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Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – July & August 2023

Final Report

Prepared for the Privy Council Office

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Canada 

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This public opinion research report presents the results of a series of focus groups conducted by The Strategic Counsel on behalf of the Privy Council Office. The fifth cycle of the first year of this study included a total of twelve focus groups with Canadian adults (18 years of age and older) conducted between July 6th, 2023, and August 23rd, 2023.

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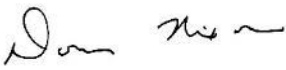
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Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of The Strategic Counsel that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications – Appendix C – Mandatory Procedures for Public Opinion Research.

Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed:  _____

Date: September 7, 2023

Donna Nixon, Partner
The Strategic Counsel

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Executive Summary

Introduction

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

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

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

This report includes findings from 12 online focus groups that were conducted between July 6th, 2023, and August 23rd, 2023, in multiple locations across the country including Alberta, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Atlantic Canada, Québec, and British Columbia (B.C.). Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are provided in the section below.

The research for this cycle focused largely on the Government of Canada's priorities and performance on a range of issues important to Canadians. Related to this, some groups took part in targeted discussions focusing on federal activities related to the cost of living, issues impacting Filipinos in Canada, and the Canada-U.S. Safe Third Country Agreement. All participants discussed what they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days, with a few groups engaging in extended conversations related to their news consumption habits, and their expectations and concerns related to living in Canada in the years to come.

This research cycle also explored issues related to the news media and the enactment of Bill C-18 (the *Online News Act*), suicide prevention, housing, and climate change. Working mothers in the Montérégie region of Quebec took part in discussions related to the job market and the cost of living, while members of the Filipino diaspora in mid-size and major centres in the Prairies shared their perspectives related to the safety of their communities.

Other topics discussed this cycle included the federal price on carbon, issues affecting the 2SLGBTQI+ community, and supports for persons living with disabilities, including the Canada Disability Benefit. Anglophones residing in Quebec discussed their experience living in official language minority communities, while participants in Northern Quebec, rural Quebec, and rural Nova Scotia discussed various challenges specific to their communities.

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 2SLGBTQI+ community, Anglophones residing in Quebec, first-time homebuyers, renters, members of the Filipino diaspora, and working mothers.

Detailed Approach

- Twelve groups across various regions in Canada.
- Six groups were conducted among the general population residing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Northern Quebec, Northern Alberta, Rural Nova Scotia, Mid-size centres in Ontario, and Small centres in Quebec.
- The other six groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
 - 2SLGBTQI+ community;
 - Anglophones in Quebec;
 - First-time homebuyers;
 - Renters and those looking to rent;
 - Working mothers aged 25-54; and
 - Filipino diaspora.
- Three of the 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, 92 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 (EDT)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Greater Toronto Area	1	English	July 6	6:00-8:00	General Population	8
Major Centres Atlantic Canada	2	English	July 11	5:00-7:00	2SLGBTQI+	8
Northern Québec Territories	3	French	July 13	6:00-8:00	General Population	6
Northern Alberta	4	English	July 18	8:00-10:00	General Population	8
Mid-Size and Major Centres Québec	5	English	July 25	6:00-8:00 pm	Anglophones in Quebec	8
Interior B.C.	6	English	July 27	9:00-11:00 pm	First-Time Home Buyers	7
Rural Nova Scotia	7	English	August 8	5:00-7:00	General Population	8
Vancouver	8	English	August 9	9:00-11:00	Renters or those looking to rent	8

Mid-Size Centres Ontario	9	English	August 15	6:00-8:00	General Population	8
Montréal Québec	10	French	August 17	6:00-8:00	Working mothers, aged 25-54	8
Mid-Size and Major Centres Prairies (MB and SK)	11	English	August 22	8:00-10:00	Filipino Diaspora	8
Small Centres Quebec	12	French	August 23	6:00-8:00	General Population	7
Total number of participants						92

Key Findings

Government of Canada in the News (All Locations)

At the beginning of each group, participants were asked what they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days. A wide range of announcements and initiatives were recalled, including the Government of Canada’s response to large-scale wildfires occurring in several parts of the country, the decision by the Bank of Canada to raise the policy interest rate by 25 basis points, and the provision of a one-time Grocery Rebate to eligible lower-income Canadian households. Participants also recalled actions from the federal government such as the enacting of Bill C-18 (the *Online News Act*), the provision of \$1.5 million in funding to Fierté Canada Pride, the introduction of a federal price on carbon in Atlantic Canada, and an investment of an additional \$10.3 million through the Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) to bring high-speed Internet access to more than 1,000 Indigenous homes in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Participants also recalled actions and initiatives related to the Government of Canada on the international stage. These included the attendance of the Prime Minister and other federal officials at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit which took place in Vilnius, Lithuania on July 11th-12th, 2023 and the ongoing provision of financial and military support to Ukraine, as well as efforts to bring in and accommodate Ukrainians displaced by the conflict.

