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Final Report

Prepared for the Privy Council Office

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Canada 

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This public opinion research report presents the results of a series of focus groups conducted by The Strategic Counsel on behalf of the Privy Council Office. The seventh cycle of the first year of this study included a total of twelve focus groups with Canadian adults (18 years of age and older) conducted between October 3rd, 2023, and October 25th, 2023.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Rapport final - Collecte continue de données qualitatives sur les opinions des Canadiens – octobre 2023.

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I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of The Strategic Counsel that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications – Appendix C – Mandatory Procedures for Public Opinion Research.

Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed:  _____

Date: November 22, 2023

Donna Nixon, Partner
The Strategic Counsel

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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 October 3rd, 2023, and October 25th, 2023, in multiple locations across the country. Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are provided in the section below.

The research for this cycle focused largely on the Government of Canada's priorities and performance on a range of issues important to Canadians. Related to this, some groups took part in targeted discussions focusing on federal activities related to Indigenous peoples, Arab Canadians, immigration, and the Northwest Territories (NT). All discussed what they had seen, read, or heard about the federal government in recent days, with several groups engaging in extended conversations related to the sources they typically use to receive their news.

This research cycle also explored issues related to housing. Several groups engaged in conversations related to various measures recently introduced by the Government of Canada on this front, including those related to initiatives such as the Housing Accelerator Fund, supports for renters, and the housing situation in Canada's North. A number of groups also discussed the perceived high cost of groceries at present as well as efforts by the federal government to stabilize grocery prices going forward. Indigenous peoples residing in urban centres in the Prairies, as well as those residing in NT and rural Ontario discussed health care in Canada, while other groups shared their perspectives on pharmacare, climate change, carbon pricing, and their expectations and concerns regarding life in Canada in the years to come. Heavy social media users residing in Winnipeg discussed their consumption of news media and their social media usage, while participants residing in London engaged in a conversation about local industries.



Other topics discussed this cycle included the Fall Economic Statement (FES), the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), community safety, and Employment Insurance (EI).

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 Indigenous peoples, renters, Arab Canadians, heavy social media users, those concerned with the cost of living, and recent immigrants.

Detailed Approach

- Twelve groups across various regions in Canada.
- Six groups were conducted among the general population residing in London, Victoria and Nanaimo, PEI, Rural Ontario, the Northwest Territories, and Edmonton.
- The other six groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
 - Indigenous peoples
 - Renters
 - Arab Canadians
 - Heavy Social Media Users
 - Cost of Living Concerned
 - Recent Immigrants
- The two groups based 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, 83 participants attended, in total. Details on attendance numbers by group can be found below.
- Each participant received an honorarium of \$125.

Group Locations and Composition

LOCATION	GROUP	LANGUAGE	DATE	TIME (EDT)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
London	1	EN	Tues, Oct 3 rd	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	7
Urban Prairies	2	EN	Wed, Oct 4 th	8:00-10:00 PM	Indigenous	6
Victoria/Nanaimo	3	EN	Thurs, Oct 5 th	9:00-11:00 PM	General Population	8
Prince Edward Island	4	EN	Tues, Oct 10 th	5:00-7:00 PM	General Population	8
Greater Toronto Area	5	EN	Wed, Oct 11 th	6:00-8:00 PM	Renters	8
Montreal	6	FR	Thurs, Oct 12 th	6:00-8:00 PM	Arab Canadians	7
Rural Ontario	7	EN	Mon, Oct 16 th	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	7
Winnipeg	8	EN	Tues, Oct 17 th	7:00-9:00 PM	Heavy Social Media Users	7
Northwest Territories	9	EN	Wed, Oct 18 th	8:00-10:00 PM	General Population	5
Mid-Size & Major Centres Quebec	10	FR	Thurs, Oct 19 th	6:00-8:00 PM	Concerned with Cost of Living	8
Edmonton	11	EN	Tues, Oct 24 th	8:00-10:00 PM	General Population	5
Lower Mainland BC	12	EN	Wed, Oct 25 th	9:00-11:00 PM	Recent Immigrants	7
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. These included announcements by the Government of Canada related to building more homes faster, meetings between federal officials and the heads of major grocers to discuss ways to stabilize grocery prices, the decision by the Supreme Court of Canada to overturn the *Impact Assessment Act*, a visit by the Prime Minister to Enterprise, Northwest Territories (NT) to assess the damage caused by largescale wildfires in the area, and an announcement by the Government of Alberta that it was considering

exiting the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and establishing its own provincially operated Alberta Pension Plan.

Participants also recalled activities related to the Government of Canada on the international stage. These included a statement by the Government of Canada unequivocally condemning attacks perpetrated by the terrorist organization Hamas on Israeli civilians on October 7th, 2023, as well as its pledging of humanitarian assistance towards Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Other issues cited included ongoing tensions between Canada and India following the announcement by the federal government that Canadian security agencies were in possession of intelligence potentially linking agents of the Government of India to the killing of a Canadian citizen in Surrey, B.C., the resignation of the Speaker of the House of Commons when it was revealed that an individual who had served in Ukraine under the command of Nazi Germany in World War II had been recognized in Parliament, and continued military and financial assistance to Ukraine in support of its efforts to defend itself against the Russian invasion of its territory. Some also recalled efforts to make it easier for migrants from the Americas to come to Canada, including an announcement by the federal government that it had been working to welcome up to 15,000 migrants on a humanitarian basis from jurisdictions such as Colombia, Haiti, and Venezuela.

