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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 fourth 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 June 6th, 2023, and June 28th, 2023.

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

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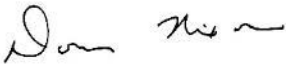
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Political Neutrality Certification

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: July 10, 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 June 6th, 2023, and June 28th, 2023, in multiple locations across the country including Alberta, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Atlantic Canada, Quebec, the Northwest Territories (N.T.), and British Columbia (B.C.). 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 the cost of living, Chinese Canadian perspectives, the Northwest Territories, and official languages. All participants discussed what they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days, with the group based in the Prairies focusing on the response to the wildfires which had been occurring in the region.

This research cycle also explored the issue of housing, which was discussed by recent graduates in the Prairies, recent home buyers in Ontario, Indigenous peoples in the N.T., and crime-concerned Canadians in the Greater Toronto Area (G.T.A.). Other topics, such as the outlook for Canada's energy sector and the federal price on carbon were explored by those residing in Calgary and Edmonton, rural Prairie centres, and St. John's, Newfoundland.

Participants in small and mid-size centres in Quebec, and Francophones in Atlantic Canada and Ontario discussed immigration, while topics related to health care and other issues such as pharmacare, opioids and suicide prevention were discussed at length by participants in St. John's, small and mid-size centres Quebec, Thunder Bay, Vancouver Island, major Quebec centres, and the N.T. Francophones residing in Ontario and Atlantic Canada and those in major Quebec centres also took part in extended discussions related to the protection and promotion of the French language. Other topics discussed this cycle included job creation, post-secondary issues, the Government of Canada's relationship with China, community safety, and local issues in St. John's, Newfoundland.

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 recent post-secondary graduates, Chinese diaspora, Francophones living outside of Quebec, recent home buyers, Indigenous peoples, and crime-concerned individuals.

Detailed Approach

- Twelve groups across various regions in Canada.
- Six groups were conducted among the general population residing in small and mid-size centres in Quebec, Thunder Bay, St. John's, Calgary and Edmonton, rural Prairies, and major centres in Quebec.
- The other six groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
 - Recent post-secondary graduates who have either started working or are looking for work;
 - The Chinese Diaspora;
 - Francophones living outside of Quebec;
 - Recent home buyers;
 - Indigenous peoples;
 - Crime-concerned individuals;
- The two groups in Quebec and the group in Francophone centres in Atlantic Canada and Ontario 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 (EST)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Small and Mid-Size Centres Quebec	1	French	June 6	6:00-8:00 pm	General Population	6
Thunder Bay	2	English	June 7	6:00-8:00 pm	General Population	7
Major City Centres Prairies (SK, MB)	3	English	June 12	8:00-10:00 pm	Recent Post-Secondary Graduates – started working or looking for work	7
St. John’s, NL	4	English	June 13	5:00-7:00 pm	General Population	7
Vancouver Island	5	English	June 14	9:00-11:00 pm	Chinese Diaspora	8
Francophone Centres Atlantic Canada and Ontario	6	French	June 15	6:00-8:00 pm	Francophones Living Outside Quebec	8
Calgary and Edmonton	7	English	June 19	8:00-10:00 pm	General Population	6
Rural Prairies (AB, SK, MB)	8	English	June 20	8:00-10:00 pm	General Population	8
Major Centres Ontario	9	English	June 21	6:00-8:00 pm	Recent Home Buyers – within the last 5 years	8
Major Centres Quebec	10	French	June 22	6:00-8:00 pm	General Population	8
Northwest Territories	11	English	June 27	8:00-10:00 pm	Indigenous	4
Greater Toronto Area	12	English	June 28	6:00-8:00 pm	Crime-Concerned	6
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, including the federal government’s response to large-scale wildfires occurring in many parts of the country, the recent decision by the Bank of Canada to raise interest rates by 25 basis points, the introduction of new initiatives aimed at assisting first-time home buyers, ongoing investigations into allegations of Chinese interference in recent Canadian federal elections, and investments by the Government of Canada towards developing electrified transportation infrastructure.

Participants also recalled actions and initiatives related to the Government of Canada on the international stage. These included the continued provision of financial and military assistance for Ukraine, the Prime Minister's recent trip to Kyiv, and the announcement that 13 new countries had been accepted into the Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA) program.

