remaining in their communities, rather than commuting to larger centres such as Montreal. It was said that this could provide long-term economic growth for many suburban municipalities if this trend were to continue.

Participants in the group from rural Ontario identified technology (in Waterloo), automotive manufacturing (in Windsor), and oil and gas refineries (in Sarnia) as key sectors. Additionally, some

also mentioned industries such as agriculture, tourism, and cannabis production as being of increasing importance in their local communities. Most participants felt these industries would remain relatively stable in the future.

In the groups based in the Prairies and Calgary, agriculture and oil and gas were commonly mentioned as important sectors to their respective regions. It was felt that agriculture would likely remain a high-demand sector for the foreseeable future, especially given the challenges related to the global food supply driven by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. While several expected oil and gas to remain important in the short-term, many felt the prominence of this sector would gradually diminish as non-renewable resources are phased out.

Asked to identify what they believed to be the key challenges to economic growth in their local regions, participants across all groups provided a wide range of responses. These included a perceived lack of skilled labour, rising costs for essential goods and services, and the potential future impacts of climate change.

Focusing on the broader Canadian economy, participants were asked which areas they expected the Government of Canada would be prioritizing going forward. A significant number of participants mentioned areas such as green technology (such as ZEVs), renewable energy, domestic manufacturing, sustainable agriculture, and healthcare. Most participants believed that prioritizing these sectors would likely have a positive impact on Canada's overall future, with some hoping that further investments into these areas would lead to the creation of more high-paying jobs for Canadians.

Asked what came to mind when they heard the terms 'green economy' and 'green jobs', participants shared several responses. Many primarily thought of renewable energy, including the development and production of these energy sources, as well as projects related to retrofitting individual homes or businesses to become more sustainable. Several participants also mentioned aspects related to green technology, including carbon capture technology and the manufacturing of ZEVs. Some pointed to initiatives related to conservation and protecting Canada's biodiversity and natural resources, believing these to be important priorities moving forward.

Many expected that a transition to a greener economy would also provide a wide range of job opportunities for Canadians and would likely require a number of different skillsets in order to be fully implemented. Focusing on renewable energy production in particular, several said that, in addition to the physical labour and construction jobs required to build the required infrastructure, there would also likely be numerous technical and digital engineering jobs created to manage the ongoing operations of these systems. A number of participants also expected there would be a significant number of manufacturing jobs created to produce ZEVs and other innovative green technology.

Focusing on what a potential green economy might look like, participants in all groups with the exception of those in Calgary were presented with a list of green sectors and asked to identify which they felt had the greatest potential to create economic opportunities within their local regions. This list included eco-recreational tourism, green energy, mining, nature protection, sustainable agriculture and food self-sufficiency, and sustainable forestry.

Across these groups, participants primarily gravitated towards green energy, nature protection, and sustainable agriculture and food self-sufficiency as the sectors which they expected would yield the greatest economic opportunities. Related to green energy, many reiterated the expectation that a shift towards renewable sources such as wind, solar, and hydro would likely create many jobs for Canadians, in terms of the construction of new infrastructure and the long-term operations of these systems. Several participants also thought that a greater focus on nature protection could lead to more jobs in the field of conservation and that this would provide those with backgrounds in forestry or the environmental sciences the ability to utilize their skills to create long-term strategies towards protecting and conserving Canada's natural resources.

Focusing on rural areas in particular, participants were asked whether they felt it was reasonable to expect these communities to be able to shift to a green economy on their own. Almost all participants felt that such a large-scale transition would be impossible without a significant amount of financial support from both the federal and provincial/territorial governments. Expanding upon this, many cited what they perceived as the high upfront costs for technology such as ZEVs, home retrofitting, and renewable energy generation, believing these were currently unrealistic for the majority of those living in rural communities. Focusing on ZEVs, participants thought this technology would have to improve substantially in terms of these vehicles' abilities to drive long distances, handle under-maintained roadways, and operate in extreme weather conditions, all of which were seen as regular challenges of rural life. While most believed an eventual transition to a green economy was important for Canada's long-term viability, it was felt this process would likely be quite gradual and that a significant amount of time would be needed to develop the necessary infrastructure as well as convince the majority of Canadians to 'buy-in' to this shift towards greater sustainability.

### **Digital Economy (Rural Ontario)**

Participants in the group from Rural Ontario briefly discussed issues related to the digital economy. Asked what came to mind when they heard the term 'digital economy', a wide range of responses were provided. These included digital financial markets, e-commerce, the emergence of cryptocurrencies (such as Bitcoin), the trend of working from home and 'telecommuting', and major online web corporations such as Amazon, Netflix, and YouTube.

Discussing whether those living in rural communities could benefit from a greater shift to a digital economy, almost all participants expected that they would. By allowing individuals to work from home, participants thought a more digitized economy would open up opportunity to work in a variety of different sectors (such as high-tech) for those living rurally. Additionally, it was felt a digital economy and a shift to 'work from home' would also benefit more traditional sectors in rural areas, as more Canadians may be interested in living rurally now that they were no longer physically required to commute to work each day.

### **Job Opportunities (Quebec Eastern Townships Low-Income Workers)**

Participants residing in Quebec's Eastern Townships who identified as low-income workers discussed the availability of job opportunities in their respective communities. Asked if they felt there were enough job opportunities in their local region for them to continue to live there long-term, most said



that there were. Several were of the impression there were a number of jobs presently available and, in many sectors, there was a shortage of workers. Some, however, qualified this statement, expressing that while there were many jobs available, these were not always high-paying and in some cases may not provide a sufficient living income. This was especially felt to be the case given the perceived high rate of inflation and rise of living costs in recent years.

