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Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – September 2022

Executive Summary

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Canada 

Executive Summary

Introduction

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

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

The research is intended to be used by the Communications and Consultation Secretariat within PCO in order to fulfill its mandate of supporting the Prime Minister's Office in coordinating government communications. Specifically, the research will ensure 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 August 31st and September 28th, 2022, in multiple locations across the country including Atlantic Canada, Ontario,

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

The research for this cycle of focus groups focused in part on the Government of Canada's priorities and performance on issues important to a wide range of subgroups and regions. These included healthcare workers in the City of London, firearms owners in Atlantic Canada, people nearing retirement in Newfoundland and Labrador, and First Nations living on-reserve in Ontario. Certain topics that were prevalent in the news during the month of September were also discussed, including Hurricane Fiona and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

The research explored a wide range of related issues in depth, with a particular focus on healthcare and digital credentials. The discussion on healthcare focused on a variety of subtopics, including the Government of Canada's healthcare priorities, the experiences and perspectives of participants related to healthcare provision in their communities, and sources of public health information. A group comprised of those concerned about the economy also discussed the upcoming Canada Dental Benefit and were presented with creative concepts designed by Health Canada to inform Canadians about this initiative. Among the several groups who discussed digital credentials, participants reacted to visual examples depicting what a digital service card may look like.

Additionally, a few groups discussed the Government of Canada's economic performance, as well as its economic priorities. Several other groups also engaged in in-depth discussions on Canada's oil and gas sector and were asked for their opinions on its plan to cap emissions from the sector. Participants in three groups – specifically firearms owners residing in Atlantic Canada, those concerned about the economy residing in small and rural centres in the Prairies, and young adults residing in Ontario and the Atlantic region – were asked for their views on the level of firearm-related crime in Canada, as well as the Government of Canada's efforts to further regulate firearms.

Other topics discussed included travel experiences of those who had recently travelled outside of Canada, agriculture, as well as discussions related to federal government services, climate change, the protection of French language communities outside of Quebec, and concerns for those nearing retirement. First Nations participants living on-reserve in Ontario also engaged in a discussion regarding issues related to their communities and Indigenous peoples more broadly.

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 Francophones, young adults (aged 25-30; 18-24; and 18-30), travellers, those concerned about the economy, healthcare workers, First Nations living on reserve, and people nearing retirement.

Detailed Approach

- Twelve focus groups across various regions in Canada.
- One group was conducted with the general population in mid-size and major centres in the Prairies.
- The other eleven groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
 - Francophones residing in Ontario and New Brunswick;
 - Young adults, aged 25-30, residing in the Atlantic region and Ontario, aged 18-24 residing in Western Canada (Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia), and aged 18-30 residing in Eastern and Central Canada (Ontario and New Brunswick);
 - Travellers residing in Frontenac County in Ontario;
 - Those concerned about the economy residing in small and rural centres in the Prairies;
 - Healthcare workers residing in the City of London;
 - Firearms owners residing in Atlantic Canada;
 - People nearing retirement residing in Newfoundland and Labrador; and
 - First Nations living on reserve residing in Ontario.
- 3 groups in Ontario and New Brunswick 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, 83 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 |
|---------------------------------------|-------|----------|--------------|---------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Mid-size and Major Centres Prairies | 1 | English | August 31 | 8:00-10:00 pm | General Population | 8 |
| Ontario | 2 | French | September 1 | 6:00-8:00 pm | Francophones | 7 |
| Eastern Canada (Atlantic Region & ON) | 3 | English | September 7 | 6:00-8:00 pm | Young Adults, aged 25-30 | 7 |
| Western Canada (SK, MB, AB, BC) | 4 | English | September 12 | 8:00-10:00 pm | Young Adults, aged 18-24 | 7 |
| Frontenac Region – ON | 5 | English | September 13 | 6:00-8:00 pm | Travellers | 8 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----|---------|--------------|---------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Eastern & Central Canada (ON & NB) | 6 | French | September 14 | 6:00-8:00 pm | Young Adults, aged 18-30 | 6 |
| Small & Rural Centres Prairies | 7 | English | September 15 | 8:00-10:00 pm | Concerned About the Economy | 7 |
| City of London | 8 | English | September 20 | 6:00-8:00 pm | Healthcare Workers | 8 |
| Ontario | 9 | English | September 21 | 6:00-8:00 pm | First Nations Living on Reserve | 8 |
| Atlantic Canada | 10 | English | September 22 | 5:00-7:00 pm | Firearms Owners | 7 |
| New Brunswick | 11 | French | September 27 | 5:00-7:00 pm | Francophones | 6 |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | 12 | English | September 28 | 4:30-6:30 pm | People Nearing Retirement | 4 |
| Total number of participants | | | | | | 83 |

Key Findings

Government of Canada in the News (All Locations)

At the beginning of each group participants were asked what they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days. A wide range of announcements and initiatives were recalled. Chief among them was the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on September 8th, 2022 as well as the announcement by the federal government of an official Day of Mourning in Canada coinciding with Her Late Majesty's State Funeral in London on September 19th, 2022. Participants also recalled actions such as the Bank of Canada's recent decision to raise interest rates, the announcement of a number of measures to assist low-income Canadians with the rising cost of living, authorization by Health Canada of an adapted version of the COVID-19 vaccine for use as a booster dose, and initiatives related to ending human trafficking as well as the launch of the federal government's 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan.

Hurricane Fiona (New Brunswick Francophones, Newfoundland and Labrador People Nearing Retirement)

Two groups based in Atlantic Canada discussed the impact of Hurricane Fiona, a powerful Category 4 storm which had made landfall in the region on September 24th, 2022, causing widespread property loss and destruction. All participants indicated that they had been following this issue closely and a number of participants had witnessed the storm firsthand. Discussing the Government of Canada's response, several recalled hearing that Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel had been mobilized and sent to the region to assist with coordinating the recovery effort. Several expressed concern regarding the impact the storm might have on local services and farming as well as what would happen to families who had lost everything and either did not have insurance or whose insurance

might not cover the extent of their losses. Focusing on the federal government's response, many praised the decision to mobilize CAF personnel and resources as well as to establish a donation-matching program with the Canadian Red Cross. Suggestions regarding additional actions the federal government could take included increased supports for those affected, deployment of an increased number of CAF personnel to assist with the recovery, financial assistance for those who may not have insurance coverage, and the provision of mental health resources for those who may have experienced trauma due to the storm.

