



Government  
of Canada

Gouvernement  
du Canada

# Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – December 2020

## Executive Summary

### **Prepared for the Privy Council Office**

Supplier name: The Strategic Counsel

Contract number: 35035-182346/001/CY

Contract value: \$1,618,838.00

Award date: December 18, 2020

Delivery date: March 5, 2021

Registration number: POR-005-19

For more information on this report, please email [por-rop@pco-bcp.ca](mailto:por-rop@pco-bcp.ca)

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

Canada 

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

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

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

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

This report includes findings from 10 online focus groups which were conducted between December 1<sup>st</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020 in multiple locations across the country including Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Nunavut, Alberta and British Columbia. Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are shown in the section below.

The research for this cycle of focus groups focussed primarily on COVID-19, as the pandemic continued in Canada. The research explored a wide range of related issues in depth, including what Canadians were hearing about the Government of Canada in the news, how Canadians behaviours had evolved and views on the federal government's procurement and expectations of timelines around the impending COVID-19 vaccine. The research also explored reactions from particular subgroups of the population in response to different creative concepts. Concepts tested included four COVID-19 Public Service Announcements with Indigenous participants, five social media advertisements aimed at informing Canadians and those thinking of travelling to Canada about Canadian travel restrictions with two groups – those residing in the Greater Montreal Area (GMA) who were exhibiting risky behaviours and young adults residing in the Greater Vancouver Area (GVA) – held early in the month, and a series of video ads aimed at informing Canadians about COVID-19 tested with those exhibiting riskier behaviour towards COVID-19 guidelines.

In addition to the pandemic, non-COVID-19 related discussions broached other topics including long-term care homes, Canada-U.S. relations, the environment, Indigenous issues and local issues in Iqaluit.

As a note of caution when interpreting the results from this study, findings of qualitative research are directional in nature only and cannot be attributed quantitatively to the overall population under study with any degree of confidence.

## Methodology

### Overview of Groups

#### Target audience

- Canadian residents, 18 and older.
- Groups were split primarily by location.
- Some groups focused on specific subgroups of the population including young adults (aged 18-24 years old), parents of school aged children (in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12), people exhibiting riskier behaviours towards COVID-19, people with elderly/vulnerable parents and Indigenous people.

### Detailed approach

- 10 focus groups across various regions in Canada.
- Two groups were conducted with the general population in the Outaouais region of Quebec and in Iqaluit.
- The other eight groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
  - Young adults (aged 18-24) residing in major centres in Alberta and the Greater Vancouver Area (GVA);
  - Parents of school aged children residing in major centres in Atlantic Canada;

- People exhibiting riskier behaviour in the Greater Montreal Area (GMA) and Peel Region of Ontario;
- People with elderly/vulnerable parents residing in major centres Ontario and Winnipeg; and
- Indigenous peoples residing in Northern Ontario.
- All groups in Quebec were conducted in French, while the others 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, 71 participants attended, in total. Details on attendance numbers by group can be found below.
- Each participant received an honorarium. The incentive ranged from \$90 to \$125 per participant, depending on the location and the composition of the group.

### Group Locations and Composition

LOCATION	GROUP	LANGUAGE	DATE	TIME (EST)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Peel Region Ontario	1	English	Dec. 1	6:00-8:00 pm	Exhibiting Riskier Behaviours	8
GMA	2	French	Dec. 2	6:00-8:00 pm	Exhibiting Riskier Behaviours	8
Greater Vancouver Area	3	English	Dec. 3	8:00-10:00 pm	Young Adults (aged 18-24)	7
Major Centres Ontario	4	English	Dec. 7	6:00-8:00 pm	People with Elderly/Vulnerable Parents	8
Major Centres Alberta (Calgary & Edmonton)	5	English	Dec. 8	8:00-10:00 pm	Young Adults (aged 18-24)	7
The Outaouais Region (Gatineau and the MRC des Collines-de-l'Outaouais)	6	French	Dec. 9	6:00-8:00 pm	General Population	7
Major Centres Atlantic Canada	7	English	Dec. 10	5:00-7:00 pm	Parents of School Age Children (JK-Gr.12)	8
Winnipeg	8	English	Dec. 15	7:00-9:00 pm	People with Elderly/Vulnerable Parents	5
Northern Ontario	9	English	Dec. 16	6:00-8:00 pm	Indigenous	6
Iqaluit	10	English	Dec. 17	6:00-8:00 pm	General Population	7
<b>Total number of participants</b>						<b>71</b>

# Key Findings

## Part I: COVID-19 Related Findings

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

To start each group, participants were asked what they had seen, heard or read about the Government of Canada in recent days. While there was a fair bit of variety from group to group, overall many had not heard anything. For those who did, issues related to COVID-19 concerning vaccines and economic relief were top of mind.