Only a small number of participants reported either currently seeking or having recently looked for new job opportunities. Asked what they would look for in a prospective employer if they were seeking a new opportunity, participants identified components such as higher wages, the potential for career advancement, benefits, a flexible work schedule, and socially responsible business practices. Almost all believed it was important for an employer to be environmentally responsible, with many indicating this would be a factor they would weigh when considering an employment offer. A few participants said they would not be willing to work for a company without a long-term environmental plan in place. A small number felt differently, believing that while the environment was an important priority, they would not be opposed to working in potentially harmful economic sectors (such as resource extraction and development) so long as the compensation was high enough. Almost all felt it was important for an employer to be socially responsible. Most said they would likely be deterred from accepting an offer of employment from a company that had not expressed a commitment to this.

### **Firearms (Greater Vancouver Area [excluding City of Vancouver] Chinese Diaspora, Mid-size and Major Centres Manitoba Métis Nation, North/South Shore of Montreal [excluding Montreal], City of Vancouver Renters, Northwest Territories)**

Five groups discussed the subject of firearms, including their perspectives regarding the current level of gun crime within Canada as well as what actions (if any) they felt the Government of Canada should take to address this issue. Asked how prevalent they felt firearms-related crimes to be in Canada, most were of the view that this was not a major issue, especially compared to the situation in the United States. A small number of participants raised concerns about the potential for individuals to create 'homemade' firearms using technologies such as 3D printing, believing this might expand the presence of these weapons within Canada.

Discussing what they felt to be the major causes of criminal gun violence in Canada, participants identified a wide range of factors. These included gang activity, mental illness and addiction, housing insecurity and poverty, social media, and perceived limitations of existing screening practices and firearm regulations. While some were under the impression that the federal government had taken action in recent years to implement stricter regulation of firearms in Canada, very few were able to recall any details except that certain classes of weapons (such as 'assault-style' weapons) had been limited or banned outright. Though several were in favour of increased regulation to prohibit or ban a wider range of firearms, along with increased background checks and the implementation of a registration system for all firearms, many were skeptical as to whether taking these steps would have the intended effect of reducing gun crime in Canada. The principal concern was that those committing gun crimes were likely to have obtained their weapons illegally and, as such, any enhancements to firearms regulations would primarily impact those who had purchased their firearms legally, while



doing very little to impact those who had acquired these weapons through illegal means. Discussing Canada's laws related to firearms, while a larger number of participants felt they were adequate, a smaller yet still significant number expressed that any action on the part of the federal government to reduce the prevalence of gun crime in Canada would be welcome.

### **Perspectives on a National Freeze on Handguns (Greater Vancouver Area [excluding City of Vancouver] Chinese Diaspora, Mid-size and Major Centres Manitoba Métis Nation, North/South Shore of Montreal [excluding Montreal], City of Vancouver Renters)**

Four groups discussed whether the Government of Canada should consider implementing a national 'freeze' on handguns. While some felt a freeze would primarily relate to halting the buying and selling of handguns within Canada, most were unsure as to the practicalities and realities of such a policy. Asked what they felt might be the difference between a freeze and an outright ban on handguns, several were of the view that a freeze would likely be temporary while a ban would be more permanent. A few suggested that a freeze may also be a precursor to or a first step towards a full ban.

After it was clarified that a freeze on handguns would work by capping the market and banning the sale and import of handguns into Canada, participants discussed the impacts they felt such a policy could have. While some were of the view that this policy would have a positive effect in that it would likely reduce the number of handguns in Canada, a large number expressed concerns about a potential freeze. Several felt such a law would have little to no effect on the prevalence of firearms-related crimes, believing those intending to use handguns for illicit activities would not be deterred by any new regulations. Some felt a handgun freeze may actually have a counter-productive effect, possibly leading to a surge of handgun purchases among those who wished to obtain a handgun, or had intended to purchase a handgun, prior to the freeze being implemented. A number also expressed concern this might lead to the growth of an unregulated and illegal market for handguns and further exacerbate the prevalence of these activities going forward.

Discussing whether they felt a freeze or ban was the most appropriate step forward, many were of the view that neither was the right step to take at present, believing this would have either a minimal impact on gun crimes or an adverse effect. Asked to consider whether they felt policies related to firearms should be consistent across Canada or tailored to different provinces or urban centres, most participants felt these laws should be consistent across all jurisdictions.

### **New Firearms Regulations (Northwest Territories)**

The focus group held among those residing in the NT was conducted after the federal government's introduction of new legislation to further strengthen firearms regulations in Canada (through Bill C-21) on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Participants discussed a number of measures that had been announced as part of this policy. These included the implementation of a national freeze on handguns, taking away firearms licenses of those involved in acts of domestic or gender-based violence and criminal harassment, increased criminal penalties for the trafficking and smuggling of firearms, the creation of a new 'red flag' law compelling individuals deemed a danger to themselves or others to surrender their firearms, and requiring magazines for long guns to be changed to ensure they would not be able to carry any more than five rounds.