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (Ontario First Nations Living On-Reserve)

One group, comprised of First Nations participants living on reserve, briefly discussed the upcoming National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, which took place on September 30th, 2022. While participants felt it was important for Indigenous voices to be heard and that this provided a valuable platform for survivors of the historic residential school system and their loved ones, a number had mixed feelings as to their expectations for this day. For some who worked in cultural education, it was expressed that while it was a positive step for non-Indigenous Canadians to seek more information about the histories of Indigenous peoples, the burden to educate often fell on Indigenous individuals themselves at a great deal of personal time and effort. Many participants indicated that while this was an important day for relaying the histories and experiences of Indigenous peoples, reconciliation needed to be a year-round effort and they did not want to see attention only focused upon this issue at a certain time each year.

Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (City of London Healthcare Workers, Atlantic Canada Firearms Owners, Newfoundland and Labrador People Nearing Retirement, Ontario First Nations Living On-Reserve)

Four groups engaged in discussions related to their local regions and/or backgrounds, as well as issues they felt needed to be prioritized to a greater extent by the Government of Canada going forward. Asked to identify areas in which the federal government had performed well as of late, participants residing in the City of London as well as Atlantic Canada put forward a number of responses. These included climate change and the environment, women's rights and social equality, and ongoing assistance for Ukraine in its defence efforts against invading Russian forces. Prompted to consider areas where the federal government could improve upon its performance, participants provided a wide range of ideas, including healthcare, the perceived rising cost of living, and housing affordability throughout Canada. Almost all participants felt their opinion of the federal government had gotten worse over time and several were of the opinion that the federal government had been mostly reactive in its handling of important issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation. Focusing on recent actions taken by the federal government related to these issues, a number recalled the recent announcement of federal initiatives to assist low-income Canadians including the establishment of the Canada Dental Benefit, a \$500 top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit, and the temporary doubling of the Goods and Services Tax Credit (GSTC). While viewing these actions as a step in the right direction, it was felt by several that they would likely not be enough to completely offset the impacts of inflation and that additional social assistance would likely need to be provided.

Speaking specifically about their province, participants in the group from Newfoundland and Labrador also identified areas such as housing affordability, healthcare, and inflation as key priorities for the federal government to work on. With an eye on recent events, many mentioned the substantial damage caused by Hurricane Fiona, expressing that while the federal government had provided some assistance on this front, a substantial amount of additional resources would be required to rebuild the affected communities. Some also viewed transportation and rising fuel costs as a specific concern for their region, perceiving that flights and ferries connecting the province to the mainland had become increasingly expensive as of late and had made it more difficult for those living in Newfoundland and Labrador to access the rest of the country.

Indigenous Peoples (Ontario First Nations Living On-Reserve)

Participants in the group comprised of First Nations individuals living on reserve discussed a number of priority areas concerning Indigenous peoples for the Government of Canada to focus on, with a specific focus on the provision of clean drinking water to all Indigenous communities. Asked to identify the most pressing concerns facing Indigenous peoples, several participants immediately mentioned a lack of clean drinking water on many reserves. It was felt that this had been a long-standing issue and that further resources urgently needed to be devoted towards resolving it. Additional priorities mentioned by participants included the resolution of existing land claims between Indigenous peoples and the federal government as well as the need for additional resources to address perceived growing issues concerning mental health and substance use in Indigenous communities. While several reported having seen these issues discussed in the media and news, none felt that any tangible progress had been achieved. While few felt the federal government had been effective in its handling of these issues, a number of participants praised organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) for their advocacy on behalf of Indigenous peoples. On balance, it was largely thought that in order for participants to feel sufficient progress had been made the federal government would need to take immediate action to ensure all Indigenous communities had access to basic necessities such as clean drinking water, food, housing, and vital services such as high-speed Internet.

Few could recall any recent actions taken by the Government of Canada specifically related to ensuring access to clean drinking water. Provided with information detailing the federal government's progress to date in lifting long-term drinking water advisories, participants largely reacted with skepticism to this information, believing it did not align with their own experiences as well as personal accounts they had heard from those in other communities. It was strongly believed that even if many drinking water advisories had technically been lifted, clean drinking water remained a widespread and pervasive issue for Indigenous communities.

Healthcare (Ontario and Atlantic Region Young Adults, Western Canada Young Adults, Eastern and Central Canada Francophone Young Adults, Small and Rural Centres Prairies Concerned About the Economy, City of London Healthcare Workers, Newfoundland and Labrador People Nearing Retirement, Ontario First Nations Living On-Reserve)

Seven groups engaged in conversations focusing on a range of issues related to healthcare provision in Canada. These discussions included perspectives on numerous healthcare priorities, personal experiences in accessing the healthcare system, the sources through which participants typically receive information related to public health, as well as evaluations of creative concepts produced by Health Canada.

Healthcare Priorities (City of London Healthcare Workers)

Participants residing in the City of London and employed in the healthcare sector engaged in a conversation regarding healthcare in their community as well as their perspectives concerning a number of healthcare priority areas recently announced by the Government of Canada.

Though many felt that the quality of healthcare workers and equipment was generally of a high standard in their area, almost all viewed accessibility and availability to be major issues. Many were of the view that there was currently a widespread shortage of staff and resources across all areas of the healthcare system. It was communicated by a number of participants that staffing shortages had greatly contributed to the temporary closures of emergency rooms and operating rooms in many regions throughout the province. All participants believed that a major overhaul of the entire healthcare system would likely be required in order to implement the level of change necessary to meet the healthcare needs of Canadians going forward.

Participants next engaged in conversations related to three important areas of Canada's healthcare system: mental healthcare, long-term care, and primary care. All participants felt that the federal and provincial/territorial governments needed to work together to provide additional assistance for Canadians struggling with mental health challenges. It was widely thought that the number of individuals dealing with these issues had risen substantially over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant suggestions regarding ways to improve mental healthcare in Canada included the establishment of dedicated mental health facilities, recruitment and training of additional mental health professionals, and increasing investments into existing organizations, such as the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA).

Turning their attention to long-term care, participants immediately identified the prevalence of for-profit care facilities as a problematic aspect of the system. Participants were largely of the opinion that rather than focusing on providing the best quality care, for-profit facilities tended to prioritize the maximization of profit wherever possible. Several felt that more could be done to make use of personal support workers (PSWs) in long-term care settings, believing these individuals to currently be underutilized.

Focusing on primary care, many participants shared concerns regarding what they viewed as a widespread shortage of family doctors. A number suggested that greater efforts be taken at both the

federal and provincial levels to incentivize incoming doctors to open practices of their own and work as primary care providers. It was believed this would enable Canadians to access healthcare more easily as well as provide patients with an ongoing relationship with a care provider who understood their individual needs and medical history. Additionally, many were of the view that increasing access to primary care providers would alleviate some of the current strain on hospitals and emergency services.

