

Health Information and the Internet

About the study

Launched in 1996, EKOS' Rethinking the Information Highway study grew out of a need to better understand how information technologies were reshaping the environment governments and companies were operating within.

Now in its eighth edition and more than 20 surveys later, the study is one of the largest and longest running studies in this area in Canada today. Given its big-picture focus on the full range of issues relating to technology usage, such as the interaction between traditional and electronic service delivery channels and privacy and security-related issues, Rethinking the Information Highway remains one of the most relied upon sources for senior decision makers who are tasked with guiding their organization through what continues to be a rapidly changing environment.

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Overview

Search for health information

Trends among Canadians searching for information:

Searching for health or medical related information remains widespread. Over 6 in 10 Canadians say they searched for health related information in the past year, up slightly from 2006. Canadians from higher income households, women, and those between the ages of 25 and 44 are particularly likely to search for health and medical related information.

Results also reveal that more than 9 in 10 Canadians who searched for health-related information in the past year say they used the Internet in their search.

Canadians tend to be evenly divided as to when they search for health information online: prior to or after an appointment with a health professional. However, demographic differences exist with younger Canadians more inclined to look for information before seeing a health professional whereas older Canadians are more likely to do so after.

Health websites

Canadians making use of a variety of websites:

Canadians are increasingly visiting a full range of websites, including non-profit organizations, government, professional medical associations and commercial websites for online research. While Canadian health websites are by far the most popular, half of Canadians who search for medical information online make use of American websites. However, tracking this data reveals that the popularity of Canadian websites is increasing, while visits to American websites is on the decline.

A fairly large proportion of Canadians, about 1 in 3, say they have visited the Health Canada website in the past year, however, confidence in the Health Canada website is down 10 points since 2005.

Online health activities

Few Canadians participate in online health activities:

Online health activities such as purchasing medication from an Internet pharmacy, participating in an online support group, exchanging email with a medical professional, and participating in an online consultation with a physician remain at low levels, and are largely unchanged over the past few years.

Online health information and health care

Benefits of sharing health information with health care providers:

Online health information appears to promote informed dialogue between patients and health care providers. A majority of Canadians say their health care providers reacted positively when they discussed health information they found online.

Canadians also believe that discussions with their health care provider about online health information generally leads to better care.

Results also reveal that the majority of Canadians that have spoken to their health care provider about information found online say they are likely to do so again.

Privacy, security and health care

Canadians are confident that personal health information given to health care professionals is safe from unauthorized access. Only 3 per cent of Canadians have withheld information over concerns about how it would be used.

Results also reveal that the plurality of Internet users say they are very comfortable providing personal health information online to medical professionals, and only 1 in 5 express little comfort with this idea.

Electronic health records

Awareness of Electronic Health Records has increased significantly over the past two years, however, a sizeable minority of Canadians remain unaware of EHRs.

Results also suggest that Canadians are generally comfortable with the idea of EHRs, and a majority supports the development of EHRs

