

RETHINKING CANADA'S AGING POPULATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Rethinking Canada's Aging Population study examined a wide range of issues of importance to Canadian seniors, such as crime, health care, housing, and income/savings for retirement. Results from the study suggest that Canadian seniors are generally upbeat, positive, and enjoy a good quality of life. However, this positive outlook is not shared equally across all seniors – there are clear cleavages exhibited across education and, to an even greater extent, income. Lower income seniors not only express significantly less satisfaction with their financial situation, but also with non-financial issues such as the safety of their neighbourhood, their health, being able to count on the help of others, and their ability to get involved in their community. Results of the survey are summarized below, and in more detail in later sections of this report.

General Views

Canadian seniors (defined as those 55 years and older for the purpose of this report) were first asked how satisfied they are with a range of aspects of their life. Results suggest that seniors are largely satisfied with their lives. Fully eight in ten express satisfaction in terms of the safety and security of their home and neighbourhood (83 per cent), their ability to get around their community (83 per cent), and being able to count on the help of friends and family (81 per cent). A further three-quarters are satisfied with their health, and two-thirds feel they have opportunities to get involved in their community. Seniors are somewhat less satisfied with the other aspects examined: six in ten (59 per cent) report satisfaction with their income/savings, and only 50 per cent express satisfaction with their ability to find out about and access government programs. Interestingly, those with higher income levels are significantly more satisfied with all the aspects of life tested.

Respondents were also asked which of a range of issues of importance to Canadian seniors should be given highest priority by the Government of Canada. Survey results reveal that health care issues are clearly seen as most important (chosen by 57 per cent), followed distantly by financial support (19 per cent), and housing issues (10 per cent). Safety and security issues (six per cent), and transportation issues (five per cent) are at the bottom of the list of issues in this forced choice scenario.

Seniors were also asked how they would rate the overall performance of the Government of Canada in terms of addressing issues of importance to them. Results reveal mixed/negative views on federal performance in this area: 27 per cent rate federal performance positively, roughly the same proportion (28 per cent) offer a negative appraisal, and the plurality are neutral (42 per cent).

Health and Health Care

Rethinking Canada's Aging Population also examined Canadian seniors' views on health and health care issues.

Respondents were first asked, unprompted, what they thought was the most serious health issue facing Canadian seniors. Lack of access to health care services topped the list (mentioned by 25 per cent of respondents). Many of the other responses to this question revolved around diseases, such as cancer (mentioned by 24 per cent of respondents), heart disease (nine per cent) and diabetes (four per cent).

Canadian seniors were also asked how satisfied they were with different aspects of the health care system. Results reveal that Canadian seniors are largely satisfied with their ability to see their family doctor (71 per cent), however results are more mixed across the other issues tested. Just over half express satisfaction with getting affordable prescription drugs (52 per cent), and only four in ten (41 per cent) are satisfied with their ability to see a specialist.

When asked how important each of a range of factors is in helping to maintain their health, all the issues examined are seen as very important by at least two-thirds of Canadian seniors, although having a positive outlook on life topped the list (seen as very important by 91 per cent of respondents). Eating a well-balanced diet (88 per cent), being physically active (86 per cent), and the proper use of medication (85 per cent) were also seen as very important by a large majority of respondents. Just over eight in ten (81 per cent) felt that lifestyle choices (such as not smoking or drinking too much) have a significant impact on their health, and three-quarters felt having a social support network is very important to maintain one's health. At the bottom of the list was having lots of health information, although two-thirds of seniors (68 per cent) felt this too has a significant impact on their health.

Crime and Security

A recent report published by Statistics Canada, based on results from the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS) on victimization and police-reported data from the 2005 Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey, revealed that "Canada's seniors (those aged 65 years and older) are less likely to be the victims of violent and property crimes than younger people."¹ Interestingly, findings from Rethinking Canada's Aging Population suggest that most seniors perceive the opposite to be true: fully two-thirds of respondents (66 per cent) believe that older Canadians are more at risk of being a victim of crime, and only 15 per cent disagree with this idea.

Canadian seniors were also asked how concerned they are about being a victim of crime in general, and fraud specifically. Results reveal that seniors express fairly high levels of concern about being a victim of both these offences, although they are somewhat more concerned about fraud than crime in general (34 per cent express a high degree of concern about fraud, compared to 26 per cent who are similarly concerned about crime).