None of the participants were aware of any recent announcements or initiatives from the federal government related to healthcare. To aid in discussion, participants were informed that the Government of Canada had recently identified five national healthcare priority areas. These included addressing health worker shortages and reducing wait times, increasing access to family health services, improving long-term and in-home care, addressing mental health and substance use, and modernizing health data management and virtual care. Sharing their initial reactions, participants were mostly positive in their assessments of these priority areas. A number voiced enthusiasm related to the expansion of virtual care options and the increased availability mental health services, believing this would greatly improve health outcomes for those in need of these services. While all participants expected that these priorities would have a positive impact if they were successfully implemented, a few expressed concerns regarding the ability of the federal government to affect this level of change in healthcare, given their understanding that this area was primarily under the purview of provincial/territorial governments.

Healthcare Perspectives (Newfoundland and Labrador People Nearing Retirement, Ontario First Nations Living On-Reserve)

Participants in two groups shared their perspectives regarding the quality of healthcare in their respective areas as well as their personal experiences in accessing these services. Several reported having personally utilized healthcare services in recent months and were relatively positive about their experiences. A number, however, indicated that while they had been able to access primary care with relative ease, appointments with specialists often needed to be scheduled months in advance due to the high demand for these services and the relatively few healthcare professionals available to provide them.

Almost all participants felt the standard of care and the skills of healthcare workers in their region to be of high quality, though a number felt more could be done to increase accessibility to these services for those who did not have a family doctor or required emergency services. Additionally, many were of the impression that while healthcare services may be accessible for those living nearer to urban centres, these tended to be far more limited for those in smaller or rural communities. Some were concerned that as a result of this many individuals would not be able to receive the care they need.

Asked to identify the most pressing healthcare challenges in their communities, participant responses primarily focused on concerns related to long wait times and pervasive healthcare worker shortages. It was widely felt that these were issues were being encountered across much of the country and had worsened considerably in recent years. Describing additional challenges, it was felt by those living on reserve that there needed to be a greater emphasis on recruiting healthcare professionals who were Indigenous themselves. It was thought that this would greatly improve the level of understanding

between physicians and their patients and increase the standard of care as a result. Almost all participants felt the Government of Canada had a role to play in addressing these challenges, especially given the impression that these issues were being felt on a national level. With this in mind, it was said that there needed to be a more collaborative effort between federal and provincial/territorial governments to ensure the healthcare needs of all Canadians were being met and that a high standard of care was maintained across the country.

Public Health Information (Ontario and Atlantic Region Young Adults, Western Canada Young Adults, Eastern and Central Canada Francophone Young Adults)

Three groups, all comprised of young adults, engaged in conversations regarding the sources they would typically use to seek out information related to public health. Asked to identify health-related issues that they wished to find more information on, a wide range of responses were shared including the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health requirements, the monkeypox virus, announcements from the Government of Canada related to healthcare, and information related to expected wait times at nearby emergency rooms and walk-in clinics. Describing where they would likely go to obtain this information, participants mentioned a variety of sources. These included radio and television, online search engines, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and word of mouth through friends and family, including those working in health-related professions.

Participants engaged in an exercise where they were shown various potential sources of information and asked to identify which they would use if they were looking for information related to mental health. Across all groups participants identified healthcare workers and online search engines as the sources they would be most likely to rely upon information related to mental health. Also receiving a moderate level of attention were international health authorities, newspapers and other written journalism, and word of mouth information from friends and family. Asked whether any sources were missing from the list, a number of participants identified therapists and/or psychiatrists as additional sources from which they might seek out information related to mental health.

Shown the same list, participants were asked which of those sources they would be most likely to trust for general health recommendations. Healthcare workers were overwhelmingly identified as the most trustworthy source by participants, with international health authorities, scientists, and official websites run by the Government of Canada and respective provincial/territorial governments also receiving a moderate degree of support. A number of participants reported having switched their answers from the previous exercise. Expanding upon this, the view was expressed by some that while personal contacts such as friends and family may be more useful for those seeking to discuss issues specifically related to their personal mental health, for general health concerns they would be more likely to follow official advice provided by health experts and public officials.

Health Canada Concept Testing (Small and Rural Centres Prairies Concerned About the Economy)

Participants in this group were asked to evaluate two creative concepts currently under development by Health Canada to advertise the recently announced Canada Dental Benefit. Only a small number indicated that they were either parents of children under the age of 12 or did not have private dental

insurance of their own. As such, few expected they would personally be able to take advantage of this initiative.

Presented with the visual concepts, participants shared their initial reactions to the designs. Many felt the concepts evoked themes of family, warmth, love, and viewed the general message they were presenting as one of reassurance. Focusing on the visual design, a large number of participants expressed a preference for the colour scheme of the leftmost concept (containing lighter tones), variously describing it as comforting, relaxing, and welcoming. A smaller number felt differently, believing the contrast of the white text on dark-coloured backgrounds was an asset of the rightmost design (containing darker tones) and felt this made the text more distinctive and likely to catch the attention of those who came across it.

Discussing how the posters might be improved, a small number expressed the view that they were somewhat bland and suggested the use of emoticons and other graphics to make the designs more eye-grabbing, especially if they were to be displayed online. A few recommended that the incorporation of a larger group of models, including more children, would help promote the understanding that this program was specifically targeted towards this age group. Asked whether they felt these posters would be more effective if encountered online or in-person, it was largely thought that they would be significantly more impactful in a real-life setting. The view was added that the design of these posters would be conducive to being displayed in places such as dental offices and medical facilities as well as distribution as flyers. A large number felt that they would be likely to scroll past these concepts if they encountered them on social media or while browsing the Internet.

Digital Credentials (Mid-size and Major Centres Prairies, Ontario Francophones, Ontario and Atlantic Region Young Adults, Western Canada Young Adults, Frontenac County Ontario Travellers, Eastern and Central Canada Francophone Young Adults)

Six groups discussed digital credentials and their potential implementation across Canada. When asked whether participants were aware of the concept of a 'digital credential', on balance, only a small number of participants were familiar. Among these participants, most were of the impression that digital credentials provided an alternative to physical forms of identification, such as driver's licences and passports.

