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Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – June 2024

Executive Summary

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 second cycle of the second year of this study included a total of twelve focus groups with Canadian adults (18 years of age and older) conducted between June 4th, 2024, and June 27th, 2024.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Rapport final - Collecte continue de données qualitatives sur les opinions des Canadiens – juin 2024.

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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: July 29, 2024

Donna Nixon, Partner
The Strategic Counsel

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 June 4th, 2024, and June 27th, 2024, in multiple locations across the country. Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are provided in the section below.

The research for this cycle focused largely on housing initiatives and immigration, including discussions related to foreign credential recognition and out-of-status workers. Some groups also



engaged in conversations related to health care, pharmacare, capital gains, climate change, electric vehicles (EVs), and clean energy and technology.

Other topics discussed as part of this cycle included what participants had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days, as well as conversations related to participants' news consumption habits and actions that the federal government had taken related to increasing investments towards research and innovation. Participants also shared their perspectives regarding the Government of Canada's management of important priority areas, including the cost of living, agriculture, reconciliation, and issues affecting Southeast Asian Canadians, Arab Canadians, and seniors. Some groups also shared their opinions related to challenges affecting their local communities, the state of diversity, equity and inclusion in Canada, online safety, and creative concepts developed by the Government of Canada pertaining to supplemented foods.

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 young women aged 18-34 who identified as heavier social media users, members of the Southeast Asian diaspora, Arab women aged 35-54, seniors aged 65+, renters, and Indigenous peoples.

Detailed Approach

- Twelve groups were conducted across various regions in Canada.
- Six groups were conducted among the general population residing in the Golden Horseshoe region of Ontario, Saskatchewan, the Estrie region of Quebec, Interior British Columbia (B.C.), Quebec City, and Northern Ontario.
- The other six groups were conducted among key subgroups including:
 - Young women aged 18-34, heavier social media users, residing in Atlantic Canada;
- Members of the Southeast Asian diaspora in Calgary and Edmonton;
 - Arab women aged 35-54 in Toronto;
 - Seniors aged 65+ based in Quebec;
 - Renters residing in Vancouver; and,
 - Indigenous peoples based in Winnipeg.

- The three groups based 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, 86 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 (ET)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Golden Horseshoe	1	EN	Tues, June 4 th	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	8
Saskatchewan	2	EN	Wed, June 5 th	8:00-10:00 PM	General Population	8
Atlantic Canada	3	EN	Thurs, June 6 th	5:00-7:00 PM	Young Women, Aged 18-35 Heavier Social Media Users	8
Calgary & Edmonton	4	EN	Tues, June 11 th	8:00-10:00 PM	Southeast Asian Diaspora	8
Estrie	5	FR	Wed, June 12 th	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	7
British Columbia Interior	6	EN	Thurs, June 13 th	9:00-11:00 PM	General Population	5
Quebec	7	FR	Wed, June 19 th	6:00-8:00 PM	Seniors, Aged 65+	7
Vancouver	8	EN	Thurs, June 20 th	9:00-11:00 PM	Renters	7
Toronto	9	EN	Tues, June 24 th	6:00-8:00 PM	Arab Women, Aged 35-54	8
Northern Ontario	10	EN	Tues, June 25 th	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	6
Quebec City	11	FR	Wed, June 26 th	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	8
Winnipeg	12	EN	Thurs, June 27 th	7:00-9:00 PM	Indigenous Peoples	6
Total number of participants						86

Key Findings

Government of Canada in the News (All Locations)

Participants in all groups were asked to share what they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days. A range of announcements and initiatives were recalled, including the decision by the Bank of Canada to lower its policy interest rate to 4.75 per cent, the tabling of a report by the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP) that had found that numerous members of Parliament had wittingly assisted foreign state actors, and the announcement by the federal government of a national pharmacare program. Participants also mentioned the recent proposal by the Government of Canada to increase the capital gains inclusion rate, actions taken to make housing more affordable for Canadians, and an announcement by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) that it would be moving to the next phase of debt recovery in terms of collecting individual overpayments for benefit programs related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

News Consumption (Atlantic Canada Younger Woman Heavier Social Media Users, Calgary and Edmonton Southeast Asian Diaspora, Quebec Seniors, Toronto Arab Women)

Participants in four groups engaged in an additional discussion related to their news consumption habits. Asked to identify the primary sources they use to receive their news, many mentioned television channels such as CBC, CTV, Global News, BBC, and CNN, radio stations such as CBC Radio, Radio Canada and local channels, and legacy news outlets such as the Globe and Mail, La Presse, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Guardian. Several also mentioned social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn, as well as other digital platforms such as Google News. Asked whether they felt some news sources were more reliable than others, while a number believed that most television, radio, and legacy news outlets were quite trustworthy, many thought that news found on social media (and in particular on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok) should be taken with some degree of skepticism.

Participants in the groups comprised of Arab women residing in Toronto and members of the Southeast Asian diaspora in Calgary and Edmonton, were asked whether they ever sought out news in languages other than English. A number in the group comprised of Arab women reported accessing news from Al Jazeera, often in Arabic, while members of the Southeast Asian diaspora recalled seeking out foreign-language news sources based in countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Discussing where they would likely go to find information and news related to the Government of Canada, most in the groups comprised of Quebec seniors and Arab women in Toronto expected that they would likely rely on official websites run by the federal government, as well as specific agencies such as the CRA and Service Canada.



Research and Innovation (Golden Horseshoe Region Ontario)

Participants residing in the Golden Horseshoe region of Ontario were asked a few additional questions related to research and innovation. Asked whether they had seen, read, or heard about any actions from the federal government on this front, a few recalled hearing about a \$5 billion joint investment it had made (along with the Government of Ontario) towards the building of a new electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing plant in Alliston, Ontario that had been announced by the Honda Motor Company as part of its \$15 billion investment towards EV manufacturing in Canada.