News Sources (Montreal Arab Canadians, Winnipeg Heavy Social Media Users, Lower Mainland B.C. Recent Immigrants)

Participants in three groups briefly discussed how they typically receive their news. Asked to share their primary sources for news, several mentioned televised outlets such as CBC, CTV, and BBC as well as legacy news organizations such as the Globe and Mail. A large number reported relying on social media for news, including platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Reddit. Discussing which sources they felt were most reliable, participants were largely of the opinion that mainstream news outlets were generally more trustworthy than news posted on social media or shared via word of mouth by friends and family.

Asked if they ever accessed news in languages other than English or from another country, several in the groups comprised of Arab Canadians residing in Montreal and recent immigrants from B.C.'s Lower Mainland indicated that they did. In addition to French-language news, a number in the group based in Montreal reported accessing news in Arabic from sources based in Qatar, Lebanon, and Tunisia. Participants residing in the Lower Mainland received news in Cantonese, Mandarin, Spanish, and French, from outlets located in China, Colombia, and France. Discussing where they would go if they were looking for news pertaining to the federal government, several indicated that they would likely utilize official websites operated by the Government of Canada.

Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (All Locations)

All groups took part in conversations related to the issues currently facing Canadians as well as their perspectives regarding the federal government's management of these priorities. Participants were asked to identify areas in which they felt the Government of Canada was performing well and areas where they felt there was room for improvement.

On a number of issues participants expressed a range of positive and negative views. These included health care, climate change and the environment, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and immigration.

Participants also identified a number of areas where they felt that the federal government had performed well, including the protection and promotion of diversity and multiculturalism in Canada, the provision of supports for low-income households, its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and its activities on the global stage.

Additionally, participants mentioned a range of areas in which they believed the Government of Canada had room for improvement. These included inflation and the cost of living, a perceived lack of affordable and accessible housing in Canadian communities, concerns regarding what was viewed as high federal spending at present, and national security, including the need for increased investments towards the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and national cybersecurity initiatives.

Prompted to identify what they viewed as the top issues that the Government of Canada should be prioritizing, several reiterated the need for a greater focus on addressing inflation and the cost of living, affordable housing, perceived health worker shortages, and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Other priority areas mentioned by participants included the perceived opioids crisis, improving public transportation in Canadian communities, making child care more affordable, and the construction of vital infrastructure such as highways (especially in Canada's North).

Indigenous Peoples (Urban Centres Prairies Indigenous Peoples)

The group comprised of Indigenous peoples residing in urban centres in the Prairies engaged in a discussion related to reconciliation and the actions currently being taken by the Government of Canada to better support Indigenous peoples and communities. Asked to identify what they felt to be the top issues facing Indigenous peoples at present, a number mentioned housing, believing there to currently be a significant lack of safe and affordable housing in many Indigenous communities. Other issues mentioned included the need for additional culturally focused resources (such as healing lodges) to treat issues related to mental health and addiction, as well as actions taken to reduce perceived discrimination against Indigenous peoples by law enforcement. A number felt that there needed to be more attention placed on addressing the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), including a greater commitment by all levels of government to investigate and prevent violence against Indigenous women going forward.

Few felt that reconciliation had been a major priority for the Government of Canada in recent years. While a number were of the impression that there had been increased funding for Indigenous-focused initiatives and financial support for Indigenous communities, it was generally felt that these actions had done little to tangibly improve the lives of Indigenous peoples. Discussing initiatives such as the introduction of an annual National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, while some felt this to be a step in the right direction, it was generally thought that too much of this day was focused on ceremonies and events rather than educating Canadians about the historical and contemporary challenges faced by Indigenous peoples.

Arab Canadians (Montreal Arab Canadians)

Arab Canadians residing in Montreal took part in a discussion related to the Arab diaspora in Canada. Most felt that the Government of Canada was currently on the right track when it came to supporting Arab Canadians, with a number of the impression that they had been provided the same level of respect and opportunity as other Canadians. Asked to identify areas impacting Arab Canadians that they felt required greater attention from the federal government, a number believed that more needed to be done to make the immigration process more equitable for those from Arab countries, with a few of the view that it was currently more difficult for Arab individuals to immigrate to Canada and bring family members into the country compared to immigrants from other parts of the world.

Discussing ways that the federal government could more effectively engage with Arab Canadians, several believed that more could be done to reach out to and collaborate with Arabic cultural organizations and community centres across Canada. It was also thought that more could be done to expedite the foreign credential recognition process for Arab Canadians as well as to expand Arabic language accessibility for federal government services and programs.