On balance, most were relatively comfortable with the notion of digital credentials. Participants frequently cited the additional convenience of having all of one's important personal information in a single location, allowing them to readily identify themselves if required. In addition, it was expected that digital credentials would be more easily renewed or updated, allowing individuals to avoid the potentially time-consuming process of renewing, or replacing their identification. While remaining open to the concept of digital credentials, a number of participants expressed concerns related to security. Of these, some were worried their personal information would be vulnerable to hackers and more specifically, identity theft. Some were also concerned that data from digital credentials would be accessible to third parties, such as advertisers, who may be looking to utilize it for profit. A small number were more negative in their opinions and expressed that they would not consider using digital credentials under any circumstance. Among these, a lack of comfort with digital technology as well as

a strong preference for physical identification were cited as the primary reasons behind their hesitancy towards digital credentials.

Asked to identify examples of digital credentials that may already exist, several thought immediately of electronic records related to the COVID-19 pandemic including the ArriveCAN app and the proof of vaccination systems previously put into place across individual provinces and territories. Others identified examples such as mobile payment methods (such as Apple Pay and Google Pay), authorization technology such as DocuSign, and digital information related to healthcare including electronic versions of an individual's health benefits card. Participants also proposed a wide range of areas in which digital credentials could potentially be used in the future, including travel, healthcare, personal identification, and employment applications.

Prompted to conceptualize a society in which digital credentials were widely used across Canada, some believed daily life would become more technologically oriented though most did not believe that there would be much in the way of tangible change. A large number were of the impression that digital credentials were already being utilized in a number of settings, and several expressed a high level of comfort with digital credentials such as mobile service transactions by debit or credit card and/or using QR codes to access or verify information. Many participants, however, reiterated the opinion that digital credentials should serve as a companion rather than a replacement for physical identification and that both options should remain available.

The Economy (Mid-size and Major Centres Prairies, Ontario Francophones, Eastern and Central Canada Francophone Young Adults)

In several of the groups which took place in September participants shared their perceptions related to the Canadian economy, including perceived connections between the economy and the Government of Canada's work on climate change and affordable child care. The discussions also yielded feedback from participants concerning the extent to which they viewed the economy as a top priority as well as their preferences regarding the type of economy Canada should be working towards.

Overall Priorities and Economic Concerns (Mid-size and Major Centres Prairies, Ontario Francophones)

Asked to identify the top issues the Government of Canada should be focusing on, a wide range of priorities were identified. Among these, two broad categories emerged: socioeconomic issues as well as those related to the environment and climate change. Focusing specifically on the economy, participants widely indicated that it ranked among their top priorities, sharing concerns related to inflation and the rising cost of living, perceived labour shortages, inadequate wages for workers, trade, globalization, and supply chain issues.

In both groups, most felt that the Government of Canada was generally on the right track when it came to addressing economic issues. This belief was underpinned by generally favourable views of the federal government's efforts to provide financial supports to Canadians during the pandemic as well as increases to the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) which had come into effect over the summer. Many felt

the Government of Canada was doing its best to assist Canadians through a challenging time, although several were of the view that there was some room for improvement. Others, by contrast, believed that some actions, such as those intended to address issues such as rising inflation and the perceived housing crisis had come too late and were mostly reactive in nature.

Asked if they were aware of any actions from the Government of Canada related to the environment and climate change, participants recalled several announcements and initiatives. These included the provision of funding to Canadians to make their homes more energy-efficient through the Canada Greener Homes Grant, the implementation of a federal price on carbon, efforts to eliminate the use of single-use plastics, long-term targets related to expanding zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) use in Canada, and participation in international climate agreements such as the Paris Climate Accords. Participants in both groups widely viewed economic growth and addressing climate change as mutually compatible goals. Many also expected that environmental initiatives would address inflation and lower costs for Canadians while also creating new jobs at fair wages, using the example of expanding industries such as renewable energy and ZEV production. There was a wide perception that if issues related to climate change were not dealt with immediately, they would become more economically costly to address in the future.

Most participants in the group held among those residing in the Prairies had heard about the Government of Canada's agreements with various provinces and territories to reduce child care costs to \$10 a day, on average. Participants were also aware that the federal government's plan included the creation of an additional 250,000 child care spaces by 2025-2026. When asked if they saw these kinds of actions as part of a larger strategy by the Government of Canada to address economic issues and to help build a fair, inclusive, and progressive economy, most believed this to be the case. Additionally, participants saw these actions as more inclusive in nature, viewing them as specifically directed at parents, whom they believed faced higher household costs relative to those without children. The federal child care initiative in particular was seen as creating opportunities for middle class families as well as allowing workers to be able to return to and maintain a stronger attachment to the workforce over the long-term.

Economic Priorities (Mid-size and Major Centres Prairies, Ontario Francophones, Eastern and Central Canada Francophone Young Adults)

In two groups, comprising Francophones in Ontario and those living in the Prairies, participants reviewed and commented on six options describing the kind of economy the Government of Canada should be aiming to build. Participants' interpretation of each option and their overall preference are detailed below:

A Fair Economy

Most interpreted a fair economy as one which was equitable and aimed to provide a more reasonable and fairer distribution of wealth across society. They also saw it as one that would reduce discrimination against and create more opportunities for marginalized groups, empowering them to participate more fully and benefit to a level commensurate with their efforts. A fair economy was

viewed as one which offered workers a living wage, ensuring all Canadians have access to the basic necessities of life regardless of their income, training, or educational background.

A Green Economy

Participants envisaged a society built upon an environmentally sustainable economy and underpinned by a framework of policies promoting 'green' activities and initiatives, with decision-making primarily based on environmental risk. Participants assumed a green economy would focus on developing communities with a focus on walkability, incentives to encourage the adoption of zero-emissions vehicles (ZEVs), incorporation of renewable energy sources, and widespread application of sustainable practices.

A Progressive Economy

A progressive economy was characterized as one which would be proactive, nimble, innovative, and be willing to embrace change. Participants felt that achieving the goal of a progressive economy would require a greater willingness on the part of individuals and businesses to take risks. Some commented that a progressive economy would create more opportunities for everyone and, similar to a fair economy, would ensure a basic standard of living for all Canadians. They saw a progressive economy as prioritizing progress in both the economic and social spheres, with a particular focus on access to post-secondary education and training.

An Economy That Works for All Canadians

An economy that works for all Canadians was generally seen as one which would provide a pathway for people to earn a comfortable living. At the same time, it was expected this type of economy would address social and environmental issues (e.g., homelessness and climate change) with a view to building stronger and more equitable communities. Participants felt there was some intersection with a fair economy in terms of addressing inequities and creating equal opportunity and access to healthcare and education for all segments of society at all stages of life, including youth, middle-aged and older people.