The topic of COVID-19 vaccines issues was referred to in every group. Hope was expressed that a vaccination program was coming and that there would be enough vaccines for all Canadians. With respect to economic issues, there were participants in each group who mentioned that they had heard something about Government of Canada initiatives related to COVID-19. While there was no clear consensus, issues as diverse as the possibility of more economic relief, an extension of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) loan, pressure from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) on small business to make repayments, and more general comments about financial support programs were all mentioned.

In several groups conducted towards the beginning of the month, participants were asked if they recalled hearing anything about the Government of Canada's fiscal update and, overall, unprompted awareness was relatively low.

In the groups with young adults and parents of school aged children, participants were provided additional information about specific aspects of the Government of Canada's Fall Economic Statement, announced November 30, 2020, which were relevant to them and were probed for their feedback.

### **Support for Students (Greater Vancouver Area Young Adults, Major Centres Alberta Young Adults)**

The group comprised of young adults residing the Greater Vancouver Area were shown a specific description regarding removing interest on the repayment of the deferral portion of the Canada Student Loans and Canada Apprentice Loans for next year (2021-22) and were asked for their feedback. Overall there was some disappointment that this debt deferral initiative applied to only the federal portion of the student debt, especially for the participants whereby the federal portion of their student loans was smaller than the provincial portion. There was also some confusion as to whether this would be a permanent write-off of the interest or just a short-term deferral. Living in B.C., these participants also felt that this was less relevant to them as they pointed out the provincial government was already moving on permanent debt relief for students.

Young adults living in major centres in Alberta, were shown a different description (included in the detailed findings section of this report) with regards to the Government of Canada's Fall Economic Statement, focused more on the proposed several initiatives to support young people including

enhanced funding for the Canada Summer Jobs program, a Youth Employment and Skills Strategy and eliminating interest on Canada Student Loans and Canada Apprenticeship Loans for 2021-22. Overall, participants responded favourably to these initiatives. The combination of the two aspects – support for employment and elements of relief for student debt – were seen to address key concerns of the demographic represented by the participants in these two groups. However, it should be noted that some reservations were also expressed in terms of these initiatives would be paid (in terms of balancing them with other economic priorities) and the timing of the focus of these initiatives given the pandemic.

### **Support for Families (Major Centres Atlantic Canada Parents)**

In the group with parents in major centres in Atlantic Canada, participants were shown information from the Fall Economic Statement regarding various proposed Government of Canada initiatives to support young families including the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit (CRCB), sustained investments in childcare and amendments to the Income Tax act around the Canada Child Benefit (CCB). Details on these statements can be found in the detailed findings section of this report.

Asked how they felt about the above-noted initiatives, responses were uniformly favourable but there were more questions than comments as there was some confusion as to what would happen in practice. Participants were specifically asked if they thought that these initiatives would be helpful for young families and the response was favourable. However, questions and critique centred on a few key areas including: concerns around tax implications, a perceived inconsistency in the age range eligibility between various programs and the need for the program to cover all dependent children regardless of age, and questions around how the financial support is being allocated with suggestions for benefits to be available to all on a sliding scale, rather than having an income cut-off.

### **Behaviour Change (Peel Region Ontario Exhibiting Riskier Behaviour, GMA Exhibiting Riskier Behaviour, Greater Vancouver Area Young Adults, Major Centres Ontario People with Elderly/Vulnerable Parents, Major Centres Alberta Young Adults, Outaouais Region Quebec, Major Centres Atlantic Canada Parents, Winnipeg People with Elderly/Vulnerable Parents, Iqaluit)**

In nine of the ten groups which were held in December participants engaged in a discussion about the impact of COVID-19 on their lives. The conversation focused on their experiences, their behaviours as the pandemic has evolved, as well as their views related to social/family gatherings with the holidays approaching, travel, and the issue of reopening the borders to travel between Canada and the U.S. as well as internationally.

On a relatively unprompted basis, many participants spoke about the mental health impacts related to COVID-19 and the COVID-related restrictions for themselves and family members. They described their mental and emotional state as worsening, attributing this to prolonged isolation, fear of the effects of the virus and questions about the post-pandemic outlook.

Parents, in particular, were struggling with the shift to online learning for their children and were generally concerned about the long-term effects of the experience of the pandemic on their children's psyche. Some were worried about the quality of the education their children were receiving, the lack of social interaction and the degree to which older children in particular would be affected by the pandemic as they embarked on adulthood having missed many of the defining moments and events in a young person's life. Young people themselves expressed a sense of frustration and anxiety, especially in relation to lost opportunities (e.g., work internships) but also post-secondary educational pursuits that were not viewed as rewarding or as delivering the expected value for money.