Virtually all participants reacted positively to these initiatives. Most felt they intuitively made sense and would likely be effective in addressing a number of the issues related to firearms. Some specifically mentioned those aspects of this legislation related to intimate partner and gender-based violence, believing they could have a considerable impact on protecting women and others who may be vulnerable to this type of violence. Asked about the freeze on handguns specifically, participants generally felt it would not have a significant impact on their communities, believing that ownership of handguns in the North was rare. Discussing what additional measures could be implemented in the future, some were of the opinion that all firearms should be registered, regardless of type or purpose. A smaller number felt that further measures were unnecessary, believing the proposed legislation was sufficient.

### **Public Mood (Rural Ontario, Mid-size Centres Prairies, Calgary Heavy Social Media Users, Atlantic Canada)**

Four groups engaged in a discussion regarding the public mood in Canada as well as their impressions regarding whether Canadians were more divided at present compared to in the past. Regionally, while almost all in the group from rural Ontario felt Canadians were mostly united, all participants in the group from the Prairies and most in Calgary said the country was significantly divided at present. Opinions in the group from Atlantic Canada were more mixed, with roughly an equal number feeling Canadians were mostly united as those who believed societal divisions had become more prevalent in recent years.

For those participants who believed Canadians were primarily unified, it was generally felt that while those taking more extreme positions on a number of issues may have become more prominent, they continued to represent a minority among Canadians. It was thought by many that Canadians remained mostly on the same page regarding important matters such as housing affordability, the cost of living, child care, healthcare, and the conflict in Ukraine, even if they may not agree on the specific solutions or actions necessary to address these issues.

Among participants who were of the opinion that divisions were more prominent among Canadians at present, it was thought by many that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter had served to greatly exacerbate this issue. It was felt that these communication tools had allowed those with more extreme perspectives to reach a wider audience as well as find like-minded individuals from across the country, further amplifying their message. Several identified misinformation and/or disinformation on these platforms as also playing a significant role in fostering this division. Questioned as to which issues they felt Canadians were most divided on, participants provided a wide range of responses including the pandemic and related public health measures and vaccine mandates, climate change and the environment, and reproductive issues such as abortion. While a number of participants expressed concern regarding these divisions, most were unsure as to whether there were any actions the Government of Canada could take to reduce them in the near future.

## **Budget 2022 – Housing (Rural Ontario, Mid-size Centres Prairies, City of Vancouver Renters, Northwest Territories)**

Four groups discussed initiatives and announcements related to housing affordability included in the recent 2022 federal Budget, which had been tabled on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Almost all participants believed housing to be an issue of the highest importance, with several identifying it as the top concern facing Canadians at present. Many were of the impression that housing had become increasingly unaffordable in recent years, especially for lower-income Canadians who were already finding it difficult to make ends meet. Some participants expressed concerns regarding their own children, younger Canadians, and other prospective first-time home buyers, believing these groups faced significant barriers towards entering the housing market at present. A large number expressed the opinion that the increasing cost of housing was primarily the result of supply-related issues, and that only by increasing the supply of homes within Canada would the federal government be able to address the issue.

Delving further into this matter, participants engaged in a number of exercises evaluating recent announcements and initiatives contained within the Budget, and were asked to identify which they felt would be most effective towards addressing the issue of housing affordability. To begin, participants were presented with a series of initiatives focusing on the goal of constructing a significant number of new homes in Canada.

Among these initiatives, the announcement of an additional \$2.9 billion (over four years) for the National Housing Co-Investment fund received a significant level of support across all groups. Several were of the view that this initiative represented the most significant investment towards housing in the Budget, and believed this would likely help the greatest number of people. Several commented positively on the aspect of this policy providing funding toward the repair of existing housing infrastructure, believing this to also be an important priority.

The new Housing Accelerator Fund, pledging to provide funding to municipalities to build 100,000 new homes across Canada, was also identified by a large number of participants as a promising initiative. Several reiterated the view that a lack of supply was the key factor driving the housing crisis, and that this initiative might go a considerable ways towards addressing this issue.

Many participants also identified the initiative to allocate \$216 million towards incentivizing developers to build new rental units charging less than the average rent in the areas in which they are built as a promising component of the federal government's housing strategy. Related to this initiative, participants expressed approval regarding the involvement of the private sector, which was felt by some to be necessary given the perceived magnitude of the housing issue at present. A small number were concerned about the prospect of these units reverting back to market rates over time and suggested that strong safeguards and oversight procedures be implemented to ensure affordability over the long-term.

The initiative to provide an additional \$750 million in public transit funding to communities which commit their own funding towards the building of new housing was also positively received by participants. Many believed that this initiative would incentivize cities and communities to build more

housing while simultaneously providing the infrastructure necessary to support this growth. Additionally, targeted initiatives, such as the provision of an additional \$1.5 billion (over two years) for affordable housing for those experiencing homelessness and/or domestic violence, were also identified as important by a number of participants. Some expressed the belief that housing should be viewed as a human right and needed to be available to all Canadians, including those in marginalized populations.

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

Of the initiatives shown to participants, those specifically targeted toward first-time home buyers received a high level of support among most groups. Specifically focusing on the expansion of the First-Time Home Buyers' Incentive, several were of the view that this would be helpful in providing a pathway to homeownership for those who remained single. It was felt that buying a house was presently extremely difficult without two incomes, and more support was required to assist single Canadians in their attempts to purchase their first homes. The proposal to double the existing First-Time Home Buyer's Tax Credit from \$5,000 to \$10,000 also received support from a number of participants, particularly renters living in the City of Vancouver. Many in this group expected this program could be of significant assistance to them personally as they looked to purchase their first homes.

