



CANADIANS SEE THEIR OWN BEHAVIOUR AND LIFESTYLE AS THE KEY TO THEIR HEALTH, NOT SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Ottawa, October 16, 2012 – Canadians are told by experts that income and education are crucial factors affecting their health, but the message does not appear to be getting through.

Income and education are seen as relatively unimportant factors in influencing the overall health of the Canadian population, especially compared to lifestyle choices and a publicly-funded health care system, according to an EKOS Research Associates [survey](#) released by The Conference Board of Canada.

“Despite much research indicating that higher income levels and educational attainment are critical factors associated with better health, Canadians do not seem to understand this relationship or agree with it,” said [Louis Thériault](#), Director, Health Economics. “This could explain why public health spending is only a fraction of total health care spending in Canada.”

A publicly-funded health care system, lifestyle factors and environmental factors were each considered important by more than 85 per cent of respondents to the EKOS survey.

A publicly funded health care system was seen as extremely important by 52 per cent of the respondents, and 87 per cent of all respondents said it was important. Canadians with household incomes of less than \$20,000 identified a publicly-funded system as crucial (94 per cent considered it important), compared to respondents making \$100,000 or more (85 per cent). Albertans placed a lower priority on a publicly-funded system than respondents in other regions – 75 per cent considered it important.

Lifestyles and health behaviour of individuals was seen as important by 88 per cent of respondents — and 45 per cent considered it an extremely important factor. Respondents from Quebec are less likely to identify daily activities as having the greatest impact on health (39 per cent), while a majority of respondents from Alberta (60 per cent) identified daily activities as having the greatest impact on the health of Canadians.

The physical environment such as air and water quality was considered important by 85 per cent of Canadians (which included 39 per cent who said it was extremely important). Interestingly, significant differences were found on either side of the Alberta-British Columbia border. Almost half of B.C. respondents considered environmental factors extremely important, compared to 30 per of Albertans who considered it extremely important.

As well, respondents under 25 years of age (15 per cent) were more apt than respondents of other ages to identify the environment as a factor that has the biggest effect on the health of Canadians.

At the bottom of the list of factors, only 21 per cent of Canadians thought education levels were extremely important to overall health, and just 15 per cent said income was extremely important. People with lower incomes placed more weight on income as a factor in the health of Canadians – respondents with household incomes of less than \$20,000 considered income a factor on par with daily activities in affecting personal health.

In addition, respondents were asked to rate the importance of various behaviours in helping them to maintain their health. The most important factors were:

- Refraining from smoking, identified as being very important by fully 82 per cent of Canadians.
- Fitness or being physically active (considered very important by 76 per cent). Quebecers considered physical activity less important than residents in Atlantic and the West. Respondents with household incomes of \$20,000 or less also placed lesser importance on fitness and physical activity.

- Nutrition or eating a well-balanced diet (considered very important by 74 per cent). Quebecers had a lower share of respondents that considered diet important, but their results were also more polarized.

EKOS Research Associates conducted this study to update and refine the understanding of Canadian views on health and the health care system. The methodology involved a nationally representative survey of 2,047 Canadians 18 years of age and older - 519 were surveyed by telephone and 1,528 completed the survey online. The sample source for this study was members of the EKOS panel, which was specifically designed for online/telephone surveys, Results include a margin of errors of plus or minus 2.2 per cent 19 times out of 20. The survey took place in May 2012, and the findings will be released throughout October and November 2012.

The study was supported by the Canadian Medical Association, Accreditation Canada and the Conference Board's [Canadian Alliance for Sustainable Health Care \(CASHC\)](#). Launched in 2011, CASHC is a five-year Conference Board program of research and dialogue. It will delve deeply into facets of Canada's health care challenge, including the financial, workplace, and institutional dimensions, in an effort to develop forward-looking qualitative and quantitative analysis and solutions to make the system more sustainable.

As part of the CASHC initiative, the Conference Board is hosting the [Summit on Sustainable Health and Health Care](#) in Toronto on October 30 and 31. The Summit will bring together Canada's health system leaders to discuss the latest research, learn from top Canadian experts, and explore solutions for Canada's greatest health challenges and opportunities.

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