Financial challenges were another major source of concern. Many participants alluded to the toll the pandemic has taken in this regard (e.g., layoffs and job loss).

Although it was mentioned with less frequency, some participants felt the COVID-19 related restrictions had led to unanticipated benefits – more time with family and/or to pursue hobbies and interests – but, on balance, the downsides appeared to outweigh the upsides.

When participants were prompted about any changes in their behaviour as the situation regarding COVID-19 has evolved in their community, most said they had maintained a fairly consistent routine from March through to December although many noted interacting with even fewer people now than they had during the summer months. Changing weather patterns were the driving factor behind limiting outdoor social gatherings.

#### **Reactions to End of the Atlantic Bubble (Major Centres Atlantic Canada Parents)**

Participants residing in major centres across Atlantic Canada were generally satisfied with the regional bubble and the degree to which it had effectively reduced transmission of the virus. However, they were worried that the high rates of infection in Quebec and the United States could penetrate the region and were concerned about the movement of people within the region itself, specifically residents from smaller communities traveling into larger centers.

#### **Response to 'Stay-at-home' Guidance (Peel Region Ontario Exhibiting Riskier Behaviour, GMA Exhibiting Riskier Behaviour)**

Two groups were conducted with participants who had reported having attended social gatherings outside their homes in the past few weeks. When asked about their motivations, most said they had done so for the sake of their mental health. They viewed social interactions and human connection as integral to their overall sense of humanity and/or as a basic right. Moreover, many felt they were behaving safely and responsibly and most were unconcerned about their own behaviour or the impact of their behaviour on others. These same participants also indicated they would likely be gathering with others during the holiday season for the same reasons but that these would be limited to immediate family members who were a part of their household or, in some cases, extended family members with whom they felt a close bond (and trusted).

While most agreed with mandatory mask wearing and the lockdowns in major centres, many raised concerns with the mandated closure of smaller businesses in their communities while larger, chain stores were allowed to remain open. Others held the view that those residing in small communities

should not be required to follow the same restrictions as applied in larger and more densely populated centres especially given what they felt were the dramatic differences in rates of infection between smaller and larger communities.

**Seasonal and Holiday Plans (Greater Vancouver Area Young Adults, Major Centres Ontario People with Elderly/Vulnerable Parents, Major Centres Alberta Young Adults, Outaouais Region Quebec, Major Centres Atlantic Canada Parents, Winnipeg People with Elderly/Vulnerable Parents, Iqaluit)**

Most participants indicated they would not be traveling, although some were more firm about their plans than others. While some were disappointed, the general consensus was that the 2020 holiday season would be more low-key relative to other years.

**Travel and Borders (Peel Region Ontario Exhibiting Riskier Behaviour, GMA Exhibiting Riskier Behaviour, Greater Vancouver Area Young Adults, Major Centres Ontario People with Elderly/Vulnerable Parents, Major Centres Alberta Young Adults, Outaouais Region Quebec)**

Participants were asked about opening up the borders to travel between Canada and the U.S., and internationally. Overwhelmingly, participants were opposed to doing so at this time. They were concerned about high rates of transmission in the U.S. and were skeptical that Americans crossing the border into Canada would abide by quarantine restrictions. Similarly, most participants felt it was still too risky to permit travels from overseas into Canada, although there was modest support for allowing entry to those from countries where transmission rates were low (e.g., Australia and New Zealand). Concerns remained even if travelers from international points of origin demonstrated that they had been vaccinated. This reflects participants' hesitancy about how the virus was transmitted, even among those who had been vaccinated, along with their concerns about the efficacy of some vaccines not approved in Canada as well as the implementation of mandatory quarantining.

**Impact of COVID-19 through the Winter Months**

A final line of questioning focused on participants' concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on their families, communities and businesses as the winter season got underway. There were concerns expressed across the board. Many were anxious about older and vulnerable family members as well as the cancellation of many community and sports-related events. Others raised the issue of the impact of COVID-19 on supports for homeless persons in their communities. The effect of the pandemic on small, local businesses was also concerning for many who worried about the solvency of independently-owned businesses in the event of further restrictions or lockdowns.

The mental health impacts of the pandemic were viewed as a grave matter and one of the more serious, likely long-term, negative consequences. While participants acknowledged the benefits of social media and communications technologies in allowing people to stay in touch, presumably reducing a sense of isolation, they also commented on the many negative mental health impacts of the pandemic, including increased anxiety and depression. There was particular concern expressed for more vulnerable populations (e.g., seniors, those living alone) for whom the inability to participate in



family and social gatherings was thought to have had a much more significant detrimental effect on their mental health.

