



Government
of Canada

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Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – July & August 2022

Executive Summary

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Canada 

Executive Summary

Introduction

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

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

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

This report includes findings from 12 online focus groups which were conducted between July 7th and August 24th, 2022, in multiple locations across the country including Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario,

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

The research for this cycle of focus groups focused largely on the Government of Canada's priorities and performance on issues important to a wide range of subgroups and regions. These included reported delays at airports and Service Canada locations, the rising cost of living, economic issues, and the environment and climate change. In addition to this, certain issues that pertained to specific subgroups were discussed, including Black Canadians, and Indigenous peoples.

The research explored a wide range of related issues in depth, including the Government of Canada's economic priorities, the Canadian economy more broadly, as well as various federal government affordability measures. Groups of those residing in mid-size centres in Quebec and those living pay cheque to pay cheque in eastern Ontario also engaged in a conversation regarding their personal financial outlook and economic state. Participants were also asked for their views on the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic and their perspectives on COVID-19 vaccination generally, as well as those specifically designed for young children. Environment-related topics such as zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs) were also discussed, including participants' vehicle purchasing considerations, their overall awareness of ZEVs, and the federal government's initiatives involving ZEVs in Budget 2022.

Parents residing in the Greater Vancouver Area (GVA) discussed the federal government's child care initiatives and its overall affordability. Other topics discussed included Government of Canada services, particularly as it relates to passport services, housing, cryptocurrency, digital credentials, Indigenous reconciliation, and local issues in Atlantic Canada.

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 those looking to purchase a vehicle, recent users of federal government services, current cryptocurrency owners, Black Canadians, people living from pay cheque to pay cheque, Indigenous peoples, parents of children aged 6 months to 4 years, those concerned about climate change, and the middle class worried about the economy and employment.

Detailed Approach

- Twelve focus groups across various regions in Canada.

- Three groups were conducted with the general population in Atlantic Canada, mid-size centres in Quebec, and the Outaouais region in Quebec.
- The other nine groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
 - Those looking to purchase a vehicle residing in Quebec;
 - Recent users of federal government services residing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA);
 - Current cryptocurrency owners residing in the Lower Mainland region in British Columbia;
 - Black Canadians residing in mid-size centres in Alberta;
 - People living from pay cheque to pay cheque residing in eastern Ontario;
 - Indigenous peoples residing in Alberta;
 - Parents of children, aged 6 months to 4 years residing in the Greater Vancouver Area (GVA);
 - Those concerned about climate change residing in major centres in Quebec; and
 - Middle class individuals who are worried about the economy and employment.
- 4 groups in Quebec were conducted in French. All other groups were conducted in English.
- All groups for this cycle were conducted online.
- A total of 8 participants were recruited for each group, assuming 6 to 8 participants would attend.
- Across all locations, 84 participants attended, in total. Details on attendance numbers by group can be found below.
- Each participant received an honorarium. The incentive ranged from \$100 to \$125 per participant, depending on the location and the composition of the group.

Group Locations and Composition

LOCATION	GROUP	LANGUAGE	DATE	TIME (EST)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Atlantic Canada	1	English	July 7	5:00-7:00 pm	General Population	7
Quebec	2	French	July 12	6:00-8:00 pm	Looking to Purchase a Vehicle	7
Greater Toronto Area (GTA)	3	English	July 13	6:00-8:00 pm	Recent Users of Federal Government Services	8
Lower Mainland British Columbia	4	English	July 19	9:00-11:00 pm	Current Cryptocurrency Owners	7
Mid-size Centres Alberta	5	English	July 21	8:00-10:00 pm	Black Canadians	7
Mid-size Centres Quebec	6	French	July 27	6:00-8:00 pm	General Population	6
Eastern Ontario	7	English	August 4	6:00-8:00 pm	People Living from Pay Cheque to Pay Cheque	8
Alberta	8	English	August 9	8:00-10:00 pm	Indigenous Peoples	7

Outaouais Region – Quebec	9	French	August 11	6:00-8:00 pm	General Population	7
Greater Vancouver Area (GVA)	10	English	August 16	9:00-11:00 pm	Parents of Children, aged 6 mos.-4 yrs.	8
Major Centres Quebec	11	French	August 18	6:00-8:00 pm	Concerned About Climate Change	6
Nova Scotia	12	English	August 24	5:00-7:00 pm	Middle Class Worried About Economy/Jobs	6
Total number of participants						84

Key Findings

Government of Canada in the News (All Locations)

At the outset of each group, participants were asked what they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days. Participants recalled a wide range of federal actions and announcements including the announcement of a one-time, \$500 Housing Affordability payment for eligible Canadians, a ten per cent increase to Old Age Security (OAS) payments to seniors 75 and older, a projected increase to the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) for the 2022-23 benefit year, the first issuance of Climate Action Incentive Payments (CAIP) to individuals in eligible provinces, an announcement of a moratorium on directed cod fishing this year in the Northern Gulf of St. Lawrence, inquiries by the Government of Canada into the nationwide Rogers Communication outage on July 8th, 2022, the decision by the Bank of Canada to raise interest rates by 1%, and the recent announcement of a \$1.3 billion land claim settlement between the federal government and the Siksika First Nation.

Additionally, a number of participants also mentioned items related to the Government of Canada's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other matters related to healthcare. These included the removal of the requirement for individuals travelling by air or rail within Canada to be fully vaccinated, the modification of procedures related to the ArriveCAN app required for all travellers entering Canada, ongoing efforts to compel individuals who may have ineligibly received pandemic-related financial supports such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to repay these amounts, and concerns regarding the potential of a widespread outbreak of monkeypox, a viral disease reported to be spreading in many regions across the world.

Some also mentioned having heard about recent actions by the Government of Canada on the international front, including continued support for the Ukrainian defence effort against invading Russian forces, the approval by the federal government for the return of sanctioned turbines (repaired in Montreal) to Germany to be utilized in the Nord Stream 1 natural gas pipeline between Russia and Germany, and an announcement that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) would be bolstering its

presence in Latvia as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) mission.

Federal Service Delays (Atlantic Canada, Lower Mainland British Columbia Current Cryptocurrency Owners, Mid-size Centres Alberta Black Canadians, Mid-size Centres Quebec)

Four groups engaged in a discussion regarding federal services for Canadians, specifically focusing on reported delays related to the processing of passport applications/renewals, immigration applications, and travel-related difficulties at Canadian airports. On balance, most participants were at least somewhat aware of these issues, with many having seen related reports in the news or on social media.

Several recalled hearing accounts of long delays and travel-related difficulties at Canadian airports, including flight delays and cancellations, long security line-ups, and lost baggage. While most were of the impression that these problems had been caused primarily due to staffing shortages, some expressed uncertainty as to whether these shortages were mostly on the part of airports, the airlines themselves, or both.

Many were also aware of reported delays experienced by Canadians in applying for or renewing their passports through Service Canada. Several recounted having personally waited many months for their applications to be processed, with a small number still waiting for their renewed passports to arrive in the mail. Related to this, it was said to be exceedingly difficult to access a Service Canada representative, and that those who were able to make contact were often told there was no definite timeline as to when their application would be processed.

A small number of participants who had recently immigrated to Canada recalled that it had taken almost a year for their work visas to be renewed through Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) after they had expired during the pandemic. This was thought to be a particularly frustrating issue given the perception that many parts of the country were currently experiencing a labour shortage which could potentially be mitigated through the processing of immigration and visa applications at a more expedient rate.

Almost all were of the opinion that resolving these issues needed to be a priority for the federal government going forward. The ability to travel was viewed by many as both a personal and professional necessity and a large number believed that rectifying these issues was a primary responsibility of the Government of Canada. A small number felt differently, believing that travel-related issues were not key priorities at the moment, especially given concerns regarding the ongoing spread of COVID-19.

Foreign Policy Initiatives (Mid-size Centres Alberta Black Canadians)

One group, comprised of Black Canadians residing in Alberta, briefly discussed matters related to foreign policy initiatives by the federal government. Asked whether they were aware of any recent announcements or initiatives related to the Government of Canada's foreign policy abroad, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine was top of mind for a number of participants. Several mentioned having heard about the federal government's support of the Ukrainian defence effort. Questioned whether

they were aware of any activities to expand Canada's diplomatic operations in Africa, while a few recalled the Prime Minister's recent visit to Rwanda none were aware of any specific initiatives.