Provided with information related to a number of areas related to research and innovation that the federal government had recently committed to making investments in, most reacted positively, believing that these were important areas for the Government of Canada to be supporting. Several, however, expected that the \$800 million amount would not be enough to sufficiently address all of these priority areas. The view was expressed by some that investments towards areas such as addressing climate change, facilitating learning and training opportunities for post-secondary students, and supporting Indigenous inclusion and research would be especially critical to the long-term success of Canada's research goals going forward.

Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (Golden Horseshoe Region Ontario, Saskatchewan, Calgary and Edmonton Southeast Asian Diaspora, Estrie Region Quebec, Interior British Columbia, Quebec Seniors, Vancouver Renters, Toronto Arab Women, Northern Ontario, Quebec City, Winnipeg Indigenous Peoples)

Eleven groups engaged in discussions 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 felt the Government of Canada was performing well and areas where they felt there was room for improvement.

On a number of issues participants expressed a range of positive and negative views. These included health care, the immigration system, and actions that the Government of Canada had taken related to protecting the environment and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Participants also mentioned a number of areas where they felt that the federal government had performed well, including providing supports and benefits for Canadians, protecting and promoting diversity and multiculturalism, its online services and websites, and humanitarian assistance that it had provided to those in other parts of the world. Additionally, participants identified a range of areas in which they believed the Government of Canada had room for improvement. These included inflation and the cost of living, housing, education (both K-12 and post-secondary), reconciliation, and public safety.

Asked to identify what they viewed as the most important priorities for the federal government to be focusing on, many reiterated the need for a greater emphasis to be placed on addressing the cost of living, including reducing the costs of groceries and housing. A number also felt that more needed to be done related to immigration, including taking steps to ensure that communities had sufficient resources and infrastructure available to accommodate a rising population. Several also mentioned



health care, emphasizing the need to address perceived health shortages of doctors and nurses and long wait times for emergency and primary care. Other priority areas identified by participants included climate change and the environment, making post-secondary education more affordable, providing increased supports for seniors, building and repairing vital infrastructure such as highways and bridges, and the need for greater investments towards national security and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

Cost of Living (Saskatchewan)

Participants residing in Saskatchewan were asked a few additional questions related to the cost of living. Prompted to identify what they viewed as the biggest challenges related to the cost of living that the Government of Canada should be prioritizing, many believed that a greater focus needed to be placed on increasing the affordability of necessities such as groceries and housing. None felt the Government of Canada was headed in the right direction when it came to addressing the cost of living and all felt that this issue had worsened in recent years.

Asked whether they were aware of any actions from the Government of Canada related to addressing the cost of living, participants recalled initiatives such as the provision of a one-time \$500 top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit for lower-income renters, and the one-time Grocery Rebate provided to eligible Canadians as a part of their quarterly goods and services tax/harmonized sales tax (GST/HST) credit payment in July 2023. A few also recalled the announcement of the Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) which they viewed as being aimed at making life more affordable for persons living with disabilities.

Questioned how important they felt it was for the federal government to be focused on increasing the affordability of telecommunications (such as mobile phone costs and home internet services), many viewed this as an important priority area. A number were of the impression that Canadians currently paid among the highest rates in the world for mobile phone and internet services and believed that efforts needed to be taken to make these services more affordable for Canadians.

Agriculture (Saskatchewan)

The group based in Saskatchewan also engaged in a brief conversation related to agriculture and actions that the Government of Canada had taken to support this sector. Asked how big of a priority they felt the agriculture sector should be for the federal government, almost all viewed it as a major area for it to be focusing on. It was widely felt that there needed to be an increased focus on recruiting and incentivizing younger Canadians to pursue careers in agriculture, with some believing that the sector was currently experiencing labour shortages in many parts of the country. A number viewed agriculture as being a critical part of Saskatchewan's economy and thought that additional support for this sector from the federal government would have a positive impact on the province as a whole.

Discussing the degree to which they felt climate change was impacting the agriculture sector and the ability of farmers to produce food, several believed that it was having a significant impact, especially in



terms of the effects of extreme weather events such as wildfires, flooding, and droughts. Asked how climate change could potentially impact the cost of living, several expected that as food became increasingly difficult to produce, it would ultimately lead to higher grocery costs for consumers.

Reconciliation (Winnipeg Indigenous Peoples)

One group, comprised of Indigenous peoples residing in urban centres in the Prairies, shared their perspectives related to the Government of Canada's progress on reconciliation. Asked to identify what they viewed as the top issues facing Indigenous peoples that the federal government needed to be prioritizing, several felt that greater efforts needed to be taken to ensure that all Indigenous communities had access to clean drinking water, affordable and nutritious food, and essential services such as health care and education. It was also thought that increased resources needed to be devoted towards investigating the disappearances of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) as well as ensuring that existing treaties between the federal government and individual Indigenous nations were being properly upheld.

Questioned whether they felt reconciliation was a priority for the federal government, while a number believed that it was, most did not feel that the prioritization of this issue had led to any tangible improvements in the quality of life for Indigenous peoples and communities. It was widely thought that while it was important for the Government of Canada to be highlighting Indigenous issues and histories, these efforts needed to be accompanied by clear and measurable actions to better the lives of Indigenous peoples.

Identifying additional areas that they felt the federal government should be prioritizing when it came to better supporting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, a large number felt that more needed to be done to provide mental health support to these communities, and especially those suffering from intergenerational trauma stemming from the historical residential school program. Asked how the Government of Canada could better respond to the needs of Indigenous peoples living in urban areas, several believed that there needed to be more frequent engagement between federal officials and Indigenous leaders and elders.