Public Mood (Quebec Montréal Region Working Mothers, Mid-Size and Major Centres Prairies Filipino Diaspora)

Two groups were asked a few additional questions regarding their expectations and concerns related to living in Canada in the years to come. Asked what, if anything, made them optimistic about their lives in Canada in the future, several spoke positively about what they viewed as increasing rates of immigration to Canada. It was felt that the arrival of a greater number of skilled workers from outside of Canada would benefit the country economically and help to address perceived worker shortages across key sectors such as health care and education. A few, who were immigrants themselves, expressed the opinion that there were typically far more economic and social opportunities available to those living in Canada compared to many parts of the world. A number also mentioned what they viewed as the Government of Canada’s protection of reproductive rights for women and its commitment to defending its citizens from gender-based violence and discrimination.

Discussing their concerns regarding life in Canada in the future, several identified challenges related to the cost of living and whether it would be possible for themselves and future generations to continue to afford to live in Canada. Several were specifically worried about the housing market and the ability of their children to ever purchase a home. A few expressed concerns about retirement and were uncertain

as to whether they would ever be able to afford to stop working, especially if the cost of living remained high for a prolonged period of time.

News Sources (Mid-Size and Major Centres Prairies Filipino Diaspora)

Those in the group comprised of members of the Filipino diaspora residing in the Prairies briefly discussed the sources that they would typically use to receive their news. Several reported regularly watching news on television channels such as CBC, CTV, and Global News as well as utilizing social media platforms including Facebook, Reddit, and LinkedIn. Asked which language they received their news in, most reported primarily consuming English-language news. A smaller number also reported occasionally reading and watching news produced in other languages such as Tagalog, Spanish, and French. Discussing where they would likely go if they were looking for news related to the federal government, most cited Canadian news sources such as CBC and Global News as well as websites officially operated by the Government of Canada.

Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (All Locations)

All groups took part in conversations related to the issues currently facing Canadians as well as their perspectives regarding the federal government's management of these priorities. Participants were asked to identify areas in which they believed that the Government of Canada had performed well as of late as well as those in which they felt there was room for improvement. On a number of issues participants expressed mixed views regarding the federal government's performance, including inflation and the cost of living, immigration, health care, and climate change.

Discussing areas where they felt the Government of Canada had been performing well, several mentioned the availability of a wide range of benefits and supports for Canadians, initiatives to protect and promote multiculturalism and diversity in Canada, and the provision of international assistance to countries such as Ukraine. Identifying areas in which they felt the Government of Canada could improve, participants mentioned issues such as a perceived lack of progress towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, Canadians no longer being able to access news content on platforms hosted by Meta and Google, and what was viewed as a widespread lack of affordable housing in many Canadian communities.

Asked to identify the top issues that they felt the Government of Canada should be prioritizing, many reiterated the need to focus on areas such as inflation and the cost of living, housing, health care, immigration (including the building of necessary infrastructure to support an influx to the population), and climate change. A number also believed that there needs to be a greater focus on providing supports for vulnerable groups such as seniors, those living with disabilities, and individuals suffering from challenges related to mental health and addiction.

Cost of Living (Greater Toronto Area, Major Centres Atlantic Canada Members of the 2SLGBTQI+ Community, Interior B.C. First-Time Home Buyers)

Three groups engaged in expanded discussions related to the cost of living. All believed that the cost of living had risen considerably in recent years and needed to be a top priority for the Government of Canada to focus on. Several were of the impression that it had become increasingly difficult for many Canadian households to make ends meet financially as of late. Almost all reported having changed their spending habits over the past year in response to the high rate of inflation. Describing specific actions that they had taken, many indicated now being far more likely to purchase non-brand name products and

groceries as well as seeking out deals and coupons to a far greater extent than they previously had. Several had decreased activities such as dining out at restaurants and attending concerts and other events, while a number reported having taken actions such as postponing planned vacations, delaying major life events such as getting married, or deciding not to purchase a home at this time.

Discussing what they felt was behind the rising cost of living, many believed it had resulted from supply chain disruptions and increased fuel and transportation costs thought to be associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and global events such as the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Several were of the view that a higher rate of immigration to Canada in recent years had contributed to the rising cost of living, placing increased demand on sectors such as housing where costs were already believed to be quite high. Asked if they could recall any actions taken by the Government of Canada to address inflation and the cost of living, several mentioned the provision of a one-time Grocery Rebate that had recently been sent to some lower-income Canadians as part of an increase to their quarterly goods and services tax/harmonized sales tax (GST/HST) credit. Almost all expected that the cost of living would continue to worsen over the next year in the absence of significant action from the federal government.

Filipino Canadians (Mid-Size and Major Centres Prairies Filipino Diaspora)

One group, comprised of members of the Filipino diaspora, engaged in a brief discussion related to the Filipino community in Canada. Asked what they felt were the top issues impacting Filipinos that required greater prioritization from the federal government, several mentioned immigration and the need to provide increased resources (such as language training, education about the Canadian financial system, and cultural supports) to those newly arriving to Canada. Focusing on the immigration process specifically, many believed that efforts needed to be taken to expedite application processing times as well as streamline the foreign credential recognition process for those educated outside of Canada. It was thought that by taking action to streamline this process, the Government of Canada would make progress in addressing perceived long-standing worker shortages in vital areas such as health care, child care, and education, where it was believed that Filipinos skilled in these areas could make an immediate positive impact.