Papal Visit (Alberta Indigenous Peoples, Outaouais Region Quebec)

Two groups discussed the recent visit by Pope Francis to Canada, spanning from July 24th to July 29th, 2022. Almost all participants were aware of the visit, with many hearing of it via traditional media outlets such as CBC and CTV, on social media, or through word of mouth from friends and family. In the group composed of Indigenous peoples residing in Alberta, a number of participants reported having personally experienced the visit, with some variously having attended the Holy Mass at Commonwealth Stadium in Edmonton, volunteered at related events, or had family members who had met Pope Francis himself. Regionally, while most in the group from Quebec's Outaouais region were of the opinion that this represented a positive step towards reconciliation, a small number questioned whether the money spent on the Papal visit might have been better allocated towards other pressing issues facing Indigenous peoples in Canada, such as the provision of clean drinking water on reserves. Participants in the group comprised of Indigenous peoples were more varied in their views. While a number of participants felt this visit had been beneficial and hoped it would help bring a sense of peace to survivors of the residential school system, it was felt by several that there had been a great deal of fanfare provided for what was expected to first and foremost be an apology on the part of the Catholic Church.

Focusing on what this visit and the Pope's apology could mean for reconciliation going forward, participants were largely of the opinion that while this was a step in the right direction, far more work needed to be done to address long-standing issues facing Indigenous peoples in Canada. Among those in the group comprised of Indigenous participants, it was believed that Pope Francis's apology was important for many elders in their community, especially those who were survivors of the residential school system. Some also expressed appreciation that this event had allowed Indigenous peoples across Canada a chance to voice their feelings, including those individuals who continued to feel anger towards the Catholic Church. It was hoped this visit and the attention it had generated would spur further federal action towards addressing issues such as living conditions on reserves, expanded mental health resources for Indigenous peoples and communities, and greater access and representation for Indigenous peoples within the federal government itself.

Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (All Locations)

All groups In July and August engaged in discussions on issues specific to their respective local regions, backgrounds, and/or broader concerns such as the cost of living and climate change. Participants shared their perspectives regarding what they viewed as the key factors driving these issues, as well as the degree to which the federal government had been successful in addressing them.

Participants in groups located within specific geographical regions (such as Atlantic Canada, Quebec, the Greater Toronto Area, and British Columbia's Lower Mainland) were asked to identify areas which they felt needed to be prioritized to a greater extent by the Government of Canada. Commonly cited

across all groups, three key areas emerged as top priorities among participants: healthcare, housing affordability, and the increasing cost of living and high rate of inflation. In addition to these frequently cited concerns, a number of participants spoke of issues specific to their local region, including the development of non-renewable resources such as oil and gas (Atlantic Canada), issues related to official languages accessibility and the provision of English-language education and services (Quebec), and rising addiction, overdoses, and deaths related to apparent increased prevalence and usage of opioids such as fentanyl (British Columbia).

Very few participants believed the Government of Canada was currently on the right track when it came to addressing the priority areas they had identified. For most, it was felt that while the Government of Canada had begun to take actions to address important concerns such as housing affordability and the cost of living, these had produced little in the way of tangible impact thus far. Speaking more generally, several expressed the opinion that actions taken by the federal government were often reactive in nature, and that more needed to be done by federal officials to anticipate the challenges Canadians would face before they become major issues. Suggestions put forward by participants were broad in scope and included a greater focus on long-term planning, implementing transparent metrics to evaluate the success of existing initiatives and programs, and greater oversight to ensure federal spending is conducted in a responsible and efficient manner.

Cost of Living (Mid-size Centres Quebec, Eastern Ontario Living Pay Cheque to Pay Cheque, Outaouais Region Quebec, GVA Parents of Young Children)

Four groups discussed a number of issues related to the cost of living at present. Asked if they could recall any major announcements from the Government of Canada on this front, several cited recent actions by the Bank of Canada to continue raising interest rates as a tool to curb inflation. Others recalled initiatives such as a 10% increase to Old Age Security (OAS) payments for seniors 75 and older, a one-time \$500 housing affordability payment for some low-income Canadians, as well the announcement of a national dental care program projected to begin being implemented by the end of 2022.

All participants felt addressing the rising cost of living to be an important priority for the Government of Canada to focus on. Asked whether they felt the federal government was currently on the right track when it came to this issue, however, few believed this to be the case. For the larger number who thought the federal government was currently on the wrong track, it was widely felt that the income of most Canadians was not currently keeping pace with rising prices and that, unless something was done to either raise wages or bring down essential costs, this problem would likely continue to persist. Several participants believed that federal actions towards addressing the cost of living should have been implemented earlier and that the Government of Canada had been too reactive in its approach to this issue. Among the smaller number who thought the Government of Canada was currently on the right track, initiatives such as the introduction of a national dental care program and the raising of interest rates by the Bank of Canada were again mentioned while others spoke positively about the decision to discontinue pandemic-related benefits, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), which was felt to have significantly contributed to inflation.

Focusing on necessary actions for the federal government to take going forward, a number of participants believed greater investments needed to be made towards making life more affordable for future generations of Canadians. This included reducing costs in areas such as housing and post-secondary tuition, which were believed to be increasingly expensive with each passing year. Several participants also called for higher taxes to be placed on large corporations, especially in sectors that were perceived as having profited financially from the COVID-19 pandemic (such as grocery stores, pharmaceutical companies and other large retailers). It was believed that by taking this action, the federal government could utilize this increased revenue to take some of the financial pressure off of individual Canadian households.

Job Creation (Eastern Ontario Living Pay Cheque to Pay Cheque, Outaouais Region Quebec)

Participants in two groups discussed the topic of job creation and the current state of the labour market in Canada. While a small number were of the impression that some federal programs and grants were available to encourage more employment in important sectors such as healthcare and education, none could recall specific actions taken by the Government of Canada to spur job creation. Several expressed the opinion that while there were many jobs available, these were not necessarily high-paying positions and may not be desirable to prospective employees, especially given the perceived rising cost of living. To address this, it was suggested that actions could be taken by the federal government to encourage businesses to offer higher wages. Some believed this could be done through the provision of wage supplements to small businesses, to assist them with the additional costs this would incur.

Asked whether they were aware of the current national unemployment rate, while a small number of participants speculated it was likely around 6%, none could provide a specific figure. To aid discussion, it was clarified that the current unemployment rate in Canada was around 4.9% and that this was the lowest level observed in the 40 or more years that Statistics Canada had been tracking this metric. While most believed this number to be encouraging at face value, many were skeptical as to whether it accurately reflected the true state of the Canadian labour market. Several put forward the view that while more Canadians may be employed now than in previous years, given the rising cost of living some may be having to work multiple jobs in order to make ends meet financially.

Economic Issues (Nova Scotia Middle Class Worried About the Economy)

This group, comprised of participants who identified as middle class and were worried about the economy, discussed a number of economic matters, including the intersection between economic goals and potential actions to mitigate the environmental impacts of climate change. Focusing on the federal government's performance in addressing the economic issues facing Canadians, participants were largely negative in their appraisals, with all believing the Canadian economy was currently headed in the wrong direction. Several identified housing affordability as a major issue of concern, believing it was becoming increasingly difficult for Canadians to afford to purchase homes as well as to rent. A number of participants expressed skepticism about the perceived emphasis placed by the federal government on transitioning to greener technology and practices. It was believed that this may have the effect of further exacerbating the cost of living for Canadians in the short term. Asked if

they believed there to be any potential economic benefits that may arise from green policies, several expressed the view that a stable environment and climate would be more conducive to a stable economy, and that addressing climate change was in the greater interest of all Canadians.

Focusing on actions taken by the Government of Canada to help address climate change, a number of participants mentioned the Incentives for Zero-Emissions Vehicles (iZEV) Program and the Canada Greener Homes Initiative. Asked if they believed there to be a positive connection between economic and environmental initiatives as a strategy to address economic issues, most participants thought this was possible. It was felt, however, that more needed to be done to ensure the perceived additional financial burden of pursuing greener policies was not being placed on individual Canadians.

Participants were next shown a number of environmental initiatives pertaining to the economy that were recently announced by the Government of Canada. These included driving down carbon pollution from the oil and gas sector, investments in clean electricity, and supporting industries to develop and adopt clean technology that would assist them in reaching net-zero emissions. Asked whether they felt these actions could also have economic benefits, most predicted that they would. It was thought that the initiatives to invest in clean electricity and help industries develop and adopt clean technology could lead to the creation of high-paying jobs and represented a growing sector in which Canada could be a global leader.