Asked how they would go about measuring the federal government's progress on reconciliation, a range of metrics were proposed. A number felt that a key focus should be placed on ensuring that Indigenous peoples had the same access to educational and employment opportunities as the rest of Canadians, believing that this would mark a significant step towards achieving reconciliation. Some also suggested tracking and regularly reporting on key statistics (such as the rate of Indigenous home ownership) to ensure that tangible progress was being made on these fronts

Southeast Asian Canadians (Calgary and Edmonton Southeast Asian Diaspora)

The group composed of members of the Southeast Asian diaspora residing in Calgary and Edmonton shared their perspectives on what they viewed as the most important issues facing Southeast Asian Canadians at present. Asked to identify what they felt to be the top issues impacting their diaspora that required further prioritization from the federal government, participants mentioned a range of



concerns. These included challenges faced by immigrants from Southeast Asia in having their professional and educational credentials recognized, difficulties in learning and conversing in English, and not feeling welcomed by others in their communities.

Asked whether the Government of Canada should be prioritizing its relationships with Southeast Asian countries (such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines), many felt that it should. A number were of the opinion that, given the perceived growing proportion of Canadian residents who were immigrants from Southeast Asia, it was increasingly important for the federal government to have strong relationships with the region.

Focusing on actions that the Government of Canada could take to improve its engagement with the Southeast Asian diaspora, participants mentioned actions such as a greater inclusion of Southeast Asian countries and peoples during Asian Heritage Month, as well as placing an increased focus on educating Canadians about the region's unique histories and cultures.

Arab Canadians (Toronto Arab Women)

One group, comprised of Arab Women residing in Toronto, shared their perspectives regarding issues impacting Arab Canadians as well as the Government of Canada's international relations with Arab majority countries.

Asked to identify the top issues impacting Arab Canadians that they felt required greater prioritization from the federal government, many shared concerns regarding what they perceived as rising rates of Islamophobia as of late. The view was expressed by several that anti-Arab sentiment had become more prominent in Canada following the October 7th, 2023, attacks perpetrated by the Hamas terrorist organization against Israel, and that this issue had continued to increase in the months that had followed. Several felt that the Government of Canada needed to do more to protect and promote the rights and safety of members of the Arab diaspora in Canada.

Discussing the Government of Canada's management of its international relations with Arab-majority countries, most felt that it was headed in the wrong direction on this front. Many were of the opinion that Arab countries were frequently treated differently by the federal government compared to countries in other parts of the world and believed that immigrants from these countries were often subjected to a greater level of mistrust and discrimination.

Describing actions that the federal government could take to improve its engagement with Arab Canadians, several suggested the need for increased outreach to Arab communities and organizations within Canada. It was felt that this would provide members of the Arab diaspora a greater opportunity to share their perspectives and provide feedback as to how they felt life could be improved for Arab Canadians going forward.



Seniors (Quebec Seniors)

Participants in the group comprised of seniors aged 65+ in Quebec engaged in a discussion related to the issues currently impacting seniors in Canada. Asked to identify what they viewed as the top challenges facing working seniors at present, participants provided a range of responses. A number mentioned the increasing physical limitations that seniors face as they age and felt that this had made it more difficult for them to engage in physical work and had placed them at a disadvantage in the workforce compared to younger workers. Asked whether they viewed the perceived high cost of living at present as a challenge for seniors, several believed that it was. A number were of the impression that, as a result of the high cost of living, an increasing proportion of seniors were now finding it necessary to work on at least a part-time basis in order to supplement the income they had saved for retirement.

Almost all reported having had to re-evaluate their retirement plans to at least some extent due to the high cost of living at present. Several commented that they had found it necessary to continue working to afford their desired lifestyle, including the ability to go on vacation as well as engage in the hobbies and pastimes they enjoyed. A number described having been compelled to make lifestyle changes due to the high cost of living, such as moving to a different location, which they felt had further complicated their retirement plans.

Asked how important, if at all, they felt government programs such as Old Age Security (OAS), and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) were to making their lives more affordable, all believed that these supports had made a positive impact on their financial wellbeing. Many expressed feeling that these programs had provided them with additional financial security and had helped them in affording the cost of living. Provided with information about these benefits, many were surprised to hear that these amounts were reviewed four times per year, and all believed that this would make it easier for seniors to adjust to higher rates of inflation. A few, however, expressed the opinion that even with more frequent reviews to OAS and GIS benefits, the amounts provided to seniors would likely not be enough to keep pace with rising costs, such as those for groceries and home renovation projects.

Discussing whether the Government of Canada was headed in the right direction when it came to engaging with seniors, almost all felt that it was not. Many were of the opinion that there had been a lack of effective communication and consultation between the federal government and the seniors' community and believed that more needed to be done to establish meaningful dialogues on this front. Participants provided a number of suggestions as to how this relationship could be improved. These included establishing local seniors' representatives with whom official consultations could be organized, distributing informational bulletins regarding actions and initiatives related to seniors, and providing a contact number that seniors could use to obtain information and share their views with the federal government.



Housing (Golden Horseshoe Region Ontario, Vancouver Renters, Northern Ontario, Winnipeg Indigenous Peoples)

Four groups took part in conversations related to housing. Those residing in the Golden Horseshoe region of Ontario, Northern Ontario, and Vancouver shared their perspectives regarding a range of housing initiatives recently announced by the federal government, while participants in the group comprised of Indigenous peoples residing in Winnipeg discussed potential actions that could be taken to improve the affordability and availability of housing for Indigenous peoples and communities.

At the outset of their conversations, participants in the groups comprised of renters in Vancouver and individuals living in Northern Ontario were asked how they would describe the current housing situation in their communities. Almost all perceived housing as having become increasingly unaffordable (both to purchase and to rent) in recent years and believed that there was not nearly enough available housing to meet the current level of demand in their areas. Several were of the impression that it had become very difficult for first-time home buyers to enter the housing market and believed that this would have a negative impact on the future financial prospects of younger generations if action was not taken to address this issue. All felt that the housing situation in their communities had worsened in recent years.

