



THE  
**STRATEGIC  
COUNSEL**



Government  
of Canada

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du Canada

# Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – May 2023

## Summary

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

Canada 

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

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

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

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

This report includes findings from twelve online focus groups which were conducted between May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, and May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023, in multiple locations across the country including Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Yukon, New Brunswick, and British Columbia. Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are provided in the section below.



The research for this cycle included discussions on the Government of Canada’s priorities and performance as well as any news pertaining to the Government of Canada that participants had seen, read, or heard about in recent days. Some groups engaged in longer discussions related to topics such as the conflict in Ukraine, national security and Arctic sovereignty, immigration, and the economy and jobs.

This research cycle also explored the issue of social media, which was discussed by those residing in Eastern Ontario, the Montérégie region in Quebec, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and by frequent users of social media in the Prairies. These discussions explored the social media usage habits of participants as well as the topic of content moderation on social media platforms. Online safety and misinformation were discussed by frequent users of social media in the Prairies and by participants residing in Quebec. Groups in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Yukon, and Quebec discussed climate change, while those in Eastern Ontario and New Brunswick shared their perspectives related to the federal government’s carbon pricing plan. Multiple groups explored the topic of housing, including those in Yukon, British Columbia, and prospective first-time home buyers in Hamilton, Ontario. Low-income participants from Quebec and first-time home buyers in Hamilton also discussed the current cost of living.

Other topics discussed this cycle included health care, pharmacare, and substance use and addiction. Some groups also took part in conversations related to the protection and promotion of the French language, community safety and bail reform, and gender equality.

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 the South Asian diaspora, low-income Canadians, first-time home buyers, frequent users of social media aged 18 to 34, younger men aged 20 to 35, and those who were concerned about crime.

### Detailed Approach

- Twelve groups across various regions in Canada.
- Six groups were conducted among the general population residing in major centres in Eastern Ontario, the Montérégie region of Quebec, mid-size centres in the Prairies, Yukon, New Brunswick, and major centres in British Columbia.

- The other six groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
  - South Asian diaspora;
  - Low-income Canadians;
  - First-time home buyers;
  - Frequent users of social media aged 18 to 34;
  - Men aged 20 to 35;
  - Those concerned about crime;
- The three 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 of \$125.

### Group Locations and Composition

| LOCATION                             | GROUP | LANGUAGE | DATE   | TIME (EST) | GROUP COMPOSITION                                   | NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS |
|--------------------------------------|-------|----------|--------|------------|---|------------------------|
| Major City Centres Eastern Ontario   | 1     | English  | May 3  | 6:00-8:00  | General Population                                  | 8                      |
| Montréal                             | 2     | French   | May 4  | 6:00-8:00  | General Population                                  | 8                      |
| Southern Ontario                     | 3     | English  | May 9  | 6:00-8:00  | South Asian Diaspora                                | 7                      |
| Mid-Size Centres Prairies (SK, MB)   | 4     | English  | May 10 | 8:00-10:00 | General Population                                  | 6                      |
| Major City Centres Quebec            | 5     | French   | May 11 | 6:00-8:00  | Low-Income – Under \$40,000 annual household income | 8                      |
| Hamilton                             | 6     | English  | May 16 | 6:00-8:00  | First-Time Home Buyers                              | 6                      |
| Yukon                                | 7     | English  | May 17 | 9:00-11:00 | General Population                                  | 7                      |
| Major City Centres Prairies (SK, MB) | 8     | English  | May 23 | 8:00-10:00 | 18-34 Frequent Users of Social Media                | 7                      |
| New Brunswick                        | 9     | English  | May 24 | 5:00-7:00  | General Population                                  | 7                      |
| Small to Mid-Size Centres Quebec     | 10    | French   | May 25 | 6:00-8:00  | Financial sector workers                            | 5                      |

|                                     |    |         |        |            |                    |           |
|-------------------------------------|----|---------|--------|------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Major City Centres British Columbia | 11 | English | May 30 | 9:00-11:00 | General Population | 8         |
| Greater Vancouver Area              | 12 | French  | May 31 | 9:00-11:00 | Crime-concerned    | 7         |
| <b>Total number of participants</b> |    |         |        |            |                    | <b>84</b> |

## Key Findings

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

At the beginning of each group, participants were asked what they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days. A wide range of announcements and initiatives were recalled, including ongoing investigations into allegations of Chinese interference during recent Canadian federal elections, an agreement reached with the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) to end the union's strike activity, and the announcement of numerous affordability measures as part of the 2023 Budget. Other actions recalled included the unveiling of a new design for the Canadian passport, the announcement of proposed changes to strengthen the country's bail system, the deployment of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel to assist with combatting wildfires in Alberta, and the release of the Government of Canada's *Action Plan for Official Languages: 2023-2028*.