Environmental Issues (Mid-size Centres Quebec, Major Centres Quebec Concerned About Climate Change)

Two groups of participants residing in Quebec shared their perspectives regarding the environment and the Government of Canada's work to reduce the impacts of climate change. One group was derived of individuals from the general population, while the other was comprised of those who had previously identified as being personally concerned about climate change. All participants identified climate change as a top priority for the Government of Canada, with many believing it to be the most important area for policymakers to focus on. Rather than viewing the environment and the economy as being at odds, it was thought by many that it was essential to develop economic policies that work within the framework of sustainability. The view was added that environmental degradation would have a negative impact on every other aspect of society, including areas such as agriculture and energy generation, which were seen as essential for human survival.

Asked what, specifically, within the broader topic of climate change they were concerned about, participants provided a range of responses. These included pollution and environmental degradation, the need for expanded recycling and waste reduction programs, and increasing temperatures and extreme weather events. Participants were varied in their opinions when evaluating the actions taken thus far by the Government of Canada to address the threat of climate change. Most in the group of those concerned about climate change were generally positive in their assessments and all believed the federal government had improved in its management of this issue in recent years. The group of participants from the general population felt differently, with most believing the federal government to currently be on the wrong track in its handling of this issue.

Among those who thought the Government of Canada was headed in the right direction, it was believed that there had been a significant emphasis at the federal level on environmental initiatives such as transitioning towards renewable energy sources, reducing waste, and investing in greener technology, such as ZEVs and public transportation. It was generally felt that the federal government was doing the best it could to protect Canadians against climate change while also balancing other important priorities, such as the economy. For those who felt the Government of Canada was headed in the wrong direction when it came to addressing climate change, several believed the transition towards renewable energy was occurring too abruptly and that a greater focus should be placed on continuing to develop non-renewable resources such as oil and gas in the interim. While most were in favour of eventually transitioning to renewable energy, it was thought this should be a gradual process rather than this perceived sudden shift in approach. A small number felt otherwise, believing this transition was occurring too slowly and that greater efforts were needed to limit emissions in the immediate future to protect Canadians against the impacts of climate change.

Black Canadians (Mid-size Centres Alberta Black Canadians)

One group, comprised of Black Canadians residing in Alberta, engaged in a discussion about issues related to the Government of Canada as well as those specifically facing the Black community in Canada.

Prompted to identify issues facing Black Canadians more specifically, as well as actions which could be taken by the Government of Canada to address these concerns, participants identified the need for greater support for Black-owned businesses and increased programming focusing on Canada's Black community as two key areas requiring further attention. Asked whether they could recall any past actions or initiatives undertaken by the Government of Canada related to these issues, it was widely felt that little had been done specifically to support Black Canadians. While a small number were aware of the Black Entrepreneurship Program (BEP), it was said that the application process and criteria for accessing this support were overly burdensome and had limited the ability of Black Canadians to utilize this program.

Several believed racism to be an ongoing issue in Alberta, as well as throughout the rest of Canada. Though thought to be less prevalent relative to other jurisdictions (such as the United States), many recalled being personally impacted by anti-Black racism. It was felt that numerous employers often gave less consideration to prospective candidates with ethnic-sounding surnames and that Black patrons tended to be treated differently than other Canadians when visiting restaurants or retail stores. While few participants had personally experienced this, it was thought that Black Canadians often experienced racial profiling by law enforcement officials, especially in larger urban centres. Almost all participants believed anti-Black racism to be a systemic problem in Canadian society, even if it often occurred in more subtle ways.

Focusing on ways in which the Government of Canada could help address this issue, it was reiterated that more could be done to provide further financial assistance for education and cultural programming spotlighting the culture, contributions, and history of Black Canadians. Related to this, it was suggested by several participants that these funding programs needed to be made more accessible, including less stringent criteria and a more straightforward application process.

Indigenous Peoples (Alberta Indigenous Peoples)

This group, consisting of Indigenous participants residing in Alberta, discussed a number of issues specific to Indigenous peoples. To begin this conversation, participants were asked to identify what they felt to be the top issues facing Indigenous peoples that required greater prioritization from the federal government. A number of responses were provided, including the lack of clean drinking water on some reserves, ongoing discoveries of unmarked graves at former residential school sites, the continued issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), a perceived lack of mental health resources in Indigenous communities, and the need for greater acknowledgement and enforcement of existing treaties and land claims.

Asked whether they recalled any recent actions by the Government of Canada related to these issues, a number of participants reported hearing about actions related to resolving clean drinking water on reserves, as well as efforts towards addressing a number of the existing land claims. It was generally thought, however, that while some progress had been made on these fronts, there was a great deal of work still to be done. No participants felt the Government of Canada was currently on the right track when it came to addressing these priorities. While it was acknowledged that there had been a greater public focus on Indigenous issues in recent years, it was largely thought that little in the way of tangible progress had been made towards improving the overall quality of life in these communities.

Focusing specifically on the issue of clean drinking water in Indigenous communities, while a small number of participants recalled hearing about the implementation of a boil water advisory in Iqaluit in late 2021 and subsequent action by the federal government (including the deployment of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel) to resolve the issue, few other initiatives could be recalled. Upon receiving information detailing the work currently being undertaken by the federal government to lift long-term drinking water advisories on Indigenous reserves a number of individuals spoke positively about the progress that had been made on this issue, with some citing the lifting of 82% of all drinking water advisories as an especially important development. Several, however, were more skeptical. They questioned whether the lifting of these advisories represented a permanent fix to the clean drinking water issues or whether it was likely that these concerns would arise again in time. A small number were of the opinion that sufficient progress would not be made until all Indigenous communities had access to clean drinking water, believing this to be a basic necessity of life and the bare minimum in terms of achieving a quality standard of living. While no participant felt that challenges related to clean drinking water had worsened as of late, several reiterated the view that water was of the utmost importance to these communities.

Financial and Economic Issues (Lower Mainland British Columbia Current Cryptocurrency Owners, Mid-size Centres Quebec, Eastern Ontario Living Pay Cheque to Pay Cheque, Nova Scotia Middle Class Worried About the Economy)

Participants in four groups shared their views on various financial and economic issues. In two groups, the discussion centered mainly on participants' personal financial circumstances and their reactions to a series of measures announced by the Government of Canada to support Canadians. The conversation in another two groups focused on broader economic goals and priorities for Canadians,

as well as participant perceptions regarding the current state of the Canadian economy and their outlook for the future.

Economic Priorities and Terminology (Nova Scotia Middle Class Worried about the Economy)

Priorities for Canada's economy were discussed in a group comprising residents from Nova Scotia who were worried about the state of the economy. To begin, participants were asked to identify which economic issues they felt needed further prioritization from the federal government. A wide range of issues were cited, including inflation and the cost of living, housing affordability, perceived worker shortages, and the need for greater domestic manufacturing and self-sufficiency.

Participants were shown several phrases describing various types of approaches to economic development and asked how they interpreted each. These phrases included *a fair economy*, *a green economy*, *a progressive economy*, *an economy that works for all Canadians*, and *an inclusive economy*.

Focusing first on *a fair economy*, participants largely thought this referred to an economy in which every individual had an equal opportunity to participate, and that one's success would be determined by merit. Many viewed this as an economy in which competition would be encouraged and career advancement would be closely linked to one's work ethic and contributions.

Several envisioned *a green economy* as one which would be centered around innovations such as zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs), comprehensive recycling and waste reduction programs, a shift away from single-use plastics, and a focus on renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydro. Some also felt this meant that all economic activity would be encompassed within an overarching framework of sustainability and that individual Canadians would be encouraged to engage in activities that would reduce their carbon footprint.

Participants largely imagined *a progressive economy* would be one in which innovation would be encouraged. They viewed it as an economic structure whereby entrepreneurs and small business owners would be financially incentivized and supported by the federal government through loans and grants.

A number of participants believed *an economy that works for all Canadians* described a system in which all Canadians would be supported, from both an economic and social perspective. It was thought that such an economy would include an expansion of social welfare and assistance programs in addition to greater investments in education, ensuring all individuals would have an opportunity to succeed.

Many felt that *an inclusive economy* would be one in which all individuals, regardless of gender, background, or socioeconomic status would be able to prosper and succeed. Participants viewed this as an economy free of barriers to participation, and one in which any Canadian could potentially lead an organization rather than being excluded simply due to preferential treatment, such as cronyism.

Having shared their initial impressions, participants were next asked to indicate which of these economic frameworks the Government of Canada should be aiming to build going forward. By a wide margin, participants exhibited a preference for the prioritization of *a fair economy* and *an economy*

that works for all Canadians. It was felt by several that these two concepts shared a great deal in common and would likely lead to a system in which all Canadians could benefit and be rewarded for their efforts. While few selected the other options available, it was thought that values such as inclusiveness, progressiveness, and a green transition would likely be incorporated into a fair economy as well as one which works for all Canadians.