Focusing on issues specifically impacting renters, all in the group comprised of renters living in Vancouver described the rental situation in their community as having become drastically unaffordable. Several felt that increasing demand in recent years combined with issues such as real estate speculation and profit-seeking behaviour from landlords had served to significantly increase the rates paid by Vancouver renters. Discussing potential actions that could be taken to assist renters, participants believed that there should be increased taxation and restrictions for those who purchase residential real estate as an investment. A few also felt that more should be done to stabilize rental costs and further limit the amounts by which landlords can increase rent. It was felt that taking this approach would allow renting to become a more viable, long-term option, and would be especially beneficial for those individuals who did not have plans to purchase a home in the foreseeable future.

Housing Initiatives (Golden Horseshoe Region Ontario, Vancouver Renters, Northern Ontario)

Three groups engaged in discussions related to a range of housing measures that had recently been announced by the Government of Canada as part of Budget 2024. Asked whether they were aware of any steps that the federal government had taken as of late to increase the affordability and availability of housing for Canadians, participants recalled a number of initiatives. These included agreements reached with municipalities, supported by the Housing Accelerator Fund, to assist in the building of new affordable housing projects, encouraging lenders to consider on-time rent payments when calculating individuals' credit scores, and extending the ban on foreign purchases of Canadian residential housing by an additional two years.

Informed that the Government of Canada had recently introduced a three-part strategy to address the housing crisis, participants in the groups comprised of renters in Vancouver and those residing in the

Golden Horseshoe region of Ontario were shown three sets of initiatives that had been announced and were asked to share their perspectives on each.

The first set shown to participants, highlighting some of the measures the Government of Canada was proposing to assist in the building of more homes, received mostly positive reactions among participants. Several, however, questioned whether these actions would be enough to make an impact on increasing the housing supply and making housing more affordable for Canadians. A number expressed the view that the estimated total of 750,000 new housing units expected to be built over the next decade via agreements reached under the Housing Accelerator Fund was too low, especially given what they perceived as high rates of immigration to Canada at present. While participants felt that the action to invest \$15 billion in the Apartment Construction Loan Program would have a positive impact on building more rental homes, a number questioned what regulations would be put into place to ensure that these homes remained affordable for lower- and middle-income Canadians. Participants were mixed in their views regarding the federal government's plan to increase its investments into technology such as prefabricated housing factories and pre-approved home design catalogues. It was felt that while this action could help to accelerate the pace at which new homes are being built, the overall quality, safety, and longevity of prefabricated homes was also a concern for several participants.

The second set of initiatives shown to participants, describing some of the actions that the Government of Canada was proposing to make it easier to purchase or rent a home received widely positive reactions. Many specifically identified the actions to extend the ban on foreign homebuyers by two years and restrict the purchase and acquisition of existing single-family homes by very large, corporate investors as measures they felt would be particularly effective. Participants also spoke positively of the initiative to allow 30-year mortgages for first-time homebuyers purchasing new builds, with a number believing that mortgages of this length should be made available to all prospective homebuyers. While generally supportive of actions to crack down on illegal short-term rentals (such as Airbnb), some questioned how this action would be enforced and what specific regulations would be put into place.

While most felt that the third set of initiatives, highlighting some of the measures that the Government of Canada was proposing to help those who struggle most with the cost of housing, represented a step in the right direction, many felt that they would only have a minor impact on assisting those who are struggling with the cost of housing. While several reacted positively to the initiative to increase funding to support organizations that prevent and reduce homelessness, a number hoped to see more specific details regarding which organizations would be supported and how much financial support would be provided. The opinion was also expressed that, given the perceived size and scope of the housing crisis, an investment of \$1 billion to the Affordable Housing Fund would not be enough to sufficiently address this issue.

Indigenous Housing (Winnipeg Indigenous Peoples)

The group comprised of Indigenous peoples residing in Winnipeg shared their perspectives related to the housing situation for Indigenous peoples and communities, both in Winnipeg as well as



throughout Canada more broadly. Asked to identify what they viewed as the biggest challenges related to housing Indigenous peoples in Winnipeg were facing, several mentioned what they perceived as the high cost of purchasing a home at present and the difficulties they had encountered in saving up the amount required for a down payment. A number also described what they viewed as a lack of safe and affordable rental options in Winnipeg, believing that many of the rental units available in their price range were often in poor condition and/or in need of maintenance and repairs. Participants engaged in an exercise where they were presented with a range of measures that had been included as part of the Government of Canada's strategy to address the housing situation and asked to identify which measures they felt would have the greatest impact on Indigenous peoples. On balance, the initiative to increase funding to organizations that prevent and reduce homelessness received the highest level of support among participants. Many felt that homelessness in their community had risen substantially in recent years and believed that a disproportionate number of Indigenous peoples were currently facing issues related to housing insecurity compared to other groups in Canada. The measures to restrict the purchase and acquisition of existing single-family homes by very large corporate investors and to extend the ban on foreign homebuyers by two years also received considerable support. It was felt that these actions would have a positive impact on increasing the supply of affordable housing and discourage behaviours such as real estate speculation that treat housing as an investment commodity rather than as a place to live. Some also spoke positively of the initiatives to invest \$1 billion to the Affordable Housing Fund to support non-profit, co-operative, and public housing providers, and \$4 billion (over seven years) towards collaborating with Indigenous partners to develop tailored housing solutions for urban, rural, and northern Indigenous communities.

Asked what impacts they expected this strategy could have for Indigenous peoples residing in Winnipeg, several hoped that these actions would help to reduce homelessness and provide more options for shelter for those living in the city. It was hoped that by making housing more affordable, these measures would lead to an overall improvement in the quality of life for Indigenous peoples in Winnipeg. Questioned whether, having been provided with information related to these measures, they felt the Government of Canada was on the right track with its housing strategy, almost all indicated that they did.