Response to Wildfires (Rural Prairies)

Participants residing in rural centres in the Prairies engaged in an additional discussion regarding the Government of Canada's response to the wildfires that had been impacting their region in recent months. Very few were aware of any actions from the federal government on this front. Provided with information regarding numerous measures the Government of Canada had taken to address this situation, all reacted positively and felt that these actions would be greatly helpful to those impacted by the fires. Asked what more could be done by the federal government to address the threat of wildfires going forward, several expressed the need for greater support for community volunteer firefighter programs. It was felt that these programs were essential to the protection of rural communities and currently lacked the resources they needed to adequately respond to wildfires.

Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (All Locations)

All groups took part in conversations related to a number of issues currently facing Canadians as well as their perspectives regarding the federal government's performance in managing these priorities. Asked to identify areas in which they felt that the federal government had performed well as of late, participants provided a range of responses. These included the provision of affordability measures to help those struggling with the high cost of living, immigration, climate change and the environment, actions to assist those impacted by recent wildfires across the country, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and foreign assistance to countries such as Ukraine.

Participants also identified a range of areas in which they felt that the Government of Canada had room for improvement. These included reducing inflation and the high cost of living, a perceived lack of affordable housing in Canada, addressing health care worker shortages and long wait times for primary and emergency care, actions to reduce crime and gang violence, and the need to better support vulnerable or marginalized communities such as those experiencing homelessness, persons living with disabilities, and individuals struggling with addiction and/or mental health challenges.

Cost of Living (Mid-Size Centres Prairies Recent Post-Secondary Graduates, Major Centres Ontario Recent Home Buyers)

Two groups took part in longer conversations related to the perceived high cost of living at present. Almost all reported having had to adjust their spending habits as of late in response to rising prices. A number expressed that the rising cost of living had negatively impacted their mental health and that concerns over finances had become a growing source of stress in their lives. Discussing what they believed was behind the rising cost of living, while most viewed this issue as initially resulting from supply chain interruptions thought to be connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, several felt that these challenges had been exacerbated by large corporations (such as major grocers) raising their prices significantly in response.

Asked if they were aware of any recent actions from the federal government to address the cost of living, participants recalled a range of initiatives. These included the introduction of the Canada Dental Benefit (CDB), the announcement of a one-time Grocery Rebate for lower-income households, and agreements

reached between the federal and provincial/territorial governments to make child care more affordable for Canadian families. Most expected that the cost of living would likely continue to worsen over the next year unless significant action was taken to address this problem. No participants expected that the cost of living would improve over the next year.

Chinese Canadians (Vancouver Island Chinese Diaspora)

The group comprised of members of the Chinese diaspora residing in Vancouver Island engaged in a brief discussion related to the challenges facing Chinese Canadians at present. Asked to identify the biggest issues currently impacting Chinese Canadians, a number believed that it needed to be easier for those educated outside of Canada to have their credentials recognized and be permitted to work in their fields of expertise. Some thought that more needed to be done to preserve and promote Chinese culture and heritage in Canada. A few also were of the view that anti-Asian hate and discrimination had increased in recent years, with some believing that this had been connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. Asked if they could recall any actions from the Government of Canada related to increasing its engagement with Chinese Canadians, a number spoke positively of what they viewed as a recent initiative to reach out to the country's diverse population (including the Chinese diaspora) in languages other than English and French. Discussing additional actions that could be taken by the Government of Canada on this front, participants suggested initiatives such as increasing funding for programming celebrating Chinese culture and heritage, providing further language resources for those who do not speak English or French, and encouraging greater representation of Chinese Canadians at all levels of government.

The Northwest Territories (Northwest Territories Indigenous Peoples)

Participants in the group comprised of Indigenous peoples residing in the Northwest Territories (N.T.) briefly discussed a number of issues currently facing their region. Asked to identify the most significant challenges impacting their respective communities, participants mentioned issues such as climate change, homelessness, mental health and addiction, and concerns related to the child welfare system. While a few spoke positively of the counselling resources provided by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), it was felt that far more needed to be done by governments at the federal and territorial level to engage with and support Indigenous families.

Discussing the most important industries to their communities, many identified mining as playing a pivotal role in the region's economy. Asked which areas were most in need of additional support from the federal government, participants mentioned concerns related to education, health care, a lack of basic necessities such as clean drinking water, and the need for further action to mitigate the potential damaging impacts of climate change to the region. All felt that the federal government was currently on the wrong track when it came to managing these issues, with some expressing that many of these challenges had existed for several decades and that little in the way of tangible progress had ever been made. It was felt that far more needed to be done at all levels of government to engage with Indigenous-led organizations to better understand their concerns and determine which actions would be most effective towards finding long-term solutions to these challenges.

