

CANADIANS WORRIED SICK ABOUT HEALTH CARE

[Ottawa – October 8, 2015] Most citizens are deeply concerned about the current status and future prospects for Canada’s public health care system. There is a clear sense that the system has eroded badly under Stephen Harper’s watch and the public are emphatically offside with many of the core health policies of the Harper government. Even within Conservative supporters, there are large levels of anxiety and dissatisfaction. In the rest of the voting population, dissatisfaction is intense – even visceral.

The question arises as to why an issue of such potent significance to Canadians, at the most basic levels of values and interests has been largely missing from Election 42? Why would we spend more time and energy debating how a handful of women might want to dress at a citizenship ceremony, when the most basic questions of how to ensure health and well-being are available in a rapidly aging society facing a protracted period of economic stagnation are ignored?

But do Canadians even care about health care and are they really that concerned about the post-Harper trajectory? Despite the relative silence in the current campaign, our new polling data suggest that:

1. Health care is the only issue which has been a pinnacle issue in the last six elections and the health care system remains nearly our most important symbol and value;
2. There is a strong consensus that things have worsened significantly on Stephen Harper’s watch;
3. Strong majorities disapprove of Stephen Harper’s core strategy for Health Care;
4. The public are looking for significantly more resources and innovation in our National Health Care; and
5. Voters would welcome hearing more about health care and would reward those parties that provide compelling answers.

Because public health and medicine are obviously complex and technical subjects, and therefore challenging for polling, public policy, or journalistic purposes, in this poll EKOS tries a new approach. The health sections of this poll were designed in collaboration with Canadian health scholars and experts. Amir Attaran (Professor, University of Ottawa, Faculty of Medicine and Faculty of Law) and Jim Chauvin (independent consultant, retired, formerly of the Canadian Public Health Association) canvassed the relevant issues or questions with the advice of colleagues at the University of Ottawa, Carleton University, University of Toronto, Bruyère Research Institute, Canadian Doctors for Medicare, and the Canadian Public Health Association. Ideas were also borrowed from the Harvard School of Public Health, specifically the Opinion Research Program directed by Professor Bob Blendon, which has provided outstanding health polling in the American environment for decades. Their contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

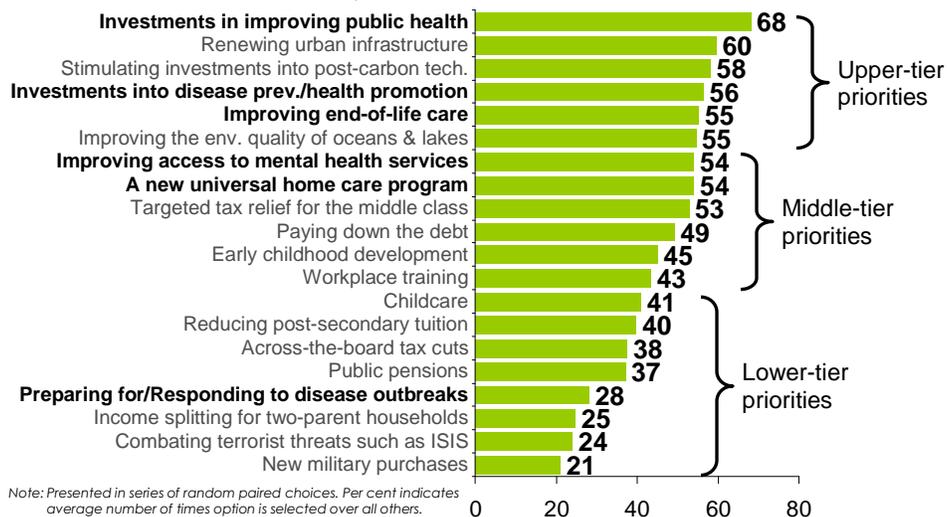
Importance of health care

We conducted what is called a trade-off analysis of how to spend one billion dollars over the next ten years. Respondents were presented with pairs of choices (from a list of 20 items) and, rather than ask them to assign some arbitrary rating for each one, we asked them to choose between the two. In a world where wants are infinite but resources are limited, forced choice exercises are an excellent option for disciplining these choices, as it forces respondents to order their preferences, thereby creating an overall hierarchy and providing a highly accurate picture of the hard choices that Canadians would make.

Results show that health care issues dominate the list of public priorities. Indeed, of the eight top issues identified in our analysis, five are related to health care. It is also interesting that many of the key pillars of the current government's platform – tax cuts, income splitting, combating terrorist threats, and new military purchases – all find themselves at or near the bottom of this list.

Preferred areas of investment

Q. Suppose you were Prime Minister for a day and you had to choose how to invest one billion dollars over the next 10 years. Which of the following investments would be in the best interest of the public?



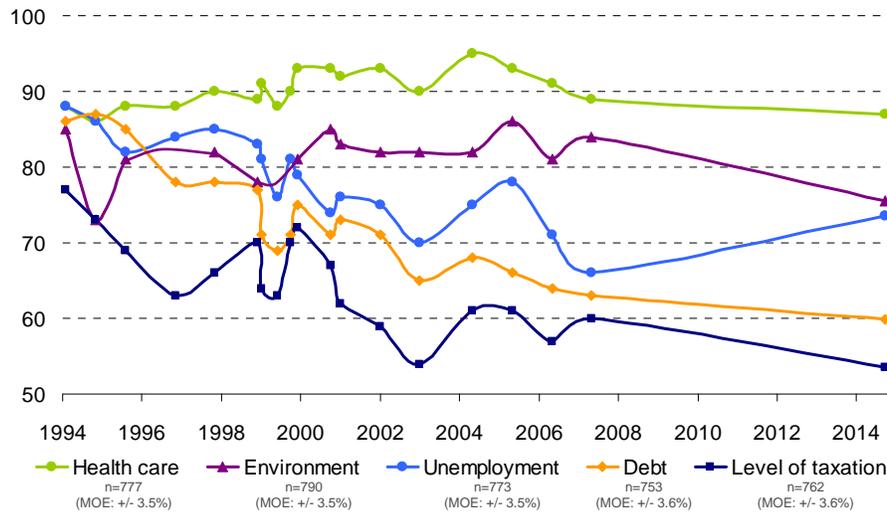
Note: Presented in series of random paired choices. Per cent indicates average number of times option is selected over all others.