Participants also recalled actions and initiatives related to the Government of Canada on the international stage, including the provision of military and financial assistance for Ukraine, actions to assist Canadians seeking to leave Sudan and accommodate Sudanese nationals within Canada amidst escalating civil unrest in that country, and the Prime Minister's attendance at the 49<sup>th</sup> Group of Seven (G7) summit in Hiroshima, Japan.

### Electric Vehicles (Major Centres Eastern Ontario)

One group, comprised of participants residing in Eastern Ontario engaged in an extended discussion related to recent investments made by the federal government towards increasing electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing in Canada, including its support for the construction of a new EV battery plant in St. Thomas, Ontario. A roughly similar number of participants reported having heard about this project as those who were learning about it for the first time.

Provided information about the project, several reacted positively and hoped that the construction of this plant would lead to increased affordability of EVs for Canadians as well as job creation in the clean energy sector. Among the smaller number who felt more negatively, concerns were expressed regarding the potential environmental costs that might be incurred through the mining of the raw materials required for EV batteries.

### **Roxham Road (Quebec Montérégie Region)**

Participants in the Montérégie region of Quebec were asked a few additional questions related to asylum seekers in the province, including those who had utilized the Roxham Road irregular border crossing. Most were generally of the impression that this crossing had recently been closed following a new agreement reached between the Government of Canada and the United States (U.S.). While none reacted negatively to this decision, a few expressed concerns that it might lead to asylum seekers taking more desperate measures to enter Canada, potentially putting their lives at risk in the process. The view was expressed that while it was important for the federal government to continue to assist those seeking asylum, there needed to be a greater effort to disperse these individuals more evenly across the country.

### **News Consumption Habits (Southern Ontario South Asian Diaspora, Major Centres Prairies Frequent Users of Social Media, Small and Mid-Size Centres Quebec Younger Men)**

Three groups took part in a discussion related to their news consumption habits as well as the platforms and/or sources they viewed as being the most reliable. Asked how much time they would typically spend reading, watching, or listening to the news, most reported doing so for approximately 15-30 minutes each day.

Describing the primary sources they use for receiving news, many mentioned traditional broadcast outlets such as television (CBC, CTV, CP24, and Global News) and radio. Several also indicated using social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok), as well as search engines such as Google and Microsoft Bing. Asked whether they viewed some sources or platforms as being more reliable than others, while most felt that mainstream news and official sources such as the Government of Canada were generally quite trustworthy, it was thought that news items posted on social media could often be misleading or inaccurate.

### **Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (All Locations)**

All groups took part in conversations related to a range of issues currently facing Canadians as well as their perspectives regarding the federal government's management of these priorities. Asked to identify areas in which they felt that the Government of Canada had performed well as of late, participants provided a number of responses. These included health care, education, the provision of a range of benefits and supports to Canadians, and improvements in service provision by agencies and departments such as the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and Service Canada. A number also mentioned areas such as climate change and the environment, immigration, protecting and promoting multiculturalism and diversity, and the provision of international assistance to countries such as Ukraine.

Participants also identified a number of areas in which they felt that the Government of Canada had room for improvement. Areas mentioned included affordability and the rising cost of living, health care, infrastructure (including the need for a great number of hospitals, schools, and public transportation services), national security, and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Asked what they believed were the top issues which they felt the Government of Canada should be prioritizing, many reiterated the importance of addressing issues related to the cost of living and the high rate of inflation. Several also believed that more needed to be done to increase the accessibility of safe and affordable housing for all Canadians and expressed concern about the perceived rising rate of homelessness in their communities. A large number emphasized the need for the federal government to continue to place a strong focus on addressing issues related to health care wait times and worker shortages, climate change and reducing the dependency of Canadians on non-renewable energy sources, and the need for continued investments into the country's education system.

### **Ukraine (Major Centres Eastern Ontario)**

Participants in one group briefly discussed the Government of Canada's ongoing financial and military support for Ukraine. Discussing whether they felt this was an important priority for the federal government to focus on, a few indicated that they did. Among these participants, it was felt that it was important for the Government of Canada to work with its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies to continue to support Ukraine, believing this was important for preserving global security in the long term. For the larger number who felt differently, it was thought that given the considerable challenges believed to currently be facing Canadians at present (including inflation and the high cost of living), it was more important for the federal government to focus on domestic issues rather than providing international assistance.

### **National Security (Yukon)**

Those in the group based in Yukon engaged in a discussion related to national security, including the priority of ensuring the sovereignty and security of Canada's Arctic region. Asked whether, on balance, they felt that the Government of Canada was headed in the right direction when it came to these issues, a large number did not believe that it was. Several expressed concerns related to the preparedness of the CAF to defend Canada in the event of a global conflict and believed that greater efforts needed to be taken to strengthen the country's broader national security capacity.

All felt that the protection of the Arctic needed to be a top priority for the Government of Canada. Discussing the federal government's performance on this front, almost all believed that there was room for improvement. Asked to identify the greatest threats to sovereignty and security in Canada's North, a number were concerned about potential encroachment upon Canadian territory by other countries. Several also cited environmental issues such as climate change as well as the potential for disasters such as oil spills and extreme weather events in their region.