Official Languages (Atlantic Canada and Ontario Francophones)

One group, comprised of Francophones residing in Atlantic Canada and Ontario, took part in an additional exercise where they were presented with a list of priorities related to official languages and asked to identify those that they felt were most important for the federal government to focus on. Almost all selected the priority of guaranteeing the equality of the French and English languages in Canada. Several felt that until this was achieved Francophones living outside of Quebec would continue to face

difficulties in accessing the same level and range of services available to their English-speaking counterparts. The priority of ensuring that every Canadian could be heard and understood by a judge in the official language of their choice when before a court also received a high level of support. This was widely seen as a basic legal right and one that needed to be made available to all Canadians. Many also believed that it was important to increase funding for schools for Francophone communities outside of Quebec. The view was expressed that there were considerably fewer resources available to French-speaking schools and that this had served to greatly reduce the quality of French-language education in these communities.

Housing (Mid-Size Centres Prairies Recent Post-Secondary Graduates, Major Centres Ontario Recent Home Buyers, Northwest Territories Indigenous Peoples, G.T.A. Crime Concerned)

Four groups engaged in discussions related to housing. These conversations focused on actions taken by the Government of Canada to increase the housing supply, initiatives and supports related to first-time home buyers, and the housing situation in Canada's North.

Housing Supply (Mid-Size Centres Prairies Post-Secondary Graduates, Major Centres Ontario Recent Home Buyers, G.T.A. Crime Concerned)

Three groups shared their perspectives related to the housing supply at present as well as actions from the federal government to increase the number of available homes for Canadians. Asked to identify the largest challenges at this time related to housing, many mentioned high home prices and the difficulties in saving up enough to afford a sufficient down payment. Several were of the opinion that increases in housing prices in recent years had been the result of not enough homes being available to meet the demands of prospective home buyers and that more needed to be done to increase the supply of housing in Canada. The view was added that along with building more homes the Government of Canada and governments at the provincial/territorial and municipal level also needed to ensure that enough supporting infrastructure such as public transportation, hospitals, and schools was being constructed to accommodate the increased populations in these communities.

Asked why they felt that more new homes were not being built at a faster rate, several believed that this was related to perceived increases in costs for building materials and challenges related to municipal zoning laws and the types of homes that developers are permitted to build. Asked whether they had heard of the Housing Accelerator Fund, very few had. Provided with information about this initiative, while a number felt that it might be helpful in increasing the amount of available housing, several were concerned as to what oversight would be put into place to ensure that the funds allocated to municipalities under this program would be used effectively. Discussing whether they had any concerns related to building more homes faster, many felt that there was a risk of these homes being of poorer quality due to their more rapid rate of construction. Some were also concerned that even if they added to the housing supply, these new housing developments would be highly priced and unaffordable for a large number of Canadians.

Asked what impacts, if any, they thought that changes to municipal zoning bylaws could have on building more homes, several expected that this would have a significant impact, believing that these laws dictated the type of housing that could be built in each municipality as well as where these new developments could be located. Most were of the opinion that municipalities should be encouraged to make zoning changes to allow for the building of more homes in their communities. Related to this, several believed that there should be an increased focus on increasing density and building multi-family housing complexes rather than single-family homes.

Recent Home Buyers (Major Centres Ontario Recent Home Buyers)

Participants in this group, comprised of individuals who had purchased a home within the past five years, discussed their experiences related to home ownership as well as initiatives from the federal government related to assisting first-time home buyers. Asked if they could recall any recent actions taken by the Government of Canada, participants mentioned initiatives such as the creation of the new First Home Savings Account (FHSA), the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive (FTHBI), and its commitment to increasing the housing supply across Canada.

Almost all indicated being concerned about recent changes to the prime interest rate. Several reported having purchased their homes when interest rates were much lower and were concerned about how much their monthly payments might increase when it came time to renew their mortgages. A large number expressed that home ownership had become less affordable for them in the past five years. Almost all were of the impression that their home utility costs had also risen considerably during this period. For many, these increases in housing-related costs had led to a decrease in discretionary spending and a greater portion of their monthly income being allocated towards servicing their mortgage payments and other debt.

Participants were next provided with information related to various housing initiatives from the Government of Canada. Several spoke positively of the decision to ban blind bidding, believing that this would help future home buyers by ensuring that they were not overbidding on homes due to not knowing the amounts that other potential buyers were offering. A number also expressed interest in rent-to-own housing options and felt that this could represent a way for Canadians to build equity in a property without the requirement of putting down a significant down payment. While expecting that these programs might be helpful to some, most believed that the Government of Canada was currently on the wrong track when it came to making home ownership more affordable. It was widely felt that due to what they viewed as exceedingly high home prices in many parts of the country, the amounts offered through these programs would likely have little impact on the ability of most Canadians to purchase a home.