**COVID-19 Vaccine (Peel Region Ontario Exhibiting Riskier Behaviour, Greater Vancouver Area Young Adults, Major Centres Ontario People with Elderly/Vulnerable Parents, Major Centres Alberta Young Adults, Outaouais Region Quebec, Major Centres Atlantic Canada Parents, Winnipeg People with Elderly/Vulnerable Parents, Northern Ontario Indigenous Peoples, Iqaluit)**

Participants were clearly interested in and paying attention to issues pertaining to the COVID-19 vaccine, including agreements by the federal government with multiple vaccine manufacturers and the imminent roll-out of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccine, specifically targeting priority groups such as those in long-term care facilities, front-line health care professionals and immunocompromised individuals. Indigenous participants and those in Iqaluit had heard that priority would be given to Indigenous people, including Elders. Issues regarding the distribution were top of mind for many participants with some concerns being raised regarding the complex logistics for vaccines which required refrigeration at very low temperatures.

Participants were asked if they thought the Government of Canada was doing a good job in procuring a vaccine and in planning for its distribution. While many were positive in their assessment, about equal numbers were uncertain or unaware, and some others were more negative. On the positive side, participants acknowledged that the federal government had moved quickly on the approvals process and in procuring vaccines once approved. A slightly slower pace in rolling out the vaccine, as perceived by some participants, was seen to be reflective of due diligence on the part of the Government of Canada. Some felt this offered Canadians the opportunity to observe the effects of the vaccine before implementing vaccinations in Canada. Moreover, some appreciated the federal government for taking a holistic approach: working collaboratively with the provinces and territories, as well as being transparent and sharing information openly. Negative comments about Canada's efforts to procure and distribute a vaccine centered on the absence of a capacity to manufacture the vaccine within Canada and the need to rely on production facilities based outside of Canada. There were concerns that delays in receiving vaccines were further harming the Canadian economy, the livelihoods and health of Canadians.

Participants noted that they would ultimately judge the effectiveness of Canada's vaccine efforts by the speed at which vaccines were given to non-priority groups and the point at which a sufficient number of people are vaccinated so that COVID-19 cases dwindle. It was thought that these particular metrics would also suggest a decline in cases of COVID-19, mortality rates and rates of transmissions and that they would be a marker for recovery and the possibility of a return to some kind of normalcy. In line with these measures, participants also indicated that more information on the number and location of vaccine distribution centres, wait times to receive the vaccine and progress in vaccinating those in long-term care would factor into their overall assessment.

When asked as to whether they felt Canada was in a better or worse position relative to other countries to obtain and distribute the vaccine, on balance most responded positively. The general view was that Canada's advanced public health and medical system, stringent federal government

oversight by agencies such as Health Canada, its geography and size, and its renewed relationship with the United States all worked in Canada's favour. At the same time, many participants simply could not make a judgement on this question one way or another and a few expressed some nervousness that Canada was falling behind other countries such as the United Kingdom in vaccine distribution.

### **Timing of Vaccinations**

Participants' estimates varied in terms of the timing related to:

- The initial administration of vaccines – Most expected vaccine to begin rolling out in the early part of 2021 – January and February and certainly within the first quarter of 2021.
- The point at which they would be in a position themselves to receive the vaccine – While Indigenous participants and others who were caring for elderly parents or employed in the health care profession indicated they expected to be eligible soon (e.g., immediately or within the first six months of 2021), others felt a reasonable timeframe would be sometime between March and September, 2021.
- The target date for completion of vaccinations among all those who wished to be vaccinated – The general consensus was that this could and should be done within six months to a year, at most. A few thought it might carry over into the early part or possibly the summer of 2022.

### **Vaccine Hesitancy**

On the more direct question as to whether participants themselves planned to be vaccinated, many indicated they did, especially those with immunocompromised family members. However, there was significant hesitancy expressed by a large number of participants, while fewer outright declared they would not get vaccinated. Those expressing some reluctance indicated a preference to wait in order to get a better sense of what the long-term effects may be. Those who were more negative cited several reasons: they generally felt their own health was sufficiently robust that it did not warrant receiving the vaccination or they had had an adverse reaction to another vaccination. Others felt the decision was highly personal and should be left up to each individual to decide. A number of participants were also concerned that there were many unanswered questions about both the virus and potential side effects from the vaccine.