### **Immigration (Southern Ontario South Asian Diaspora)**

Participants in the group comprised of members of the South Asian diaspora took part in a discussion related to immigration and the challenges faced by newcomers to Canada. Asked to identify the most important issues facing South Asians in Canada, a number mentioned difficulties related to the foreign credential recognition process. It was thought that new arrivals from South Asia (and other parts of the world) frequently faced challenges regarding the recognition of their professional and educational credentials, making it difficult for them to find employment in their fields of expertise.



Asked whether they felt immigration more generally should be a high priority for the Government of Canada, most did. It was thought that by focusing on increasing immigration rates and bringing in skilled workers from outside of Canada, the federal government would be able to address perceived worker shortages across a range of sectors. Discussing the most important issues related to immigration at present, some reiterated concerns over the foreign credential recognition process. Other issues mentioned included the need to ensure international students were able to access the same services and benefits as the rest of Canadians, out-of-status workers were protected from exploitation by their employers, and that certain countries or backgrounds were not prioritized over others when it came to immigration.

### **Economy and Job Creation (Small and Mid-Size Centres Quebec Younger Men)**

One group engaged in an additional conversation related to the Canadian economy and job creation. Several felt that the economy was in poor condition at present, with a number specifically mentioning the perceived high costs of essentials such as groceries and gasoline. A small number felt somewhat differently, expressing the view that while the economy was currently facing challenges, it was still performing relatively well compared to other jurisdictions throughout the world. Asked whether they expected the Canadian economy would be better, worse, or about the same five years from now, participants were mostly negative in their forecasts.

Focusing on the state of the job market more specifically, a large number were of the opinion that while there were many jobs currently available, these positions did not necessarily offer high wages or sufficient benefits for workers. A roughly equal number felt that the Government of Canada was currently on the right track when it came to job creation as those who were more uncertain. Asked if they were aware of any actions or initiatives from the federal government related to job creation, a number were of the impression that it had offered grants and funding for training programs in important sectors such as technology and health care, though none could recall any specific details.

### **Social Media (Major Centres Eastern Ontario, Quebec Montérégie Region, Mid-Size Centres Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Major Centres Prairies Frequent Users of Social Media)**

Participants in four groups engaged in conversations related to social media. These discussions focused on participants' usage of social media, the trustworthiness of information found on these platforms, and perspectives related to the moderation of content posted on social media.

### **Social Media Usage (Major Centres Prairies Frequent Users of Social Media)**

One group, comprised of individuals who identified as frequent users of social media, discussed their social media usage and the ways in which they engage with these platforms. Asked how frequently they would use social media on a given day, most estimated their daily usage to be somewhere in the range of 3-5 hours. Discussing the platforms that they would typically use, several mentioned Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok with a smaller number also reporting using LinkedIn, YouTube, and Snapchat. For most, the primary reasons for visiting these platforms were entertainment and communicating with family and friends. Asked if they would use social media to find information,





while a large number indicated that they would do so for local events or news pertaining to their communities, few reported using social media to learn more about broader national issues or events.

Very few reported following the Government of Canada, or related accounts belonging to specific departments or agencies, on social media. Asked what advice they would give to the federal government regarding the content it creates for these platforms, a number felt that its posts should be designed to highlight the most positive aspects of Canada, including the national parks system and the country's diverse population. As a general comment, it was expressed that the Government of Canada should tailor the content it creates to each individual platform rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach. It was felt that the content preferences of social media users varied greatly depending on what platform they were using and that it was important for the federal government to understand these differences.

### **Social Media Content Moderation (Major Centres Eastern Ontario, Quebec Montérégie Region, Mid-Size Centres Saskatchewan and Manitoba)**

Three groups took part in a discussion related to the content found on social media, including the trustworthiness of information on these platforms, the impact of potentially harmful posts or comments, and potential measures to moderate this content. Asked how frequently they would use social media, most reported doing so on a daily basis. Asked which platforms they would typically use, a large number mentioned Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Describing how they would typically engage with content on these platforms, a roughly equal number reported that they would frequently react to or comment upon social media posts from friends, family, and/or public figures and organizations compared to those who rarely or never did so.

Only a small number reported following social media accounts operated by the federal government and by related agencies and departments. Asked whether they would typically trust content shared by the Government of Canada on social media, a similar number reported somewhat trusting this content relative to those who neither trusted nor distrusted it. A smaller number indicated a strong level of trust, while very few somewhat or strongly distrusted social media content from the federal government.