Participants were asked to evaluate the terms *supporting the middle class* and *supporting workers* and identify what differences, if any, they felt existed between the two concepts. While some perceived there to be a partial relation between the terms, in that middle income individuals included workers, it was largely felt that 'workers' was a broader term that included lower income Canadians and those living below the poverty line, not just the middle class. Asked how the Government of Canada could better support workers, participants suggested more thorough enforcement of workplace safety standards, increased financial supports for those with longer-term disabilities, greater education provided towards improving financial literacy among Canadians, and efforts to raise the minimum wage.

Personal Financial Outlook (Mid-size Centres Quebec, Eastern Ontario Living Pay Cheque to Pay Cheque)

Responses varied across the two groups when asked about their financial situation and specifically whether it had changed over the last year. Among those who felt their economic situation had worsened over the past year, many cited inflation and the rising cost of living as the primary factors. Several also reported that their wages had not kept pace with the rate of inflation and that it was becoming increasingly difficult to afford essential goods and services. Participants also spoke about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their financial situation. Some had lost their jobs or were temporarily out of work and were accessing savings or using debt financing in order to make ends meet month-to-month. Even among those who had said they had subsequently regained full-time employment several commented that they continued to face financial pressures as they attempted to rebuild their savings while also coping with rising inflation.

For participants whose financial situation had improved over the past year, many attributed this to their ability to continue to work during the pandemic or a recent return to full-time employment. Some also reported having recently received wage increases, allowing them to eliminate a portion of their personal debt and begin to build up savings.

Among participants whose financial situation had remained the same, several expressed concern over the continued high rate of inflation and worried that their finances may begin to weaken if this trend continued.

Looking ahead over the next year, participants were asked if they felt their situation would likely improve, worsen, or stay the same. Most in the group residing in Quebec were largely optimistic, with about as many anticipating that their situation would improve as those who expected it to remain much the same. By contrast, very few participants living pay cheque to pay cheque felt their circumstances would improve or get worse. On balance, the sense among this group was that their financial situation would likely remain unchanged. Though many of these participants expressed

concern about inflation, a small number were optimistic that it would ultimately taper off and that the situation would begin to improve in 2023.

Canadian Economy (Lower Mainland British Columbia Current Cryptocurrency Owners)

One group comprising cryptocurrency owners engaged in a discussion about the Canadian economy. Most participants were negative in their outlooks, citing inflation and market volatility (specifically, related to the domestic securities market) as key concerns. Some worried that Canada's economy was highly exposed and could be adversely affected by a number of disruptive forces, including the emergence of another pandemic or public health emergency, expansion of the conflict in Eastern Europe, or a downturn in vital sectors of the economy such as the housing market.

A smaller number held a more positive view, commenting that Canada's economic situation had been improving and had recovered significantly following the COVID-19 pandemic. This more optimistic outlook was predicated on a view that Canada's rich natural resources and the potential of its agriculture and agri-food sector positioned the Canadian economy to withstand economic shocks resulting from wider global events.

Asked if economic conditions in Canada had changed over the last year, most believed the economy had declined. Participants commented on rising inflation and wages that had not kept pace with the cost of living, in addition to perceived labour shortages among the skilled trades. For the few who believed the economy was now in better shape, there was a sense that Canada had weathered the pandemic reasonably well, that Canadians were returning to work in large numbers, and that the financial outlook for many would improve through 2022.

Looking ahead, almost all participants expected Canada's economy to worsen over the course of the next year. Several were concerned about the risks of a crisis in Canada's housing market and the possibility of Canada sliding into a recession in 2023. Some were specifically concerned about the state of the U.S. economy, believing it to be increasingly volatile. It was felt that any downturn in the American economy would have serious ramifications for the Canadian economy as well. Several were also concerned about labour shortages in vital sectors such as healthcare and education and anticipated that this situation would worsen.

Focusing on actions the Government of Canada could take to address the economic challenges facing Canadians, several suggested placing a greater emphasis on the development of domestic natural resources, including non-renewable energy sources such as oil and gas. It was felt that given increasing global tensions and the economic consequences still being felt in the wake of the pandemic, the federal government should prioritize developing an economy centered on increased self-sufficiency and domestic production. In addition, it was thought that efforts could be taken to accelerate the pace of foreign credential recognition, ensuring a more expeditious process for foreign workers to gain status in their field of expertise.

Affordability Measures (Eastern Ontario Living Pay Cheque to Pay Cheque)

Participants in one group discussed a number of measures announced by the Government of Canada to help support Canadians. Provided with information related to a number of recent actions and

announcements, participants shared their perspectives as to which would have the greatest impact on them personally. Most felt the implementation of a national dental plan would have the most immediate effect on their personal financial situation. Several were also supportive of the indexing of benefits to keep pace with the rate of inflation and felt this would be beneficial. Participants were hopeful that by taking these actions the Government of Canada would be able to assist in reducing the financial stress believed to be facing many low and middle-income households.

Participants were then shown a second set of announced initiatives specifically focused on addressing the issue of housing affordability in Canada. On balance, participants responded positively to these initiatives, although they expressed some uncertainty as to whether they would or could personally benefit. Most believed that the introduction of a new Housing Accelerator Fund would help to increase the housing supply across Canada, while programs such as the Tax-Free First Home Savings Account (FHSA) and the doubling of the First-Time Home Buyers' Tax Credit (HBTC) would be advantageous for those looking to enter the housing market, especially younger Canadians who had a longer time horizon to accumulate savings towards the purchase of their first home.

After reviewing and discussing the various initiatives many participants reported feeling more optimistic about the current economic situation. While some felt the impact of these initiatives would not necessarily be felt for many years, they were nevertheless reassured that the federal government had committed to taking these actions. Asked what more could be done by the Government of Canada to assist those whose financial situations were somewhat more precarious, participants put forward a number of suggestions. These included further support directed at improving the ability of families to purchase nutritional foods, initiatives aimed at increasing the number of higher-paying jobs available to Canadians, and debt relief or forgiveness, particularly for those paying off student loans.

COVID-19 Outlook and Vaccines (Mid-size Centres Alberta Black Canadians, Mid-size Centres Quebec, GVA Parents of Young Children)

Three groups discussed a number of issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including participant perspectives regarding the Government of Canada's handling of the pandemic, views on past and present public health measures, and opinions related to the COVID-19 vaccine.

COVID-19 Forecast (Mid-size Centres Alberta Black Canadians)

One group comprised of Black Canadians residing in Alberta shared their opinions regarding the federal government's management of the pandemic to date, as well as the effectiveness of public health requirements implemented to help limit the spread of COVID-19. Asked to identify areas where the Government of Canada had been successful in its response to the pandemic, a number of participants mentioned financial assistance programs such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). Focusing on aspects of the federal government's response which could have been improved upon, some felt that stronger guidance could have been provided to provincial/territorial public health authorities regarding how best to respond to the pandemic, with a focus on fostering a more unified, national approach to combatting the virus.

Focusing on COVID-19 public health requirements, participants were asked whether they felt measures such as requiring international travellers to be vaccinated, mandating facemasks at airports and on planes, and implementing randomized testing for travellers arriving in Canada were still necessary to have in place. Participants were mixed in their responses; some believed existing restrictions could be removed with minimal risk to public safety and were of the impression that other jurisdictions, including the U.S., had already done so with little negative effect. A roughly equal number, however, felt measures such as wearing facemasks and vaccine requirements for international travellers were important to maintain, especially as travel increased during the summer months.

Prompted to consider what daily life may be like in the summer of 2023 in the event that COVID-19 remained an issue, few participants expressed concern about possibly contracting the virus, while many were worried about the potential of increased restrictions being implemented. Several were of the view that the return of public health measures such as lockdowns, mask mandates, and limits on social gatherings and activities would lead to increased mental health challenges for many and a breakdown of communities which were still believed to be rebuilding after the disruption of the past two years. While no participants wished to see further public health measures implemented, several expected this would likely occur if the situation surrounding the virus worsened considerably in the autumn and winter months.

When asked if changing public health requirements and protocols over the course of the pandemic (such as wearing facemasks, social distancing, and vaccination mandates) had altered their opinions regarding the benefits of following these measures, few participants felt this to be the case. Though some few reported that they had been less vigilant regarding the extent to which they follow public health measures, this was primarily due to diminished concern regarding contracting the virus rather than a response to changes in public guidance. Questioned whether they continued to wear facemasks in public settings, a larger number of participants reported no longer doing so than those who were.