### **COVID-19 Public Service Announcements (Northern Ontario Indigenous Peoples)**

Scripts for four public service announcements (PSAs) were read aloud to participants (see the Detailed Findings and the Appendix for the full scripts). Following this, participants were asked about their thoughts and feelings on each.

The primary message of the first PSA focused on following public health guidelines and getting tested for COVID-19. Most were somewhat critical, citing that it was not relevant and provided information of which most were already aware and/or following. Although they found the PSA to be clear and responded positively to the use of Indigenous health care workers as spokespeople, they suggested

that it could be more effective if the messaging about unity and the protection of community, family and elders was strengthened.

Participants reviewed three other PSAs specifically pertaining to COVID-19 vaccines. They were titled: 'Priority Immunization,' 'Key Facts' and 'Traditional Medicine.' Each was evaluated individually first after which participants were asked to compare and contrast the three.

Of the three PSAs presented, participants overwhelmingly selected 'Priority Immunization' as the most effective announcement in terms of helping Indigenous people make decisions about getting a vaccine. Comments suggested that participants found the PSA to be well-balanced both in its style and in the information it provided. It was also viewed as reassuring, inclusive and it spoke to Indigenous people being part of the solution as well as actively involved in the decision-making, specifically regarding prioritizing those who are vaccinated first.

Participants responded with mixed views on 'Key Facts'. While it was seen as straightforward and easy to understand, the phrasing about Health Canada approving only those vaccines which are safe and effective was viewed as reassuring by some, but raised some concerns with others. Among the latter group, several participants felt it further reinforced vaccine hesitancy and the conflicting information about the vaccines which they were seeing on social media.

Participants were least enthusiastic in response to the PSA which was titled 'Traditional Medicine.' The main criticism related to the tone which was viewed as directive (e.g., telling them what to do), rather than engaging and informing. And, although they appreciated the emphasis on traditional knowledge systems and approaches to medicine as well as Elders, they felt this announcement targeted Indigenous people to the exclusion of others. By contrast, the other two PSAs were seen as more inclusive in that they spoke to all Canadians ('Key Facts') or to Canadians and Indigenous peoples ('Priority Immunization').

### **Travel Creatives – Disaster Check (GMA Exhibiting Riskier Behaviour, Greater Vancouver Area Young Adults)**

The Government of Canada developed a series of three creative concepts, intended for use on social media, which were aimed at informing Canadians about current travel guidelines and restrictions as a result of COVID-19. The concepts were labeled as follows and the creative can be found in the Detailed Findings as well as the Appendix:

- Winter: Versions 1 and 2
- Quarantine
- General: Versions 1 and 2

While each of the concepts varied both in terms of their focus on a particular aspect of travel and the imagery used, all three employed a question format (e.g., posing a question to the viewer/reader about a specific aspect of travel) and encouraged Canadians to get the facts about travel prior to making any decisions by checking a Government of Canada website ([travel.gc.ca/travel-covid](https://travel.gc.ca/travel-covid)).

As the concepts were shown to participants in a draft format, participants were asked about their general reaction to each (and multiple versions, as relevant) in addition to their views on the tone and key message take-away. They were also asked to elaborate on any further refinements to the concepts.

Comments from participants reflected their anxiety about the spread of COVID-19 as a result of interprovincial and international travel. Overall, participants' primary concerns with these concepts centered on the timing of the ads and the motivation. They also felt that they ran counter to federal government initiatives to reduce travel as a key public health measure in the effort to control cross-border spread of COVID-19. They felt that it would be inappropriate to release these ads, in their current form, noting that the timing might be more suitable once travel restrictions have been lessened or completely lifted. Participants were also of the view that the concepts appeared to tacitly suggest that the Government of Canada approves travel for both essential and non-essential reasons, despite current restrictions and border closures. This view was principally a factor of the question format used and, more specifically, the way in which some questions had been framed. For example, participants felt that questions such as "Considering a trip?" which was included in all three concepts, and "Should we go away for a winter break?/Should we go visit family for the holidays" (see the Winter concept Versions 1 and 2, respectively) were posed in a way that appeared to be inviting Canadians to consider travel, either within Canada or abroad. At the same time, the latter question was seen as somewhat more relevant and relatable as many participants had this very question on their minds, especially given the upcoming holiday season.

Similarly, while participants acknowledged that the question format employed in the Quarantine concept was intended to prompt audience engagement on the topic and to speak more directly to prospective travelers, most were concerned that this technique resulted in a degree of equivocation that led to a lack of clarity in terms of the main message. On a more positive note, participants did like the focus on the issue of quarantine for travelers coming into Canada. They felt this was an important and serious restriction of which more should be aware. They also thought that referring to quarantine measures would not only attract the target audience's attention, but also prompt further review of the rules and requirements for travelers arriving in or returning to Canada.