Focusing on potentially harmful content posted on social media (including posts containing hate speech, harassment or threats, misinformation, and/or other obscene or inappropriate content), a large number indicated that they encountered these types of posts on a regular basis. Asked whether empowering social media managers to hide or delete these types of posts as well as to prevent the offending users from seeing or commenting on future posts would be an effective approach to managing this type of content, participants were mixed in their views. Most were in favour of content moderators taking this type of action, especially in instances of hateful, racist, or sexist posts; personal threats to other users; and posts which intentionally presented false or misleading information. Several, however, expressed the opinion that there was a fine line between this type of moderation and the broader censorship of differing opinions. Among these participants, it was widely felt that there needed to be strict criteria established regarding which types of content would be subject to moderation on social media accounts operated by the federal government to ensure that users would continue to be able to freely express themselves.

### **Online Safety (Major Centres Prairies Frequent Users of Social Media, Small and Mid-Size Centres Quebec Younger Men)**

Participants in two groups engaged in conversations related to online safety. Those in the group comprised of frequent social media users discussed online safety and harmful content more generally, while both groups shared their perspectives related to the issue of misinformation.

#### **Harmful Content (Major Centres Prairies Frequent Users of Social Media)**

Asked to identify what they believed to be the positive impacts of the Internet and the online world on society, many mentioned the increased ability to connect and interact with family, friends, and others throughout the world as well as the widespread availability of information on an endless number of subjects. Discussing the potential drawbacks of the Internet, a number described issues such as the spread of harmful content online, concerns related to a loss of individual privacy, the prevalence of online scams, and the risk of addiction to social media and the Internet.

Asked what the term 'online safety' meant to them, most believed it referred to one's ability to protect their information and privacy online. While few had concerns related to their own safety online, a number felt that more could be done to protect groups such as seniors and younger Canadians who may not have developed the skills to detect online risks or who may be targeted by bad actors online. Few believed that the presence of harmful content online was a major issue at present, with several of the opinion that one could always log off or intentionally avoid these types of posts if they encountered them. Several were also of the impression that hateful content was strictly regulated on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and that sufficient steps had already been taken on this front.

#### **Misinformation (Major Centres Prairies Frequent Users of Social Media, Small and Mid-Size Centres Quebec Younger Men)**

Asked how frequently they came across information online that they were uncertain of the accuracy, a large number in both groups reported encountering these types of posts on a daily basis. Several expressed concern about what they viewed as the increasing prevalence of misinformation and disinformation online, believing this had served to obscure the truth on numerous important subjects and led to Canadians forming opinions on issues based on incomplete or false information.

Describing examples of misinformation or disinformation that they had encountered online, many recalled posts or comments related to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the conflict in Ukraine.

Asked how they would go about confirming whether the information they read was true, most indicated that they would likely use a search engine such as Google or visit the Government of Canada's website to determine its veracity.

Discussing actions that could be taken to combat online misinformation or disinformation, few believed that there should be direct action from the Government of Canada on this front. On balance, most thought that it was ultimately the responsibility of users to avoid information that they did not agree with or believed to be untrue. The view was expressed that more should instead be done to educate individuals regarding how to recognize misinformation or disinformation rather than actively

removing it. While a number felt that the Government of Canada had a role to play in combatting misinformation and disinformation, several believed that this would best be accomplished by ensuring that all information posted on official websites was accurate, indisputable, and based on verifiable facts. It was thought that this would position the federal government as a highly trusted source on important issues such as health care and the economy and encourage more Canadians to use official websites to verify the information they encounter online.

### **Climate Change (Mid-Size Centres Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Major Centres Quebec Low-Income, Yukon)**

Three groups engaged in discussions related to climate change. These conversations focused on the actions participants had taken to prepare for the impacts of climate change as well as the potential costs that might be incurred by the federal government in taking action to address this issue

### **Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation (Mid-Size Centres Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Yukon)**

Asked whether they felt that climate change was having a major, minor, or no impact on their respective regions, most residing in Saskatchewan and Manitoba felt its impact had been minor thus far, while almost all in Yukon believed that climate change had significantly impacted their communities. Expanding upon this, several in Yukon identified changes to Northern weather patterns as well as the perceived increased prevalence of extreme weather events such as large-scale flooding, wildfires, and unusually warm weather as challenges facing the region related to climate change.

Very few felt that their communities were prepared to deal with the potential impacts of climate change such as increased flooding and wildfires. While a small number mentioned that actions had been taken to clear emergency corridors and implement community emergency preparedness plans in the event of a natural disaster, few felt that this had decreased the overall vulnerability of their communities to extreme weather events. Few reported having personally taken any measures to prepare their households for climate change, with a number indicating that with the perceived high cost of living at present, it was difficult to budget for anything beyond their monthly expenses.

A large number felt that the federal government had a role to play in assisting communities with preparing for climate change. Asked if they could recall any recent actions taken by the Government of Canada related to climate change, a number recalled the implementation of a federal price on carbon and what they viewed as its focus on increasing the development of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectricity. Provided with information related to steps the Government of Canada was taking to address climate change, most believed these actions represented a step in the right direction. A few reacted more negatively, expressing the opinion that rather than devoting these resources to climate change, a greater focus needed to be placed on what were viewed as more pressing issues such as the high cost of living, health care wait times and worker shortages, and a lack of clean drinking water in several Indigenous communities.