COVID-19 Vaccines (Mid-size Centres Alberta Black Canadians, Mid-size Centres Quebec)

Two groups shared their experiences and perspectives regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, with a particular focus on the third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, also known as a 'booster dose'. While all participants had received their initial two doses of the vaccine, when asked if they had received a booster dose, a greater number of participants had not compared to those who had done so. For those who had received a COVID-19 booster dose, reasons for having done so included a desire to protect themselves and their loved ones, plans to travel internationally, and work-related reasons, with some anticipating a third dose would eventually be required as part of future vaccine-related mandates. Among the larger number who had not received a booster dose, many felt there was not much point in doing so, believing it would do little to curb the spread of COVID-19. Several were also of the impression that the current COVID-19 vaccines had been designed specifically to combat the virus in its original form and were less effective against newer variants (such as Omicron) that had emerged following the vaccines' development. A few indicated that if an updated vaccine was available which focused on newer variants or provided longer-term protection, they would be more open to receiving a third dose.

Asked if they believed vaccinations and booster doses prevent infection and/or serious illness from COVID-19, participants were mixed in their responses. A number were of the impression that even individuals who were fully up to date on their vaccinations were still at risk of severe outcomes related to contracting COVID-19. Some were also of the view that the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccinations and booster doses varies with the physical health and medical history of the individual, as well as the specific variant of the virus they are infected with. Discussing vaccinations more generally, almost all were of the view that vaccines and booster doses were generally useful in preventing infection and serious illness (especially for those who were immunocompromised or otherwise vulnerable), even if they harboured some doubts regarding the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines more specifically.

While few reported feeling comfortable with the prospect of contracting COVID-19, several reported being resigned to the expectation that they would likely become infected with the virus at some point in the future. In addition to the potential negative health outcomes associated with contracting COVID-19 for themselves as well as their loved ones, several were worried about the interruptions an infection may have on their work and ability to earn an income. When asked if they were worried about any potential side-effects related to COVID-19 vaccines, most participants were not. For the smaller number who were concerned, issues such as blood clots, myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle), and strokes were cited as potential risks they believed to be associated with the vaccines.

COVID-19 Vaccines for Children (GVA Parents of Young Children)

In this group, parents of children aged between 6 months and 4 years briefly discussed the COVID-19 vaccine for children. It was clarified for participants that, as of July 14th, 2022, Health Canada had approved the use of the Moderna Spikevax COVID-19 vaccine for children within this age range. Asked whether they had gotten their children vaccinated or made an appointment to do so, no participants had.

Sharing the concerns they held that were influencing their decisions to not vaccinate their children at this time, several cited what they perceived to be a lack of a long-term track record related to the vaccine. As such, it was felt that not enough was known about the potential side-effects, especially in children whose bodies were still developing. While a number of participants expressed that they would likely get their children vaccinated against COVID-19 at some point, most were in no rush to do so. This sentiment was in part influenced by the general impression that the virus was becoming less dangerous with each additional variant and that the overall risk to young children remained exceptionally low. For the small number who planned on getting their child vaccinated in the immediate future, it was felt that the vaccine would provide them with the peace of mind that their family was as protected against the virus as possible.

Climate Change and Environment (Quebec Looking to Purchase a Vehicle, GTA Recent Users of Federal Government Services, Major Centres Quebec Concerned About Climate Change)

Participants in three groups engaged in conversations related to the environment and climate change. A number of topics were discussed, including zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs), the federal carbon pricing

system, personal actions that can be taken to address climate change, and the Government of Canada's recently announced Emissions Reduction Plan.

Zero-Emission Vehicles (Quebec Looking to Purchase a Vehicle)

This group, comprised of participants residing in Quebec who were expecting to purchase a vehicle within the next five years, discussed ZEVs. Describing their current primary means of transportation, most relied upon gasoline-powered vehicles, while a smaller number reported owning electric or hybrid-type vehicles. For several, the desire to purchase a new car was primarily driven by lifestyle changes (such as having children) while others were looking to upgrade from their current vehicle. All participants indicated that affordability, both in terms of the price of the vehicle as well as fuel costs, was a leading consideration influencing the type of vehicle they would decide to purchase. Other important factors mentioned by participants included environmental considerations as well as the ability to repair one's own vehicle rather than having to rely upon the manufacturer. Questioned specifically if fuel efficiency was important to them, all indicated that it was. This was felt to be particularly the case for those living in more rural areas who often had to drive long distances as part of their everyday activities.

Asked if they were contemplating purchasing or leasing an electric vehicle, almost all participants indicated that they were. Several were looking to purchase a fully electrically powered automobile while a smaller number were considering a hybrid vehicle. For most, affordability and environmental considerations were cited as the primary drivers behind their purchasing decisions. A large number identified a perceived lack of affordability as a key barrier that might potentially influence their decision as to whether to purchase a ZEV. It was widely thought that, even with subsidies such as the Incentives for Zero-Emission Vehicles (iZEV) program, these types of vehicles remained quite costly and were likely prohibitively expensive for many Canadians. Others also mentioned a perceived lack of charging stations (especially outside of urban centres) as well as outstanding questions related to the distances these vehicles can travel as well as how they would fare in the extreme cold experienced in several regions of the country during the winter months.

Almost all participants felt it important for ZEVs and/or ZEV parts to be made in Canada. Several expected that investments in the domestic manufacturing of ZEVs would be beneficial for Canada's economy, especially as the adoption of these vehicles became more widespread. It was thought that by investing in this sector, the Government of Canada could position the country as a leader in ZEV manufacturing and reap the economic benefits of exporting this technology to other markets. The view was added that increasing domestic ZEV production would likely lead to the creation of numerous high-paying jobs for Canadians, including those already working in the automotive industry.

Participants next engaged in an exercise where they were shown a number of initiatives related to ZEVs that were recently announced as part of the 2022 federal Budget and instructed to select which, if any, they felt would have the most positive impact.

The first set of initiatives shown to participants focused on the goal of reducing emissions produced by driving. On balance, all initiatives were received positively, with each receiving a relatively similar level of support among participants. Several commented positively regarding the focus of these initiatives

on a wide range of vehicle types. It was felt that by prioritizing these actions, the federal government would be assisting in providing Canadians with different options as to the ZEVs available to them for purchase. In addition, it was also seen as beneficial to specifically focus on medium- and heavy-duty vehicles (MHDVs) which were seen as among the highest emitters currently.

The group was next shown a second set of two initiatives, each with a focus on making the transition to ZEVs more affordable for Canadians. Both initiatives were met with positive reactions, with slightly more participants voicing support for the investment of \$1.7 billion (over five years) to extend the iZEV program until March 2025. This was seen as a significant investment into ZEVs and was expected to be helpful in incentivizing more individuals to consider purchasing a ZEV as their next automobile. A number of participants expected the provision of up to \$5,000 of purchase incentives for eligible ZEVs would also be personally helpful for them.

Participants were next shown a final set of initiatives aimed at building a national network of electric vehicle charging stations. While all initiatives were thought to be important, participants largely gravitated towards the plans to invest \$500 million and \$400 million respectively to develop ZEV charging infrastructure in urban as well as suburban and remote communities. These actions were seen as crucial to the success of a large-scale transition to ZEVs, as many believed that a lack of charging stations represented one of the primary barriers holding individuals back from purchasing these vehicles at present.

Considering the federal government's ZEV plan as a whole, most felt these various initiatives represented a positive step forward towards the transition to widespread ZEV use. Several, however, were skeptical as to whether it would be possible to accomplish all these initiatives within the proposed timeframes. It was widely felt that managing a societal shift towards ZEVs would be a massive challenge for the federal government and could potentially be delayed in the event of an economic recession and/or a lack of willingness from the general public to switch to ZEVs.

Carbon Pricing (GTA Recent Users of Federal Government Services)

Participants based in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) briefly discussed the Government of Canada's actions to place a price on carbon pollution. While a small number of participants were aware of this initiative, none could recall any specific details. To clarify, participants were provided information related to this program, including the detail that 90% of proceeds collected through this initiative would be directly returned to residents in eligible provinces in the form of incentive payments. Upon receiving this information, several expressed confusion as to why funds were subsequently returned to individual households. Many questioned the purpose of this pricing system and largely felt this approach would not encourage Canadians to reduce their emissions. While most participants felt this system was fair for individual Canadians, due to the high cost of gasoline and other essentials at present, few thought these incentive payments would have any tangible impact on their financial situation.