¹ Statistics Canada. 6 March 2007. *The Daily*. <<http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/070306/d070306b.htm>>

Despite fairly high levels of concern about fraud and crime, fewer than one in ten seniors say they have been the victim of property theft (six per cent) or fraud (five per cent) in the past year, and more than nine in ten say they have not been the victim of either of these offences.

Those who indicated they were a victim of fraud were asked a number of follow-up questions about the nature, method of solicitation, and reporting of the incident.² Results reveal that more than four in ten seniors who report being the victim of fraud in the past 12 months (46 per cent) say this has happened to them before, while just over half (54 per cent) say they have not been prior victims of fraud. Among those who are repeat victims of fraud, four in ten (39 per cent) say this has happened to them twice before, and a surprising six in ten (61 per cent) say they have been the victims of fraud three times or more.

Respondents who said they had been the victim of fraud in the past 12 months were asked to specify the nature of the fraudulent activity. Results suggest that credit card/bank fraud was the most common type of fraud experienced by these respondents (cited by 34 per cent). About one in four say the fraud involved merchandise purchased that was misrepresented or never delivered (27 per cent), or services that were not performed properly or were not provided at all (26 per cent).

Results also reveal that face-to-face meetings appear to be the most common method of solicitation used to perpetrate the fraud (mentioned by 39 per cent of these respondents). One in five say they were solicited over the phone (20 per cent) or through a bank/credit card offer (18 per cent). One in ten were solicited through the mail (nine per cent) or via email/the Internet (eight per cent).

According to Statistics Canada, there is little data that can be used to fully understand the nature and extent of fraud in Canada due to the under-reporting of fraud by individuals and businesses.³ Results from Rethinking Canada's Aging Population support this conclusion: more than six in ten of those who indicated they were a victim of fraud (63 per cent) said they did not report the incident to police, while only one-third (35 per cent) said they did report the fraud to the police. Those who did not report the incident to the police were given a list of reasons why some people might not contact the police about a fraudulent activity and asked which ones apply to their incident. The majority of these respondents (53 per cent) say they did not report the incident to the police because it was dealt with in another way, and slightly fewer said they did not report the incident because they did not think the police could do much to help (48 per cent). A further one in seven (14 per cent) said the fraudulent activity was not important enough to them to bother reporting it to police.

² Please note that due to the small sample size associated with these results, caution is urged in interpreting these results.

³ "A Feasibility Report on Improving the Measurement of Fraud in Canada." Statistics Canada. 26 March 2007. <<http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/85-569-XIE/2006001/back.htm>>

Retirement and Retirement Plans

A 2001 report by Statistics Canada revealed that more than 1.5 million families who had a main provider between the ages of 45 and 64 had no private pension savings in 1999, and consequently would have to rely almost solely on public pensions such as the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and the Old Age Security Pension (OAS) in their retirement.⁴ Results from Rethinking Canada's Aging Population suggest that reliance on public pensions as a source of income for retirement is still widespread.

Retired respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they are relying on a range of income sources. Results reveal that retirees are most likely to say they are relying on public pensions such as CPP or OAS (59 per cent), followed distantly by private or company pension benefits (39 per cent). About three in ten say they rely on personal savings and investments other than RRSPs (31 per cent) or equity from assets they own such as real estate (28 per cent). Only one in four (26 per cent) say they are counting on RRSPs to get them through retirement.

Survey results also suggest that retirees are generally confident that public pensions will be there for them throughout their retirement. More than half (53 per cent) express confidence in the sustainability of the CPP/Quebec Pension Plan (QPP), while only one in ten (11 per cent) do not. An even greater proportion of retirees (57 per cent) express confidence that the OAS and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) will be there for them throughout their retirement (and only 12 per cent express little confidence in the sustainability of these programs).

Seniors who are still in the workforce were asked a set of questions similar to those asked of retirees. As was the case with those who have retired from the workforce, working seniors are most likely to say they are counting on public pensions, such as CPP and OAS, to support them through retirement (54 per cent). Just over four in ten say they expect they will rely on RRSPs (42 per cent), and equity from assets such as real estate (41 per cent). Just under four in ten expect private or company pension benefits (38 per cent), and personal savings and investments other than RRSPs (37 per cent) to be important sources of income in their retirement.