An Inclusive Economy

At its core, an inclusive economy was viewed as one which embraces, values, and creates opportunity for all Canadians regardless of their background, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or socio-economic status. Some believed that an inclusive economy would specifically aim to address the needs of marginalized groups and newcomers to Canada, ensuring that these groups have access to the services they require and to opportunities that allow them to fully participate in society.

An Innovative Economy

The key features of an innovative economy were seen as primarily being focused on creativity and proactive action. Several participants described this type of economy as one which would think outside of the box, with a particular emphasis on improving existing processes and practices, fostering and incubating new ideas, and identifying better approaches to utilizing Canada's domestic resources. It was believed this would require further investments on the part of the Government of Canada towards innovation and supporting Canadian-based entrepreneurs.

Of the six options discussed, most believed that the federal government should be aiming to build an economy that works for all Canadians as well as one which is progressive. These ideas resonated with participants for several reasons. An economy which works for all Canadians was seen as all-encompassing in the sense that it also incorporated many of the features of the other visions examined, including inclusivity, progressiveness, sustainability, fairness, and equity. For similar reasons, participants were equally favourable towards a progressive economy as it was seen to comprise many of the positive elements of the other options discussed. There was also a level of interest among participants in building an innovative economy as several felt that the idea of innovation was not necessarily a prominent feature of the other options listed.

Participants were next shown pairs of phrases and asked to share their thoughts on the similarities and differences between them. The first pair shown to participants was *supporting the middle class* and *supporting workers*. While many participants viewed these terms or phrases as similar and interchangeable, noting that most workers are considered part of the middle class, others had a different opinion, believing the term workers to be more general and inclusive, regardless of income levels, while the term middle class was thought to be somewhat less tangible and undefined. Regarding actions it could take to support workers, participants thought the Government of Canada should ensure that all workers receive a fair wage and that workplaces promote and maintain health and safety standards. In terms of supporting the middle class, participants recommended a similar approach as well as one that focused on lowering taxes. In addition, many felt that the federal government could do more to address inflation and the cost of essential goods and services for middle class Canadians.

The second pair of phrases shown to participants was: *Labour Force* and *Workforce*. Participants generally viewed the term 'workforce' as applying to all those currently working, while the term 'labour force' was more akin to a subset describing those whose work could be considered physical or manual labour. Others took a slightly different view, associating workforce only with that group of people who are currently working, while labour force included everyone currently working or seeking employment.

Participants in the group held among Francophone young adults living in Eastern and Central Canada were shown and discussed a range of phrase which presented different ways of identifying the type of economy the Government of Canada should be building. Participants were asked to provide their thoughts on these phrases and, specifically, whether they interpreted each of them in the same way or as being different from one another. While participants believed all of the above statements encompassed the overarching goal of helping Canadians and improving their financial well-being, many felt there were subtle nuances that slightly altered the meaning or intent of each.

Overall, when asked to choose which of the statements they preferred, participants leaned more towards *an economy focused on the welfare of Canadians* and *an economy which provides results for all Canadians*. In line with earlier comments, the former statement was preferred given its focus on the welfare and/or well-being of Canadians. *An economy which provides results for all Canadians* was the preference of a number of participants who felt that, while somewhat general, it was a more comprehensive and all-encompassing statement. Specifically, these participants were drawn to the

focus on results, which they felt could encompass an economy that also focused on the well-being of Canadians.

This group was also asked to consider two additional statements: *We continue our work so that all Canadians can benefit from the economy* and *We continue our work so that all Canadians can be at the centre*. Evaluating the two messages, most felt that they understood the message the Government of Canada was trying to get across. In particular, participants responded favourably to the implication that work was ongoing or continuing, and that Canadians were at the centre of the federal government's actions and goals. The second of the two statements held more appeal for some in that they felt it suggested a more collaborative approach in which Canadians are active as both contributors and beneficiaries. Asked whether they felt it was appropriate for the Government of Canada to be using this kind of messaging, most were of the view that this messaging offered a level of reassurance to Canadians that the country is heading in the right direction and that citizens and the federal government are working together to contribute to economic growth.

Oil and Gas Sector (Western Canada Young Adults, Frontenac County Ontario Travellers, Small and Rural Centres Prairies Concerned About the Economy)

Three groups took part in conversations related to Canada's oil and gas sector as well as recent efforts by the federal government to cap greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions produced by oil and gas companies. Asked if they had heard of the Government of Canada's plan to cap emissions in this sector, several indicated that they had. While few specific details could be recalled, a small number reported having seen headlines regarding related initiatives such as the Government of Canada's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, its requirement that all new car and passenger truck sales be zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs) by 2035, and ongoing support for international climate agreements such as the Paris Climate Accords.

On balance, while all participants felt reducing emissions from the oil and gas sector was something the Government of Canada should be a focused on, a number expressed concerns as to whether the goals it had set out were realistic or achievable. Several were of the view that any step towards reducing emissions was a positive one and thought that it was prudent for the federal government to focus on industrial activities (especially within the oil and gas sector), believing these to be the primary contributor of emissions throughout Canada. For those who were more skeptical of these initiatives, it was generally felt that until an effective alternative energy source became widely available, oil and gas emissions would likely continue to be an issue for the foreseeable future. Citing concerns over rising global energy costs, a small number did not want to see any reduction to the amount of oil and gas produced in Canada.

Though almost all felt that the Government of Canada would need to be involved in order for tangible reductions in emissions to occur, a few felt this could be done by incentivizing oil and gas companies rather than implementing limits and regulations. The opinion was also shared that in order for progress to be made on this front there would need to be a societal shift towards more sustainable energy use. It was believed that as long as there was a demand from Canadians for oil and gas, that companies in this sector would continue to produce at a high capacity.

While several felt that capping Canadian oil and gas sector emissions could have a moderate impact on the fight against climate change, most believed this would not be enough on its own and that a concerted global effort would be necessary. A number, however, expressed that these efforts would still likely be helpful and that any action towards mitigating climate change was worth pursuing. Though many expected that the cost of gasoline would go up as a result of these actions, participants were largely mixed as to whether prices would slightly increase or rise substantially. Focusing on the crisis in Ukraine, most were of the impression that Canadian oil and gas production had been largely unaffected thus far by the conflict. A few, however, believed that the Government of Canada should remain open to increasing oil and gas production should the conflict escalate and to be open to providing assistance to European allies who may experience energy shortfalls during the winter months.