Northern Housing (Northwest Territories Indigenous Peoples)

Those in the group comprised of Indigenous peoples residing in the Northwest Territories (N.T.) briefly discussed the housing situation in their region. Almost all believed that housing in their communities was very lacking at present and that it had become increasingly difficult for those residing there to afford to purchase or rent a home. The view was added that the limited available housing was often in poor condition and in drastic need of repair. All felt that the housing situation in their region had worsened in recent years and a few commented that they would likely be leaving the North in the future due to the lack of housing options and other challenges related to the high cost of living there.

Discussing what would need to happen to improve the situation in the N.T., participants believed that far greater investments needed to be made towards building more homes in the region. Most felt that the federal government was currently on the wrong track when it came to housing, with a few expressing that they no longer felt homeownership was a realistic possibility for them. Asked what more could be done by the Government of Canada on this front, participants recommended greater assistance for first-time home buyers as well as increased funding towards improving the quality and availability of housing in Northern communities.

Energy Outlook (Calgary and Edmonton, Rural Prairies)

Two groups shared their perspectives regarding Canada's energy sector, with a specific focus on their expectations related to oil and gas production going forward. All felt that oil and gas was a significant economic driver at present and was of critical importance both to the Prairies as well as for Canada more broadly. Discussing the importance of oil and gas in their region, several reported that this sector continued to be a top employer in their communities and felt that these resources were essential to

meeting the energy needs of a large portion of Canadians. As such, it was expected that it would be difficult to transition away from oil and gas at any point in the near future. Almost all believed that the oil and gas sector was performing strongly at present and had experienced significant economic growth in recent years. Asked how important they felt it was from an economic perspective to diversify beyond oil and gas, most believed this to be a significant priority, with several of the impression that this process had already begun in their respective areas. A number thought that given the finite nature of non-renewable resources such as oil and gas, more sustainable alternatives would soon become a necessity. Several also felt this to be important from an environmental perspective, believing that a greater use of renewable energy would have a considerable benefit towards mitigating the potential impacts of climate change.

Most believed that clean energy represented a significant economic opportunity for Canada and expected that investments in this sector would likely lead to the creation of numerous high-paying jobs (including for those currently employed in oil and gas). Questioned if they were familiar with the term 'sustainable jobs', very few were. Discussing what came to mind when they thought about sustainable jobs in the clean energy sector many believed that these would likely be those positions responsible for maintaining and managing the systems responsible for producing this energy. Asked who or what they believed was driving the development of the clean energy sector in their region, several felt that this had primarily resulted from a public desire in many jurisdictions across the world to transition to more renewable energy sources as a way of mitigating the impacts of climate change. It was thought that the Government of Canada had also worked to develop this sector through the provision of grants and tax credits to clean energy producers as well as by making significant investments towards the construction of clean energy infrastructure.

Carbon Pricing (St. John's Newfoundland, Calgary and Edmonton, Rural Prairies)

Three 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 reduce carbon pollution in Canada. Many believed this to be an important priority, feeling it was prudent to take these actions now in order to reduce the impacts of climate change on future generations. Asked if they were aware of any actions taken by the Government of Canada to reduce carbon pollution, participants mentioned initiatives such as the introduction of a federal price on carbon, rebates for the purchase of electric vehicles (EVs), increased funding for public transportation systems in Canadian communities, and grants for home retrofitting projects via the Canada Greener Homes Grant (though not mentioned by name).

Questioned whether they supported placing a price on carbon, many were uncertain and felt that they did not know enough to properly evaluate this measure. A roughly similar smaller number expressed support for a price on carbon as those who opposed this initiative. To aid in conversation, participants were informed that there were two parts to carbon pollution pricing – a fuel charge, which applies to things such as oil and gas and a separate system for industry, and that in provinces where the federal fuel charge applies all direct proceeds are returned to Canadians, primarily through Climate Action Incentive Payments (CAIPs). Many questioned the purpose of most households receiving this money back as this felt counterintuitive to many.

Discussing where they would go if they were interested in finding more information related to carbon pollution pricing, many indicated that they would likely look to official websites hosted by the Government of Canada. Asked whether they viewed climate scientists as credible sources for information related to carbon pricing, most did, believing these individuals typically had considerable expertise in this area. While several felt that economists were also trustworthy sources of information on this front,

concerns were expressed by some that they may be overly focused on the financial aspects of carbon pricing rather than the environmental impacts.