Asked whether they felt that the Government of Canada paid attention to and understood the issues important to the Filipino community, a large number believed that it did. It was generally thought that the federal government placed a high priority on protecting and celebrating diversity throughout Canada and that there was a wide range of cultural resources available to Filipinos in many parts of the country. A few believed that while supports for Filipinos were generally widely present in major urban centres, these were typically less available in more rural communities.

Safe Third Country Agreement (Rural Quebec)

Participants residing in rural Quebec briefly discussed the Canada-U.S. border, and notably the recent expansion of the Canada-United States (U.S.) Safe Third Country Agreement. Discussing whether they had seen, read, or heard about asylum seekers entering Quebec via Roxham Road, a large number reported being aware of this. While a few were of the impression that action had recently been taken to prevent these crossings, none could recall any specific details. Asked whether they had heard of the Canada-U.S. Safe Third Country Agreement, only a small number had. Provided with information about this agreement, most were positive in their reactions. Believing that many of those entering Canada between official ports of entry and claiming asylum had been putting themselves ahead of those applying for permanent residency in Canada via other immigration channels, a number thought that returning these individuals to the U.S. would increase the fairness of the immigration system. A few, however, were worried that taking this action may have unexpected consequences and expressed concerns that asylum

seekers looking to enter Canada may attempt to do so via increasingly desperate and dangerous means going forward.

News Media (Greater Toronto Area, Northern Quebec, Mid-Size and Major Centres Quebec Anglophones, Mid-Size Centres Ontario)

Four groups took part in conversations related to the news industry in Canada. Asked how much time they typically spend reading, watching, or listening to the news, participants provided a range of responses, with the largest number reporting consuming approximately 30 minutes – 1 hour of news per day. Describing their primary sources for news, participants mostly reported utilizing television, news websites, and social media platforms to receive their news. Participants specifically mentioned outlets such as CBC, Global News, CP24, CNN, and BBC as places they usually turn to for televised/digital news while those who utilized social media indicated using platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok. Asked whether they felt that some sources of news were more reliable than others, participants largely believed that news content produced by traditional media outlets was typically more accurate than news stories they encountered on social media. The view was expressed that news found on social media could often be editorialized by the individual posting it and was based more on opinion rather than fact.

Asked to share their impressions regarding how the news media industry had changed over the last decade, a large number believed that news had become more opinion-oriented and sensationalized in recent years. Several also commented on the more instantaneous nature of news today, believing that this had been brought on by the advent of social media and the ability of users to post news updates about events as they were happening in real time. Almost all believed that Canadians now had far more ways to access the news compared to a decade ago and most were of the impression that there were more news outlets operating in Canada today compared to in the past. Many living in more rural or mid-sized centres believed that there was considerably less news coverage of local happenings in their communities and that much of the news that they received was primarily focused on national or global events.

Informed that the number of media outlets in Canada and jobs in journalism had declined in recent years, a large number believed that this had primarily been the result of the perceived growing reliance of Canadians on the Internet and social media for their news. It was thought by several that due to people now having instantaneous access to news from across Canada and around the world via devices such as smartphones there was now no longer as much of a need for locally produced television and/or print news. Asked to what extent this decline in the number of Canadian news outlets was concerning to them, only a small number indicated being worried about this issue. While a few expressed concerns that this decrease in news outlets could lead to less legitimate sources being available to Canadians, most believed that this did not represent a problem, so long as major outlets such as CBC, CTV, and Global News continued to provide accurate information.

Asked whether they felt that protecting and supporting the Canadian news industry should be a priority for the federal government, few did. While it was widely felt that the Government of Canada should continue to ensure that news was widely accessible to all Canadians in the official language of their choice, only a small number believed that the news industry in general should be a top priority at present. Provided with information regarding the new requirement from the federal government for some large digital platforms to pay news outlets for news stories hosted on their platforms, participants were mixed in their reactions. Among those who supported this action, it was felt that locally based news and strong journalistic practices were critical for keeping a population informed about the happenings around them

and that unless action was taken to protect these outlets it was likely that there would be fewer legitimate Canadian news organizations operating going forward. For those who were opposed to this action, it was felt that requiring digital platforms to pay for the news shared on their platforms may have the unintended consequence of reducing the amount of news available to Canadians, especially those who primarily receive their news from social media. A few voiced the opinion that, rather than being a detriment, it was beneficial for Canadian outlets to have their news shared on social media as this greatly increased the reach of their content and could have the additional benefit of driving more users to the websites operated by these organizations.

Suicide Prevention (Greater Toronto Area, Major Centres Atlantic Canada Members of the 2SLGBTQI+ Community, Northern Alberta)

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

Three groups took part in discussions related to suicide prevention and the implementation of 9-8-8, a three-digit telephone number to assist those suffering from emotional distress and dealing with suicidal ideation. Shown a number of potential statements designed to promote and provide information related to this service, participants largely favoured those that were direct, informative, and featured language conveying the gravity of these mental health challenges. A number believed that an effective statement for this service would need to maintain a balance between communicating the urgency and seriousness of suicidal ideation while also reassuring those considering using the service that they would be met with compassion and understanding.