Health Care (Interior British Columbia)

Participants residing in Interior British Columbia (B.C.) took part in a conversation related to health care. All viewed health care as a major priority for the Government of Canada to be focusing on, and several described having personally encountered issues on this front, including long wait times at emergency rooms and walk-in clinics, difficulties in obtaining appointments with specialists, and a perceived shortage of health care workers such as doctors and nurses. A few reported that doctors and other health workers had been leaving their communities in increasing numbers in recent years, and that services such as walk-in clinics had closed altogether. Asked to rate the quality of health care in their area, while most believed that health care services and professionals in their region were



generally of a high calibre, many reiterated concerns related to the ability to access these services, including the difficulties they believed many faced in obtaining a family doctor.

No participants felt the federal government was on the right track when it came to health care and believed that far more emphasis needed to be placed on improving health care provision in Canada going forward. Discussing potential actions that could be taken, many believed that more should be done to recruit and train more individuals (both from Canada as well as outside the country) to work in the health care sector. It was felt that efforts should also be made to reduce tuition costs for prospective health care workers as well as increase the number of seats available in Canadian medical and nursing programs. Additionally, it was thought that actions should be taken to work to increase the wages received by doctors and nurses, as well as provide better mental health care for health care professionals to better assist them in managing and coping with the stresses of their work.

Pharmacare (Saskatchewan)

Participants residing in Saskatchewan engaged in a conversation regarding pharmacare and recent actions by the Government of Canada to introduce a national pharmacare program. Questioned whether they viewed the cost of prescription medication as a major challenge currently facing Canadians, while almost all believed that it was an important issue, several viewed it as a lower priority compared to other issues such as health worker shortages and long wait times to access primary and emergency care.

Asked to describe the overall state of prescription drug coverage in Canada, many were of the impression that prescription medications were relatively affordable and accessible for most Canadians. Several, however, expressed the view that if one did not have prescription drug coverage through their insurance or employment benefits, these medications could become very challenging to afford, with potentially life-threatening consequences for those with chronic conditions. Questioned whether they would support a universal pharmacare program where all Canadians would receive coverage for prescription medication, all indicated that they would.

Provided with information related to the first phase of the federal government's recently announced national pharmacare program all reacted positively, with several expressing particular support for the inclusion of diabetes medications in the initial phase of this program. A number reported having friends and family members with diabetes and believed that this would have an immediate positive impact on their quality of life.

Questioned whether they favoured a completely public pharmacare program or a "close the gaps" approach, where public coverage would account for areas not covered by one's private insurance and benefits, most expressed support for the latter approach. It was felt that this would be preferable for most Canadians as it would allow them to continue to utilize their existing benefits programs, while also likely reducing the costs of the national pharmacare program for taxpayers.

Immigration (Calgary and Edmonton Southeast Asian Diaspora, Estrie Region Quebec, Toronto Arab Women, Northern Ontario, Quebec City)

Five groups engaged in discussions related to immigration in Canada. Asked how they would describe the current state of the Canadian immigration system, many perceived it as experiencing considerable strain at present. The view was expressed by several that the country had taken in more people than it could realistically handle in recent years and that this had negatively impacted the cost of living and availability of housing in many Canadian communities.

Describing what they viewed as the benefits of welcoming new immigrants to Canada, participants identified a range of positive impacts. Several mentioned the role immigrants played in filling existing labour shortages, believing this was especially important given the growing number of Canadians that they expected would be entering into retirement in the coming years. Others felt that immigrants provided considerable cultural enrichment to the country through the sharing of their unique perspectives, practices, and traditions.

Asked what actions the Government of Canada should take to improve the immigration system, participants offered a range of suggestions. These included building more affordable housing projects, streamlining the foreign credential recognition process, subsidizing education and skills training for new immigrants seeking to work in sectors experiencing labour shortages, and providing language training and social supports for immigrants to assist them in acclimatizing to their new communities. Questioned whether they thought the Government of Canada should increase, decrease, or keep the rate of immigration at about the same level, most felt that the current rate of immigration should be maintained, while a smaller number respectively felt that it should be increased or decreased.

Foreign Credential Recognition (Calgary and Edmonton Southeast Asian Diaspora)

Participants in the group comprised of members of the Southeast Asian diaspora based in Calgary and Edmonton were asked a few additional questions related to the foreign credential recognition process. Asked how important, if at all, they felt it was for the federal government to address issues related to recognizing foreign credentials, all viewed this as a major priority.

Almost all reported having gone through the foreign credential recognition process themselves or had a friend or family member who had done so. While some had heard that the Government of Canada had recently fast-tracked this process for new arrivals from some countries, it was widely felt that the process of getting one's education and professional credentials recognized continued to be a major challenge for many recent immigrants.

Discussing additional steps that the federal government should take to address this issue participants mentioned a range of potential actions. These included assisting immigrants in getting their credentials recognized prior to arriving in Canada, providing grants and funding for new arrivals to acquire the certifications necessary to work in their fields of expertise, and matching new immigrants with mentors who had previously immigrated to Canada who could assist them in navigating this process.



Out-of-Status Workers (Estrie Region Quebec, Quebec City)

Two groups engaged in discussions related to out-of-status workers. Asked whether they were familiar with the terms “out-of-status” or “undocumented” people, most indicated that they were, with several believing that these terms primarily referred to those living in Canada without legal documentation and/or individuals who had entered the country through non-legitimate pathways.

