



Health and Health Care in the 21st Century

WAVE 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC.

June 2012

EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Ottawa Office

359 Kent Street, Suite 300

Ottawa, Ontario

K2P 0R6

Tel: (613) 235 7215

Fax: (613) 235 8498

E-mail: pobox@ekos.com

Toronto Office

181 Harbord Street

Toronto, Ontario

M5S 1H5

Tel: (416) 598 8002

Fax: (416) 533-4713

E-mail: toronto@ekos.com

www.ekos.com

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Background and Methodology

Over the next decade, our health care system will face a number of daunting challenges. Among the most significant of these challenges is Canada's aging population, and the associated pressures this will have on the health care system. Compounding this is the significant fiscal challenge being faced by governments in Canada. In an era of fiscal restraint, health care costs continue to soar: health care costs are greatly outpacing GDP growth, and health care spending accounts for as much as 40 per cent of provincial budgets. Given the crucial importance of the health care system, and in light of the upcoming federal-provincial health accord negotiations, EKOS Research Associates conducted a study to update and refine our understanding of Canadian views on health and the health care system.

The methodology for this study involved a nationally representative survey of 2,047 Canadians 18 years of age and older. We surveyed 519 Canadians by telephone and 1,528 respondents completed the survey online. The sample source for this study was members of the EKOS panel, which was specifically designed for online/telephone surveys. Our panel offers complete coverage of the Canadian population (i.e., Internet, phone, cell phone), random recruitment (in other words, participants are recruited randomly, they do not opt themselves into our panel), and equal probability sampling.

Survey Findings

Outlined below are key findings and conclusions from this study. The remainder of this report describes survey results in more detail. Where available, results are tracked to earlier studies. However, please note that only telephone results are tracked to ensure consistency with the methodology employed in these earlier surveys.

Performance of Government in Health Care

Canadians were asked a number of questions about the performance of both the federal and provincial governments in the area of health care. When asked whether they have more confidence in their provincial governments or the Government of Canada to strengthen and protect Canada's health care system, the majority of Canadians (55 per cent) express more confidence in their provincial governments to protect health care, while only about one in four (26 per cent) express more confidence in the federal government. Tracking reveals that Canadians are becoming increasingly confident in their provincial government (and correspondingly less confident in the federal government) to protect the health care system. In 2000, equal proportions expressed confidence in the provincial and federal governments (40 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively). Today provincial governments lead the federal government in public confidence by a margin of two to one (57 per cent versus 27 per cent, respectively).

In a related question, Canadians were asked whether they believe that their federal and provincial governments have been paying more or less attention to health care in the past year. The majority of Canadians (58 per cent) feel that the Government of Canada has been paying less attention to health care, and only one in eight (13 per cent) believe the federal government has been paying more attention. Provincial governments are viewed in a more positive light: only about one in three (34 per cent) feel their provincial government is paying less attention, and a sizeable proportion (30 per cent) feel their provincial government has been paying more attention to health care over the past year. Tracking reveals a clear divergence in perceptions of the federal and provincial governments in terms of attention paid to health care. In 1999, both levels of government were viewed in a relatively negative light: the plurality (44 per cent) felt the federal government was paying less attention to health care, and a similar proportion (42 per cent) felt their provincial government was paying less attention. Today, the proportion of respondents who believe the federal government is paying less attention to health care has jumped to 54 per cent, while the proportion of Canadians holding this view of their provincial government has dropped to 33 per cent.

Respondents were also asked whether they would prefer their provincial government or the Government of Canada take the lead in matters related to health care. Despite some fairly negative views expressed in terms of federal performance in health care, a clear plurality of Canadians (42 per cent) feel that both levels of government should be responsible for protecting and strengthening Canada's health care system.

Preferred Methods for Improving Health Care System

The survey also asked a number of questions about preferences for improving the health care system.