Informed that other countries, including Denmark, the United Kingdom (U.K.), Sweden, France, Netherlands, Chile, and Japan, all had implemented their own ways of pricing carbon pollution, participants were asked whether this impacted their level of support for carbon pricing in Canada. While a number felt that it was encouraging that other countries were taking these steps, very few said that knowing this impacted their support for carbon pricing. Participants were largely of the view that each country faced its own unique challenges related to limiting carbon pollution and that Canada's carbon pricing system should be tailored to its own needs and not be influenced by strategies utilized in other jurisdictions.

Asked whether they felt that a price on carbon would discourage Canadians from polluting, few believed that it would. While it was expected that some individuals might adjust their daily behaviours to produce fewer emissions, it was generally thought that this was not possible for everyone. The view was added that making these changes would be particularly difficult for those living rurally who often had to drive long distances to get from place to place and whose communities typically had limited public transportation options available. Questioned whether they felt that the costs of a price on carbon were higher in the short term than the costs of climate change, most were uncertain. This said, a large number were of the view that even if the costs of implementing a price on carbon were relatively high, this action was still worth taking if it served to mitigate the impacts of climate change on future generations.

Immigration (Small and Mid-Size Centres Quebec, Atlantic Canada and Ontario Francophones)

Participants in two groups discussed the current state of the immigration system in Canada. Asked if they could recall any recent actions taken by the federal government related to this front, a number had heard that it was currently working to increase the rate of immigration to Canada in the coming years. While most were generally accepting of a higher level of immigration, several were concerned about the capacity of Canadian communities to accommodate and support a large influx of new arrivals. Related to this, it was widely felt that a proportionate amount of additional infrastructure and essential services such as hospitals and schools would need to be constructed to accommodate these newcomers.

Asked whether they thought that the Government of Canada was currently on the right track when it came to immigration, most in Quebec felt this to be the case. Those residing in Atlantic Canada and Ontario were more mixed in their opinions with a roughly equal number feeling that the federal government was on the right track as those who believed it was headed in the wrong direction. Discussing the potential benefits of immigration, several felt that it was essential to ensure that there would be enough workers to meet the needs of Canadians, particularly in vital sectors such as health care and education. Some also spoke about the potential for immigration to increase the diversity of the population, believing that this would provide a greater variety of perspectives and cultural richness to Canadian communities. Among the smaller number who felt that the federal government was on the wrong track when it came to immigration, concerns were expressed that the addition of too many new arrivals in a short period of time would place severe strain on areas such as housing, health care, and the education system. Asked whether they thought that the immigration rate to Canada should increase, decrease, or stay the same, most believed that it should be kept relatively stable in the years to come. It was widely felt that this would be the most effective way to bring more people to Canada while not overwhelming the housing market and/or the ability of communities to continue providing essential services to their residents.

A number expressed the view that efforts should be taken to ensure that a sizeable portion of new arrivals spoke French. This was thought to be especially important in terms of the ability of newcomers in French-speaking municipalities to successfully integrate into their new communities. Informed that through the Action Plan for Official Languages, the Government of Canada was planning to boost Francophone immigration, participants were largely positive in their reactions. Several thought that this action would go a long way towards strengthening the French language and Francophone culture in Canada. Discussing what more should be done by the federal government on this front, a number recommended a greater focus on recruiting French-speaking individuals with qualifications in important sectors such as health care, education, construction, and other trades, as well as making it easier for their credentials to be recognized in Canada.

Health Care (St. John's Newfoundland)

Participants residing in St. John's, Newfoundland took part in a brief discussion related to health care in their region. Almost all felt that the health care system in their province was under considerable strain and that this had greatly impacted the quality and accessibility of these services. Describing the most pressing challenges related to health care at present, many identified what they viewed as a persistent shortage of doctors and nurses in the region. Related to this, several identified long wait times at emergency rooms and walk-in clinics as a growing area of concern, believing that worker shortages had made it difficult to access emergency or primary care in a timely fashion. A large number also mentioned a lack of family doctors practicing in the region, with several describing having personally faced challenges in acquiring a family physician in recent years.

Provided with information related to priority areas recently established by the Government of Canada related to health care, all reacted positively. Several reiterated the importance of addressing health worker shortages and reducing wait times, expressing the view that many of the other issues currently facing the health care system in their province stemmed from a lack of available personnel and resources. A number also thought that it was of critical importance for the Government of Canada to place an increased focus on addressing mental health and substance use. It was believed that these issues had increased substantially in their community in recent years and required urgent attention. A few also spoke positively of the priority related to modernizing health data management and virtual care. It was felt that by implementing a digital health system, health care providers would be able to communicate much more effectively with one another, making it easier for patients to have their records transferred and benefit from a more personalized health care experience.