Prompted to estimate approximately how many out-of-status workers were currently living in Canada, participant responses ranged from 10,000 to upwards of 3 million, with most believing this amount to be somewhere between 100,000 and 300,000. Asked whether they felt out-of-status workers residing in Canada should be provided with a pathway to permanent residency and citizenship, almost all believed that they should. A large number felt that as these workers were already in Canada and contributing to their communities, it was important for them to have access to the same benefits and protections as the rest of Canadians. Among the very small number who felt otherwise, it was thought that as out-of-status workers had not followed the proper immigration practices, it was unfair to provide them with a pathway to citizenship, especially given the perceived long wait times for those seeking to immigrate to Canada via the official channels.

Capital Gains (Quebec Seniors 65+, Vancouver Renters)

Two groups took part in discussions related to proposed changes from the Government of Canada related to the taxation of capital gains. Provided with information related to recent actions from the federal government aimed at changing how capital gains are taxed, most in the group comprised of seniors residing in Quebec were positive in their views, believing that this would serve as an effective way to generate revenue that could be utilized to fund social programs and assist in addressing the national debt. Among those in the group of renters living in Vancouver, many were more neutral or uncertain in their reactions, with several expecting that this action would have little impact on them personally. A small number expressed concern that these actions by the federal government could potentially have a negative impact on investments and economic activity in Canada going forward.

Discussing who they felt would be most impacted by these proposed changes, several in Quebec believed that it would primarily be those in the middle class as well as individuals who were currently approaching retirement. Among these participants, it was felt that these populations typically placed a large portion of their savings into long-term investments that typically produced significant capital gains and, as a result, could be subject to paying increased taxes upon the eventual sale of these investments. Those in Vancouver expected that these changes would primarily impact only the wealthiest of Canadians, believing that most households did not typically have annual capital gains in excess of \$250,000.

Questioned whether they felt this change was an effective way for the federal government to raise revenues to invest in programs related to housing, dental care, pharmacare, health care, and other areas, most believed that it was. Several, however, were of the opinion that any additional revenues collected as a result of these changes should primarily be directed toward housing, which they viewed as the highest priority at present.

Public Sentiment (Toronto Arab Women)

Participants in the group from Toronto, comprised of women who were members of the Arab diaspora in Canada, shared their perspectives related to life in Canada and the current state of equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the country. Asked what made them feel optimistic about their futures in Canada, a number mentioned the feeling of safety in their communities as well as the freedom they felt to pursue their own goals and passions. Participants widely viewed Canada as a peaceful country where they could expect to experience far less discrimination compared to other parts of the world. Discussing what made them feel concerned about their futures in Canada, many identified the high cost of living, a perceived lack of affordable housing, and what they viewed as a growing lack of safety on public transit. A few also worried about what they viewed as increasing rates of criminal behaviour and addiction in their communities.

Asked to describe the state of diversity, equity, and inclusion in Canada, participants were mixed in their opinions. While several felt that Canada had performed better on these fronts compared to most other countries, it was thought there was still room for improvement. A number were of the impression that the level of support for diversity-focused initiatives varied throughout the country, believing that these values were protected and promoted to a greater extent in major urban centres compared to more rural communities.

Climate Change Impacts (Interior British Columbia)

Participants residing in Interior British Columbia (B.C.) engaged in a discussion about climate change and actions that the Government of Canada was taking to address its impacts. Asked how worried they were about the potential impacts of climate change, all viewed this as major area of concern. Many described what they perceived as a significant increase in uncontrolled wildfires across Canada in recent years, believing this to be an impact of climate change that was already being felt. Others were of the impression that weather patterns had become far less predictable as of late and believed that issues such as extreme heat and drought had begun to negatively impact the ability of farmers to produce food.

All expected that their communities would be at greater risk of experiencing the impacts of climate change in the decades to come. Several recounted instances in recent years where wildfires had come very close to damaging their communities and believed that it was only a matter of time before they would be forced to evacuate. Provided with information related to actions that the Government of Canada was taking to manage wildfires and support communities in preparing for and responding to these events, participants were mostly positive in their reactions. Several viewed the initiative to train 1,000 additional wildland firefighters as being particularly promising.

Asked if they felt the federal government was doing enough to help communities affected by wildfires, a number felt that it was not. Asked what more the federal government could be doing on this front, participants suggested actions such as providing funding to create paid firefighter roles where there are currently volunteer fire services, increasing the recruitment of firefighters from other provinces or



countries, and allocating greater investments towards the rebuilding of communities destroyed by wildfires and other extreme weather events.

Clean Energy and Technology (Saskatchewan)

Participants residing in Saskatchewan shared their perspectives related to clean energy and technologies, as well as the investments that the federal government had recently made towards these areas. Informed that the Government of Canada was investing in clean energy and clean technologies as a part of its efforts to decrease emissions, participants were asked what came to mind when they thought of clean energy and clean tech. Several mentioned renewable forms of energy such as solar, wind, and hydroelectricity, while others thought of green technology such as electric vehicles (EVs) and electric scooters. Asked whether they felt the Government of Canada should be making investments towards these areas, all believed that it should.

Discussing the potential benefits of the Government of Canada encouraging investments towards clean energy and clean technology, several expected that this would have a positive impact on reducing emissions and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Questioned whether they thought that the increased use of clean electricity and clean technology would lead to more, fewer, or have no impact on the risks of power outages, most believed that it would not have much of an impact. A few felt differently, believing that an increased incorporation of clean energy sources into the power grid would likely strengthen its overall capacity and result in a reduced risk of power outages.

Focusing on the potential impact that the development of the clean energy sector could have on Saskatchewan (including for workers in the province), while a few expressed concerns about potential job losses in the oil and gas sector, a greater number believed that it would have an overall positive impact. Among these participants, it was believed that investments towards clean energy would lead to the creation of a large number of well-paying jobs in the sector, providing an overall benefit to the province's economy and the financial wellbeing of its residents.