### **Costs of Climate Change (Major Centres Quebec Low-Income)**

Asked how worried they were about climate change, most in the group comprised of low-income individuals in Quebec reported being somewhat concerned about this issue. Discussing the aspects of climate change that they were most concerned about, participants mentioned issues such as the increased prevalence of extreme weather events, the potential for decreased agricultural production, and the impacts this issue would have on their children and future generations. Asked whether they had observed any impacts of climate change in their own communities or across Canada more broadly, several believed that wildfires and floods had been occurring with increasing frequency as of late and that this had at least partially been caused by climate change.

While all expected that there would be a significant economic cost to taking action to address climate change, most believed that this was still worth doing. It was believed that actions taken now to combat this issue would be of immense benefit to future generations. Discussing the different approaches that could be taken in addressing climate change, most preferred programs and initiatives which incentivized individuals to engage in more sustainable behaviours rather than measures which placed additional costs on carbon emitting activities, such as the federal price on carbon. It was felt that given the high rate of inflation and rising cost of living at present, many households would not be able to afford increased expenses related to their emissions.

### **Carbon Pricing (Major Centres Eastern Ontario, New Brunswick)**

Participants in two groups took part in conversations related to carbon pricing in Canada. Those residing in Eastern Ontario discussed the federal carbon pricing system, including the Climate Action Incentive Payments (CAIP) distributed to Canadians, while participants in New Brunswick shared their perspectives related to carbon pricing more generally.

### **Carbon Pricing in Canada (Major Centres Eastern Ontario)**

Asked whether they had seen, read, or heard anything about carbon pollution pricing in Canada, most were of the impression that the federal government had recently implemented a price on carbon and that this system was currently in effect in Ontario. Several believed that much of the revenue collected through this program was ultimately returned to Canadian households, though few could recall any specific details as to how this occurred. Only a small number were familiar with the term 'Climate Action Incentive Payment'.

While most reacted positively to this information and were in favour of placing a price on carbon pollution, several questioned whether this program had been effective thus far. While a number felt that this program might have a limited impact on reducing the amount of oil and gas used by Canadians, the view was expressed that for some it would not be possible to reduce daily behaviours such as driving and that this initiative would only serve to make life more unaffordable for these individuals. This was felt to especially be a challenge for those living in rural or remote communities where public transportation options were not more limited.

Discussing whether they expected a federal price on carbon to have a major, minor, or no impact, no participants thought it would have a major impact. While most expressed that they did not know enough about this program and CAIPs to determine whether it was fair to Canadians, several believed that it made sense for the federal government to pursue this initiative, believing that this was generally where the global economy was headed.

### **Carbon Pricing Perspectives (New Brunswick)**

Asked how important they felt it was for the Government of Canada to focus on reducing carbon pollution in Canada, almost all in the group based in New Brunswick believed this should be a top priority. Discussing recent actions taken by the federal government on this front, participants recalled initiatives such as the introduction of a federal price on carbon, investments towards a greener economy including clean energy production and the manufacturing of electric vehicles (EVs), and programs such as the Canada Greener Homes Grant. Almost all supported the implementation of a price on carbon, believing this to be an important step towards protecting the environment and combatting climate change.

Discussing where they would likely go to find information related to carbon pricing, several mentioned official sources such as the Government of Canada website as well as search engines such as Google. Asked whether they would likely seek out information from climate scientists and/or economists, a large number indicated that they would, believing that these experts would likely provide important perspectives on this issue. Informed that many economists had said that setting a price on carbon was the most cost-effective way of reducing carbon emissions at the scale and speed necessary to mitigate the impacts of climate change, most believed that this further justified the federal government's decision to take this action.

Questioned whether they believed that the implementation of a price on carbon would encourage Canadians to reduce their emissions, none expected that it would. It was largely felt that many individuals would still need to partake in carbon emitting activities such as driving and heating their homes and that this would continue to be the case until sustainable clean energy alternatives became more readily available. Almost all, however, reaffirmed their support for a federal price on carbon, believing that actions such as this were important in the long-term fight against climate change.

### **Cost of Living (Major Centres Quebec Low-Income, Hamilton First-Time Home Buyers)**

Two groups engaged in conversations related to the cost of living and actions which had been taken by the federal government to help make life more affordable for Canadians. Almost all felt that the Government of Canada was on the wrong track when it came to addressing the high cost of living at present. A large number cited what they perceived as a substantial increase in prices across all sectors in recent years and were concerned that this trend would continue for the foreseeable future. Asked if they could recall any recent actions from the federal government related to assisting Canadians with the rising cost of living, participants mentioned initiatives such as the provision of Climate Action Incentive Payments (CAIP) as well as the temporary doubling of the goods and services tax/harmonized sales tax (GST/HST) credit.