Pharmacare (Small and Mid-Size Centres Quebec, Thunder Bay)

Two groups engaged in discussions related to the potential implementation of a national pharmacare program. Asked to identify the biggest challenges related to health care in need of further attention from the Government of Canada, participants identified a wide range of issues, including long wait times when accessing emergency care, a shortage of doctors and nurses, a dearth of family doctors in many Canadian communities, limited mental health services, a lack of home care options for the aging population, a limited availability of virtual care options, and a perceived lack of prevention-based medicine. Asked specifically about the cost of prescription drugs, almost all in the group from Thunder Bay thought this was an important issue, while most in the group from Quebec believed that there were more pressing issues facing the health care system at present.

Describing the current state of prescription drug coverage in Canada, a large number were of the impression that they were relatively affordable in most cases. Almost all were familiar with the term 'pharmacare' and most believed that this referred to the public provision of prescription drugs and medications. None were aware of any plans from the Government of Canada on this front. To aid in the conversation, it was clarified that the federal government intended to move forward on implementing a national pharmacare program to make prescription drugs more affordable and accessible to a greater number of Canadians. Almost all reacted positively to this information, and many were enthusiastic about the prospect of reducing the costs associated with prescription drugs and helping to make them more accessible to all Canadians.

Asked who they felt should be covered under a national pharmacare plan, participants expressed a range of views. Most felt that this coverage should be extended only to those who did not have access to a private insurance plan. Regarding potential options, participants were informed that a national pharmacare program could be completely public (similar to health care) or could work to 'close the gaps' so that people could continue to use existing public and private plans. Discussing the potential benefits and drawbacks of each approach, all expressed a preference for the completely public option, believing that providing equal coverage to all Canadians represented the best way to deliver a pharmacare program. Asked if they would support a universal pharmacare program, almost all reported that they would. Most, however, indicated that they would be less likely to support this program in the event that it led to higher or new taxation or increased the federal deficit.

Opioids (Thunder Bay, Vancouver Island Chinese Diaspora)

Participants residing in Thunder Bay and Vancouver Island took part in conversations related to addiction and opioid use in their communities. All in Thunder Bay and most from Vancouver Island felt this to be a major issue at present and believed that the rate of addiction and substance abuse in their area had increased substantially as of late. No participants were hopeful that this issue would improve in the coming years. It was felt that too few resources had been devoted towards addressing substance use in Canadian communities and that more needed to be done to ensure those suffering from addiction were able to access treatment. Asked if they could recall any actions taken by the federal government regarding this issue, a few mentioned initiatives such as increased funding for safe injection sites and the availability of Naloxone kits for those experiencing overdoses.

Asked what came to mind when they heard terms such as 'safe supply' and 'safe injection sites', most were positive in their impressions. On balance, it was believed that these were initiatives aimed at preventing overdose deaths by ensuring those suffering from addiction had a safe place to consume these substances and greater assurance that the drugs they were consuming had not been laced with more dangerous substances. While mostly supportive of harm reduction initiatives such as these, several did not believe that these programs would be sufficient on their own in curbing the rate of addiction. It was felt that while the availability of a safe supply and access to safe injection sites would likely reduce overdose deaths, a greater focus needed to be placed on assisting these individuals in accessing treatment for their addictions and getting them to stop using drugs in the long term. It was widely felt that the Government of Canada had a role to play both in the funding of harm reduction initiatives as well as ensuring treatment options were available for those suffering from addiction.

Provided with information related to the federal government's Substance Use and Addictions Program (SUAP), most expected that this initiative would have a positive impact on reducing overdoses and other harms associated with substance use. It was widely felt, however, that in order for these actions to be effective they would need to be accompanied by increased accessibility to mental health treatment and

safe and affordable housing for those suffering from addiction. It was thought that more should be done to incentivize Canadians to pursue careers in mental health and addiction treatment, with some of the impression that there was currently a shortage of skilled workers in these areas.

Job Creation (Mid-Size Centres Prairies Recent Post-Secondary Graduates)

Participants residing in mid-size centres in the Prairies engaged in a brief conversation regarding the state of the Canadian job market and recent job creation efforts undertaken by the Government of Canada. All reported being recent post-secondary graduates. Sharing their perspectives regarding the current state of the job market and the opportunities available to new graduates, many indicated that it had been difficult to find work in their field of study and that they had either accepted employment in an unrelated area or been searching unsuccessfully for work for several months.