Immigration (Lower Mainland B.C. Recent Immigrants)

Participants residing in B.C.'s Lower Mainland discussed a range of issues related to immigration. All reported having recently immigrated to Canada within the past ten years. Asked to describe the current state of the Canadian immigration system, several felt that while the process was relatively straightforward it often took a considerable amount of time for an individual to become a Canadian citizen. Discussing their personal experiences with the immigration system, participants shared a number of perspectives. While several recalled that their own immigration process having been completed within a matter of months, most believed that this was primarily due to them having skilled work experience and/or having already been hired by a Canadian company. Among those who did not have employment upon their arrival in Canada and/or did not have an in-demand skillset at the time of their immigration, it was generally felt that the immigration process had been considerably slower.

Asked to describe ways that the Government of Canada could improve the immigration system, several believed that efforts could be taken to reduce processing times and the number of steps required to acquire citizenship. Discussing whether they felt it was important for the federal government to address issues related to the foreign credential recognition process, several believed that it was. Among these participants, it was felt that the process of becoming certified to work in one's field of expertise in Canada was often lengthy and expensive and that more needed to be done to streamline this process for new immigrants.

Most felt that the Government of Canada was on the wrong track when it came to immigration. Asked whether they felt the Government of Canada should increase, decrease, or maintain the rate of immigration at its current level, almost all believed that immigration should be decreased. A large number expressed concerns related to the availability of housing and employment opportunities at present and believed that continued increases in population would likely exacerbate these issues further. It was felt that by temporarily decreasing immigration in the short-term, the federal

government would be better able to address the issues currently impacting those already living in Canada.

Northwest Territories (Northwest Territories)

Participants residing in NT took part in a short discussion related to their local region. Asked to identify the top issues facing their respective communities that required further prioritization from the federal government, participants mentioned challenges related to food security and the high cost of groceries in the North, a perceived lack of skilled workers across a range of sectors, and the need to build additional infrastructure (such as highways) to make it easier to transport goods into the region.

Asked to identify the most important sectors to their respective communities, participants mentioned areas such as mining, oil and gas exploration and extraction, and tourism. Questioned whether they felt that the Government of Canada was currently on the right track when it came to engaging with those residing in NT, most had a neutral impression, while a smaller number believed it to be headed in the wrong direction on this front. Discussing how the federal government could better engage with those in their region, several believed that there should be a greater presence of federal officials in NT communities. It was felt that this would provide the opportunity for more-in depth discussions regarding the challenges currently facing the North and the potential supports that the Government of Canada could provide.

Housing (London, Urban Centres Prairies Indigenous Peoples, Victoria and Nanaimo, Prince Edward Island, GTA Renters, Montreal Arab Canadians, Northwest Territories, Mid-Size and Major Centres Quebec Concerned About the Cost of Living)

Participants in eight groups took part in conversations related to housing. These discussions focused on participants' reactions to housing-related measures recently announced by the Government of Canada, challenges facing renters, and the housing situation in Canada's North.

Housing Initiatives (London, Urban Centres Prairies Indigenous Peoples, Victoria and Nanaimo, Prince Edward Island, GTA Renters, Montreal Arab Canadians, Mid-Size and Major Centres Quebec Concerned About the Cost of Living)

Seven groups discussed a number of recent announcements from the Government of Canada related to housing, including those pertaining to the Housing Accelerator Fund. Asked whether they were aware of the Housing Accelerator Fund, few reported having heard of this initiative. Among those who had heard something, it was primarily believed that this program was focused on building new housing at a faster pace that would be affordable to lower- and middle-income Canadians.

Provided with information regarding the Housing Accelerator Fund and other actions the Government of Canada was taking related to housing, while most reacted positively to these initiatives and felt that they represented a step in the right direction, few expected they would have a significant impact on addressing the current challenges related to housing. Several expressed concerns that these issues did nothing to address the affordability of housing and believed that more steps needed to be taken to



ensure that the housing built through the Housing Accelerator Fund would be accessible for lower- and middle-income Canadians.

Asked what impact they expected these initiatives would have on their communities, several were hopeful that increases in the housing supply would remove some pressure from the housing and rental markets and make housing more affordable in the long term. A small number expressed concerns regarding potential rapid increases in the population of their communities in the event that large new housing developments were built and questioned whether there was sufficient infrastructure and services in place to accommodate this influx of new residents.

Those in groups based in London and Victoria and Nanaimo were asked an additional question regarding whether they had heard the term 'exclusionary zoning' before. Very few were previously aware of this term. Asked how they felt about the Government of Canada asking local governments to end exclusionary zoning in exchange for funding for housing, participants were mixed in their opinions. While some felt that this would be an effective way to encourage the building of new housing, a larger number believed that funding for new housing should not be dependent on exclusionary zoning decisions. It was felt that in many municipalities exclusionary zoning laws had likely been implemented due to a range of considerations, including the impact of new housing on community services and the environment, and that it might not be feasible for communities to change these regulations.

All groups except Arab Canadians residing in Montreal were asked whether, having now discussed these measures, they felt the Government of Canada was on the right or wrong track when it came to addressing the housing situation. On balance, slightly more felt that the federal government was headed in the right direction on this front compared to those who felt otherwise.