When asked how they would allocate one billion dollars in government funding to improve our health care system, better access to family doctors and nurses was seen as the best way to improve our health care system (selected 70 per cent of the time over the other options tested). Expanded home and community care services is also seen as a good way to improve the health care system (selected 54 per cent of the time).

When asked where they would prefer governments to focus health care funding, Canadians believe doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals should be the top priority (selected 67 per cent of the time over the other options examined). Interestingly, home care is selected second most often as an appropriate area for investment (52 per cent of the time), to an even greater degree than hospitals (selected 47 per cent of the time).

Respondents were also asked what they considered to be the best options for improving Canada's health care system. Consistent with previous results, the most frequently selected option for improving Canada's health care system is increasing the number of doctors (selected 59 per cent of the time over other options). Allowing a two-tiered health care system in which Canadians could pay extra for

better or quicker service is seen as the least popular option to improve the health care system (selected only 24 per cent of the time over the other options examined).

Two-Tiered Health Care

Canadians were also asked a number of other questions regarding their views on “two-tiered” health care. Survey results reveal little support for the idea that individuals should be allowed to pay extra for quicker access to health care services (32 per cent agree with this idea, and 57 per cent disagree). Tracking reveals that opposition to a two-tiered health care system has increased over the past few years, with more than half of Canadians (53 per cent) disagreeing that individuals should be able to pay for quicker access to services, up from 46 per cent in 2007. This figure, however, remains well below its peak in 1997 (when 67 per cent of Canadians disagreed with two-tiered health care).

In a related question, Canadians were asked about the impact of allowing private delivery of health care services. Consistent with other findings, Canadians are not particularly optimistic regarding the impacts of private health care. The majority (61 per cent) feel that allowing private services will cause the system to deteriorate, and only one in four (26 per cent) feel that private delivery of health care services will improve the health care system. Tracking reveals that Canadians are becoming increasingly polarized when it comes to the impacts of allowing Canadians to pay for superior health care services. The proportion of Canadians who predict an overall deterioration in services has increased to 54 per cent, up from 48 per cent in 1999. At the same time, the proportion of Canadians who anticipate an improvement has also increased, from 24 per cent to 28 per cent (the proportion of respondents who foresee no impact at all has dropped from 26 per cent to 17 per cent).

Views on Health and Health Care System

Canadians were also asked a number of more general questions about their health and the health care system.

When asked to rate their health, results suggest that Canadians generally feel healthy, with half of respondents rating their health as either excellent (16 per cent) or very good (34 per cent). A further third (32 per cent) cautiously rate their health as good. A sizeable minority of respondents (18 per cent), however, are considerably less optimistic regarding their health, rating it as either fair (14 per cent) or poor (four per cent). In keeping with literature suggesting that socio-economic status is a key determinant of health, those with high school education or less deem themselves the least healthy (32 per cent rate their health as fair or poor, compared to 16 per cent of university graduates); and just 10 per cent of those with a household income of \$100,000 or more rate their health as fair or poor, compared to fully 38 per cent of those earning less than \$20,000.

Canadians were also asked how they envision the future of health care in Canada. Results reveal some fairly high levels of concern about the health care system of the future. Nine in ten believe that

there will be a higher demand for health care services (92 per cent) and that the costs of maintaining the health care system will be higher (87 per cent). Eight in ten (82 per cent), believe that health services provided outside of hospitals will become more important, and roughly two in three (64 per cent) believe that Canadians will have to pay more in terms of out of pocket expenses for health care. There is some uncertainty over the role that governments will play in the future, with fewer than half (46 per cent) believing that governments will become more involved, and a sizeable minority (28 per cent) believing that governments' role will diminish in the future. Tracking reveals that across many of the images/issues examined, results have remained largely stable over the past decade or so, with the exception of government role: half of Canadians (52 per cent) believe that the government will become a more influential player in the future, up from 39 per cent in 1999.

Satisfaction with Health Care System

Canadians were also asked a series of questions about their satisfaction with the health care system.