All felt that the Canadian job market would be significantly worse in five years' time. Several were concerned about the potential proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) and believed that this could result in mass layoffs and fewer job opportunities for humans. All believed that the Government of Canada was currently on the wrong track when it came to creating jobs and very few were aware of any work it had undertaken on this front. Asked what more could be done to create jobs, provide skills training, and support workers, participants suggested that the federal government create incentives for students to study and enter in-demand fields (such as health care), as well as make post-secondary education more affordable for Canadians.

Post-Secondary Issues (Mid-Size Centres Prairies Recent Post-Secondary Graduates)

Participants in the group comprised of recent post-secondary graduates residing in the Prairies, took part in a brief discussion related to the affordability of post-secondary education. Asked if they were aware of any work the Government of Canada had done to make post-secondary studies and paying off student loans more affordable, many recalled its recent decision to permanently eliminate interest on Canada Student Loans and Canada Apprentice Loans. Several were also aware of the availability of student loan repayment assistance programs, including the ability to defer loan payments until borrowers began earning an annual income of more than \$40,000. All were positive in their reactions to these actions and many expressed appreciation regarding the decision to permanently eliminate interest on Canada Student Loans and Canada Apprentice Loans. While enthusiastic about these initiatives, most felt that these actions represented temporary solutions to addressing education unaffordability, rather than a permanent or long-term resolution to this issue.

Asked what more the Government of Canada could do to help new graduates, participants believed that actions could be taken to ensure that entry-level work would be available to students in their fields of study upon graduation. Others suggested that the federal government reverse its recent decision to allow international students to work for more than 20 hours per week, believing that this had created further competition in what was perceived to be an already competitive job market.

Relationship with China (Vancouver Island Chinese Diaspora)

One group, comprised of members of the Chinese diaspora living in Vancouver Island, engaged in a short discussion related to the Government of Canada's current relationship with China. Almost all believed that Canada's relationship with China had worsened in recent years and several expressed concerns related to the potential economic and geopolitical consequences of perceived escalating tensions with

China. Discussing actions that the federal government could take to improve its management of this relationship, a large number believed that more could be done to broaden its economic and cultural connections to China. It was felt that this could include increasing the number of students studying abroad in each country and further expanding trade relations between the two jurisdictions. Asked how they expected this relationship to develop moving forward, most felt that this was difficult to predict and would depend considerably on the actions taken by China on an economic and geopolitical level going forward.

French Language Protection and Promotion (Atlantic Canada and Ontario Francophones, Major Centres Quebec)

Participants in two groups engaged in brief conversations related to the protection and promotion of the French language in Canada. All were of the view that this needed to be a top priority for the Government of Canada. Asked whether they could recall any actions from the federal government on this front, many mentioned the announcement of the Government of Canada's *Action Plan for Official Languages: 2023-2028*.

Provided with information regarding the specific objectives and initiatives contained within this Plan almost all were positive in their reactions, and many felt that these measures would be greatly helpful in protecting and promoting the French language both in Quebec and across Canada. Several expected that it would greatly benefit Francophone communities outside of Quebec, providing them with a broader range of resources and programming for their residents. Many thought that the initiative to invest in Francophone child care centres across Canada would be especially impactful, believing that it would help a greater number of children to develop French language skills from an early age. A number also felt that investments towards Francophone community organizations would have a significant impact, believing it had the potential to strengthen Francophone communities and ensure broader access to French-language services and resources.

Asked what else the Government of Canada could do to better protect and promote the French language, participants recommended increased investments towards French-language programming and resources for seniors, promoting the greater use of French on labels and signage, and requiring manufacturers and corporations throughout Canada to provide French-language products and services.

Suicide Prevention (Major Centres Quebec, Northwest Territories Indigenous Peoples)

Content Advisory: Please note that the following section deals with the topic of suicide and emotional distress and may be upsetting for some readers.

Participants in two groups engaged in discussions related to suicide prevention and the implementation of 9-8-8, a three-digit telephone number for those suffering from emotional distress and dealing with suicidal ideation. Shown a number of potential statements designed to promote and provide information related to this service, participants largely favoured those which were direct, informative, and provided statistics that conveyed the gravity of these mental health challenges.