Participants reacted mostly positively to both versions of the general concept. They had fewer objections to the use of the question format in the context of alerting prospective travelers to new guidelines or rules about travel, viewing this approach as more informational and less as an invitation to travel. Participants commented that the questions very clearly indicated that new information about travel guidelines or rules was available and found this to be helpful and of interest to anyone who might be considering traveling either within or outside of Canada.

Feedback from participants across all three concepts indicated a general preference for a more forceful tone and a more direct approach, making it clearer in each of the concepts that travel for other than essential purposes was not advised at this time. The consensus among participants was that the main message, specifically with respect to the winter and quarantine concepts, should be formulated in a less passive manner. They felt these ads should be framed in a clear, unequivocal and explicit fashion,

while at the same time underscoring the importance to travelers of staying informed and directing them to vital information pertaining to their own safety and the safety of others.

### **Advertising Campaign Review (Peel Region Ontario Exhibiting Riskier Behaviour, GMA Exhibiting Riskier Behaviour)**

Throughout the pandemic, the federal government has run various advertising campaigns to inform Canadians about COVID-19, the available financial supports and the public health measures which have been put in place to keep Canadians safe. Three such ads, which had been developed to promote awareness of and continued compliance with public health and safety protocols, were shown to participants: 'This is for That,' 'Glitter,' and an advertisement featuring Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada (in the English version) and Dr. Njoo, Canada's Deputy Chief Public Health Officer (in the French version). The videos are included in the Detailed Findings and the Appendix.

Participants were shown the ads one at a time and asked for their reaction, specifically with respect to the key messages, the tone and likely impact of each ad. In both groups participants reacted more positively towards two of the three ads – 'This is for That' and 'Glitter.'

'This is for That' connected strongly with participants at an emotional level and this was the driving factor behind favourable reactions. The depictions of happier times before the pandemic served to reinforce a personal commitment to public health measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19. Participants were drawn to the realistic but hopeful tone of this ad, the focus on community and the larger goal at stake (e.g., return to some kind of normalcy).

Many participants also found 'Glitter' intriguing and unique in its approach to visualizing the virus as purple glitter and illustrating how it is readily transmitted from person to person, in this case, at a house party. The ad had the effect of making the virus more real and present, underscoring the need for Canadians to be more self-aware of how their daily interactions may contribute to the spread of the virus as well as the measures they should take to reduce transmission.

The third ad with Dr. Tam/Dr. Njoo as spokespersons was viewed as educational and a good reminder of the importance of taking preventive measures to minimize the spread of COVID-19. Relative to the other two ads, however, it was viewed as somewhat repetitive – some participants felt the information relayed in the ad had been in the public domain for quite some time. Moreover, some participants did not readily connect with this ad at an emotional level and, as such, it was viewed as less impactful with respect to behaviour change.

## **Part II: Other Issues**

### **Long-Term Care Homes (Major Centres Ontario People with Elderly/Vulnerable Parents)**

A discussion was held among a group comprising participants with elderly and/or vulnerable parents on the topic of long-term care.

While relatively few participants were aware of federal government initiatives related to long-term care, there was strong support for the suite of measures announced by the Government of Canada to protect people in long-term care facilities. Many were particularly supportive of any measures which would assist seniors to remain at home, either by increasing investments in home and community care or by increasing the Old Age Security (OAS) and Canada Pension Plan (CPP) Survivor's benefits. It was viewed as preferable for elderly people to have the option of aging in place, but noted that many lacked both the financial support to do so and the assistance required to be able to carry out day-to-day activities. Some participants also expressed support for targeted measures for personal support workers which was interpreted as additional funding to increase the number of personal support workers thereby expanding the workforce of those available to care for seniors at home. There was also interest in and some support for new Criminal Code amendments which would hold people accountable for any instances of neglect of seniors under their care. Several participants felt that stricter provisions were required in this area as they felt the Criminal Code may not be as clear cut on this issue as compared to other crimes. A few responded positively to creating new, national standards within the sector, seeing this as a way to ensure greater oversight particularly in for-profit facilities.

Knowing that long-term care homes fall under provincial jurisdiction, most participants agreed it would, however, be challenging for the federal government to set and oversee standards in the sector, although there was some expectation that it could establish minimum standards which all provinces would be required to meet or exceed. The consensus view was that the priorities and needs of seniors varied from province to province as did community resources and supports. As such, most felt provinces not only had constitutional authority, but were also in a better position to set standards regarding long-term care.