Sharing their perspectives regarding a number of features important to the service, all felt that it was important to emphasize the confidentiality of the 9-8-8 line. It was believed that this would provide those in need of assistance with the reassurance that their conversations would be conducted in a safe and private manner. Very few were familiar with the term 'trauma-informed', with several believing that this phrase was unlikely to resonate with much of the general public. While some believed that it was important for the service to be culturally inclusive, a larger number felt that this was likely not a top priority for those suffering from emotional crises. While it was viewed as beneficial for the service to be inclusive, most felt that the key focus needed to be on providing those calling/texting 9-8-8 with help for their immediate problems rather than ensuring that the assistance provided aligned with their unique cultures and backgrounds. While a few thought that it was intuitive that this service would be free and did not believe that this needed to be emphasized, several felt differently. Among these participants, it was expressed that cost was often a deterrent for many in seeking help for their mental health and that it was important to highlight the free nature of the service in the messaging.

Focusing on the 9-8-8 service more generally, participants were asked what types of promotional materials, information resources, or advertising about 9-8-8 they would be most likely to pay attention to. It was widely felt that this information should be presented across a wide range of platforms and targeted towards a variety of demographics (with a particular focus on younger Canadians). Areas mentioned by participants where 9-8-8 could be advertised included social media, television and radio, and on physical spaces such as bus benches and billboards. It was felt that given the perceived prevalence of mental health concerns among Canadians right now, the focus should be on reaching as many people as possible with this message. A number felt that it would be helpful to include additional information regarding what those reaching out could expect after calling/texting 9-8-8. Almost all reported that they would be motivated to share information regarding 9-8-8 with family, friends, and others in their lives who may require assistance.

Housing (Interior B.C. First-Time Home Buyers, City of Vancouver Renters, Mid-Size Centres Ontario)

Three groups took part in discussions related to housing. These conversations focused on recent housing initiatives announced by the Government of Canada, challenges currently impacting renters, and participants' perspectives related to the current housing supply in Canada and potential actions that could be taken to build more homes.

Housing Initiatives (Interior B.C. First-Time Home Buyers, City of Vancouver Renters, Mid-Size Centres Ontario)

All three groups engaged in discussions related to a range of housing initiatives recently announced by the Government of Canada. Discussing what they felt were the biggest challenges related to housing that required greater attention from the federal government, several believed that more needed to be done to increase the housing supply, including building homes that were affordable for lower- and middle-income Canadians. Asked to identify the biggest barriers they had encountered when seeking to purchase their first home, participants in the group comprised of first-time home buyers residing in Interior British Columbia (B.C.) described a range of issues. These included the significant amounts required for a down payment, difficulties in securing a large enough mortgage to afford a home in their area, and challenges related to saving up enough money to purchase a home amidst the perceived high cost of living at present. Discussing potential actions that could be taken by the Government of Canada to assist prospective first-time home buyers, participants in this group felt that more needed to be done to make the prices of homes more affordable for a larger number of Canadians.

Participants were next shown information related to numerous housing initiatives that had recently been announced by the Government of Canada. Focusing on the First Home Savings Account (FHSA), while some thought this might be helpful, it was generally believed that even if one were able to achieve the maximum benefit of this program by saving up to \$40,000 tax-free, this would still likely not be enough to afford a down payment in most Canadian communities. Opinions were mixed regarding the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive. While some believed that this could provide an avenue to homeownership for some, participants questioned what would happen if those using this program were no longer able to make their payments or if the value of their property declined substantially. Most also reacted positively to the decision to expand the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive, increasing its flexibility and making it easier for single Canadians to access. None felt that doubling the First-Time Home Buyers' Tax Credit (HBTC) would have much of an impact, believing that the \$1500 of additional support would make very little difference considering the substantial costs of purchasing a home in most communities. While most were supportive of the action to temporarily ban non-Canadians from purchasing residential property for two years, several believed that this action should go further and that this ban should be made permanent. Likewise, while the Housing Accelerator Fund was seen as a step in the right direction, a few questioned whether the \$4 billion investment would be enough considering the number of houses they believed would need to be built to meet the current level of demand. Focusing on these actions from the Government of Canada as a whole, very few felt that these would do much in the way of assisting prospective home buyers. It was believed that the housing market in many communities was too expensive for any of these measures to have much of an effect.

Renters (City of Vancouver Renters, Mid-Size Centres Ontario)

Participants in two groups engaged in discussions related to actions taken by the Government of Canada specifically focused on supporting renters. All residing in the group based in the City of Vancouver were currently renters or were looking for a place to rent. Among these participants, it was widely believed that

rental costs in Vancouver were too high, there was too much competition for available rentals, and that landlords often took advantage of this situation to drive rental costs up further. Several in this group believed that a lack of new affordable housing developments as well as the growing popularity of short-term rental platforms such as Airbnb had served to further exacerbate this issue. Discussing actions that could be taken to improve the situation for renters in Vancouver, participants mentioned potential initiatives such as implementing caps on the amount of rent that can be charged by landlords, building more housing for the specific purpose of providing affordable rentals, and placing limits on the number of properties an individual or business could own.