The announcement of the new Tax-Free First Home Savings Account, allowing prospective home buyers to save up to \$40,000 tax-free to put towards the purchase of their first home, was also met with a largely positive reaction among participants. Many felt this initiative could be of particular value to young people with longer investment time horizons, providing them with an additional way to save towards an eventual down payment for their first home.

The allocation of an additional \$200 million towards increasing rent-to-own housing options also received a great deal of support, particularly among those in rural Ontario. Participants were generally enthusiastic about the possibility of rent-to-own housing options, which they felt provided an alternative pathway to home ownership and a new opportunity for Canadians to build equity in a home without necessitating an expensive down payment.

While many felt the investment of \$562 million (over two years) to fund organizations addressing homelessness, as well as an additional \$62 million specifically addressing this issue among veterans, were worthwhile initiatives, few identified them as the most pressing issues at the present time. The proposal of a one-time \$500 payment to Canadians facing housing affordability challenges was also met with very limited support, with numerous participants feeling it would likely have little to no tangible impact and represented a waste of federal resources.

Participants next evaluated a third set of initiatives, this time focused on protecting Canadians in the housing market. On balance, all initiatives received a considerable level of support, with a number of participants expressing the view that all these initiatives would likely have a positive impact on Canadians and the housing market overall.

Many felt especially positively regarding the initiative of making assignment sales of new and renovated housing taxable, serving to deter speculators from purchasing these homes as investments rather than as residential housing. A number of participants felt it was inappropriate that homes were being left vacant while many Canadians experienced housing insecurity or homelessness. It was added by some that this initiative could help prevent people from using the Canadian housing market as an investment vehicle, believing this to be a key driver behind the rise of housing prices in several parts of the country. A large number of participants expressed support for the creation of new taxation penalties to stop landlords from 'renovicting' tenants. Some were of the view that this practice had become quite prevalent and represented a significant problem in their local communities.

Participants were generally mixed in their support of the decision by the Government of Canada to prohibit all non-Canadians from buying residential properties in Canada for a period of two years. For those in support of this ban, it was felt that, in many cases, foreign buyers were currently taking advantage of the Canadian housing market, purchasing these properties as investment vehicles rather than for use as residential housing. A number of participants felt more negatively about this initiative, with some worried it could lead to potential discrimination against foreign homebuyers, and may be used by some to stoke populist sentiments among Canadians towards immigrants and other new arrivals.

A significant number of participants also expressed support for the proposal to end 'blind bidding', with many believing this practice often served to artificially inflate real estate prices. This was seen by many as an increasingly prevalent issue and one that was potentially dangerous in that it encouraged people to take greater risks and submit bids that may be outside their price range in order to outbid other potential buyers. Though less broadly popular, the initiative to introduce new taxation rules to deter house flipping also received some support from participants.

Asked to reflect on these housing initiatives as a whole, a number of participants remained ambivalent. While many were enthusiastic about the prospect of the Government of Canada taking action to address housing affordability, several believed it may not be enough to address the significant housing challenges currently facing Canadians. It was thought by many that the proposed initiatives did not go far enough, and that even more emphasis would need to be placed on increasing the supply of housing in particular.

Discussing whether it was realistic to expect the Government of Canada to be able to accomplish all of these initiatives, many expressed pessimism as to whether this was possible. A number of participants questioned whether any of these initiatives would be able to address housing challenges in the short-term, believing more immediate measures may be needed. Several also expressed the desire for a multi-level approach to housing, advocating for the federal government to work with provincial/territorial governments to develop strategies that would allow these new initiatives to be implemented as expediently as possible.

### **Official Language Priorities (Quebec Eastern Townships Low-Income Workers, North/South Shore of Montreal [excluding Montreal])**

Two groups comprising Francophones residing in the province of Quebec discussed a number of actions the federal government could be taking to better support Francophone communities across Canada. To prompt discussion, participants were shown a list of six priorities and asked to identify which were most important.

Several participants indicated the importance of ensuring every Canadian can be heard and understood by a judge in their official language of choice when before a court as a particularly important priority. It was widely felt that given the importance of these proceedings, it was a necessity that all participants be able to communicate and engage in the official language of their choice. If this were not the case, it was felt some parties may potentially be placed at significant disadvantage in their ability to present the facts of their case.

A large number also identified guaranteeing the equality of the English and French languages in Canada as a key priority. These participants spoke about the perceived relative dominance of English in many regions of Canada (including some areas of Quebec) and felt that a focus on official language equivalence would ensure that, at a minimum, governmental institutions at all levels would be prepared to provide services in both official languages across Canada. At the same time, several were of the view that guaranteeing equality of the French language outside of Quebec could be challenging given the relatively large Anglophone share of the total population in Canada.

Beyond this, some believed that it was also important to promote French language training outside Quebec and felt that doing so would not only enhance the fluency of Anglophones in both official languages, but would also contribute to conserving the French language and culture. In the context of this discussion, several participants commented on the need for more French training in schools and greater access to a range of courses offered in the French language.

### **Climate Change and Environment (Mid-size Centres Quebec Environmentally Concerned, Northwest Territories)**

This group of participants, identified as being concerned about the potential impacts of climate change, discussed a number of issues related to the environment. These included initiatives and announcements focusing on reducing carbon emissions as well as green technology such as Zero-Emission Vehicles (ZEVs).