A range of suggestions were offered in response to a question asking what else the Government of Canada could do to address issues in long-term care homes, including securing sufficient doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to allow all residents to be vaccinated, and regular inspections/audits to ensure stronger oversight and the delivery of quality care.

### **Canada-U.S. Relations (Major Centres Alberta Young Adults, Outaouais Region Quebec, Major Centres Atlantic Canada Parents)**

Most participants were of the view that, following the recent election in the United States the relationship between the two countries would likely to improve. The expectation was for a period of greater stability and collaboration. At the same time, there was some uncertainty which stemmed from a lack of awareness of the specifics of the relationship and questions about how decisions taken by the new administration would impact the oil and gas sector in Alberta, in particular.

The general sense of optimism regarding future Canada-U.S. relations was evident in descriptions put forward by participants reflecting their view of the upcoming years. While participants in Alberta were somewhat more guarded, due to their concerns about the Alberta economy and the oil and gas sector, most anticipated the relationship to be respectful, collaborative, friendly, workable, transparent, and mutually beneficial. This upbeat tone contrasted with participants' views of the relationship over the last four years, which they described as distant, strained, stressful, challenging, uncertain, unclear, unstable, turbulent, adversarial, uncooperative and deteriorating.

While many were hopeful that the Canada-U.S. relationship was entering on an era of improved communication and better alignment with respect to national goals, some participants underscored that Canadians should remain somewhat guarded.

Participants were asked about areas or issues that could create conflict between the two countries. Several were identified, including: trade agreements, the relationship with China, and human rights. Some were concerned about the lingering effects of American protectionism, although they expected this to ease in the coming years.

By contrast, potential areas of cooperation as outlined by participants included, in the short-term, issues such as police brutality and racism, re-engaging with allies and partners on international affairs and other issues of global concern, trade and tariffs, as well as the Keystone XL pipeline, and rising cases of COVID-19. Over the longer term, participants saw opportunities for greater collaboration on issues such as climate change, trade and immigration.

On the topic of the environment, most participants felt that Canada should work with the U.S. to set joint standards for environmental regulations, emissions standards, carbon pricing and emission reduction targets. Participants believed that Canada's size and population precluded it from working independent of the U.S. on these issues. In addition, participants were of the view that the Canadian and U.S. economies were so intertwined that it would not make sense to work unilaterally.

A more in-depth discussion with participants focused on how Canada should respond under two possible scenarios: one in which the U.S. had weaker environmental regulations, compared to Canada, and another in which U.S. regulations were stronger. Most felt the latter scenario was unlikely. With respect to the former scenario, participants were not overly-concerned about the possibility that Canadian businesses might find themselves at a competitive disadvantage. Many felt that that American and international environmental standards were likely to increase in the next few years. Some were also of the view that cooperation did not imply a requirement for identical environmental frameworks or regulations. The prevailing opinion was that Canada should not lag behind other countries in terms of environmental standards and that it should demonstrate a strong commitment of stewardship to the environment and natural resources.

### **Environmental Plans (Peel Region Ontario Exhibiting Riskier Behaviour, GMA Exhibiting Riskier Behaviour, Greater Vancouver Area Young Adults, Major Centres Ontario People with Elderly/Vulnerable Parents, Major Centres Alberta Young Adults, Outaouais Region Quebec, Major Centres Atlantic Canada Parents, Winnipeg People with Elderly/Vulnerable Parents)**

Relatively few participants had heard anything about the Government of Canada's plan to tackle climate change as most continued to focus primarily on news and updates about COVID-19, vaccines and vaccine distribution. A small number of participants across all the groups did mention some relevant aspects of the federal government's plan, including the target of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 and support for green technologies, although most were unable to recall additional details.

Participants residing in Winnipeg only were specifically asked if they had heard anything about the Government of Canada's recent announcement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. A few had heard something about this topic but were short on specifics. When provided with more information on the Government of Canada's recent announcement of proposed measures aimed at cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and getting to net-zero emissions by 2050, participants were generally positive in their response to the various initiatives. And, while most felt some sense of urgency to move forward on environmental issues, some participants expressed concern about the timing given the ongoing pandemic. Those holding the latter perspective were concerned about the cost implications for individual Canadians and businesses who had been adversely affected by the pandemic. Additionally, there was a sense that the Government of Canada should remain singularly focused on COVID-19 related matters until the pandemic is over.