Renters (GTA Renters)

Participants in one group, comprised of renters residing in the GTA, discussed issues related to housing in their community, with a particular focus on participants' experiences as renters. All felt that the housing market in the GTA was very expensive at present, believing this to be the case both for renters as well as those looking to purchase a home. Several viewed these challenges as being primarily related to a perceived low supply of available housing in the GTA, which they believed had served to drive up housing costs for those looking to rent or purchase a home. Discussing additional factors that they felt had contributed to the perceived lack of available rental housing in their communities, participants cited a range of factors. These included homes being purchased as investments and left vacant, corporations purchasing large swaths of housing and increasing rental costs on these properties, and high levels of immigration in recent years which had further increased the demand for housing in their area.

Describing additional actions that the Government of Canada could take to better assist renters, a number felt that it should place a greater focus on the construction of publicly funded housing for lower- and middle-income Canadians as well as an increased emphasis on co-operative housing developments. It was also felt that actions should be taken to increase the financial penalties for those who decide to leave their properties vacant rather than placing them on the rental market.



While all aspired to be homeowners one day, only a small number believed that this was something that they could realistically achieve. Asked whether they felt the federal government was on the right or wrong track when it came to making home ownership more attainable for first-time home buyers, participants were mixed in their views. A number felt that while the Government of Canada was aware of the issues facing homebuyers and taking steps to address these challenges, little progress had been made on this front. Presented with information regarding the actions the federal government was taking to assist prospective home buyers, while several felt that these actions were a step in the right direction, a number were concerned that they would not be enough to address the issues related to the affordability of housing.

Northern Housing (Northwest Territories)

Participants residing in NT briefly discussed the housing situation in their region. All viewed housing as a major issue in their communities at present. Describing the biggest challenges related to housing in the North, participants mentioned issues such as a lack of affordability, limited supply, and a perceived shortage of construction materials and workers required to build new housing. A number described the quality of housing in NT as an issue, believing many homes in their communities were in poor condition, unsuitable for extreme cold temperatures, and in need of significant repairs. All expected that these problems would persist in the coming years unless there was significant action taken to increase the housing supply.

Most felt that the Government of Canada was currently on the wrong track when it came to addressing the housing situation in the North. Asked what more could be done by the federal government on this front, participants suggested actions such as increasing funding towards the construction of new housing in the North, the development of housing specifically for at-risk or marginalized populations (such as Indigenous peoples) and stronger regulations regarding the amounts landlords can charge for rent.

Groceries (Prince Edward Island, GTA Renters, Mid-Size and Major Centres Quebec Concerned About the Cost of Living, Edmonton)

Four groups took part in discussions related to the perceived high cost of groceries at present as well as the actions the federal government was taking to help make groceries more affordable for Canadians. All were of the impression that the cost of groceries had risen considerably in recent years, with many believing that this had primarily been the result of increased transportation and manufacturing costs as well as disruptions to global supply chains believed to have been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants residing in Edmonton and Quebec discussed the strategies that they had been using to help save money on their grocery expenses. Many reported that they were now preparing more meals for themselves at home rather than dining at restaurants or ordering takeout. Several had begun utilizing coupons and price matching to reduce grocery costs as well as shopping at stores where food prices were generally cheaper. Asked whether they would be likely to turn to the Government of



Canada for information regarding strategies to save money on groceries, few indicated that they would.

All groups were asked whether they had seen, read, or heard anything from the Government of Canada regarding the actions it was taking to address the cost of groceries. While most had not heard anything, a small number recalled actions such as the provision of a one-time Grocery Rebate to eligible lower-income Canadians who were struggling with the cost of groceries as well as recent meetings between federal officials and the heads of major grocery chains to discuss ways to make groceries more affordable. Provided with information regarding the actions the federal government was taking on this front, most reacted positively. Many, however, believed that the effectiveness of these measures would largely be dependent on their implementation as well as whether major grocery chains would follow through on their commitments to stabilize grocery prices. Several spoke positively regarding the proposal to amend the *Competition Act* to empower the Competition Bureau to take actions to make the grocery sector more competitive, including removing barriers for smaller competitors looking to enter this sector.

Almost all felt that, if properly implemented, these measures would have an impact on lowering the cost of groceries. Though a number reported feeling more optimistic now that they knew the federal government was pursuing these measures, several questioned why action had not been taken sooner and with greater urgency. Among these participants, it was felt that rising food costs had been an evident issue for a number of years and that more proactive measures should have been taken by the Government of Canada to prevent this situation from escalating into what, in their opinion, could now be considered a crisis. Asked whether they expected these actions would have a major, minor, or no impact, most believed that these measures would have at least a minor impact on making groceries more affordable.

Fall Economic Statement (Montreal Arab Canadians)

Participants in one group engaged in a brief discussion related to the Government of Canada's upcoming Fall Economic Statement (FES), scheduled to be released on November 21st, 2023. No participants reported having heard about the FES prior to this discussion.