#### **Carbon Emissions (Mid-size Centres Quebec Environmentally Concerned)**

To begin these conversations, participants were asked if they had ever heard of carbon-capture, usage, and storage (CCUS) projects, including how they work and what they might be used for. No participants had, though a small number felt these might be related to the recent pledge by the Government of Canada to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. After being presented with additional information regarding CCUS technology, participants were asked what impacts, if any,

they felt these projects could have in Canada. While a number of participants said this technology might be helpful in mitigating the effects of greenhouse gas emissions, a few believed a greater focus needed to be placed on reducing these emissions altogether rather than focusing on ways to limit their impact. Several also felt the widespread use of this technology would position Canada as a leader among its international peers in terms of sustainability and green innovation.

Focusing on the recent 2022 federal Budget, participants were informed that the federal government had announced the introduction of a refundable tax credit to offset the costs for companies purchasing and installing equipment for carbon capture, transportation, and storage. The tax credit will provide an estimated \$2.6 billion over the next five years, and \$1.5 billion each year after that until 2030. Though some expressed the desire for additional information, several believed this to be a positive initiative at face value, so long as the majority of these incentives went to Canadian-based companies. In addition, some believed that similar financial incentives should be offered to small businesses and individual households that make investments into green technology and retrofitting, believing these also represented significant costs that should be supported by the federal government.

Discussing oil companies more specifically, participants were asked what responsibility, if any, oil and gas companies should have regarding reducing carbon emissions in Canada. While most said these companies should be responsible for reducing their sector's impact on the environment, several thought it was unlikely that oil and gas corporations would take this action on their own, believing action would only take place through stricter regulation from the federal government.

Few participants were familiar with the term 'net-zero' oil. To aid conversation, participants were informed that this refers to oil extraction projects that completely negate any greenhouse gas emissions experienced in the extraction process. While most expected a transition to net-zero practices by oil and gas companies would make a difference in helping Canada to reach its emissions targets in the future, some felt more would also need to be done to address other sources of emissions (such as industry and automobiles) rather than solely focusing on the extraction process.

Discussing recent substantial rises in gasoline prices across Canada, felt to be partially in response to the crisis in Ukraine, participants were asked whether recent events had prompted them to reconsider their stance on domestic oil production. Several indicated that they had changed their minds somewhat, believing that while a green transition remained important, the federal government may need to prioritize oil and gas production in Canada to a greater extent.

### **Zero-Emission Vehicles (Mid-size Centres Quebec Environmentally Concerned)**

Participants in this group were also asked a series of questions related to ZEVs. All were aware of this technology, with many having recently seen, read, or heard about it in communications from the federal government as well as in the media. Some commented negatively on what they viewed as the considerable price of these vehicles, believing them to be prohibitively expensive for many Canadians. Though participants were aware of the federal government's support for ZEVs in a general sense, few were aware of any specific initiatives or announcements related to the manufacturing of this technology in Canada.



Though no participants owned a ZEV (currently or in the past), most indicated that they would consider buying one in the future. For these participants, the environmental benefits as well as savings on gasoline, were identified as the foremost reasons behind their interest in purchasing a ZEV. A number of these participants, however, also raised concerns regarding these vehicles, with some reiterating the considerable upfront cost to purchase a ZEV. Regardless, virtually all participants felt the Government of Canada should pursue greater investments towards ZEVs. Discussing the federal government's performance to date on this front, most felt it was on the right track in its efforts to increase the manufacturing of ZEVs in Canada as well as expand the number of charging stations to support these vehicles. Almost all participants felt more would need to be done to make these vehicles more affordable if a large-scale transition to ZEVs was expected to occur.

### **Fisheries (Atlantic Canada)**

Participants in the group based in Atlantic Canada engaged in a brief discussion related to issues concerning the fishing industry in the region. While some had heard in passing about a potential freeze on certain fishing stocks, few participants were aware of proposed cuts to herring fishery quotas by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). Discussing their reactions, while many expected these cuts may assist in preserving the long-term sustainability of the fishing stock, a significant number also emphasized the economic importance of the sector to Atlantic Canada and suggested the federal government consider developing financial supports or retraining programs for those whose livelihoods might be negatively impacted by these potential quota reductions.

Asked to evaluate the performance of the Government of Canada in supporting the fishing sector, many expressed uncertainty, feeling they did not have enough knowledge about the sector or existing supports to properly assess the issue. Though few had any suggestions as to how the federal government might better support the fishing sector moving forward, a small number proposed that additional resources could be allocated towards research and innovation related to sustainable fishing practices. It was thought this could help in creating a viable future path for the industry while still aligning with larger goals related to long-term sustainability.

### **Relationship with China (Greater Vancouver Area [excluding City of Vancouver] Chinese Diaspora)**

One group, comprised of members of the Chinese diaspora within Canada, engaged in a discussion regarding the Government of Canada's relationship with China. Asked to describe this relationship at present, many believed it to be mostly negative, feeling it had become somewhat strained and distant in recent years. Discussing what factors had contributed to this, many recalled the events surrounding the extradition of the chief financial officer of Huawei Technologies as a key factor in the deterioration of the Sino-Canadian relationship. Participants also cited worsening relationships between China and other jurisdictions such as the United States as an additional contributor to this perceived growing tension.