Results also reveal that compared to their retired counterparts, working seniors are somewhat less confident in the longevity of public pensions. Just under half (49 per cent) say they are confident that the CPP/QPP will be there for them when they retire, while one in five (18 per cent) are not confident. Similarly, fewer than half (47 per cent) express confidence that the OAS and the GIS will be there for them when they retire, while 21 per cent are not confident.

Recent Census numbers reveal that there is almost a one-to-one ratio between those entering the workforce and those retiring, and that within 10 years retirees will outnumber entrants to the workforce, suggesting that employers must think of new ways to keep older workers in the workplace. Rethinking Canada's Aging Population asked employed seniors who are nearing retirement (i.e., 65 years of age and under) if they would consider working past the age of 65. Results suggest that many older Canadian workers would indeed consider working beyond the "normal" retirement age: fully seven in ten of these

⁴ http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2001/12/14/pensionstudy_011214.html

respondents (72 per cent) say they would consider working past age 65, while only one in four (25 per cent) say they would not. Looking at the reasons why these older workers would consider working beyond age 65, the need for additional income is the most commonly cited reason (mentioned by 48 per cent of respondents). However, income is not the only reason older workers would continue to work: more than one in three (34 per cent) say they would continue to work past the age of 65 because they don't want to be bored, and a similar proportion (31 per cent) say they like their work. A further 15 per cent say they would continue to work beyond age 65 because they want to stay active and healthy.

All seniors were asked how confident they were that they will have sufficient income in their retirement. Results suggest that Canadian seniors are generally satisfied with the adequacy of their retirement income: more than half (51 per cent) say they are confident they will have enough income in their retirement, while only about one in six (16 per cent) say they are not confident. However, this confidence is by no means uniform across all seniors: only 29 per cent of those earning less than \$20,000 in annual household income are confident they will have enough income in retirement, compared to 81 per cent of those earning \$100,000 or more.

Caregiving

Canadian seniors were also asked about their experience with, and views on, caregiving. Respondents were first asked if they are currently receiving any care from a friend or family member due to being disabled or having a long-term physical or mental health issue. Results reveal that only seven per cent of respondents say they are receiving this type of care, while fully nine in ten (93 per cent) say they are not.

Seniors were also asked if they look after a friend or family member who is disabled, has a long-term physical or mental health issue, or is frail and elderly. Findings suggest that Canadian seniors are three times more likely to be providing care than receiving it: 21 per cent say they look after a friend or family member who is disabled, has a long-term physical or mental health issue, or is frail and elderly.

Those respondents who indicated they were looking after a friend or family member were asked if they are concerned that this caregiving responsibility will limit their ability to earn income or impact their retirement plans. Results reveal that only one in five of these respondents (19 per cent) are concerned about this possibility, while the majority (52 per cent) are not concerned.

Those who do not provide care to a family member or friend were asked how concerned they are that they will have to provide this type of care for a friend or family member at some point in the future. Only about one in five of these respondents (18 per cent) express concern about the possibility of this occurring, while almost half (47 per cent) do not.

Housing

The Rethinking Canada's Aging Population study also contained a number of questions examining seniors' views on housing issues.

Survey results suggest that most Canadian seniors have little difficulty paying their current household expenses (e.g., rent, mortgage, food, utilities). Only eight per cent say they have difficulty paying their household expenses, while 73 per cent say they have little difficulty meeting their basic needs. However, as with many other issues, these results vary by income: only 48 per cent of those earning less than \$20,000 in annual household income say they have little difficulty meeting household expenses, compared to 93 per cent of those earning \$100,000 or more.

Despite the fact that three in four seniors say they have little difficulty meeting their household expenses, results suggest that relatively few Canadian seniors are satisfied with the availability of affordable housing in their community. Only one in four (25 per cent) agree there is enough affordable housing in their community, while 50 per cent disagree with this idea.

Rethinking Canada's Aging Population results also reveal that Canadians 55 years of age and older report a high degree of self-sufficiency with respect to their living situation: fully 93 per cent of seniors say that, for the most part, they are able to continue living independently. Results further suggest that Canadian seniors are fairly comfortable in their current accommodations: fully 92 per cent say their current housing situation generally meets their needs.