Firearms (Ontario and Atlantic Region Young Adults, Small and Rural Centres Prairies Concerned About the Economy, Atlantic Canada Firearms Owners)

Three groups engaged in conversations related to firearms. These discussions focused on participants' perspectives concerning firearms as well as their opinions regarding recent measures introduced by the Government of Canada to help reduce gun crime in Canada.

Firearms Perspectives (Atlantic Canada Firearms Owners)

Participants in this group shared their impressions related to firearms as well as their perspectives regarding the current level of gun crime in Canada. Asked whether they felt it was difficult to purchase a firearm in Canada, most did not believe this to be the case, viewing the process as relatively reasonable and straightforward. It was acknowledged, however, that completing the necessary certification and background checks to acquire a Possession and Acquisition Licence (PAL) required for the purchase of firearms or ammunition could often take several months. Several identified this as a positive component of Canadian gun laws, with many believing a lack of similar regulations in jurisdictions such as the United States to be a key factor behind the substantially higher incidences of gun crime there relative to Canada. Questioned specifically whether it was more difficult to purchase a handgun in Canada relative to other types of firearms such as hunting rifles, most were of the impression that it was.

Discussing the level of gun crime in Canada, almost all were of the impression that firearm-related crimes had increased as of late. Many were of the opinion that gun crime had become a particular issue in urban centres such as Halifax and St. John's, with a number of participants expressing that it felt like they were now hearing about these types of crimes on an almost daily basis. Focusing on the potential causes contributing to this perceived rise in gun crime, a large number cited mental health as a major factor, believing that many Canadians suffering from these issues were unable to receive the care they required and were turning to criminal activity as a result. Several also identified rising poverty and issues related to drugs and addiction as key drivers.

No participant thought Canada's current gun laws were too strict, with most feeling they were at about the right level at present. Several commented that it made sense to have a rigorous certification and

licencing process for prospective firearms users and that the presence of these regulations made them feel safer overall about the presence of firearms in Canada. While believing Canadian firearm laws to be reasonable for the most part, a few participants expressed the opinion that there should be greater allowances for those who utilize firearms for sport (such as target shooting) or who may wish to purchase certain firearms (such as antique pistols or revolvers) as collectors. Among these participants, it was felt that measures such as the recent federal freeze on the buying and selling of handguns were overly punitive towards law-abiding firearms users. Several also thought that greater efforts needed to be taken to address the illegal smuggling of firearms across the Canada-U.S. border, believing this to be a major issue at present.

Firearms Measures (Ontario and Atlantic Region Young Adults, Small and Rural Centres Prairies Concerned About the Economy, Atlantic Canada Firearms Owners)

Three groups discussed a range of firearms-related measures recently implemented by the Government of Canada. On balance, only a small number could recall any past actions taken by the federal government related to firearms. Among these participants, some indicated awareness of initiatives to prohibit the ownership of assault-style firearms, while a few also mentioned the recent announcement of a national freeze on the buying and selling of handguns in Canada. To aid in conversation, participants were shown a list of actions the Government of Canada had recently taken to address gun crime. These included a national freeze on the buying and selling of handguns, taking away firearms licences from those involved in domestic violence or criminal harassment, instituting a 'red flag' law for those deemed a potential danger to themselves or others, actions to combat firearm smuggling, and requiring magazines for long guns to be able to carry no more than five rounds.

While almost all participants supported the overarching goal of reducing the prevalence of crimes involving handguns and decreasing the overall number of handguns in circulation, a number were skeptical as to whether a national freeze on the buying and selling of handguns would be effective. Among the larger number of participants who were supportive of this measure, it was largely thought that handguns had no place in Canadian society and that apart from those working in law enforcement or a similar field, there was little reason for an individual to possess one. For the smaller, yet still significant number who questioned the effectiveness of this initiative, it was largely felt that the majority of handgun-related crimes were caused by those who had obtained their firearms illegally and, as such, this action would do little to address the issue.

All participants believed combatting gun smuggling and trafficking to be an important priority for the federal government to focus on and believed this measure would be helpful in combatting gun crime. Many viewed illegally sourced firearms as the greatest contributor to gun crime in Canada at present and felt that by cracking down on smuggling, the prevalence of firearms-related incidents could be drastically reduced. Participants also reacted overwhelmingly positively towards initiatives relating to taking away firearms licences from those involved in acts of domestic violence and/or criminal harassment, as well as the institution of a red flag law for those who were determined to be a danger to themselves or viewed as at risk of committing intimate partner or gender-based violence. Several voiced surprise that these laws were not already in place, believing that measures such as this should have been enacted years ago.

While a number of participants felt they did not know enough about firearms to determine whether requiring magazines to be able to carry no more than five rounds would be an effective measure, most viewed this action as a step in the right direction. Expanding upon this, several questioned why any individual would ever need more than five rounds, believing this to be more than enough, especially for recreational activities such as hunting.

Travel Experiences (Frontenac County Ontario Travellers)

One group, comprised of individuals identified as frequent travellers, discussed a number of issues related to travel and federal service provision. These included concerns related to passport renewals, long wait times at airports, and reported backlogs in the processing of immigration applications. A large number recalled having personally experienced issues related to air travel in recent months, with several reporting long flight delays as well as late-arriving or lost baggage. A number of participants also recalled accounts from family and friends related to difficulties using the ArriveCAN app as well as widespread staffing shortages at airports which were believed to have further exacerbated these travel-related challenges.

Asked if they were aware of any recent actions or announcements from the federal government related to travel and services for Canadians, a number had heard that Service Canada would be enhancing its passport application processing capabilities, including the hiring of new staff and bolstering the administrative capacity of regional locations such as in Kingston, Ontario. To aid in discussion, participants were informed that the Government of Canada had recently hired more than 700 new employees at Service Canada offices, decreased passport call centre wait times, and had established an increased number of passport pick-up service locations. While most viewed this as a step in the right direction, several expressed the opinion that these actions had been too reactionary in nature and that the federal government should have foreseen these travel-related issues in advance and taken proactive steps to address them before they became a significant problem. Considering additional steps the Government of Canada could take to address this issue, participants recommended actions such as expanding operating hours to accommodate those with unconventional schedules, placing a greater focus on expediting the processing of mail-in applications, and improvements to the physical accessibility of Service Canada locations.

Focusing on the perceived causes of delays related to passport services, most believed staffing shortages to be a major issue at present. It was widely felt that worker shortages were presently being experienced across many industries and sectors. Additionally, some speculated that these issues had been heightened due to a higher-than-normal demand for travel at present, with many Canadians looking to travel internationally for the first time in over two years.