Personal Climate Change Actions (Major Centres Quebec Concerned About Climate Change)

One group engaged in a discussion related to actions that can be taken at the individual level against climate change. All participants in this group had previously indicated that while they were concerned about climate change, they found it difficult to find ways to effectively address its impacts. Asked to identify ways in which they have attempted to fight climate change and reduce their personal emissions, participants provided a wide range of responses. A number of participants living in larger urban centres such as Montreal reported utilizing public transit whenever possible, though this was said to be more difficult for those living in rural areas where public transportation options were more limited. For others, actions taken included eating less meat, cutting down on their consumption of single-use plastics, and participating in environmentally focused holidays and events. All participants indicated that they also regularly engaged in activities such as recycling and composting, believing this to be a fairly common practice in their communities.

While a number of participants expressed interest in purchasing a ZEV as a further action against climate change, the perceived lack of affordability of these vehicles was cited as a prohibitive factor. A few also expressed skepticism as to whether a ZEV would be able to meet their lifestyle needs, including regularly driving long distances as well as handling extreme weather conditions during the winter months. A small number indicated that they were taking action to reduce their consumption wherever possible, though this was felt to be difficult at times and required a considerable amount of personal discipline.

Emissions Reduction Plan (Major Centres Quebec Concerned About Climate Change)

Participants in this group engaged in a discussion related to the Emissions Reduction Plan recently announced by the Government of Canada. Only a small number reported having previously heard about this initiative, and few could recall any specific details. To aid in conversation, participants were provided information related to the plan and a number of ways in which the Government of Canada would be taking action to reduce emissions by 2030. While all participants reacted positively to the initiatives contained within this plan, a number believed these to be somewhat ambitious and questioned whether the federal government would be able to achieve all these priorities, especially given the 2030 timeline.

The initiative to drive down carbon pollution from the oil and gas sector received the highest level of support among participants. Several were of the impression that large oil and gas companies were among the highest producers of greenhouse gas emissions and believed that by taking this action, the federal government could bring about a significant impact on the fight against climate change. To achieve this goal, many suggested the implementation of stricter regulations on the oil and gas sector as well as increasing the federal price on carbon for these larger companies.

Many were also in favour of the initiative to assist industries in the development and adoption of clean technology in their journey to net-zero emissions. Reiterating the importance of curbing the emissions of large corporations, several believed this would be an important step in addressing the issue of climate change. It was thought that while transitioning to greener practices had become a growing trend in many sectors, further support from the Government of Canada would likely assist with

accelerating this process. Some also suggested that by assisting industries in developing clean technology, Canada could become a global leader on this front and potentially achieve additional economic benefits from exporting this technology to other parts of the world.

A number of participants spoke positively of the commitment to powering the economy with renewable energy such as solar, wind, and hydro. Many felt this to be a step in the right direction and a necessary transition in order to ensure a more sustainable environment in the long term. Several also suggested that there may be economic benefits to taking this action, believing it could lead to the creation of numerous high-paying jobs as well as lead to a more energy-efficient manufacturing process. While some participants hoped to see this transition take place as soon as possible, others were more cautious, expecting that it may take a longer period of time to make these changes and that this would likely be a gradual process.

Healthcare (Mid-size Centres Quebec, Outaouais Region Quebec)

Two groups based in Quebec discussed a number of issues related to healthcare provision in their province as well as across Canada more broadly. These discussions focused on participant experiences and perspectives related to the Canadian healthcare system as well as identifying which areas most needed to be prioritized by the Government of Canada going forward.

Healthcare Impressions (Mid-size Centres Quebec, Outaouais Region Quebec)

To begin, participants shared their impressions regarding the healthcare system in Canada as a whole. On balance, participants were largely positive in their perspectives, believing healthcare in Canada to be generally of high quality. Several reported having access to a family physician whom they could see on short notice. In addition, it was believed that many Canadians were now able to access healthcare services through digital platforms and/or via the telephone, improving the availability of these services for those living in more rural or remote locations. Identifying areas where healthcare provision could potentially be improved, a number of participants spoke of increasingly long wait times in emergency rooms and at walk-in clinics. Many believed this issue had been exacerbated by staff shortages resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and several expressed concerns about the physical and mental health of those still working in the healthcare field who were believed to have taken on extra work as a result of these shortages.

Focusing specifically on accessibility, while few reported having personally experienced healthcare-related challenges, most were of the impression that for some, especially those without family doctors, healthcare services were becoming increasingly difficult to access. Many recalled having personally heard accounts from family and friends regarding the difficulty in finding available specialists, with waiting lists often running for several months to over a year. Asked if they felt accessibility to healthcare had worsened over the course of the pandemic, all believed this to be the case. Additionally, a number of participants thought there to be insufficient mental health resources available at present, believing many in need of treatment in this regard were often unable to access care.

Asked an additional question as to whether they had recently accessed any healthcare services in their area, almost all participants in the group from Quebec's Outaouais region reported that they had. Among this group, all spoke positively of their experience, with many describing their visit as quick and effective in addressing their medical concerns. Focusing on areas where improvements could be made to the quality of service they had received, it was felt there could be greater collaboration among family doctors, specialists, and other healthcare service providers, especially for those patients required to undergo tests, consultations, and/or procedures at more than one location. Several also reiterated the view that more needed to be done to ensure all Canadians had access to a family doctor, believing this to be a crucially important aspect in terms of receiving personalized and high-quality care.

Healthcare Priorities (Outaouais Region Quebec)

Participants in the group based in Quebec's Outaouais region engaged in an expanded discussion related to healthcare, with a specific focus on which areas most needed to be prioritized by the Government of Canada in the immediate future. Prompted to identify the most significant challenges currently impacting healthcare provision in their region, almost all focused on perceived healthcare worker shortages, believing this to be a pressing concern. Additionally, several spoke of a general lack of specialists and family doctors in their area, believing this to be a prevalent issue throughout the region

Asked if they were aware of any recent announcements or initiatives from the Government of Canada related to healthcare, none were. To aid in discussion, participants were informed that the federal government had recently identified five key priority areas for healthcare services in Canada. These included addressing health worker shortages and reducing wait times, increasing access to family health services, improving long term and home care, addressing mental health and substance use, and modernizing health data management and virtual care. On balance, participants were largely supportive of all priorities, believing each represented an important step towards finding solutions to the healthcare challenges currently impacting Canadians.

Many participants viewed addressing healthcare shortages and reducing wait times as a top priority for the Government of Canada at present. A number of participants, however, felt there was little the federal government could do apart from increasing funding, given their understanding that healthcare was primarily a provincial/territorial responsibility. All felt that addressing this situation would positively impact themselves and their communities, believing more Canadians would be inclined to seek out medical care if they knew they would be able to access it with relative ease. Related to this, several also identified increasing access to family health services as an important initiative. Several commented that family doctors were important in the process of initially detecting medical issues in their patients and played a pivotal role in ensuring those in need of medical care were referred to the proper specialists.

A large number of participants identified improving long term and in-home care as a much-needed action on the part of the federal government. Many hoped to see additional investments by the Government of Canada into these facilities as well as towards initiatives that would allow seniors to remain in their homes for longer. It was thought that by taking these actions, the federal government

would assist not only seniors, but their families as well, who were thought to typically assume the emotional and financial strain of caring for their elderly parents and other loved ones.

All participants felt that addressing mental health and substance use was an important area on which the Government of Canada should focus. Many viewed mental health as a growing issue and believed that with greater access to resources, more individuals would be able to get the help they need at an earlier stage, preventing their mental health challenges from progressing further. Related to addictions, a number of participants were of the opinion that there needed to be a greater effort to educate Canadians, especially younger individuals, about the dangers of addiction and how it can progress.

While fewer participants spoke specifically about the initiative to modernize health data management and virtual care, this was still felt to be a useful action on the part of the federal government. A number of participants believed the expansion of virtual care could be helpful for those living in more rural or remote areas, such as those in Canada's North. Related to modernizing health data management, a few participants felt this could be a helpful step towards improving communication throughout the healthcare system, allowing medical records to be transferred among different providers with relative ease.

Child Care and the Canada Child Benefit (GVA Parents of Young Children)

Participants residing in the Greater Vancouver Area (GVA) and parents of children six months to four years in age, engaged in a discussion related to affordable child care and the Canada Child Benefit (CCB). Many reported having children currently enrolled in child care, with several participants recalling having encountered challenges in finding and securing a place for their child. In a number of instances, participants had been placed on long waiting lists, in some cases waiting for over two years for an opening to become available. Along with challenges related to availability, child care was also seen as having become increasingly expensive, with participants reporting monthly costs ranging from \$900 to \$2100 per child, per month.