Electric Vehicle Manufacturing (Golden Horseshoe Region Ontario)

One group, comprised of residents of the Golden Horseshoe region of Ontario, took part in a brief discussion related to the manufacturing of electric vehicles (EVs). Asked whether they felt the Government of Canada was generally headed in the right direction when it came to supporting the automotive industry a larger number were uncertain or neutral in their views compared to those who felt it was on the wrong track. No participants felt that the federal government was on the right track in this regard.

Provided with information related to a recent \$15 billion investment that Honda Canada was making alongside the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario to increase the manufacturing of EVs and EV batteries in the province, most reacted positively and believed that these investments would lead to the creation of many high paying jobs in their area, stimulate the province's manufacturing industry, and benefit the environment due to the increased production of clean

technology such as EVs. A few, however, expressed concerns regarding the potential negative environmental impacts of increased EV production, focusing particularly on the raw materials required to be mined in order to manufacture EV batteries as well as the perceived difficulties in recycling these batteries at the end of their lifespans.

Public Transit (Golden Horseshoe Region Ontario)

Participants residing in the Golden Horseshoe Region of Ontario engaged in a discussion regarding the federal government's role in providing public transportation for Canadians. To begin, participants were asked whether they felt investing in public transit should be a priority for the Government of Canada. While most felt that public transportation was an important priority, several were of the impression that this was primarily a provincial and municipal responsibility and did not believe that the federal government should be directly involved in this area. A number expressed the view that while the federal government should provide funding to provincial and municipal governments to support public transportation projects, they did not feel it should be directly involved in the creation, development, or construction of these systems.

Asked to describe what they felt were the most important objectives for the Government of Canada to be focusing on related to public transit, many felt that it should primarily be focused on ensuring that public transportation systems in Canada were environmentally friendly and helping in the fight against climate change. Discussing specific actions that could be taken by the federal government in this regard, participants suggested making efforts to electrify public transit vehicles, assisting public transit agencies in transitioning to clean energy sources, and reducing the overall emissions of public transit systems across Canada.

All reacted positively when provided with information related to the Zero Emission Transit Fund (ZETF) and the Government of Canada's commitment to investing \$2.75 billion over five years to help public transit operators plan for electrification by supporting the acquisition of zero-emissions buses, new charging stations, and facility upgrades. Many expected that this support would assist municipalities with managing the high costs of reducing or eliminating emissions from their public transit systems and would be instrumental in increasing the sustainability of public transportation vehicles and infrastructure in many Canadian communities.

Online Safety (Atlantic Canada Young Women Heavier Media Users)

One group, comprised of young women in Atlantic Canada who identified as heavier media users, took part in a discussion related to online safety and actions that the Government of Canada was taking to combat hateful content and the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation in online spaces. Asked to identify what positive impacts, if any, they felt the internet was having on society today, participants provided a range of responses. These included the ability to connect with family and friends across the world, finding communities and discovering passions, engaging with global issues, accessing information and entertainment through streaming services, and providing a greater number of individuals with the ability to work remotely.



Participants also identified a number of ways in which they felt that the internet had negatively impacted society. These included a perceived reduction in the frequency of individuals engaging in in-person social interactions, negative effects on the social development of children, increased feelings of depression and anxiety due to the prevalence of negative content online, and harmful online behaviours such as cyberbullying and harassment.

All believed that harmful online content was an issue at present. Asked what constituted harmful content, most believed that this term was somewhat subjective and largely dependent on the individual viewing the content. Describing examples of harmful content, participants mentioned violent online videos, behaviours such as “catfishing”, and digital scams designed to steal money and/or personal information. Several also expressed concerns regarding content that was designed to evoke extreme or distressing emotions, or which encouraged viewers (and youth especially) to engage in risky behaviours or challenges.

Questioned whether, to the best of their knowledge, there were currently protections in place to keep Canadians safe on the internet, many believed that companies such as Google and Meta had filters and parental controls available to prevent children from accessing inappropriate content. Many, however, expressed that they were not very confident in the measures that were in place to reduce the exposure of harmful content to Canadians. Asked whether they believed that social media companies were accountable for the impact on users of the harmful content posted on their platforms, all felt that they were. The view was expressed that as profit-driven businesses, platforms should be required to take responsibility for this aspect of their services, particularly regarding how it impacts children’s profiles and their exposure to exploitative content.

No participants were aware of any actions or initiatives from the Government of Canada related to online platforms and harmful content. Asked specifically whether they had heard anything related to the *Online Harms Act*, none could recall anything. Provided with information related to this proposed legislation, participants expressed a range of reactions, with a greater number holding more neutral opinions compared to those who reacted positively. Among the smaller number who felt more positively, it was thought that these were the right areas for the Government of Canada to be focusing on, and so long as they were properly implemented, these measures would go a long way towards combatting cyberbullying. For those who were more neutral in their reactions, many questioned whether it would be possible to monitor such a large amount of content.

Provided with additional information related to specific components of the *Online Harms Act*, a large number expressed strong support for these measures, and many believed that these actions should have been put into place years ago. Asked if they had any questions about these aspects of the legislation, a few were curious as to whether reported content would simply be removed or if it would also be subject to further actions, such as fines and penalties. Several questioned what would happen if users failed to remove harmful content, and how platforms would prevent users from re-uploading content that had previously been removed. Discussing whether they expected this legislation would



have a positive impact on protecting the online safety of Canadians, most felt that it would, with several believing that it would be especially helpful towards protecting the safety of children online.

Discussing the five categories of harmful content that social media companies would be required to limit on their platforms, participants were asked whether these were the right areas for the Government of Canada to be focusing on. While all believed that these were important areas, several thought that greater clarity would be needed regarding the definition of terms such as 'violence' and 'hatred' under this legislation. Some were of the opinion that this approach was too broad and believed there needed to be a more precise explanation of what 'reducing exposure' entailed. Asked whether there were any other types of harmful content that they felt needed to be addressed, a number believed that a greater focus should be placed on reducing the prevalence of online scams and fraud.