Engaging in an exercise, participants were shown a number of potential factors which might be influencing these delays and asked to identify which they felt were having the greatest impact. Among these, participants largely focused on an increased volume of passport applications as well as a shift to mail-in applications as the factors they felt were most impacting these delays. A number believed that it made sense that a greater number of mail-in applications would take longer to process given the additional complexity these would likely entail. While a small number were skeptical as to whether

there truly was a disproportionate number of complex applications at present, it was believed by several that this could also play a role in further delaying the renewal process.

Most were unaware of any recent actions taken by the federal government to address wait times and delays at Canadian airports. A small number, however, recalled hearing that efforts had been made to streamline the randomized mandatory COVID-19 testing for fully vaccinated travellers arriving in Canada, including no longer requiring travellers to remain at the airport and/or quarantine while awaiting their test results. Shown a list of actions the Government of Canada had recently taken to address airport delays and long wait times, while participants reacted favourably to these initiatives it was felt that more would likely need to be done to fully address the challenges currently facing travellers. Specifically, many felt additional staff would need to be hired at airports to perform vital tasks such as transporting baggage and assisting passengers with navigating the pre-flight process. It was felt that the hiring of a sufficient number of staff to effectively address these delays would likely be a significant undertaking and would need to be a collaborative effort on the part of the Government of Canada and the individual airlines.

Only a small number of participants were aware of any recent actions by the Government of Canada related to addressing the reported backlog of immigration applications. Among those who had heard something, it was believed that additional staff had been hired to work at Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) offices across Canada. In addition, it was believed that some processes had been streamlined, including allowing individuals to apply for their work visas and work permits simultaneously rather than consecutively. Informed that the Government of Canada had recently announced that IRCC will have hired up to 1,250 new employees by the end of the fall, participants reacted positively, viewing this as a step in the right direction that would be greatly helpful for those currently navigating the immigration process.

Agriculture (Small and Rural Centres Prairies Concerned About the Economy)

In this group, comprised of individuals residing in small and rural centres in the Prairies, participants discussed the topic of fertilizer use on Canadian farms, as well as recent efforts by the Government of Canada to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fertilizers. Asked whether they thought fertilizer use had increased, stayed the same, or decreased in the past fifteen years, most were of the view that it had likely increased. Several cited Canada's growing population as well as the desire by farmers to increase crop yields as the primary factors driving this perceived increase. Questioned whether they felt there to be a connection between increased greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and increased fertilizer use, many believed these two factors to be related. Most participants were of the view that GHG emissions from fertilizer use were a growing issue and would represent a major environmental challenge in the future if actions were not taken to address it. Several expressed the view that if the climate continued to become more unstable due to GHG emissions, this would likely negatively impact food production and make it more difficult to meet the nutritional needs of Canadians in the years to come.

Few participants were aware of the federal government's plan to reduce GHG emissions from fertilizers. Of those who had heard something, it was believed that the Government of Canada had

recently taken actions to regulate the use of fertilizer on Canadian farms, reducing the quantity of fertilizer individual farms can use. To assist in conversation, participants were provided information regarding the federal government's approach to reducing these emissions. Asked whether they supported these actions by the Government of Canada to reduce emissions from fertilizer, all felt this to be an important priority to focus on, believing initiatives such as this to be critical to promoting long-term sustainability. Several, however, expressed concern. Some reiterated worries that this approach could adversely impact smaller or family-run farms and hoped the federal government would find ways to support these farmers as they transitioned to utilizing less fertilizer for their crops.

While almost all believed the federal government had a role to play in reducing agricultural GHG emissions, most were of the view that there would need to be some degree of flexibility regarding any regulations to ensure that smaller farms would not be placed at a significant disadvantage. A few suggested that in addition to encouraging reductions in fertilizer use, the Government of Canada could also provide farmers with incentives for these actions, creating a financial impetus for them to develop more sustainable practices in this regard. Though most expected a reduction in fertilizer use would likely have some positive impact, it was generally thought that a global effort would be necessary to sufficiently address the threat posed by climate change.

Climate Change (New Brunswick Francophones)

One group briefly discussed the topic of climate change, focusing on the potential impacts this may have going forward as well as actions that could be taken to mitigate its effects. Asked what came to mind when they thought of climate change, many mentioned extreme weather events such as hurricanes and ice storms, prolonged droughts, and long-term changes in weather patterns. Describing the impacts of climate change upon their own community, several mentioned challenges related to reduced fishing stocks, coastal erosion, and greater concerns related to wildfires in recent years.

Most were of the view that the effects of climate change overall had been relatively minimal in New Brunswick and many did not feel as if they had been personally impacted to date. Participants expressed only moderate concern related to the potential impacts of climate change on their community in the near future. Most generally believed that their communities were prepared to handle the potential consequences of climate change in the short-term and were not under the impression that immediate action needed to be taken to prepare for situations such as floods or hurricanes. Discussing their personal level of emergency preparedness, all participants reported having taken measures over the last year to better prepare their households for the potential impacts of wildfires and major storms.

Official Language Challenges and Priorities (New Brunswick Francophones)

One group comprised of Francophones residing in New Brunswick discussed the current state of the French language in Canada, challenges related to French language services in their communities, as well as their perspectives regarding a number of potential actions and initiatives the Government of

Canada could take to better support French-speaking communities outside of Quebec. Most participants had a positive view regarding the present state of the French language in New Brunswick. This view was largely driven by the impression that most communities in the province provided access to services in French and that they were generally able to communicate in French as they went about their daily activities. Asked, however, if they were concerned about the future of the French language in their communities, most indicated that they were. It was said that while a significant portion of the region's population continued to speak French, English was spoken far more predominately, especially among younger individuals outside of school. Participants also commented that the majority of the content consumed by their family, either on television or online, was in English, further contributing to their perception that the French language was under threat.

Shown a number of potential challenges experienced by Francophones in New Brunswick and asked which they felt to be the most impactful, a large number strongly felt that *attracting Francophones from outside the region* to their communities was one of the greatest challenges they encountered at present. Some believed that a lack of available job opportunities, especially those who primarily spoke French, limited the desire of Francophones to move to New Brunswick. Related to this, *keeping young Francophones in the region* was also identified as a difficult challenge, with many of the impression that the vast majority of younger Francophones tended to move outside of the province in search of greater opportunities elsewhere. Reiterating concerns related to the tendency of their children to primarily speak English in social settings as well as mostly consuming English-language media, many also identified *transmitting the French language and culture to the next generation* as an ongoing challenge.