In light of these challenges participants expressed hope that, in time, it would be possible to resolve these differences and develop a closer relationship. Asked if the Government of Canada should pursue a stronger relationship with China, all participants believed that it should. Many participants expressed a desire to see closer ties with China, with several identifying potential economic benefits as the primary reason for their position. Adding to this, some emphasized China's status as a vital trade partner for Canada and believed that strengthening this relationship would likely result in increased economic prosperity for Canadians as a whole. Despite their enthusiasm for the prospect of working toward a closer relationship with China, participants also felt that Canada's relationship with the United States was extremely important and needed to be taken into account. The view was expressed by some that any actions towards developing stronger ties with China should not come at the expense of existing Canada-U.S. relations.

### **Persons Living with Disabilities (Windsor Persons Living with Disabilities)**

Issues facing persons with disabilities in Canada were discussed in a group comprising those with lived experience in this regard. To begin, participants spoke about some of the unique challenges they frequently encounter and their impact on everyday activities. A number of issues were mentioned, including a lack of accessibility, mobility challenges in urban centres (especially in periods of heavy snowfall), and chronic pain management and sensory issues.

Speaking more generally, many also expressed the desire for a greater emphasis on addressing issues affecting persons living with disabilities at a more individualized level, believing these challenges tended to vary widely from person to person. It was said that a 'one size fits all' approach to disabilities was generally insufficient and that policy makers and urban planners should develop a better understanding of the unique nature of the issues faced by those with disabilities.

Focusing on their current wellbeing and quality of life, several recalled experiencing financial difficulties, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked to elaborate, participants explained that they had incurred additional costs in obtaining care or treatment for their disability over the course of the pandemic, while some had also been affected by the resultant economic downturn and lack of employment opportunities. Many reported being heavily reliant on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) which was viewed by several as falling short of meeting their financial needs. A large number of participants also cited challenges related to affordable and accessible housing given the limited income opportunities for many of those with disabilities. Related to this, it was suggested by some that the federal government should consider developing a 'living wage' program for persons with disabilities which would provide a guaranteed basic income.

Asked to identify the most significant challenges faced by Canadians living with disabilities, many reiterated issues raised earlier in the discussion, including reduced employment opportunities, limited financial supports, accessibility challenges, and social isolation. Few were able to recall any recent actions the federal government had taken towards addressing these issues. Some also took this opportunity to comment on current programs and initiatives directed at people with disabilities, saying that the eligibility criteria were often overly restrictive and limited their ability to take advantage of these supports.

While a few were somewhat encouraged by the recent appointment of Canada's first Chief Accessibility Officer (CAO), overall, participants could not say definitively that the Government of Canada was currently on the right track when it came to meeting the needs of persons living with disabilities. Some expanded upon this, reiterating their desire for the federal government to take a more individualized or customized approach to care and treatment options as well as place a greater emphasis on initiatives supporting self-sufficiency and personal autonomy for those with disabilities. A number of participants also called for a multi-level approach to addressing the needs of persons with disabilities, believing the federal government should work with provincial/territorial governments to establish national accessibility standards that would more effectively support and care for persons with disabilities.

Discussing whether the Government of Canada should focus more on policies that remove barriers for disabled persons or those that provide equal opportunities, all participants felt these two goals were interconnected and should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. It was generally felt that removing barriers would ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities. Asked what they would expect to see from a federal government focused on addressing these areas, a wide range of responses were provided. These included the promotion of increased personal autonomy and self-sufficiency for disabled persons, greater consultation with these individuals when it came to developing policies and initiatives to address their unique challenges, and efforts to ensure employment equity for those with disabilities. Speaking more broadly, participants felt that greater efforts should be taken by the Government of Canada to educate all Canadians regarding the unique challenges encountered by those living with disabilities. Several were of the view that a lack of understanding among the general public contributed to widespread misperceptions and stigma towards disabled people which, in turn, created additional barriers for these individuals.

Discussing the performance of the federal government in terms of providing opportunities for people living with disabilities, very few participants felt that much in the way of tangible progress had been made. It was widely thought that the current supports in place at both the federal and provincial/territorial levels of government provided only short-term solutions which did not fully address the needs of these individuals. Asked what more could be done to better support persons living with disabilities in the long-term, many pointed to the need to provide more affordable and accessible housing options. Several were of the opinion that housing prices in general were becoming increasingly unaffordable, both in terms of purchasing a home and renting, and that people with disabilities had even fewer options available to them due to their unique needs.

Asked to consider what 'accessibility' meant to them, most equated the term with universal inclusivity, meaning that all people, regardless of ability, should feel included in all aspects of society. Several were of the opinion that the conditions for full accessibility would only be met once every person was able to access any service, building, or essential activity without encountering difficulties. Discussing the phrase 'disability inclusion', a number of participants took issue with the reference to 'disability', believing the focus should be on broader inclusivity rather than for disabled people specifically. Several felt that doing so served only to separate people living with disabilities from the rest of society, and was counterproductive to the overall goal of inclusion.

Participants were not aware of any recent announcements related to a proposed Canada Disability Benefit (CDB). To clarify, it was explained that this program would be modelled after the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for seniors and would provide a regular long-term supplement to other provincial or territorial supports, essentially acting as a Universal Basic Income (UBI). While most participants felt this was a positive development and would be helpful, many expressed skepticism as to whether it would actually be implemented as stated, believing similar initiatives had been proposed in the past and had not come to fruition. Relatively few were confident the program would be in place within the next few years, with many believing it would either take far longer or would ultimately not be implemented at all.