Asked if they were aware of any recent actions or announcements from the federal government related to child care, many recalled the agreements it had reached with each province and territory to provide \$10-per-day, on average, child care throughout Canada. While supportive of the initiative to provide Canadians with more affordable child care, several expressed uncertainty as to the specific details of these programs. Speaking as parents, participants largely felt that they had not received much information about the implementation of these programs or the steps one would need to take to access them.

Informed that the Government of Canada's plan was to lower the cost of child care to an average of \$10/day and create 250,000 new child care spaces across Canada by 2025-2026, several expressed concern as to whether this commitment would be financially feasible for the federal government. Some expressed curiosity as to whether these programs would be open to all families, or if there would be different eligibility criteria based on income level. Concerns were also raised as to whether there would be enough early childhood educators available to accommodate the expected increase in

parents accessing child care under this program, with a number of participants under the impression that there was already a shortage of skilled workers in this sector.

Discussing the potential impact of these agreements, a number of participants were uncertain as to the extent to which they would personally benefit. It was largely felt that while helpful at face value, many questions remained as to how and when these programs would become widely accessible for parents. Several expressed a desire for the development of a detailed timeline and action plan from the federal and provincial governments as a way to provide parents with clearer expectations as to when these programs would be implemented in their communities. All participants viewed the provision of affordable child care as an important priority for the Government of Canada. It was largely thought that the cost of raising a child had become increasingly expensive in recent years and any actions towards alleviating these costs represented a welcome development.

Focusing on supports and programs for parents more broadly, participants expressed enthusiasm for a number of existing initiatives targeted towards assisting parents with the additional costs of raising children. Specific programs mentioned included the provision of 12-month maternity leave, the Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP), and the Canada Child Benefit (CCB). Focusing on the CCB in particular, all participants indicated that they were aware of the program and were current recipients of it. Several spoke positively of the financial assistance the CCB provided, the perceived ease of the application process, as well as the benefit of not being subject to taxation. Suggesting areas for improvement, a small number expressed the opinion that the existing adjusted family net income (AFNI) thresholds were too low at present and needed to be re-evaluated to address issues such as high inflation and the rising cost of living. Asked how they would typically utilize the CCB benefit they receive, most identified child-related expenses such as diapers, food, savings for unexpected emergencies, or investments into their children's RESPs.

Government of Canada Services (GTA Recent Users of Federal Government Services)

In a group comprised of individuals who had recently utilized services provided by the Government of Canada participants discussed their service experience and offered suggestions for improvements. With respect to the types of services and interactions participants had experienced, many spoke about renewing their passports (or those of family members) via Service Canada. A few others had also recently interacted with Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA).

While those who had dealt with the IRCC and CRA commented positively on their experience, almost all participants who had interacted with Service Canada, either in general or specific to passport renewal, were more critical in terms of the process and their interactions. Many reported experiencing long lineups when visiting offices in-person, commenting that it was necessary to begin queuing with other members of the public very early in the morning in order to be assured of speaking with a service representative at some point during the business day. For those who had submitted their applications and had yet to receive their passports, there was a general feeling of uncertainty as to how long this process may take. Many also recounted difficulties when it came to contacting Service Canada representatives for updates regarding the status of their passport applications.

Participants were shown a list of factors that could have implications for passport services and asked about their impact on any delays they had experienced or had heard about. This list included an increase in the volume of applications, a shift to more time-consuming mail applications, public health restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a larger proportion of complex applications. Almost all participants felt an increase in the volume of applications was the primary driver behind the reported issues related to passport services. It was believed that many individuals had allowed their passports to lapse during the COVID-19 pandemic and that this had led to a significant backlog of renewal applications as increasing numbers of Canadians were now looking to visit destinations outside of Canada for the first time in two years. Several felt these challenges, combined with increasingly complex applications due to life changes during the pandemic (such as new addresses, changes in marital status, and new or additional dependents) had likely made passport applications somewhat more time-consuming to review and process. While few identified a shift to mail-in applications as a major contributor to these perceived delays, it was suggested that Service Canada should develop a more comprehensive and user-friendly tracking system which would allow applicants to easily check the status of their application online. All participants believed addressing these issues to be an important priority for the Government of Canada. In addition to increasing the number of staff, it was suggested that there were opportunities to further streamline and simplify the passport application process, including innovations such as allowing current passport holders to renew their passports online.

Housing (Atlantic Canada)

Participants residing in Atlantic Canada engaged in a discussion related to housing, with a specific focus on numerous housing-related initiatives announced as part of the 2022 federal Budget. Engaging in a series of exercises, participants were asked to evaluate various sets of initiatives, each focusing on addressing a specific challenge related to housing.

Among the first set of initiatives, which focused primarily on actions to increase the housing supply across Canada, a large number of participants identified the creation of a new Housing Accelerator Fund, providing funding to municipalities to build 100,000 homes across Canada, as a promising initiative. Many believed that a lack of available housing was the primary driver behind rising housing prices and expected that these efforts would go a long way towards improving housing affordability in several regions. The announcement of an additional \$1.5 billion investment over two years for new affordable housing units for those experiencing homelessness or domestic violence was also popular among participants. It was largely felt that the federal government should prioritize those experiencing these challenges, and that a significant financial commitment such as this was a necessary step towards addressing this issue.

Numerous participants felt the initiative to allocate \$216 million towards incentivizing developers to build new rental units charging less than the average rent in their areas to also be an effective component of the federal government's housing strategy. Many identified increasing rental costs as a growing challenge for Canadians, particularly those residing in urban centres where rent was believed to have risen substantially in recent years. A number of participants also felt the provision of an

additional \$750 million in public transit funding to communities which commit their own funding towards building new housing to be an important initiative. Several believed that by taking this action, the federal government could increase the capacity and ridership of existing transit systems while also expanding these services into suburban and rural areas where public transit is currently less accessible.

Participants were next presented with a second set of priorities, this time focusing on the issue of housing affordability and creating additional pathways to homeownership for Canadians. On balance, most initiatives received a considerable level of support, with a number of participants expressing the view that all of these actions would likely have a positive impact towards improving housing affordability for Canadians. Several participants were especially supportive of those initiatives aimed at assisting first-time home buyers, such as the commitment to doubling First-Time Home Buyers' Tax Credit (HBTC), the expansion of the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive, and (to a lesser extent) the creation of a new Tax-Free First Home Savings Account. It was felt by many that the significant costs of entering the housing market (typically including a sizeable down payment) represented the greatest barrier for prospective homebuyers and that by taking these actions, the federal government would be providing many with the additional financial support necessary to purchase their first home.

The allocation of an additional \$200 million towards increasing rent-to-own housing options also received considerable support among participants. It was widely believed that many were currently struggling with high rent costs, and that this program represented an alternative pathway to homeownership for those currently finding it difficult to save up for a sufficient down payment. Many also spoke positively of the investment of \$562 million towards organizations addressing homelessness, as well as an additional \$62 million specifically addressing this issue among veterans. It was widely believed that these actions would provide a great deal of positive impact and represented the right thing to do on the part of the federal government.

Participants next evaluated a third set of initiatives, this time focused on protecting Canadians in the housing market. Among these, the initiative to end blind bidding received the highest level of support among participants. Several had personally participated in this process when buying their own homes and believed it had led to increased anxiety as well as pressuring them to submit higher than necessary bids to secure their purchase. The action to create new taxation penalties to stop landlords from "renovicing" tenants also received considerable attention from participants. Many recalled hearing first-hand accounts from loved ones who had been subject to this practice, believing it to be unfairly punitive to renters who would likely struggle to find affordable alternative housing.

Reflecting on their overall impressions related to the federal government's housing plan, a number of participants expressed concern regarding the significant scope of these actions. Several were of the opinion that rather than pursuing such a wide range of initiatives, the federal government should instead focus on a few key priorities at a time. Asked, however, whether they felt it was realistic to expect the Government of Canada to be able to accomplish all of these initiatives, participants were mostly optimistic, believing that with enough time and commitment, all of these initiatives could realistically be implemented.

