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COVID Alert App Exploratory and Concept Testing Executive Summary

Prepared for Health Canada

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For more information on this report, please contact Health Canada at:
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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

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August 2021

This public opinion research report presents the results an online survey conducted by Earncliffe Strategy Group on behalf of Health Canada. The quantitative research was conducted from May 5th-16th, 2021.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre: Tests exploratoires et de concepts pour l'application Alerte COVID

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Earnscliffe Strategy Group (Earnscliffe) is pleased to present this report to Health Canada summarizing the results of the quantitative research project conducted to explore and test concepts involving the COVID Alert app.

On July 31, 2020 a new nation-wide COVID Alert app was made available to Canadians for free download. The app, developed in response to the rapidly evolving coronavirus pandemic, is completely voluntary and is used as an exposure notification app that tells people who have downloaded it if they may have been exposed to COVID-19. Since the release, several new functionalities are being implemented to fully enhance the app's effectiveness. Among these new functionalities is the anticipated addition of QR code capability which could allow users to scan a QR code when they enter a business, venue, or event. Should a possible exposure risk be identified at that venue/location, it would be marked by local public health authorities and users who scanned the QR code at the time and place of the exposure would receive a notification as well as guidance about what to do next. Encouraging the use of the COVID Alert app and associated QR codes could help limit the spread of the virus. This research will help refine communications aimed at increasing awareness, motivating interest, and generating engagement among Canadians with the COVID Alert app.

The primary objective of the research was to provide Health Canada with insights into how best to encourage the use and functionality of the COVID Alert app. The contract value for this project was \$73,884.88 including HST.

To meet this objective, Earnscliffe was commissioned to conduct a quantitative exercise involving an online survey of 2,412 Canadians aged 18 and older. The online survey was conducted using our data collection partner, Leger's, proprietary online panel. The survey was conducted from May 5th-16th, 2021 in English and in French, and was an average of 13 minutes long. The data was weighted to reflect the demographic composition of the Canadian population aged 18 and older. Because the online sample is comprised of those who initially self-select for participation in Leger's panel, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated, and the results cannot be described as statistically projectable to the target population. The treatment here of the non-probability sample is aligned with the Standards for the Conduct of Government of Canada Public Opinion Research for Online Surveys.

Key Findings

- **Overall favourability towards each concept is quite similar.** Roughly half have a favourable opinion of each concept: Collectivity (53%), Reason (56%), End Result (54%), and Responsibility (55%). About one-in-five view each concept unfavourably.
- **There is virtually no difference in the percentage of respondents who view each concept as appropriate for the Government of Canada to use.** Slightly more than half of Canadians think Collectivity (57%), Reason (57%), End Result (56%) and Responsibility (56%) are appropriate for the Government of Canada to use. About one-quarter feel that each concept is inappropriate.

- **Impressions of and attitudes surrounding the clarity of each concept** (including being easy to understand, explains why the QR code should be scanned and explains the feature well) **and whether it is attention grabbing are similar for each concept.** The majority of Canadians (six in ten or more) agree that the four concepts embody those attributes.
- **Canadians are divided on whether the concepts are relevant, increase interest in the COVID Alert app, increase motivation to use the feature or drives interest in getting more information.** Around half say those attributes apply to the concepts.
- **When asked what they would change about the concepts to improve them, a plurality of Canadians think that the concepts should be left as is.** Other mentions, cited by significantly fewer Canadians, include providing a better explanation, better narrative and reassuring that privacy/security would be upheld.
- **Despite the remarkably similar ratings provided for each concept, there are two favourites: Reason and Responsibility.** One third of Canadians indicate that the Reason (33%) and Responsibility (32%) concepts are the most effective in encouraging the use of the app and feature, while fewer say that of the End Result (20%) or Collectivity (16%) concepts.

COVID Alert App and QR Codes

- **Most Canadians have a newer model cell phone.** Indeed, almost all (86%) have a smartphone and among that group, three-quarters (77%) have a model produced in the last 5 years.
- **Survey results find that among those who have a smartphone less than 5 years old, 40% have the COVID Alert App on their phone.**
- **The majority of Canadians are familiar with QR codes.** One third of respondents (32%) are very familiar with QR codes, while an additional 36% said they are somewhat familiar.
- **Half of those with a smartphone (50%) would be likely to use the COVID Alert App to scan a QR code upon entering a business.** Forty-five percent (45%) would be unlikely to.
- **Perception of the effectiveness of the new feature in helping to stop the spread of COVID-19 is divided.** About half (49%) believe the QR function of the COVID Alert App will be helpful in stopping the spread of COVID-19.

Research Firm:

Earnscliffe Strategy Group Inc. (Earnscliffe)
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I hereby certify as a Representative of Earnscliffe Strategy Group that the final deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy

of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting 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: August 24, 2021

Stephanie Constable
Principal, Earnscliffe