Only a small number of participants were aware of other existing financial supports made available by the federal government to persons with disabilities such as the Disability Tax Credit (DTC) and Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) disability benefits. Discussing additional financial supports the Government of Canada could be providing, some suggested initiatives such as rebates for purchasing accessible vehicles and/or modifying vehicles to be more accessible, as well as grants for those looking to retrofit their homes to better accommodate their needs. All participants felt the federal government should increase financial supports to those with disabilities to facilitate their being able to obtain affordable and accessible housing. These included a general lack of available options as well as accessibility and safety issues among the small number of dwellings that were available. A few suggested the federal government could work with realtors and real estate corporations to identify affordable housing options including upgrades or retrofits to current housing stock in order to improve accessibility.

### **Public Health Ad Testing (Mid-size Centres Prairies)**

Participants in one group were presented with a storyboard advertising concept promoting Canada's public health system, with a view of obtaining their initial top of mind reactions as well as the extent to which they found the concept informative. Most participants responded positively to the advertisement, finding it to be both interesting and educational. A number of participants commented that the concept presented a more holistic view of Canada's public health system, specifically focusing on what it is, how it operates, and the ways in which it works to keep Canadians healthy and safe. For most, the key message of this concept centered on promoting community health and safety for Canadians in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several found this message to be both timely and important, providing reassurance that public health and safety would remain key federal priorities going forward.

Views were somewhat mixed among participants as to whether the concept altered their impressions regarding the public health system in Canada. While some said the concept did not affect their current level of awareness or understanding regarding Canada's public health system, others commented that it had been useful in highlighting the interconnectedness of individual, community, and societal health. Several participants felt that the advertisement had effectively helped to elucidate the extensive nature of public health activities within Canada as well as the pervasive impact the system has across many aspects of everyday life.

### **Métis Issues (Mid-size and Major Centres Manitoba Métis Nation)**

Participants in the group comprised of individuals of Métis descent discussed a number of issues specifically related to the Métis community. Asked to identify important issues related to Métis peoples requiring increased attention from the Government of Canada, participants put forward a wide range of responses. For many, it was felt the federal government needed to do far more to address issues such as systemic racism, intergenerational trauma, and cultural appropriation, all of which were felt to be having an adverse impact on Métis specifically and Indigenous communities more broadly at present. Some were also of the view that more resources should be devoted towards the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW), expressing disappointment regarding what they viewed as a lack of progress on this front.

Asked for their opinion regarding the level of commitment demonstrated by the Government of Canada towards addressing Métis issues, all participants were of the view that not enough attention had been devoted to this area. Focusing on reconciliation in particular, it was suggested that a more consultative approach needed to be developed regarding this matter, with some of the opinion that at present this was primarily a 'top-down' process on the part of the federal government. Though voicing their dissatisfaction with efforts towards reconciliation to date, all participants believed this remained a critically important priority for the Government of Canada to focus on. Some suggested that high-ranking federal officials (including the prime minister) should take greater efforts to regularly visit Indigenous reserves as well as remote and Northern Indigenous communities, believing that physically engaging with these communities would likely provide a better understanding regarding the challenges they are currently facing.

Identifying potential actions the federal government could take to demonstrate its commitment to reconciliation with Métis in particular and Indigenous peoples more broadly, participants provided a wide variety of responses. These ranged from locally-targeted initiatives to assist with mental health and addiction issues in Indigenous communities to calls for a systemic overhaul of Canada's parliamentary system and existing legislation such as the Indian Act. It was felt by a number of participants that greater resources needed to be allocated towards mental health and addictions treatment in Indigenous communities, allowing those suffering from these issues to receive care within their local regions rather than being forced to travel long distances. Some also suggested potential actions towards increasing the visibility of the Métis community within Canada, such as increased cultural programming as well as further promotion and recognition of the historical contributions of Métis individuals such as Louis Riel. A small number recommended the creation of additional seats in Parliament specifically for Indigenous individuals, believing this could go a long way towards providing greater representation of these communities in the policy development process.

### **NORAD (Northwest Territories)**

Participants in the group from the Northwest Territories (NT) engaged in a brief discussion regarding the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). Only a small number of participants reported having heard of the organization, and were only vaguely aware of its primary objectives. After it was clarified that NORAD chiefly focused on monitoring and protecting North American

airspace, many believed this to be an important role in terms of protecting Canadians and warding off potential threats. It was felt by some that in addition to protecting Canadians, NORAD represented an opportunity for ongoing cooperation with the United States, serving to continue to strengthen this alliance. Discussing whether changes should be made regarding the Government of Canada's approach to air defence given the current geopolitical environment, it was felt by many that existing efforts were satisfactory. Most expressed confidence that NORAD would be able to effectively identify and address any air-based threats to Canadians and protect them from potential harm. A few, however, were more concerned, worrying that the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia may eventually escalate and that more should be done to secure Canada's North, especially given its relatively close geographic proximity to Russia.

### **Local Issues (Quebec Eastern Townships Low-Income Workers, Mid-size and Major Centres Manitoba Métis Nation, City of Vancouver Renters)**

Participants in three groups discussed a number of issues related to their local communities and/or regions. Across all groups, a significant number of participants identified issues such as housing affordability, healthcare shortages, insufficient mental health resources, and the perceived rising cost of living throughout the country as the most pressing concerns currently facing their communities.

#### **Eastern Townships (Quebec Eastern Townships Low-Income Workers)**

Participants residing in the Eastern Townships region of Quebec discussed issues related to their local communities, including housing, perceived labour shortages in the region, and infrastructure more generally.