Participants in this group were shown a series of five possible names the Government of Canada could use to frame its plan to help businesses reduce their greenhouse gas emissions (see the full list in the Detailed Findings). The balance of participants preferred *A strategy to help sectors across our economy cut pollution*. This option resonated with participants who found it was both clear and inclusive in its tone. Generally participants favoured simple and straightforward language or wording. In further discussion, participants also indicated a preference to refer to 'sectors' over 'businesses' finding the former term to be more all-encompassing. While participants commented favourable on phrases like 'strategy to help' as it implied a collaborative approach, in general 'plan' was preferred over 'strategy.' A strategy was thought to be a deliverable that preceded a plan and the latter more concrete than the former. Reference to a strategy left the impression among a number of participants that the Government of Canada was still at the stage of considering its options as opposed to having goals and targets, along with a rough roadmap outlining a series of specific actions.

### **Indigenous Issues (Northern Ontario Indigenous Peoples)**

Indigenous participants cited a number of issues when asked to identify their priorities for the Government of Canada, including access to clean water, unsafe and inadequate housing, substance use, the current child welfare system and repatriation of Indigenous lands.

While many praised the Government of Canada for its promises of better healthcare and water for Indigenous peoples on reserves, and for supporting job creation and opportunities for Indigenous



people, others were more critical of what they viewed as lengthy timelines for the completion of projects affecting Indigenous people (e.g., infrastructure projects). They generally felt that the federal government should do more to elevate the priority attached to Indigenous issues and to implement projects more quickly.

Very few participants were familiar with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). When provided with some information about the main themes in the declaration and about the recent Government of Canada legislation to implement UNDRIP, the consensus view was that this would have a positive impact both for Indigenous people and for all Canadians. But, there was also disappointment that progress in this respect had been slow and was the result of pressure from an international organization.

Participants were well aware of the issues of drinking water advisories on reserves. Upon reviewing an infographic (included in the Detailed Findings) which detailed the federal government's progress in this area, many were unimpressed and expressed frustration that so many Indigenous communities continued to live under boil water advisories. Participants' frustration was further compounded when they were told that the Government of Canada had recently announced it would miss the March 2021 target to lift all First Nation water advisories, as originally planned. Even with the additional \$1.5 billion funding announced by the federal government, on top of the existing \$2.19 billion already budgeted for ending long-term drinking water advisories, participants expressed skepticism about the federal government's commitment. There was an expectation that the Government of Canada should assign a much higher priority to resolving this issue. They were particularly concerned that Indigenous communities without access to clean water were even more vulnerable given the pandemic. Many felt that the issue should be addressed immediately, but expected that it would take at least one to four years to resolve.

### **Local Issues (Iqaluit)**

In a discussion among participants in Iqaluit about issues affecting their local community, three overarching areas of concern emerged: housing shortages, food security and substance use and addictions. In the context of these overarching issues, participants also commented on the high cost of living in Iqaluit, overcrowded housing, unemployment, and a lack of mental health and rehabilitation facilities, as well as language barriers in accessing mental health services in Inuktitut.

Although there was some awareness of Government of Canada funding to the region, participants were generally unaware of specific details. Nevertheless, the federal government was credited with providing necessary relief for Nunavut through Inuit organizations and many referenced emergency COVID-19 initiatives such as transportation subsidies, food subsidies, food hampers and pre-loaded gift cards. Overall, participants were supportive of the emergency initiatives that had been launched.

When asked if the Government of Canada had done anything which may have had a negative impact on Iqaluit, participants mentioned concerns that Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) payments may have exacerbated substance use issues. Separately, they also raised the issue of

funding to French schools whereas they felt that more attention should be given to Inuktitut within the educational system.

When the conversation delved further into infrastructure needs in Iqaluit, participants again pointed to homelessness and housing, specifically citing the issue of overcrowding as well as homes that have been contaminated by mold and asbestos. Others raised the issue of a safe indoor play space for children during the winter months.

When asked about local environmental concerns, participants focused on the climate crisis, linking it to issues of food insecurity, and waste management/recycling. On the latter issue, the point was made that Iqaluit lacks a broad recycling program.

To conclude the discussion, participants were shown a list of various possible community concerns and asked to identify those they viewed as major concerns and/or which they worried about the most. Key issues reflected many of the topics which had surfaced earlier in the discussion (homelessness, the cost of housing, availability of quality affordable food, substance use and overdoses). Other issues highlighted by this exercise included: the availability of childcare options, employment, public transit and low high school graduation rates. On the topic of affordable food, participants attributed much of the issue to the high cost of transporting these goods from point of origin to destination. And, while many participants mentioned the federal government's *Nutrition North Canada* program as important in subsidizing the cost of food, there were also concerns that the distributors were being deceptive and mismanaging/misusing the subsidy funds.

---

#### **MORE INFORMATION**

The Strategic Counsel  
Contract number: 35035-182346/001/CY  
Contract award date: December 18, 2020  
Contract value: \$1,618,838.00

---