Identifying areas in their lives in which prices had risen, several mentioned essentials such as groceries, gasoline, and monthly mortgage and rent payments. A number reported no longer dining out at restaurants as well as engaging in fewer entertainment and recreational activities as a result of the rising cost of living. Asked what they felt was contributing to the rising cost of living, several mentioned issues such as increasing transportation costs, the interruption of global supply chains perceived to be caused by the pandemic, and geopolitical issues such as the conflict in Ukraine. While most believed inflation and the rising cost of living to be a global issue, many still felt that there was more the federal government could be doing to address this issue. Suggested actions including increasing housing affordability for low- and middle-income Canadians, implementing price caps on essentials such as groceries and fuel, and placing a greater focus on domestic agriculture and manufacturing.

Participants in the group comprised of low-income individuals residing in Quebec engaged in an additional exercise where they were shown a number of measures from the Government of Canada related to assisting those struggling with the current cost of living and asked to select those which they felt would be the most impactful. Among these initiatives the introduction of the Canada Workers Benefit (CWB) received the highest level of support, with several believing this would not only help those receiving the benefit but stimulate the economy as well by encouraging more Canadians to work. The indexing of benefits to inflation and the provision of a one-time Grocery Rebate also received a high level of support, though some felt more long-term efforts needed to be taken to assist Canadians struggling with grocery prices. While receiving less attention from participants, the expansion of dental care in Canada and the Canada Housing Benefit (CHB) were also widely viewed as important initiatives.

### **Housing (Hamilton First-Time Home Buyers, Yukon, Major Centres British Columbia, G.V.A. Concerned About Crime)**

Participants in four groups took part in discussions related to housing. These conversations focused on a range of issues, including measures recently announced by the federal government to assist first-time home buyers, initiatives to build an increased number of homes across Canada, and concerns related to housing in Northern communities.

#### **Prospective Home Buyers (Hamilton First-Time Home Buyers)**

Participants residing in Hamilton shared their perspectives related to the affordability of Canadian housing and the challenges that they had faced related to purchasing their first home. Asked to identify the largest barriers faced by prospective home buyers at present, a large number mentioned the significant down payment one needed to purchase a home in many parts of the country, believing that the amount required had become prohibitively expensive for many. Asked if they were aware of any recent actions taken by the Government of Canada related to housing, participants recalled the implementation of a two-year temporary ban on non-Canadians from purchasing residential housing properties, as well as the introduction of the Underused Housing Tax (UHT) and the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive (FTHBI).

All felt that the Government of Canada was on the wrong track regarding housing affordability. Several were of the view that while some supports had been provided, these had done little to address long-term issues related to housing affordability and the perceived exponential rise of housing prices in recent years. Asked what more needed to happen to address this issue, participants suggested a range of potential actions. These included the provision of further financial assistance via grants and loans to assist first-time home buyers in affording down payments, the development of social housing projects specifically for low-income Canadians, and for the Bank of Canada (BOC) to consider lowering interest rates to make mortgages more affordable for home buyers.

Participants next engaged in an exercise where they were presented with information related to numerous housing initiatives recently announced by the Government of Canada and asked to identify which they felt would have the most impact. The introduction of the FTHBI received the highest level of support among participants, with several of the view that this would assist prospective home buyers in affording a down payment, which they believed to be the most significant barrier to purchasing a home at present. Likewise, the introduction of the Tax-Free First Home Savings Account (FHSA) received a number of positive reactions, with some expecting that this would make it easier for Canadians to save up for their down payments. While receiving less attention, participants were also mostly positive in their reactions to the expansion of the FTHBI to make it easier for single Canadians to access, the doubling of the First-Time Home Buyers' Tax Credit (HBTC), and the investment of \$200 million towards rent-to-own housing options.

The group was next presented with a second list of initiatives, this time focusing on making a positive impact on the housing market more generally. Among these, the measure to ban blind bidding received the highest level of support among participants, with many believing that this would have a sizeable impact on reducing housing prices. A large number reacted positively to the decision to temporarily ban non-Canadians living outside of Canada from purchasing residential properties. It was also felt by some that the introduction of a new house-flipping tax by the federal government could be an effective way of preventing this practice.

### **Housing Supply (Major Centres British Columbia, G.V.A. Concerned About Crime)**

Two groups based in British Columbia (B.C.) took part in a brief conversation related to the housing supply and initiatives to build more homes in Canada. Asked to identify the largest challenges related to housing that required further attention from the federal government, several mentioned the perceived lack of affordable housing options in a large number of Canadian communities. Related to this a few were of the impression that this problem would likely increase in the years to come given the federal government's commitment to increasing the rate of new immigrants to Canada. Asked whether building more homes should be a priority for the federal government, while most believed that it should it was also felt that efforts needed to be taken to build homes specifically for low- and middle-income Canadians who were currently struggling to purchase a home.