Discussing the most pressing challenges at present, most identified affordable housing as a key concern in their region. It was felt that rising housing prices had made it difficult for many to enter the housing market as well as find affordable rental options in their areas. While a small number recalled hearing about the expansion of the First-Time Home Buyer's Tax Credit, few others were aware of any recent actions taken by the federal government to address the housing situation. Almost all participants felt there was more that the Government of Canada could do to address this issue.

In addition to housing, a number of participants believed there to be a shortage of workers in their local communities, perceiving this as a growing issue for a number of sectors. Some expressed the view that this was primarily the result of insufficient wages, believing many no longer viewed it as worthwhile to continue working. A few others also thought that more could be done by the Government of Canada to accelerate the credential recognition process for those arriving in Canada from other jurisdictions. It was felt that at present many highly skilled, foreign-born workers were unable to gain employment in their areas of expertise and that this was having a negative impact on the Canadian economy overall.

Discussing whether they felt the Government of Canada was currently on the right or wrong track regarding the issues mentioned above, responses were mixed. For those who felt the Government of Canada was on the wrong track, it was said that not enough action had been taken to address these

issues and that more should be done to work with provincial/territorial and municipal governments on this front. For the smaller number of participants who believed the federal government was on the right track, it was generally felt that sufficient resources were being allocated towards these issues at present and that progress was being made, even if some issues continued to persist.

### **Manitoba (Mid-size and Major Centres Manitoba Métis Nation)**

Participants in the group from Manitoba engaged in a brief discussion regarding priorities specific to their region. To begin, participants were asked what they felt to be the most important sectors and industries to their respective communities. Responses generally focused on the retail and service sector (including restaurants), manufacturing, construction, and local small businesses. Additionally, some also mentioned the prevalence of businesses and resources established to assist marginalized populations, including supervised consumption sites and homeless shelters. While it was felt these may be beneficial in some respects, it was said that not enough was being done to address the root causes of these issues, including mental health challenges and intergenerational trauma. Discussing what more the federal government could do to address this issue, participants emphasized the need for an increased focus on housing affordability and homelessness, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many were of the view that having access to safe and reliable housing would yield positive outcomes and could substantially improve the economic and social well-being of marginalized individuals.

Asked which local sectors and industries required additional support, several reiterated the need for increased assistance to small and locally owned businesses, especially given the challenges they had faced over the past two years. Some also discussed the need for additional support for those pursuing post-secondary education, believing this had become increasingly expensive and difficult to manage for many. Focusing on recent initiatives or actions taken by the federal government towards addressing these issues, a few recalled pandemic-related supports for small businesses such as the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS). Related to post-secondary expenses, while a small number recalled hearing discussions regarding federal student debt forgiveness and increased post-secondary financial supports, none were able to recall any specific details on this front.

Focusing on the issues most prevalent within their local communities, some reiterated concerns regarding housing affordability and the number of individuals currently living in poverty and/or experiencing homelessness. Some also identified violent crime as a particularly concerning issue, with a number of participants of the impression that the homicide rate in Winnipeg was considerably higher relative to comparable urban centres throughout the rest of Canada. Related to this, a number of participants believed these crimes often disproportionately targeted Indigenous individuals and that more needed to be done by the federal government to address the prevalence of racially-motivated crimes in their area.

### **Vancouver (City of Vancouver Renters)**

One group, comprised of renters residing in the City of Vancouver, discussed a number of issues related to their local community as well as potential actions or initiatives the Government of Canada could take to better support those living in the region. Asked to identify what they believed to be the

most pressing concerns currently facing the City of Vancouver, a number of issues were mentioned, including healthcare worker shortages, affordable housing, and racial discrimination (particularly towards individuals of Asian heritage). In addition to these issues, participants also mentioned areas such as climate change and the environment, improved access to social services, the increasing cost of essential goods and services (such as groceries and gasoline), and the need to increase the compensation of educators within the province.

Related to what could be done to address these issues, a number of participants felt more should be done to create affordable housing options, believing these needed to be far more accessible. It was believed by some that affordable housing had become stigmatized due to its perceived association with low-income and marginalized populations. To address this, it was suggested that affordable housing be built throughout all areas of Vancouver, rather than being centralized within specific neighbourhoods. It was felt this could have the effect of reducing this stigma while also providing a greater number of affordable housing options to those in need.

Focusing on the issue of violent crime (including racially-motivated attacks) many were of the view that much of the violence in Vancouver stemmed from gang activity and that in many cases these crimes were often perpetrated by youth who had become involved in these gangs due to their prominence within their communities. It was suggested that greater efforts be taken to develop community and recreational programming for youth, providing them with alternatives to participating in gang activity.

Asked if they felt the Government of Canada was primarily on the right or wrong track when it came to these issues, almost all believed it to be on the wrong track. Regarding housing, it was felt by several that actions such as the raising of interest rates by the Bank of Canada should have been taken far earlier to address this issue and that existing federal programs and initiatives had done little to resolve the problem. Discussing what could be done in order for the federal government to get back on the right track, participants primarily focused on issues related to the healthcare sector. Suggestions included actions related to addressing healthcare worker shortages, long wait times, a limited availability of appointments, the backlog of postponed surgeries and appointments due to the pandemic, and increased access to mental health and addictions resources. In addition, it was felt more needed be done to retain healthcare workers and encourage them to continue practicing within the province via the provision of higher wages, increased benefits, and more reasonable working conditions.

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#### **MORE INFORMATION**

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