Asked to identify the top issues that the federal government should be prioritizing as it prepares for its upcoming FES, participants mentioned areas such as health care, housing, and the ability of Canadians to access employment that pays a living wage. Other issues also viewed as important by participants included actions to mitigate the impacts of climate change, increased financial supports for lower- and middle-income households, improving and expanding public transportation infrastructure, and making recreational activities more affordable for families and youth.

Canada Pension Plan (Edmonton)

Participants residing in Edmonton engaged in a conversation related to the Canadian economy, as well as their perspectives related to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). Asked how they would describe the

Government of Canada's management of the economy, almost all believed that there was room for improvement. Several felt that federal spending had increased substantially in recent years and that this had served to exacerbate the perceived high rate of inflation and challenges related to the cost of living. Discussing what they viewed as the most important economic issues at present, several mentioned the difficulties that they believed many Canadians were currently facing in meeting basic needs such as affording groceries and securing safe and accessible housing.

Asked how often, if ever, they thought about retirement, almost all reported that this was something they considered on a regular basis. Several were concerned about whether they would be able to afford to retire as planned (or ever), with a number commenting that they did not have much in the way of savings and/or a pension through their employer.

All were familiar with the CPP. Asked if they had heard about any recent news related to the CPP, a small number were aware of a recent proposal by the Government of Alberta to withdraw from the CPP and create a provincially operated Alberta Pension Plan. Concerns were expressed that if the Government of Alberta were to take this action it could greatly diminish CPP payments for other Canadians and could also lead to financial uncertainty for Albertans, especially seniors and individuals nearing retirement. All were of the view that this issue should be addressed by the Government of Canada with a great deal of care, caution, and consideration, as it had the potential to weaken the pensions of all Canadians if not handled correctly.

Discussing their views on the CPP more broadly, all felt that it was worth contributing a portion of their earnings today to receive support later in life. With this in mind, many identified the CPP as a critical aspect of their retirement planning. Informed that, as of 2019, the CPP was gradually being enhanced, meaning that workers today would need to contribute a bit more annually in order to end up with higher benefits when they retire, all felt that this was a step in the right direction.

Health Care (Urban Centres Prairies Indigenous Peoples, Rural Ontario, Northwest Territories)

Three groups took part in conversations related to health care. These discussions focused on participant perspectives related to health care provision in their communities, actions the Government of Canada could take to improve the health care system, and the unique experiences of Indigenous peoples in accessing health care.

Health Care Perspectives (Rural Ontario, Northwest Territories)

Two groups shared their perspectives related to health care in their communities as well as Canada more broadly. Asked how they would describe the health care system in Canada today, several felt that it was experiencing considerable strain at the moment. It was believed that health care providers in many parts of the country continued to face backlogs of appointments and procedures in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also thought that there was currently a shortage of health care workers such as doctors and nurses in many parts of the country.

All felt that improvements could be made related to health care provision in Canada, with a larger number believing that major changes were necessary compared to those who felt that minor changes would likely suffice. Discussing the types of changes that they felt were necessary, a number believed that more needed to be done to incentivize young Canadians to enter the health care field, expand the number of seats available in health care education programs, and make this process more affordable for those from lower- and middle-income backgrounds.

Participants were next asked whether they were typically able to access the health care they required in their local communities. While some reported they could receive basic care in their communities, most indicated that in order to access appointments and/or procedures with specialists they often had to drive several hours or, in the case of those in the Northwest Territories, travel outside of their territory. Asked how their experience accessing health care had changed in recent years a number described increasing challenges related to finding a family doctor, accessing services such as dental care in their communities, and longer wait times for important appointments and procedures.

Most were of the opinion that the Government of Canada's role in health care should primarily be focused on ensuring that provinces/territories had the funding they required to facilitate the delivery of effective health care to their constituents. Discussing ways that the federal government could improve on this front, it was thought by several that greater investments needed to be made towards treating issues related to mental health as well as making it easier for health care professionals to become licenced and practice in different provinces and territories.

Indigenous Health Care (Urban Centres Prairies Indigenous Peoples)

Participants in the group comprised of Indigenous peoples residing in urban centres in the Prairies shared their perspectives related to health care provision in their communities as well as the unique challenges faced by Indigenous peoples on this front. Several felt that health care provision in their communities was facing significant challenges at present and had worsened in recent years. Issues identified by participants included long wait times for emergency care, a perceived lack of doctors and nurses, and increased demand for health care services in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Asked whether they felt that Indigenous peoples experienced a different level of care compared to non-Indigenous peoples, most believed this to be the case. A number believed that Indigenous individuals frequently faced discrimination when attempting to access health care, including encountering stigma related to the perception that Indigenous health problems were often connected to addiction and substance use. Describing additional barriers faced by their community, several identified the high proportion of Indigenous peoples residing in rural or remote areas and the difficulties these individuals faced in accessing health care within their own communities.