Asked whether they could recall any actions that the Government of Canada had taken to address the current challenges facing renters, while a small number mentioned the provision of a one-time \$500 top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit (CHB) to some lower-income households earlier in 2023, none were aware of any other actions from the federal government on this front. Discussing what, if anything, the Government of Canada should do to support renters, participants recommended actions such as placing caps on how much rent a landlord can charge, building more housing with a specific focus on affordable rental developments, and increasing support for those currently struggling to afford their monthly rent.

Provided with information related to the Canada Housing Benefit (CHB), very few recalled having received this support and a number questioned the income threshold for this initiative, believing it might have been set too low. Only a small number reported having been previously aware of this program. While a few expected that this support might provide some households with some temporary relief from high rental costs at present, none believed that this would have any impact on the long-term problems facing renters.

Housing Supply (Interior B.C. First-Time Home Buyers, Mid-Size Centres Ontario)

Two groups also took part in conversations related to potential actions that could be taken by the federal government to increase the housing supply in Canada. Asked what they had seen, read, or heard about any work the Government of Canada had done or was planning on doing to encourage the construction of more homes, few could. While most were of the impression that the federal government had made commitments to build more housing, including for lower-income Canadians, none could recall any specific initiatives or details. Provided with information regarding the recently announced Housing Accelerator Fund, a \$4 billion fund that provides money to municipal governments to encourage them to take steps to increase the local housing supply in their communities, most reacted positively to this information. It was believed that any actions taken to increase the housing supply represented a step in the right direction. A few, however, expressed concern about the long-term quality of these homes if they were built too rapidly and did not follow typical homebuilding procedures. Several expected that while this action would likely have a positive impact in the long-term, it may take a significant amount of time for communities to build the number of homes necessary to address the housing needs of their residents.

All supported taking action to increase the housing supply in their respective communities. Asked whether they felt that there should be consequences for municipalities that do not prioritize building enough homes, participants were mixed in their reactions. While a number believed that there should be consequences for communities that do not actively seek to build more homes, several thought this should be determined on a community-by-community basis. It was expressed that due to factors such as existing community planning strategies, a lack of necessary infrastructure, zoning requirements, and/or environmental concerns, it may be difficult for some municipalities to build more housing. Asked whether they had any concerns about building more homes faster in their community, some questioned whether there would be enough resources available to build the additional infrastructure (such as public

transportation, hospitals, and schools) that would need to accompany new large-scale housing developments.

Asked what impact, if any, they felt that municipal zoning bylaws could have on the building of more homes, most believed these had a significant influence as they determined what types of housing could be built and where. While some felt that communities should be encouraged to adjust their zoning bylaws to allow for the building of more homes, a roughly equal number thought this may not be the best course of action. Among these participants, it was felt that many municipalities had likely been planned around existing zoning bylaws and that adjusting them may have unintended consequences on the community and the surrounding environment. Asked what more they felt the Government of Canada should do to assist in the building of more homes, participants recommended a number of actions. These included converting vacant commercial real estate and offices into residential housing, building affordable rental housing targeted towards specific groups such as seniors and students, and recruiting more Canadians to pursue careers in the trades in order to carry out the building of more homes.

Climate Change (Northern Alberta, Rural Nova Scotia, Rural Quebec)

Three groups took part in discussions related to climate change. These conversations focused on the recent impacts of extreme weather on participants' communities, actions that can be taken on an individual level to mitigate the dangers of climate change, and the Government of Canada's response to the large-scale wildfires that had recently been occurring in many parts of the country.

Community Impacts (Northern Alberta, Rural Nova Scotia, Rural Quebec)

All three groups engaged in a conversation related to climate change and recent extreme weather events (such as wildfires, mass flooding, and windstorms) that have been impacting several parts of the country, including in their respective regions. All felt that climate change was an important priority for the federal government to focus on and many were concerned about the potential impacts a changing environment would have on their own lives as well as those of future generations. A large number expressed the view that recent wildfires and/or flooding in their respective areas had been the result of climate change and had served as a strong reminder of the potential threats this issue posed.

Discussing the impacts of climate change that they had observed in their own communities many in Northern Alberta mentioned recent wildfires that had impacted their region. Several were of the impression that recent wildfires had led to significant property loss in some communities as well as a considerable drop in the air quality in their region due to the smoke produced by these fires. A number in rural Quebec recalled facing challenges related to flooding in their local regions as well as poor quality due to smoke from nearby wildfires. In addition to the recent damage caused by wildfires and flooding in their area, many in Nova Scotia recalled the devastating impact of Hurricane Fiona on their communities in 2022 and were worried that severe storms such as this would be occurring in their region with increasing frequency going forward. Several expressed concerns about the impact that changing/more extreme weather patterns could have on agricultural production within their provinces and questioned whether it would still be possible to produce enough food to meet the needs of Canadians in the decades to come. Very few felt that their communities were sufficiently prepared for climate change and only a small number reported having taken actions in their own lives to better prepare for its impacts going forward. Among those who had begun preparing for climate change, participants reported taking actions such as storing emergency supplies of food and water, planting a home garden, and changing their daily habits to reduce their carbon footprint.