Describing the most significant barriers when it came to building more homes, a large number believed that increases in the costs of labour and materials in recent years had made these projects significantly more expensive for developers. A number were also of the view that there were too many regulations related to home building at present and that more needed to be done, especially at the





municipal level, to streamline the approval process for new housing developments. It was largely felt that all levels of government had a role to play in increasing the housing supply for Canadians. Discussing the federal government's role more specifically, most felt that it would be most effective on this front through the provision of increased financial support for new housing projects as well as by developing and overseeing a national strategy to construct more homes.

### **Northern Housing (Yukon)**

Participants residing in Yukon shared their perspectives related to housing in their respective communities as well as the North more broadly. Almost all described the housing situation as poor in their region, with many citing issues such as high rent prices, a lack of safe and affordable housing, and a limited supply of new housing available for purchase. It was generally felt that the housing situation in the North had worsened in recent years and most expected that this trend would continue unless action was taken by the federal government to address these issues.

Asked what could be done to improve this situation, a number felt that the Government of Canada should devote more resources towards building affordable housing in the region. Additionally, it was thought that there should be a greater focus on increasing density in Northern communities, building larger housing complexes and allowing more people to be able to live in a smaller amount of space. It was largely felt that housing was a shared responsibility of both the federal and territorial governments and that efforts needed to be taken at all levels to ensure Northern communities had sufficient levels of safe and affordable housing.

### **Health Care (Yukon)**

Participants in one group engaged in a discussion related to health care provision in their region. Asked to describe the current health care system in Yukon, participants identified a range of challenges. These included long wait times for emergency care and important appointments and procedures, limited medical resources, a shortage of doctors and nurses, and a lack of mental health and addiction treatment services. Many felt that Yukon's health care system required major changes, namely in the form of increased financial investments, additional opportunities for health care education and training for those living in the region, and greater incentives to attract and retain doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals in Northern communities.

Asked if they had heard of any recent actions from the Government of Canada related to health care, mental health, or substance use and addiction, very few could recall anything. Presented with information related to a recent agreement reached between the federal government and Yukon to provide increased funding for health care in the territory, almost all reacted negatively to this information. Many were of the opinion that more territorial and provincial oversight from the federal government was needed in order to effectively provide health care services and to make the most effective use of this funding.





### **Pharmacare (New Brunswick, Major Centres British Columbia)**

Two groups engaged in discussions related to the potential implementation of a national pharmacare program. Asked to identify the biggest challenges related to health care in need of further attention from the Government of Canada participants identified a wide range of issues. These included long wait times in accessing emergency care, a perceived shortage of doctors and nurses, a lack of family doctors, increased burnout among medical professionals, and a widespread dearth of mental health services. Asked specifically about the cost of prescription drugs, few felt this to be a significant issue at present. Many commented that Canadians typically received coverage in this area through their employers, while a few were of the impression that these costs could be claimed on one's annual tax returns. A smaller number felt differently, believing that prescription drug coverage was not affordable in a number of cases, including for the treatment of serious diseases such as cancer and diabetes.

Provided with information related to plans for a potential national pharmacare program almost all reacted positively to this information, with several expressing particular enthusiasm regarding the commitment by the federal government to negotiate prescription drug prices on behalf of Canadians. A few felt more negatively about this initiative, believing a national pharmacare program was too ambitious and unlikely to be financially feasible if implemented.

Informed that this program could either be provided universally for all Canadians or via a 'close the gaps' approach, providing coverage for those who currently did not have it, participants expressed a range of opinions. Many believed that the fully public plan would promote fairness and accessibility while reducing the cost of employee benefits packages, which were thought to have expensive premiums at present. A number, however, were concerned that this approach could lead to over-prescription by pharmacists and the potential for exploitation for those seeking to use these medications for recreational purposes. The positive aspects associated by participants with the 'close the gaps' approach were primarily linked to perceived lower costs for the overall program, the targeting of federal assistance to those who needed it most, and a more personalized approach to pharmacare. Many, however, expressed concerns regarding the possible emergence of a two-tier pharmacare system if this approach were to be implemented.

Asked if they would support a universal pharmacare program, those in the group from New Brunswick were mostly supportive, while participants in British Columbia (B.C.) were more skeptical, feeling that there were more pressing issues related to health care for the federal government to focus on. Asked whether they would still support this program in the event that it increased the federal deficit or led to increased or new taxation, very few in either group indicated that they would.

### **Substance Use and Addiction (Southern Ontario South Asian Diaspora, Major Centres British Columbia, G.V.A. Concerned About Crime)**

Three groups took part in discussions related to substance use and addiction. Asked whether substance use was an issue in their communities, almost all in the two groups based in British Columbia (B.C.) believed it to be a major issue while most in southern Ontario believed it to be a minor issue or not an issue at all. Asked if they could recall any recent actions taken by the Government of

Canada on this front, several believed that it had provided funding and support for supervised consumption sites in several provinces/territories. Other actions cited included efforts to ensure drug users had access to clean needles as well as allowing for the provision of free Naloxone kits in most Canadian pharmacies.