Reinforcing the idea that most seniors are satisfied with their current housing situation, we find that nine in ten seniors (87 per cent) say they are planning to remain in their present home for as long as possible, even if there are changes in their health situation, while only one in ten say they do not intend to remain in their present home.

Survey results also suggest that relatively few Canadian seniors would consider creating a secondary suite in their home or installing a garden suite on their property for a family member (such as one of their parents or their spouse's parents). Fewer than one in four (23 per cent) said they would consider creating a secondary residence for a family member, while the majority (69 per cent) said they would not consider doing this.

Those who said they would not consider installing a secondary/garden suite were asked, unaided, why they would not consider this option. The plurality (29 per cent) cited a lack of need as the primary reason, while one in five say they simply lack the room to build them (19 per cent), and about one in seven (15 per cent) say they are happy with their current living arrangements.

Seniors who said they *would* consider installing a secondary or garden suite on their property were asked, unprompted, what benefits they would expect from this type of dwelling. The plurality of these respondents (45 per cent) believe a secondary/garden suite would allow their parents or their spouse's parents to live close to them, and about one in five (17 per cent) say a secondary/garden suite would allow their parents or their spouse's parents to continue to live independently.

Although relatively few Canadian seniors say they would consider installing a secondary/garden suite on their property, results suggest that they are more amenable to living in one. When asked if they would consider living in a secondary suite or a garden suite created in the home of a family member, more than four in ten seniors (44 per cent) say they would consider this (although it should be noted that a slight majority – 51 per cent – say they would not).

Volunteering and Communicating with Seniors

Survey results reveal that four in ten Canadian seniors (44 per cent) say they engage in volunteer activities, while just over half (54 per cent) say they do not. Those who indicated they do not volunteer were asked, unprompted, what the main barriers are that prevent them from volunteering. Time is seen as the biggest impediment to volunteer activities (mentioned by 40 per cent of these respondents), followed by health/mobility issues (25 per cent).

Canadian seniors were also asked, unprompted, what they thought would be the best way to get information to seniors about issues of importance to them. Flyers in the mail were mentioned most often (32 per cent), followed by television advertising (27 per cent), and newspaper advertising (18 per cent). One in ten respondents felt that transmitting information through seniors/community centers (10 per cent), radio advertising (nine per cent), or the Internet (eight per cent) would be the most effective way to reach seniors.

Respondents were also asked from which sources they are most likely to *obtain* information about issues of importance to them. Interestingly, responses to this question do not match those provided when asked about the most effective way to get information *to* seniors. Newspaper advertising is mentioned most often as the way in which seniors currently receive information (30 per cent, compared to 18 per cent who mentioned newspaper advertising as an effective way of getting information to seniors). Internet is also assigned higher prominence as a current source of information (20 per cent) than as an effective way to get information to seniors (eight per cent). Television advertising is fairly consistent between the two questions (second in the hierarchy of responses for both). As mentioned earlier, flyers in the mail was seen as the most effective way to get information to seniors, but ranks a distant fourth in terms of how seniors currently acquire information about issues of importance to them.

Segmentation

In order to add texture to the survey results, multivariate analysis (cluster analysis) was undertaken with findings from the survey. The results of this cluster analysis reveal that Canadian seniors can be grouped into five segments: the ***Optimistic***, the ***Comfortable***, the ***Negative***, the ***Insecure***, and the ***Distressed***.

The results of the cluster analysis suggest that Canadian “seniors” are not a homogeneous monolith; their views and attitudes vary significantly across a range of issues. Interestingly, however, age is not the primary driver of these differences; mirroring the findings described earlier (and outlined in more detail in later chapters of this report) income, and to a lesser extent education, appear to have the strongest influence in terms of Canadian seniors’ attitudes and outlook on life. The two groups with low income and education levels (the Insecure and the Distressed) are significantly less satisfied with their lives than those with higher income and education levels (the Comfortable, the Negative, and the Optimistic), not only in terms of financial security, but also in terms of non-financial issues such as the safety of their neighbourhood, their health, and their involvement in their community (the results of the cluster analysis are described in detail in Chapter 9).