Sharing their reactions to measures that had been proposed specifically aimed at protecting children from harmful content online, most felt that this approach was appropriate and that the Government of Canada was on the right track with these actions. Discussing additional actions that could be taken, many expressed the need for increased education and knowledge about these issues to be integrated into K-12 education to better protect children. Some suggested that greater education for parents would also be beneficial, given that parents were the ones primarily responsible for their children's safety.

Participants were informed that this legislation would also lead to the creation of a Digital Safety Commission to enforce these rules and hold platforms accountable to remove the harmful content posted by their users. Most believed that the establishment of this Digital Safety Commission would be ineffective towards addressing harmful content online, feeling it would be impossible for any regulatory body to monitor the entirety of the internet. Several also expressed concerns regarding the potential for individual biases on the part of those working for this Commission to unfairly impact what types of content was deemed harmful under this legislation.

Provided with a definition for 'hate speech' under this legislation, many expressed feeling that it was somewhat unclear. Concerns were raised by several that this definition could potentially lead to ambiguity, reiterating the subjective nature of what is classified as 'hate speech'. Asked if the Government of Canada should include hate speech in this legislation, all believed that it should. A few, however, expressed the belief that while no one should be subjected to hate, it was important that Canadians continue to be able to freely express themselves online and that for this legislation to be effective, there needed to be clearer definitions in place regarding what constitutes hate speech.

Supplemented Foods Concept Testing (Northern Ontario, Quebec City, Winnipeg Indigenous Peoples)

Three groups shared their perspectives regarding social media concepts designed by the Government of Canada to highlight information related to supplemented foods.



Participants were presented with two different concepts, first one after the other, and then side by side, and were informed that these posts were designed specifically for adults over the age of 51, students, and those who are physically active. Reactions to these concepts were mixed among participants. A number reported feeling initially more drawn to the second post, perceiving it to be less targeted to specific groups and more applicable to the general public. Few, however, felt that either of these concepts were very captivating, with some expressing the opinion that the concept featuring the energy drink more resembled an advertisement than an informational message from the Government of Canada.

Asked what they liked about the concepts, many appreciated that the concepts included a link to more information, believing this was important to include for those wishing to learn more. Several also spoke positively of the content related to minerals and supplements, viewing this as new information that would likely be relevant to a large number of Canadians. Discussing ways in which these concepts could be improved, several felt that these posts could do more to stand out and capture the attention of the reader, while others thought that this information should also be disseminated on other platforms (such as television, radio, and on physical spaces) in order to reach more individuals.

Questioned specifically whether they would notice these posts, only a small number expected that they would. For those who felt that these concepts could be more visually remarkable, participants suggested changes to how the information is formatted, such as breaking up long-form text with bullet points and using more direct language to make the messages more succinct and digestible. A number also felt that these concepts would benefit from the incorporation of more dynamic and eye-catching imagery. Asked if seeing these posts would motivate participants to do anything, several commented that they would likely click on the link to find out more information. All participants felt that the messaging of these concepts was clear, with a number describing feeling surprised regarding the potential negative consequences of consuming supplemented foods.

Participants were also presented with a series of additional social media messages that could potentially accompany the graphics they had previously been shown. Many participants reiterated the importance of this messaging, and several appreciated that certain messages were targeted to different groups. Among these participants, it was felt that given the diversity of Canada's population, a range of different communication styles and approaches would be necessary in order for this information to be resonant. A number suggested condensing the information in these statements to make them more digestible for social media users who were accustomed to consuming small pieces of content at a time.

Community Challenges (Interior British Columbia, Estrie Region Quebec, Calgary & Edmonton Southeast Asian Diaspora)

Three groups, comprised of participants residing in Interior B.C., the Estrie region of Quebec, and Calgary and Edmonton, respectively, took part in conversations related to their local communities. Asked to identify the top issues facing their communities that required greater prioritization from the

federal government, participants in all groups mentioned concerns related to housing, health care, and the cost of living.

Questioned whether they had seen, read, or heard anything as of late related to the Government of Canada and infrastructure in their region, few could recall anything. While a number were aware of recent projects to improve local infrastructure such as roadways, bridges, and schools, most expressed uncertainty as to whether these had been financed by the federal government. Discussing the types of local infrastructure projects that they felt would be most important to their region, many believed that more needed to be done to expand public transportation services in their areas. Additionally, a number felt that more should be done to increase the number of walkways and bike lanes in their communities, create more public spaces such as parks, community gardens, and sports fields, and provide residents with additional health care resources such as hospitals, walk-in clinics, and long-term care facilities.

Describing what they viewed as the most important industries and sectors to their communities, participants provided a range of responses. Those residing in Calgary and Edmonton felt that oil and gas, health care, construction, and the machinery manufacturing industries were the most significant in their area, while participants in the Estrie region mentioned mining, agriculture, energy production, education, tourism, and health care as key economic drivers in their community. Participants in the group based in Interior B.C. identified sectors such as logging, forestry, tourism, agriculture, and the hotel industry as being important to their region.

Participants in all groups viewed labour shortages as being an issue in their communities. Prompted to identify the specific industries that they felt had been most impacted by these shortages, participants mentioned sectors such as agriculture, child care, restaurants and hospitality, education, health care, and construction. Discussing the factors that they felt had contributed to the labour shortages in their respective communities, many believed that employers in many cases were not offering to pay their workers a living wage, and as such, the jobs on offer were not desirable for prospective workers. Additionally, a number were of the impression that many of the jobs available were either part-time or seasonal and did not provide the full-time work that most individuals were looking for.

MORE INFORMATION

The Strategic Counsel

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