Participants were next also shown a selection of potential priorities related to official languages and asked to select those which they believed were the most important for the Government of Canada to focus on. Several participants identified increasing funding for French-language schools in Francophone communities outside of Quebec, making investments to improve access to French immersion and French second-language programs across Canada, and guaranteeing the equality of the English and French languages in Canada as major priorities. Related to education, many were of the impression that English language schools often received a greater amount of funding and amenities than their French-language counterparts and that further efforts needed be taken to ensure French-language schools received an equal amount of support. A number of participants believed that the quality of French-language education could also be improved through the recruitment of teachers who spoke French as their first language rather than those from English-speaking backgrounds. Ensuring the equality of the English and French languages in Canada was also seen by several as a priority of significant importance. Participants expressed that the ability to obtain services in both official languages was a fundamental right of all Canadians and was a key responsibility of the federal government to uphold. Asked whether there were any additional actions that could be taken by the federal government towards supporting the Francophone community in Canada, a number of participants suggested increased funding for French language education, including French speaking post-secondary programs, subsidies and grants for those electing to study in French, and incentives for Francophone graduates to come to French-speaking communities to work and live.

Retirement Concerns (Newfoundland and Labrador People Nearing Retirement)

Participants nearing retirement expressed concerns about a number of issues including the cost of living, housing, healthcare and climate change. It was felt that inflationary pressures along with recent volatility in the stock market and housing market had contributed to a sense of financial vulnerability for many who are currently heading into retirement. Some described their long-term financial outlook as bleak, suggesting that they were not overly optimistic that it would improve by the time they expected to retire. Resulting from this, several were rethinking their retirement plans with a view to extend their participation in the labour force, either full-time or part-time, as a means of enhancing their household income prior to or during the early phases of their retirement. Discussing their retirement planning, a number of participants shared concerns that any additional income they earned may be at risk of being clawed back by the federal government by way of taxation. This was a particular concern for those with a spouse or partner in receipt of government benefits or income supplements (e.g., disability benefits). This led to suggestions from some participants regarding the need for the Government of Canada to implement some type of Universal Basic Income (UBI). A few participants also felt the federal government should aid families, including the elderly, through food subsidies to make essential goods such as groceries more affordable.

Retirement planning was identified as a major priority for all participants. While several were generally aware of government programs like the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), they were less familiar with the specific details of these programs, particularly regarding the GIS. Many anticipated that they would not qualify for the GIS, based on their household income, and that they may be required to repay all or a part of the OAS and CPP once eligible to receive them. Several reported that they were also actively contributing to Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs) or were taking part in employer-funded/managed pension plans as ways to bolster their income in retirement. Most participants indicated that they would need to rely on multiple income sources to fund their retirement, including pensions, RRSPs and income support programs, and that it would be necessary to carefully manage expenditures at this stage in their lives.

Additional information about each of the three government programs and about recent changes to two of the programs was shared with participants to clarify that:

- OAS is considered taxable income and is subject to a recovery tax for those with an individual net annual income above \$79,845 (for 2021). As of July 2022, an automatic 10% increase in the OAS pension for those 75 years or older was implemented;
- The GIS is a non-taxable benefit payable to low-income pensioners, based on their marital status and level of income, with payments increasing/decreasing/stopping according to changes in one's annual net income; and
- The CPP is a monthly, taxable benefit which can begin as early as age 60. The amount received is based on one's average earnings throughout their working life, their contributions to the CPP, and the age at which they start their CPP retirement pension. In 2019, a CPP enhancement was phased-in which provides higher benefits in retirement in exchange for higher CPP contributions.

Participants were unaware of, but very favourable to, the fact that OAS, GIS and CPP benefits would now be adjusted annually to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Similarly, most did not know that OAS was subject to a recovery tax beyond a certain income level. With respect to the enhancement to the CPP, some were uncertain as to whether they would be eligible to take advantage of this given the short period of time until their expected retirement. At the same time, almost all were supportive of the enhancement and believed it would be beneficial for future generations whom they felt may find it harder to save for their retirement. It was also thought that higher contributions to the CPP would be vital towards ensuring the program's long-term sustainability. Regarding the increase to the OAS pension for seniors 75 years of age and older, some felt this increase should have been applied to all seniors 65 and older. When asked what else the Government of Canada should do to help support those planning for retirement, participants recommended reviewing the income thresholds for GIS and OAS, with a view to adjusting the thresholds for recovery. This was a particular concern for couples who file their taxes together rather than individually, as they were concerned that their combined income would affect their eligibility for these programs or the amount recovered.

First Nations Issues (Ontario First Nations Living On-Reserve)

Participants in one group discussed a range of issues related to First Nations peoples. Conversations focused on the challenges currently facing their respective communities as well as participant experiences related to accessing federal government services. All participants resided in Ontario and identified as currently living on reserve.

Though perceiving First Nations issues as having been in the headlines more often in recent years, very few believed that the Government of Canada had made much in the way of tangible progress towards addressing the most pressing concerns for their communities. Asked to identify instances where the federal government had been successful with respect to its handling of First Nations issues, no positive actions or initiatives could be recalled. Focusing on areas where the federal government could improve going forward, participants provided a wide range of responses. These included a lack of clean drinking water and the need for further action towards ensuring all First Nations communities had access to this basic necessity, challenges related to housing affordability, and a strained relationship with law enforcement. Related to this last item, several participants were of the view that at present there was a pervasive lack of understanding and trust shared between First Nations communities and law enforcement as a whole.

Asked whether they felt safety to be an area of concern for their community, most indicated that it was. Several described drug use and addiction as growing issues on their reserves, leading to an increase in violent or criminal acts by those suffering from these afflictions. Some also spoke of safety concerns related to the limited or deteriorating infrastructure on their reserves, recounting that in some instances it could take several days or even weeks for power to be restored following a major storm. No participants felt their communities had sufficient access to safety resources. It was reported by some that their reserves lacked access to services such as ambulances and that often safety concerns had to be communicated via word of mouth as there was no rapid alert system in place.

Focusing next on the accessibility of federal services on their respective reserves, most expressed having limited experience in interacting with agencies, departments, or representatives of the Government of Canada. While a small number recalled applying for and renewing their passport as well as utilizing Crown services such as Canada Post, few other instances could be recalled in which they had made use of federal government services. Most were of the opinion that the Government of Canada could be doing more in terms of ensuring those living on reserve had access to the same level of service as other Canadians. With this in mind, many called for the Government of Canada to devote greater resources towards establishing high-speed Internet and reliable phone connectivity on their reserves, believing this to be severely lacking in many communities at present.

MORE INFORMATION

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