Discussing the availability of traditional Indigenous medicines and health practices in their communities, most believed that these were relatively easy to access. Participants were mixed in their perspectives regarding the importance of traditional medicines and practices, with a roughly equal number reporting relying upon these regularly as those who had rarely or never accessed them. Identifying ways the federal government could improve health care provision for Indigenous peoples, participants mentioned potential actions such as expanded cultural sensitivity training for all health

care providers, a greater emphasis on doctors and nurses spending time in Indigenous communities during their training, and increased incentives and encouragement for Indigenous individuals to work in the health care sector.

It was widely thought that more needed to be done to increase accessibility in Indigenous communities to mental health and addiction treatment services specifically designed for Indigenous peoples. All identified substance abuse as a major problem in their communities and believed that far too few resources had been devoted towards addressing this issue. Asked if they could recall any efforts by the Government of Canada on this front, a number mentioned its support for initiatives such as safe consumption sites and the distribution of take-home naloxone kits.

Pharmacare (GTA Renters, Rural Ontario)

Two groups engaged in discussions related to the potential implementation of a national pharmacare program. All believed that this should be a top priority for the Government of Canada. Asked what factors the Government of Canada should keep in mind when planning the next steps of a national pharmacare plan, many felt that it was most important to prioritize ensuring all Canadians were able to access prescription drugs that had life-saving properties. Others highlighted the importance of ensuring that the same program with the same benefits was available across Canada, rather than having different levels of coverage dependent on one's province/territory.

Almost all residing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) expressed a preference for a universal public approach to pharmacare, believing that providing equal coverage to all Canadians represented the fairest way of delivering this type of program. Those in the group based in rural Ontario felt differently, with many favouring a 'close the gaps' approach, primarily as a way of minimizing the potential costs of this program. Asked if a national pharmacare program would make life more affordable, most in the GTA felt that it would, especially for those facing financial challenges. Almost all residing in rural Ontario, however, believed that the financial costs of creating and operating this program would require increased taxation and lead to life being less affordable as a result.

Participants in the GTA expressed support for a national pharmacare program, with most saying that they would support its implementation even if it resulted in increased taxes and/or added to the deficit. Those in rural Ontario were more conditional in their support. While almost all in this group supported the creation of a national pharmacare program, none indicated that they would continue to do so if it resulted in additional taxes or increases to the national deficit.

Climate Change (Northwest Territories, Victoria and Nanaimo)

Participants in two groups engaged in discussions related to climate change and its potential impacts. Those residing in the Northwest Territories began their discussion by focusing on issues related to climate change that they believed were having a particular impact on communities in Canada's North. Asked if they felt that climate change was having a major or minor impact in the North at present, most felt that the impact had been relatively minor. Several, however, expected that while minor at

present, these impacts would likely increase in severity as time went on. Discussing whether they had noticed any environmental changes that they believed had been caused by climate change, several identified issues such as reduced snowfall, lower water levels, and elevated solar intensity in recent years.

Participants residing in Victoria and Nanaimo were asked how important a priority they felt climate change should be for the Government of Canada. Almost all believed that climate change needed to be one of the federal government's highest priorities, expressing concerns that if immediate action was not taken, it may be too late to reverse its future impacts. Discussing what came to mind when thinking about the potential impacts of climate change, participants identified a number of challenges, including flooding, wildfires, drought, a greater frequency of extreme weather events and natural disasters, rising sea levels, the thawing of permafrost in the North, higher temperatures, and an increased likelihood of contagious disease outbreaks and global pandemics.

All in this group were of the view that climate change had a major impact on the cost of living and everyday goods and services. It was thought that climate change-related weather events had caused significant property damage, destroyed agricultural operations, and increased home insurance rates. Discussing the impact of climate change on infrastructure in their area, many were of the opinion that it had been mild-to-moderate, though expected that this would escalate in the near future if the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and natural disasters continued to accelerate. Several also expressed concerns about the impact of changing climate and weather patterns on the agricultural industry. A few felt more positive about the potential response to climate change for the economy, believing that efforts in this area would likely produce a number of high-paying jobs related to the green economy, renewable resource development, and climate change mitigation.

Participants in both groups were asked if they felt that their communities were prepared to handle the potential impacts of climate change. Most did not believe that they would be ready to do so. Discussing what actions, if any, that their households had taken to prepare, many in Victoria and Nanaimo reported installing air conditioning units and/or purchasing fans to cope with increasing temperatures during the summer months. A number reported that they had begun to grow their own food as well as stockpile food supplies, drinking water, and gasoline due to concerns regarding potential shortages or natural disasters in the future.

Few in NT reported having taken any measures to prepare their household for climate change. Discussing how the Government of Canada could support communities in the North with preparing for these impacts, many in this group expressed a desire for the federal government to purchase and supply response equipment which could be stored in local communities, as well as to fund and support the training of individuals to operate this equipment in the event of a natural disaster. Several also suggested long-term support, including continued investments in renewable energy and upgrades to increase the climate resilience of vital infrastructure such as roadways and bridges.