Focusing on the different features offered by the 9-8-8 service, many felt that confidentiality was of significant importance, believing that a far greater number of Canadians would be motivated to utilize this service knowing that their conversations would be kept private. The view was expressed that there was still considerable stigma around mental health and suicidal thoughts and that confidentiality was key to this service being effective. A large number also felt it important that this service be free, though many

thought that this would already be an expectation for most and did not need to be highlighted to a significant extent. It was widely thought that it was important for the 9-8-8 service to be culturally appropriate for users. Several commented that some cultures might experience mental health challenges in different ways and that it was of critical importance for responders to be able to communicate to callers in ways that related to them and their backgrounds. Participants in the group comprised of Indigenous peoples felt that this might encourage a greater number from their communities to utilize this service, believing that they would feel more confident in knowing that their unique experiences and challenges would be understood by responders.

Discussing the types of promotional materials and information resources related to 9-8-8 that they felt would be most effective once the number was launched, several believed that this advertising should appear on social media platforms as well as on television and radio. Given the perception that many younger Canadians often faced with struggles related to mental health, it was felt that social media would be a highly intuitive place for messaging regarding 9-8-8 to appear. A few also suggested that these messages should be accompanied by images of real people, further conveying to viewers the human consequences related to struggles with mental health and suicidal thoughts. Asked if they would be likely to share information related to 9-8-8 with family, friends, and/or colleagues almost all indicated that they would. Shown a number of potential names for this service, most participants felt the service should be called '9-8-8 Canada', with an accompanying call to action ("988 Canada: Call or text for suicide crisis help"). Related to this potential call to action, a few commented that it was important to let people know that they could also text this service, believing that this had not previously been apparent.

Community Safety (G.T.A. Crime Concerned)

Participants residing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) shared their perspectives related to the current rate of crime in their area. A roughly similar number believed that crime was currently a major issue in their community as those who felt it was a moderate or minor challenge. Asked to identify the types of crimes that they felt were an issue at present, participants mentioned activities such as home robberies, violent assaults, car theft, and drunk driving. Many were also of the opinion that crime on public transit had become a growing concern in recent years. Almost all felt that the rate of crime had increased as of late, with a small number believing it had mostly remained the same. Several reported having recently changed their behaviours in response to rising crime. Actions taken on this front included no longer walking alone at night, driving as opposed to taking public transit, and keeping a closer eye on their children in public areas.

Asked what actions should be taken to address rising crime, a few believed there needed to be increased investments towards law enforcement and bolstering the presence of police in their community. A larger number, however, felt differently, believing that increased policing was not the answer and that more needed to be done to address the root causes behind why these crimes were occurring. Asked whether they could recall any actions from the Government of Canada related to addressing crime, a number recalled recent bans on certain types of firearms. While generally supportive of taking action to reduce gun crime, a few believed that other types of firearms, notably hunting rifles, had been banned due to this action, and felt that this was unfair.

Provided with information regarding steps the federal government was taking to crack down on gang violence, including through increased investments towards law enforcement, participants were mixed in their reactions. While hopeful that these actions would be effective, many were concerned that not enough focus was being placed on preventing crimes from occurring in the first place. It was felt that if significant investments were made towards providing individuals with safe and affordable housing, a

living wage, and treatment for issues such as mental health and addiction, many would no longer be compelled to engage in criminal behaviour. With this in mind, it was thought that a greater focus should be placed on increasing the overall well-being of vulnerable individuals and that taking this approach would be much more effective in the long term towards reducing crime.

Local Issues (St. John's Newfoundland)

Participants residing in St. John's, Newfoundland engaged in a brief discussion related to the top issues impacting their region that they believed required further prioritization from the federal government. Asked to identify the most pressing challenges currently facing their community, participants mentioned areas such as inflation and the high cost of living, a perceived lack of affordable housing, health care worker shortages, long wait times for emergency and primary care, and what was viewed as increasing rates of homelessness and addiction in recent years. Almost all felt that not enough attention was being paid to these issues by the Government of Canada at this time.

Discussing the most important sectors and industries in their region all felt that the oil and gas sector was of critical importance to the local economy and served as one of the top employers for those residing in the region. Asked what they viewed as the biggest issues facing the oil and gas sector at present, a number mentioned increasing fuel and energy prices, believing that this had served to reduce consumer demand in the sector. Identifying additional challenges, participants also described what they viewed as a growing global trend away from non-renewable resources towards more sustainable energy options, believing this had also contributed to a decrease in demand for oil and gas.

Asked whether they were aware of the Bay du Nord Development Project, a roughly similar number of participants reported having heard of it as those who had not. Informed that Equinor, the company behind the project, had recently decided to postpone the project for three years for economic reasons, while most felt this likely made financial sense, it was widely felt that this action would have a negative impact on the provincial economy and the creation of high-paying jobs in their community. Several hoped that the project would eventually go forward and were of the view that it would be a major loss to their region if it were to be cancelled permanently.

MORE INFORMATION

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