Climate Change Behaviours (Rural Quebec)

Participants in rural Quebec took part in an additional discussion regarding the actions that can be taken on an individual level to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Asked whether they felt that individuals had a responsibility to help stop climate change, almost all did. Discussing behaviours that one can take that could help prevent climate change, participants identified actions such as recycling and reducing household waste, growing food in a garden, converting to more energy-efficient home heating systems, and utilizing public and/or active transportation rather than personal automobiles.

Asked whether, over the next six months, they intended to engage in more, less, or about the same number of pro-climate actions, a roughly equal number of participants expected that they would do more as those who would likely continue to do the same. No participants planned on engaging in fewer pro-climate actions over the next six months. Questioned whether knowing others were taking action to stop climate change would likely influence them to do the same, most felt that it would, believing that the actions of others would serve as a source of motivation and encouragement. Asked whether they felt that individual actions, taken on a collective level, could have an impact on reducing the impacts of climate change, almost all believed this to be the case.

Wildfire Response (Northern Alberta)

Participants residing in Northern Alberta engaged in an additional conversation specifically focusing on the Government of Canada's response to recent wildfires in their region. Asked what they had seen, read, or heard related to the federal government on this front, a number were of the impression that it had deployed Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel as well as recruited firefighters from outside of Canada to assist with the response. Most felt that the federal government had done a strong job in responding to this emergency, believing it had reacted quickly and decisively to combat the fires and assist those who had been displaced from their homes.

Provided with information regarding the actions that the Government of Canada had taken in response to these wildfires, most believed that these actions were headed in the right direction when it came to assisting those impacted by the fires. Asked what more should be done by the federal government to address wildfires, it was thought that greater resources should be placed into assisting communities with the development of emergency response plans to ensure that they were better prepared for these types of events going forward. It was also felt that increased investments should be made into volunteer firefighter programs, with several believing that these were heavily relied on by rural and remote communities to protect themselves against wildfires.

Carbon Pricing (Rural Nova Scotia)

One group, comprised of participants residing in rural communities in Nova Scotia, discussed the recent implementation of a federal price on carbon in their province. Almost all felt that reducing carbon pollution was an important priority for the Government of Canada to focus on. Several believed that carbon pollution was a significant driver of climate change and that it had been a major contributing factor to what they viewed as an increased number of extreme weather events in recent years. While all reported having heard something about carbon pollution pricing in Canada, several were uncertain as to whether there was currently a federal price on carbon in place in Nova Scotia. Asked whether they had heard anything about Climate Action Incentive Payments (CAIPs) a greater number reported being unaware of these payments relative to those who were. Very few reported having received a CAIP to date.

Provided with information regarding the implementation of a federal price on carbon, almost all reacted negatively. While several reiterated that it was important to take action to reduce carbon pollution, none felt that the implementation of a price on carbon was the right action to take at this time. Many expressed concerns that this would lead to an overall increase in the cost of living and would make it harder for Canadian households (many of whom were already believed to be struggling due to high inflation) to make ends meet financially. A number believed that this initiative would have a disproportionate impact on those living rurally who had to drive long distances during their daily activities and were unable to reduce their emissions even if they desired to.

Receiving further information related to the implementation of carbon pricing in Nova Scotia as of July 1st, 2023, none felt that this system would have a positive impact. Many were of the opinion that rather than improving the lives of Canadians, the implementation of a price on carbon would increase the cost of living, both in terms of the additional costs paid directly by consumers as well as what they expected would be increasing costs for businesses to manufacture and transport goods both within and outside of Canada. It was expected that increased manufacturing and transportation costs would ultimately lead to higher prices being passed on to consumers across a wide range of goods and services. The view was expressed that rather than implementing a price on carbon, the federal government should instead devote greater resources towards incentivizing Canadians to install devices such as solar panels and heat pumps in their homes that would assist them in reducing their household emissions.

Jobs and the Economy (Quebec Montérégie Region Working Mothers)

Participants in one group, comprised of working mothers residing in the Montérégie region of Québec, shared their perspectives regarding the current employment market, the cost of living, and their experiences as parents amidst the present economic climate. Asked how they would rate the Canadian job market at present, participants were mixed in their assessments. Several were of the impression that the employment market was quite strong at present, believing that there was presently a large number of jobs available across a wide range of sectors. A few expressed the opinion that many Canadians, and younger people in particular, did not seem to be interested in working for the wages currently being offered by employers. A number felt that this was understandable, believing that it was the responsibility of employers to offer prospective workers a living wage and sufficient benefits and that many of the positions currently available did not do so.