Cryptocurrency (Lower Mainland British Columbia Current Cryptocurrency Owners)

One group, comprised exclusively of individuals who owned cryptocurrencies, engaged in a wide-ranging conversation on their experiences with digital currencies. While a few participants had only recently learned about and invested in cryptocurrencies in the past year, others reported being aware of and engaged in the purchase and trade of currencies such as Bitcoin for many years. When asked how they typically obtained information about cryptocurrencies, most said they conducted their own online research via Google or followed subject matter experts on platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok. Several participants viewed cryptocurrencies as a high-risk/high-reward asset class and did not expect to rely heavily on them in their financial portfolios or in planning their financial future. By contrast, a few participants felt that digital currencies represented the future of financial investing.

Participants' experiences with cryptocurrencies were mixed. A few described trading these financial instruments as fun and exciting due to the potential for high returns. Many, however, were of the view that cryptocurrencies represented an exceedingly risky investment. Expanding upon this point, some expressed concerns about a lack of involvement from the formal banking system. Several participants recalled having previously experienced significant fluctuations in their cryptocurrency portfolios, describing cryptocurrencies as tremendously volatile. Elaborating on their key concerns about cryptocurrencies, participants identified areas such as a lack of financial security, challenges related to the scalability of cryptocurrencies, the prospect of increased regulation of these currencies going forward, and a high degree of volatility within the cryptocurrency market.

On balance, most were opposed to further regulation of cryptocurrencies by the Government of Canada. While several were of the view that more regulation could be implemented, particularly of the major exchanges which facilitate the trading of large quantities of cryptocurrencies, they did not advocate for broader regulatory action across the sector. Nevertheless, several were concerned that mismanagement within these companies could lead to substantial losses for investors and that more could be done to ensure appropriate oversight of their operations. Almost all participants were concerned about the potential of scams involving cryptocurrencies. Related to this, most felt the Government of Canada should do more to educate Canadians regarding cryptocurrencies, especially in terms of how to recognize potential scams and invest in a responsible manner.

Digital Credentials (Nova Scotia Middle Class Worried About the Economy)

One group engaged in a discussion regarding digital credentials and their potential implementation across Canada. Asked whether they were aware of the concept of a 'digital credential', very few were. To clarify, participants were informed that digital credentials represent a way for individuals to provide information about themselves electronically and that these credentials served as an electronic equivalent of physical documents.

While a number of participants thought that digital credentials might be a more convenient way for individuals to present their identification, many expressed concerns about the widespread usage of this technology. Several were worried about the security risks of storing sensitive personal information on their mobile devices, believing digital credentials could be vulnerable to hackers and/or at serious

risk in the event that their device was lost or stolen. While most participants expressed a preference for continuing to use physical identification, it was felt by some that digital credentials may be useful as a companion to these physical cards so long as they did not replace them entirely.

Focusing on types of digital credentials that were already in use, several participants pointed to existing technology such as contactless digital payment options (such as Apple Wallet and Google Pay), pandemic-related tools such as digital proof of vaccination documents, and the ArriveCAN app. Several participants felt there to be potential for digital credentials to be utilized in fields such as healthcare, allowing patients to have all their medical information in one place as well as for parents to have an easily accessible record of their children's medical history. Some also suggested that these credentials could have widespread security applications, combining technology and biometrics to provide an extra layer of protection for those seeking to gain access to secure areas such as residential buildings.

Asked to identify the benefits of using digital credentials, a number of participants believed using these would likely make it easier to update their information in the event of an address or name change, as this could be performed digitally and would no longer require the creation of a new physical card. A few also speculated that for those with a number of different identifications and qualifications all of their vital information could be consolidated in a single app rather than necessitating separate identification cards.

Prompted to share any concerns they may have related to this technology, several reiterated worries related to identity theft and the security of their personal data. Many also questioned who would be able to access this data and what protocols and regulations would be implemented to ensure it would not be utilized by third parties. Concerns were also raised that a widespread adoption of digital credentials might possibly be discriminatory towards low-income individuals, due to the high costs of associated technology required to present this information.

Asked what impacts they expected would be felt by a society in which digital credentials were widely used, a number of participants believed daily life would feel far more restricted and were skeptical of assigning such high responsibility to a single department or agency to manage these credentials (based on their perceptions that a government department would be managing all credentials). Some also expressed concern about the potential for older Canadians to feel isolated due to lack of familiarity with digital credentials and devices (in general), causing them to withdraw from a society in which this technology was widely adopted. It was thought that due to these factors, widespread adoption of digital credentials by Canadians may be difficult to achieve, especially among cohorts of society who may already be somewhat distrustful of public institutions.

Reconciliation (Alberta Indigenous Peoples)

One group, comprised of Indigenous peoples residing in Alberta, talked through a number of issues related to reconciliation. Participants were shown information detailing several actions recently announced by the federal government to address concerns currently facing Indigenous communities.

Presented with the first set of initiatives, focusing on addressing past harms and discrimination related to Indigenous children, several spoke positively about the commitment to allocate \$4 billion towards the implementation of *Jordan's Principle*, which asserts that all Indigenous children should have access to the products, services, and supports they need, when they need them. It was expressed by a number of participants that accessibility to goods and services was limited in many Indigenous communities, and that funding such as this would likely go a long way towards addressing this issue and ensuring Indigenous children have all that they require. On balance, participants expressed support for all other initiatives shown, though a small number shared concerns regarding the commitment of \$5.1 million towards ensuring the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) would be able to support community-led responses to unmarked burial sites. Some questioned the involvement of the RCMP in this process, especially given the perceived role played by the agency in the enforcement of the historic residential school system.

Participants were next shown a second set of initiatives, this time focusing on actions to support stronger and healthier Indigenous communities. While all initiatives received primarily positive reactions, participants were particularly interested in the Government of Canada's commitment to provide \$4 billion to support the development of housing in Indigenous communities. Speaking on housing, several were of the view that affordable housing was currently in short supply on many reserves and that much of the housing that was available was in poor condition and in need of repair. It was thought that improving the housing situation within these communities would likely have a positive impact on many Indigenous individuals. Participants felt that by providing those currently struggling with a solid foundation in the form of housing, these individuals would likely be able to improve other aspects of their lives, such as their economic and social wellbeing.

In addition to housing, several identified the perceived low quality of education at all levels to be one of the most pressing issues currently facing Indigenous communities and believed the initiative to provide \$310.6 million towards ensuring Indigenous children living on-reserve receive a high-quality education would have a significant impact. A number of participants were of the opinion that the quality of education on-reserve could be greatly improved and hoped these investments would yield long-term benefits for Indigenous children going forward. It was suggested that this additional funding could be utilized to recruit skilled teachers and support staff to work in these communities, as well as to provide critically needed infrastructure upgrades for on-reserve schools.

The group was next shown a third set of initiatives, focusing on advancing self-determination and economic development for Indigenous communities. Several expressed interest in the commitment of \$103.4 million from the federal government to provide opportunities for Indigenous communities to benefit from natural resource projects. It was widely felt that this represented a promising opportunity for Indigenous peoples to economically benefit from the land and resources in their area and could go a long way towards fostering sustainable job creation in these communities. It was also thought that this would provide Indigenous peoples with a greater sense of autonomy in terms of determining how these resources should be utilized going forward. A few reacted favourably to the announcement of \$35 million to increase Indigenous communities' participation in economic projects and specialized training opportunities delivered by Indigenous communities. It was expected that this would help stimulate economic growth and provide Indigenous workers with an expanded skillset to contribute to

their local economies. Though believed to be a step in the right direction, a number of participants felt the amounts allocated to address major issues such as climate change and Northern economic development (\$29.6 million and 15 million respectively) would not be enough to achieve tangible progress on these fronts.

Local Issues (Atlantic Canada)

Participants residing in Atlantic Canada briefly discussed issues related to their region, with a specific focus on key economic sectors/industries in their respective communities. Prompted to share which sectors they were currently employed in, participants identified areas such as education, financial services, restaurants and hospitality, and technology/software development. Asked if they believed there to be sufficient employment opportunities in their respective sectors, most felt this to be the case, with a large number commenting that there were several opportunities available, especially in the education, hospitality, and software development fields. The impression was added that a number of sectors were currently dealing with a shortage of skilled workers and that many employers had recently faced challenges in filling key positions.

Asked to identify the most important sectors for their local communities, participants from all provinces mentioned industries such as fisheries, tourism, and the public sector as important economic drivers across Atlantic Canada. Focusing on which sectors were in most need of support from the Government of Canada, several identified healthcare, believing perceived worker shortages had been acutely felt in this sector, leading to long wait times in emergency rooms and walk-in clinics and difficulties for many in accessing the care they require. A number of others thought greater assistance should be provided to small businesses, especially in the tourism sector which was felt to still be facing considerable challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

MORE INFORMATION

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