Carbon Pricing (Prince Edward Island, Rural Ontario)

Participants in two groups took part in conversations related to the Government of Canada's carbon pricing system. To begin, participants were asked how important they felt it was for the federal government to work towards reducing carbon pollution in Canada. While most viewed this as an important priority, several indicated that they did not expect any efforts by Canadians to reduce carbon pollution would be impactful without the full participation of the international community. While many were aware of Climate Action Incentive payments (CAIPs), only a few were of the impression that they or someone they knew had received one.

Provided with information related to the carbon pricing system, many in PEI reacted positively to this information, believing that this system would incentivize more people to use renewable sources of energy, which in turn would reduce overall carbon emissions. All of those in rural Ontario reacted negatively, believing that this system was inefficient and would not have a tangible impact on reducing emissions or mitigating the impacts of climate change.

A large number stated that they felt the system was unfair to people living in rural communities, as these individuals often needed to drive long distances each day and did not have access to alternative modes of transportation such as public transit. Informed that those living in rural communities would be receiving a 10 per cent supplemental top-up to the CAIPs they received, none indicated that this information had changed their opinion of carbon pricing in Canada. Asked whether they felt that this approach to carbon pricing was fair to those living in rural and smaller communities, almost all believed that it was not.

Community Safety (Urban Centres Prairies Indigenous Peoples)

One group, comprised of Indigenous peoples residing in urban centres in the Prairies, shared their perspectives regarding the safety of their respective communities. Many reported feeling less safe in their communities as of late, with several of the impression that crimes such as assaults, property thefts, domestic violence, drug trafficking, and gang activity had been occurring with increasing frequency in recent years.

Asked if they were aware of any recent actions by the Government of Canada related to addressing crime, none could recall any initiatives on this front. Questioned specifically if they were aware of any actions related to the increased regulation of firearms, several indicated that they were. Actions recalled by participants included the implementation of a buyback program for recently prohibited firearms, as well as efforts to strengthen the screening and certification process for those interested in purchasing a firearm.

Discussing what further actions the federal government could take related to reducing crime, a number believed that more should be done to address the mental health issues that they believed many Canadians were currently facing. It was thought that taking this step would address what participants viewed as one of the key drivers behind the perceived recent rise in crime in their communities.

News Media (Winnipeg Heavy Social Media Users)

Participants residing in Winnipeg engaged in a conversation related to the news industry in Canada. All identified as heavy users of social media. Asked to describe the ways in which they felt that the news media industry had changed over the last decade, a number believed that the news had shifted to a more global perspective. Several were of the impression that there had been a significant transition towards digitally based news over the past decade, including an increased prevalence of news items being conveyed through short-form videos and text posts on social media.

All felt that Canadians had more ways to access the news today relative to previous decades. Several, however, shared concerns that this increase in accessibility had also been accompanied by an increased proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, making it difficult in some circumstances to determine whether the news one was reading was trustworthy. Asked whether they felt there was a wide variety of coverage of news and events in their local community, few believed this to be the case, with most reporting that the news they received was primarily focused on national and/or global events.

Most expected that there were far more news outlets at present compared to ten years ago, with several of the impression that this increase had been connected to the growth of social media as well as the relative ease in establishing an online news outlet compared to creating a television channel or starting a newspaper. Almost all, however, thought that there were fewer jobs in journalism today compared to ten years ago. Informed that journalism jobs and the number of news outlets operating in Canada had decreased considerably over the past decade a number expected it to be due to a larger number of Canadians now preferring to access their news primarily through social media and/or other digital platforms.

While concerned about the state of news media in Canada, very few believed that this should be a top priority for the federal government at present. Several were of the perspective that as long as Canadians had the ability to access trustworthy news coverage from unbiased sources, there was no need for the Government of Canada to provide financial support to those outlets that were currently struggling. Provided with information related to a recent law that the federal government had passed related to better protecting Canadian news outlets and journalists, most were of the view that the intent of this law appeared reasonable and felt that it was important that news outlets and journalists be compensated fairly. A large number, however, believed that the implementation of this legislation had resulted in negative consequences for Canadians. A number reported that Meta's Facebook and Instagram platforms had been their primary source for news and that, due to Meta's decision to block news content for Canadians on its platforms, they no longer consumed any news at all.

Social Media (Winnipeg Heavy Social Media Users)

Participants in the group comprised of heavy social media users residing in the City of Winnipeg engaged in a discussion regarding their social media usage as well as their perspectives regarding the presence of misinformation on social media channels. Asked what social media platforms they use most frequently, many identified YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, with a smaller number

mentioning X (formerly Twitter). Discussing the aspects of these platforms that appealed to them most, several spoke positively of the ability of social media to provide them with online connections to friends and family, as well as the entertainment they derived from the content posted on these platforms.

Discussing their experiences with misinformation on social media, all reported that they frequently came across online content that they felt might be inaccurate or misleading. Many were familiar with the term 'misinformation,' while fewer had heard the term 'disinformation.' Asked what they believed these terms referred to and how they differed, most believed that misinformation was information that was incorrect, while disinformation was information that was intentionally designed to mislead.