Discussing whether it had been easy or difficult to find a job in a field of interest to them, participants were varied in their responses. While some had found this process relatively straightforward, others had experienced considerable difficulties. Asked whether they had faced any challenges in their jobs specifically related to being working mothers, several recalled facing challenges with their employer during situations where they had to balance their work with taking care of their children as a result of illness, injury, or some other emergency. Asked whether they felt that the Canadian job market would be better, worse, or about the same in five years' time, several expected it to worsen. It was thought that automation and the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) would lead to fewer positions being available to prospective workers. Additionally, a few expressed concerns that there would be a growing worker shortage in fields such as the trades, which were believed to be less popular among younger Canadians at present. Questioned whether they felt that the Government of Canada was on the right track when it came to creating good jobs, the opinion was expressed that more could be done by the Government of Canada to improve employment conditions for working parents, including by implementing standards to ensure employers were supportive and accepting of the work-life balance required for most parents.

Focusing on the economy more broadly, most believed that the Government of Canada was currently on the wrong track when it came to its management of issues such as the cost of living, inflation, and ensuring Canadians were able to continue to make ends meet financially. Asked which economic issues they were most worried about from their perspective as working mothers, most mentioned the general rise in the cost of living, commenting that the prices of essentials such as groceries, gasoline, clothing, and school supplies had all risen considerably in recent years. Several reported having taken actions such as cutting back on recreational and entertainment expenses for themselves and their children, postponing family vacations, and having had to seek out assistance from family members to pay for after-school programs such as sports.

Questioned whether they were aware of any policies, programs, services, or benefits from the Government of Canada aimed at assisting parents, participants mentioned initiatives such as the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), Canada Dental Benefit (CDB), and a range of recent initiatives believed to be targeted towards assisting prospective first-time home buyers. Provided with additional information about the CCB and CDB, participants were very positive in their reactions and were especially pleased that benefits such as the CCB would be indexed to the rate of inflation. Focusing on the CDB, a number who did not have dental benefits and/or insurance through their employer expected that they would benefit immensely from this program. Asked what more the Government of Canada could do to support working mothers, participants recommended actions such as working to increase the number of sick days available to Canadian parents, providing increased benefits and supports to those with children with rare diseases and/or medical conditions, and increasing the income thresholds for these supports to make them more widely available to Canadian families.

Community Safety (Mid-Size and Major Centres Prairies Filipino Diaspora)

One group, comprised of members of the Filipino diaspora residing in the Prairies, shared their perspectives related to the safety of their respective communities and perceived rising crime in recent years. Many reported feeling less safe in their community as of late, with several reporting that crimes related to violent assaults, property theft, and gang activity had been occurring more frequently over the past few years. Several were of the impression that the rate of homelessness had risen considerably in their communities and speculated that a large portion of the perceived rise in crime had been the result of these individuals (as well as those suffering from mental health and addiction issues) engaging in illegal activity out of desperation.

Asked who was responsible for addressing criminal activity, a number believed that this was primarily the responsibility of municipal governments. Discussing what role they felt that the Government of Canada should have in addressing crime, participants identified areas such as its oversight of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) as well as its ability to address financial and online crimes that occur across several jurisdictions. The view was expressed that the RCMP was especially important for providing law enforcement in smaller communities that did not have a local police force.

Discussing what more should be done by the Government of Canada to reduce crime, several believed that greater resources needed to be allocated towards addressing what they viewed as the root causes of criminal behaviour, including issues related to mental health and addiction. It was thought that these issues had been impacting a larger proportion of Canadians as of late and that greater investments into the treatment of these challenges would likely prevent many individuals from resorting to criminal behaviour. A few also recommended that actions should be taken by the federal government towards stricter bail reform and preventing dangerous individuals from being able to re-offend while released on bail.

Issues Affecting the 2SLGBTQI+ Community (Major Centres Atlantic Canada Members of the 2SLGBTQI+ Community)

One group, comprised of individuals identifying as members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, discussed a number of issues faced by 2SLGBTQI+ individuals as well as recent actions taken by the Government of Canada to address these challenges. While some thought that Canada was generally an inclusive place to live and that tangible progress had been made in recent years towards protecting 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, a larger number were more uncertain as to how they felt. Though many were of the impression that Canada was more inclusive than many other jurisdictions throughout the world, it was also widely thought that 2SLGBTQI+ individuals continued to face discrimination in many parts of the country and that progress on these issues had been inconsistent over recent decades. Several identified what they perceived as an increase in overt hostility over the past two –to three years towards 2SLGBTQI+ individuals and communities.

Asked what more should be done to promote the greater acceptance, support, and inclusion of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, a number emphasized the need for increased empathy and education among Canadians regarding the challenges these communities face. It was also believed that there needed to be a larger focus on providing proactive support for 2SLGBTQI+ initiatives and programming. Many felt that misinformation had contributed to perceived increased acts of hate towards the 2SLGBTQI+ community and believed that more comprehensive strategies needed to be put in place to address this issue. All felt that promoting and protecting 2SLGBTQI+ rights and freedoms was an important priority for the Government of Canada to focus on. Asked whether they believed that the Government of Canada was generally on the right track on this front most were uncertain or mixed in their views. While a large number believed that the Government of Canada's objectives were the correct ones to focus on, it was widely felt that there needed to be a more realistic and definitive action plan as to how they would be achieved.