When asked whether they believe that the quality of health care in Canada has improved, deteriorated, or stayed the same over the last two years, the majority (52 per cent) say they perceive no recent change in the quality of health care. One-third (30 per cent) believe the system has deteriorated during this period, and only one in ten (11 per cent) believe that health care has improved. Despite low levels of belief that the health care system has improved over the past two years, tracking reveals a significant decline in the proportion of Canadians who feel that the health care system has deteriorated (29 per cent, down from a peak of 72 per cent in 1999). At the same time, the proportion of Canadians who believe the quality of health care has remained the same is up significantly (to 53 per cent, from a low of 19 per cent in 1999).

Canadians were also asked whether they believe that the quality of health care will improve, deteriorate, or stay the same over the next two years. Results reveal mixed views on the future of Canadian health care. Four in ten (44 per cent) feel the quality of health care will remain largely the same over the next two years, however, a similar proportion (39 per cent) predicts a decline in health care quality. Just one in six (16 per cent) believes the quality of health care will improve. Tracking reveals that, despite mixed views on the future of Canadian health care, Canadians have become somewhat less pessimistic about this issue. In the late 1990s, the plurality of respondents (40 per cent) believed that the system would deteriorate, and just 34 per cent believed health care quality would remain unchanged. Today, nearly half of Canadians (47 per cent) feel health care quality will remain the same over the next two years, and just one in three (32 per cent) believe that the health care system will deteriorate.

Turning to confidence in accessing health care services, a clear majority of Canadians (65 per cent) agree that they would have access to the necessary health care services should they or a family member become sick. Tracking reveals that the proportion of Canadians who are confident that they would be able to access necessary health care services has remained fairly stable over the last few years, but is

well above 2002 levels when only 55 per cent of Canadians were confident in their access to health care services.

Canadians were also asked to rate their satisfaction with a number of key elements of the health care system. Results reveal mixed satisfaction with many aspects of the health care system. The majority (60 per cent) indicate that they are satisfied with their ability to see their primary care provider. However, across the other issues examined, only a minority of Canadians express satisfaction. Fewer than half (48 per cent), are satisfied with the availability of affordable prescription drugs, and fewer than four in ten are satisfied with the availability of specialists (37 per cent) or access to new diagnostic tests and treatments (35 per cent). And fewer than one in five (18 per cent) say they are satisfied with the availability of affordable home care, although a large proportion (39 per cent) did not provide a response to this question, suggesting some uncertainty about this issue.

Conclusions

Survey results reveal that Canadians express far more confidence in their provincial government than the federal government to protect and improve the health care system. Moreover, confidence in the provincial government is up considerably over the past decade, while confidence in the federal government is down significantly over this timeframe.

When asked about the best way to improve the health care system, more doctors/nurses are consistently seen as the best way to improve the system, however, increased home care is also frequently mentioned as a good way to improve health care.

Results suggest that Canadians generally feel healthy, however, in keeping with literature suggesting that socio-economic status is a key determinant of health, those with high school education or less and those with lower incomes feel far less healthy than those with higher incomes and educational attainment.

Survey results also reveal that Canadians are increasingly confident about the health care system. Tracking reveals a significant decline in the proportion of Canadians who feel that the health care system has deteriorated, and a significant increase in the proportion who believe the quality of health care has remained stable or improved. Moreover, the proportion of Canadians who are confident that they would be able to access necessary health care services is up considerably since 2002.

However, despite increasingly optimistic views about the health care system, results reveal mixed satisfaction in terms of accessing some elements of the system. While the majority of Canadians (60 per cent) are satisfied with their ability to see their primary care provider, only a minority of Canadians express satisfaction with the availability of affordable prescription drugs, the availability of specialists, or the ability to access to new diagnostic tests and treatments. And fewer than one in five say they are satisfied with the availability of affordable home care (although it should be noted that many did not provide a response to this question).