All indicated that they were concerned about the spread of misinformation and disinformation online. While misinformation was viewed as more prevalent, disinformation was thought to be more dangerous, given the perceived nefarious intentions of those who produce and disseminate it. Discussing what should be done to limit the spread of misinformation and disinformation online, several believed that credible news sources should be prioritized by social media algorithms over those with questionable motivations and/or with a historical record of publishing inaccurate information. Others felt that there should be a zero-tolerance policy for accounts that post misinformation and disinformation on social media, and that all accounts engaging in this activity should be removed.

Questioned whether they felt that Government of Canada had a role in combatting misinformation and disinformation, participants were mixed in their views. Several stated that while the federal government should continue to regulate the content of traditional media outlets, attempting to regulate the content generated by individual users of social media platforms would be inappropriate.

Public Sentiment (Montreal Arab Canadians, Lower Mainland B.C. Recent Immigrants)

Two groups, comprised of Arab Canadians in Montreal and recent immigrants residing in British Columbia (B.C.)'s Lower Mainland respectively, shared their perspectives regarding their futures in Canada, as well as the inclusiveness of Canadian society. Sharing what made them feel optimistic about their future in Canada, many identified such factors as freedom, safety, opportunity, and peace. Other factors included what they viewed as the widespread accessibility of Canadians to health care, arts and culture, and natural spaces. Asked what concerned them regarding life in Canada going forward, several mentioned the high cost of living, inflation, a perceived lack of competitive wages, difficulties in affording housing, and the impacts of climate change in the years to come. A number were worried about retirement and life in their senior years, with some indicating that they were considering moving back to their countries of origin due to concerns that they would not be able to afford to retire in Canada.

Discussing the state of diversity, equity, and inclusion in Canada, many expressed positive views. It was thought that Canada was a highly diverse country and one that typically placed a high priority on multiculturalism compared to other jurisdictions throughout the world. Asked if they felt that Canadian society was welcoming and respectful of different cultures, beliefs, and values, almost all felt that it was. A few in the group comprised of recent immigrants shared a more nuanced perspective,

expressing the view that while Canada promoted multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusivity, most immigrants continued to seek social connections within their own diaspora groups rather than among Canadians more broadly.

Employment Insurance (Prince Edward Island)

Participants residing in Prince Edward Island (PEI) took part in a brief discussion related to Employment Insurance (EI). Almost all were familiar with this program, and a number had previously accessed it themselves or had known someone who had done so. Asked whether they thought EI was a valuable program for Canadians, most believed that it was. Among those who had previously accessed EI or knew of someone who had, however, all felt that the program did not meet Canadians' needs. Questioned whether they would be willing to pay higher EI premiums in order to receive more generous benefits, however, none indicated that they would. Describing their reasoning, participants mentioned concerns related to the potential misuse of this program and the concern that higher benefit payments might encourage the dependence of some Canadians on this program rather than seeking new employment.

Discussing potential barriers individuals may face when re-entering the workforce, participants identified concerns related to anxiety over beginning a new job, costs associated with training and recertification, as well one's ability to relocate to areas where there was a higher demand for workers in their field of expertise. Asked how the EI program could better assist Canadians when it comes to re-entering the workforce a few suggested that EI payments should continue for the initial weeks after an individual finds new employment. It was felt that this supplemental income would go a long way towards reducing the financial and mental stress they felt was often associated with starting a new job.

Local Industries (London)

Participants residing in London, Ontario engaged in a brief discussion related to local industries and the current state of the employment market in their area. Asked how they would rate the quality of the job market in London at present, participants were mixed in their responses. While it was generally believed that there were numerous jobs available, several were of the impression that many of these positions did not offer a living wage and/or were physically intensive and may not be accessible to persons with disabilities and others who were less physically able. Sharing their perspectives regarding what the local job market would look like five years from now, most were hopeful that it would improve, with a number believing that there would likely be job growth in areas such as post-secondary education, health care, and manufacturing. Several, however, expressed concerns related to the ability of wages to keep pace with the rising cost of living as well as the potential negative impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) on the employment market going forward.

Asked to identify the most important industries in their local region, participants mentioned sectors such as agriculture, health care, post-secondary education, and manufacturing. Questioned whether they felt that auto manufacturing specifically would be an important industry in London over the next five to ten years, a number expected that it would. Discussing whether they had seen, read, or heard



anything in the last few months related to the Government of Canada and a new EV battery plant being built in their area by Volkswagen, very few reported being aware of this project. Most reacted positively to this news, believing this to be a step in the right direction towards bolstering the local economy and increasing the number of high-paying jobs available to local workers. Several thought that this project would have a positive impact on the local economy in the long term and believed that, if successful, it could encourage other foreign companies to make similar investments towards expanding their operations in Canada.

Informed that the Government of Canada had agreed to provide Volkswagen with up to \$13 billion in subsidies over 10 years, several expressed concerns regarding what they viewed as the significant cost of these subsidies. A number felt that the financial cost of these subsidies far exceeded the potential economic benefits and job creation related to this project. Among these participants, it was believed that these investments by the federal government could be better spent towards improvements in other areas such as health care, which they felt required increased funding at present.

MORE INFORMATION

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