Discussing additional actions that could be taken by the federal government to support 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, a few believed that there needed to be an increased focus on creating an ongoing dialogue and expanding accessibility to discuss these issues with representatives at all levels of the government. Some also thought that there needed to be greater representation of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals at all levels of government, while others described the need for greater awareness and promotion of these communities outside of Pride Month.

Disability Benefits (Northern Quebec)

One group, comprised of participants residing in Northern Quebec, shared their perspectives regarding the challenges faced by Canadians living with disabilities, as well as the federal government's role in supporting these individuals. A number reported having family members and/or friends who were currently living with a disability. Asked to identify the biggest challenges faced by those living with disabilities, several mentioned difficulties related to accessibility, with some emphasizing the struggles faced by these individuals when it came to accessing public locations and services as well as adapting their own homes to accommodate their needs. It was felt that this perceived lack of accessibility often served to marginalize those with disabilities, making it difficult for them to participate and be active in their communities and society at large.

Discussing the role that the Government of Canada should be playing in addressing these challenges, several underscored the importance of raising awareness regarding those living with disabilities as well as ensuring greater representation of these individuals in all parts of society. Many were strongly supportive

of the notion that the federal government should consider providing those with disabilities with a basic income that would cover their immediate needs such as food, housing, and other costs necessary to improve their quality of life. Informed that the Government of Canada had passed legislation to create a new Canada Disability Benefit, which will provide a direct monthly payment to low-income Canadians with disabilities of working age, several reacted positively, believing this would be of great assistance to these individuals. Asked whether this initiative was something that should be pursued by the Government of Canada, even if it raised taxes, all believed that it should. It was largely felt that there were other ways to reduce public spending and that this initiative was a worthwhile expense for the federal government to support. A number expected that this support would have a positive impact on helping those in their own lives who were currently living with disabilities.

Official Languages (Mid-Size and Major Centres Quebec Anglophones)

One group, comprised of Anglophones residing in Quebec, engaged in a discussion related to the challenges faced by English speakers in a predominantly French-speaking province. Asked whether they had personally encountered any challenges on this front, several recalled difficulties in finding employment and were of the impression that employers in their area generally favoured hiring applicants who could speak French fluently. A number also reported having faced difficulties in accessing English-language services in important areas such as health care, education, and the processing of important permits, like driver's licences. Asked whether these challenges had impacted their sense of belonging or inclusion in their communities, several indicated that they had. No participants were optimistic that the experiences of Anglophones in Quebec would improve going forward and a number expected that they would eventually leave the province at some point in the future due to these concerns.

Several felt that more needed to be done to increase the number of resources and supports available to help non-French speakers in Quebec learn the French language and immerse themselves into the province's culture. Asked what rights official language minority communities (such as French-speaking communities outside of Quebec and English-speaking communities inside Quebec) should have, it was believed that at the minimum there needed to be a guarantee that all public services would be made available in both official languages. Several also thought that more needed to be done to place a greater focus on bilingual education throughout Canada, both at the primary/secondary levels as well as at post-secondary institutions. It was felt that encouraging younger Canadians to learn both official languages as a part of their formal education would lead to greater professional and personal opportunities for these individuals in the future as well as contribute to the greater acceptance of both languages across all parts of the country.

Asked whether they felt that the federal government had a role to play in ensuring the equal status of English speakers in Quebec, many believed that it did, and all felt that this needed to be a major priority going forward. Most felt that the Government of Canada was currently on the wrong track when it came to this issue, and a number were of the impression that while much had been done in recent years to better support Francophones living outside of Quebec, far less attention had been paid to assisting Anglophones in the province. Discussing potential actions that could be taken by the federal government to support English-speaking communities in Quebec, it was believed that a greater emphasis needed to be placed on fostering bilingualism and finding ways to bring English and French speakers together.

Community Challenges (Northern Quebec, Rural Nova Scotia, Rural Quebec)

Participants in three groups engaged in brief discussions related to a range of challenges currently facing their respective communities. Asked to identify the top issues facing their communities that required greater attention from the federal government, participants shared a range of concerns. These included inflation and the cost of living, a lack of affordable housing, difficulties in accommodating higher rates of immigration to rural communities, health care wait times and worker shortages, the need for greater investments into education, and a lack of public transportation available in rural communities.

Discussing the most important industries and sectors to their respective communities and regions, participants in all groups identified areas such as mining, forestry, and health care as being key to the economic well-being of their communities. In addition to these sectors, a number in both groups based in Quebec identified tourism as important to their local economy, while fisheries were viewed as a top sector by those residing in Nova Scotia. Some based in Nova Scotia also mentioned the Michelin tire plant in Pictou County, NS as a key employer and economic driver for their communities.

Identifying the sectors in their region that they felt needed the most help from the federal government, several mentioned health care. It was believed that many (and especially those living in rural communities) were currently facing difficulties in receiving timely care, accessing specialists for important procedures and appointments, and finding a family doctor. A number also mentioned agriculture, believing that this sector had faced challenges in recent years due to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events and was critical to ensuring their region would continue to have a stable food supply. It was thought that greater incentives should be provided by the federal government to encourage younger Canadians to enter the agriculture sector, with some worrying that there would soon be a labour shortage in this area as older farmers began to retire.

MORE INFORMATION

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