Asked to share what came to mind when they heard the term 'safer supply', most believed that this referred to the regulation and/or distribution of illicit substances for those suffering from addiction to ensure that they were not consuming drugs which had potentially been cut with toxic substances. Asked if they were familiar with the term 'supervised consumption site', several were of the impression that these were locations in which individuals struggling with addiction could come to consume illicit substances in a safe place and in the presence of health care professionals. While most felt that the availability of a safer supply and supervised consumption sites would likely have a beneficial impact on protecting drug users and reducing overdoses, few believed that this would have a tangible effect on reducing addiction and the use of illicit substances. Several expressed the opinion that in addition to harm reduction efforts, there needed to be a greater focus on treating and assisting these individuals in overcoming their addictions.

Both groups based in B.C. were asked to share their perspectives regarding the recent decision by the Government of Canada to grant an exemption to the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* to remove criminal penalties for the possession of up to 2.5 grams of certain illegal drugs in B.C. Almost all residing in the Greater Vancouver Area (G.V.A.) supported this action while those residing in major centres across B.C. were more mixed in their opinions. For those who supported this action, it was felt that this would allow law enforcement to devote greater resources towards other areas and potentially take pressure off the province's criminal justice system. Amongst those who were more uncertain or opposed to this measure, concerns were raised that this would lead to the increased use of these substances now that individuals were no longer concerned about the potential legal consequences of possessing them.

### **French Language Protection and Promotion (Quebec Montérégie Region)**

Participants residing in the Montérégie Region engaged in a brief conversation regarding the importance of protecting and promoting the French language in Canada. While most felt that this was an important priority and one in need of increased attention from the federal government, few were aware of any recent initiatives or announcements on this front. Informed that the Government of Canada had recently introduced its *Action Plan for Official Languages: 2023-2028*, participants were provided with a list of key objectives and proposed measures related to this plan.

All reacted positively to these measures and it was widely felt that these actions would be highly useful towards protecting and promoting the French language both in Quebec and throughout the rest of Canada. Several expected that the provision of increased investments towards language training for newcomers would have a significant impact on increasing the prevalence of French in Canada. A number also believed that greater investments towards an increased number of Francophone child care centres across Canada would be impactful in that it would enable children to develop French language skills from an early age.

### **Community Safety and Bail Reform (Southern Ontario South Asian Diaspora, G.V.A. Concerned About Crime)**

Two groups discussed the issue of community safety as well as recent actions taken by the Government of Canada related to bail reform. Asked whether they believed that their respective communities were safe, a larger number did relative to those who felt otherwise. Almost all were of the impression that the rate of crime had increased in their communities in recent years. Describing the potential causes behind rising crime, a number believed that an increase in the rate of homelessness, addiction, and those suffering from mental health challenges had been significant contributing factors.

Asked if they had recently seen, read, or heard anything about Canada's bail system very few had. While none were aware of any specific details related to the bail system, a large number were of the impression that it was quite lenient at present and thought that it needed to be stricter. Discussing whether the current bail system was fair, many felt that they did not know about this issue to provide a proper evaluation. Focusing on the impact of individuals re-offending while out on bail, a roughly equal number believed this to be a major issue as those who felt it was only having a minor impact. Informed that the federal government had recently taken actions to strengthen Canada's bail system and make it more difficult for individuals to re-offend, all reacted positively to this information. Most felt that this would prevent individuals from taking advantage of the bail system and expected that it would help towards reducing crime in their communities.

### **Gender Equality (Small and Mid-Size Centres Quebec Younger Men)**

Participants in one group, comprised of younger men residing in small and mid-size centres in Quebec, engaged in a brief conversation related to gender equality. Asked to share their perspectives related to gender stereotypes and the expectations faced by men in society, many believed that traditional gender roles continued to influence societal expectations, particularly in the areas of family, dating, and relationships. A small number were of the impression that men continued to experience a considerable degree of shame or embarrassment when disclosing issues such as mental health challenges and felt that there was still an expectation for men to suppress their emotions rather than share them. Asked how these stereotypes impacted their personal well-being, several expressed feelings of stress and pressure to live up to what they believed were society's expectations of them.

Describing what 'equal rights' meant to them, many believed that this involved both men and women having access to equal rights, responsibilities, opportunities, and expectations in society. Asked if young men had a role to play in promoting gender equality, a large number expressed uncertainty, with many believing that this had already been achieved for the most part. Almost all disagreed with the statement that society was gradually moving away from traditional gender roles occupied by men and women in the workplace and at home. Many believed that it was still difficult for men to take on traditionally female roles and that those who did so continued to be stigmatized to some degree. It was thought that more work needed to be done to ensure that men were accepted and encouraged to take on more traditionally female roles if they desired to do so.



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