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BASE: Canadians; September 14-22, 2015 (n=2,011), MOE +/- 2.2%, 19 times out of 20

Tracking federal government priorities

Q. Canada is facing a series of difficult challenges. Thinking not just of today but over the next five years, what priority should the federal government place on each of the following areas?

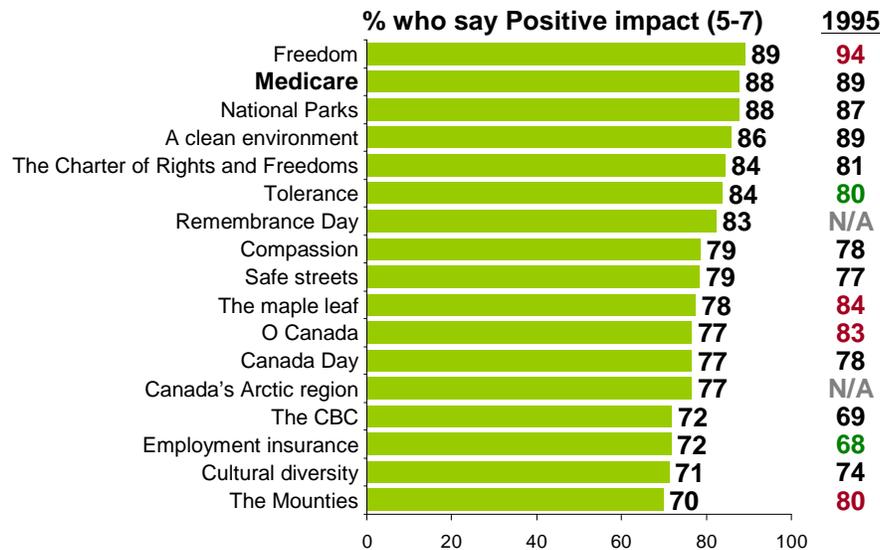


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BASE: Canadians; September 21-25, 2014 (n=753-790), MOE +/- 3.5-3.6%, 19 times out of 20

Symbols and values (top 15)

Q. How strongly do you think each of the following events, objects and values detract or contribute to your sense of Canadian identity?"



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BASE: Canadians; May 29-June 1, 2015 (n=937), MOE +/- 3.2%, 19 times out of 20

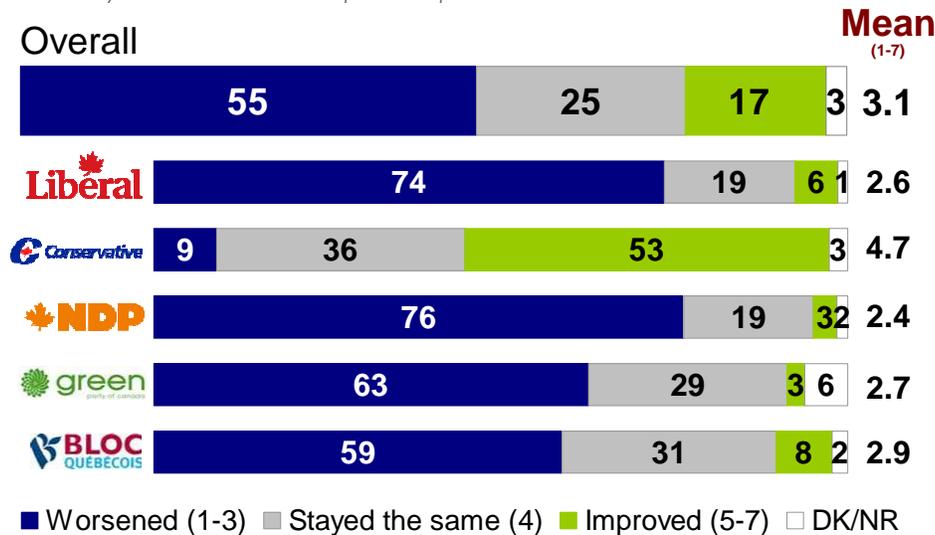
What went so awfully wrong?

Outside of the Conservative base, the vast majority of Canadians believe that the quality of health care has eroded since Stephen Harper took office. The biggest perceived threat to Canada's health system stems from the increased demands from an aging population; there are also broad concerns about a shortage of doctors and resources, as well as an inadequate focus on health promotion and preventative care.

Furthermore, strong majorities disapprove of Stephen Harper's core strategy for Health Care. Even Conservative supporters' attitudes range from tepid neutrality to clear opposition when it comes to some of his more controversial decisions. Refusing to meet with Canada's premiers seems to have struck a particular chord with Canadians; even Mr. Harper's own base firmly rejects this decision

Trends in quality of health care since 2006

Q. Overall, do you believe that public health care in Canada has improved, worsened, or stayed the same since Stephen Harper took office in 2006?

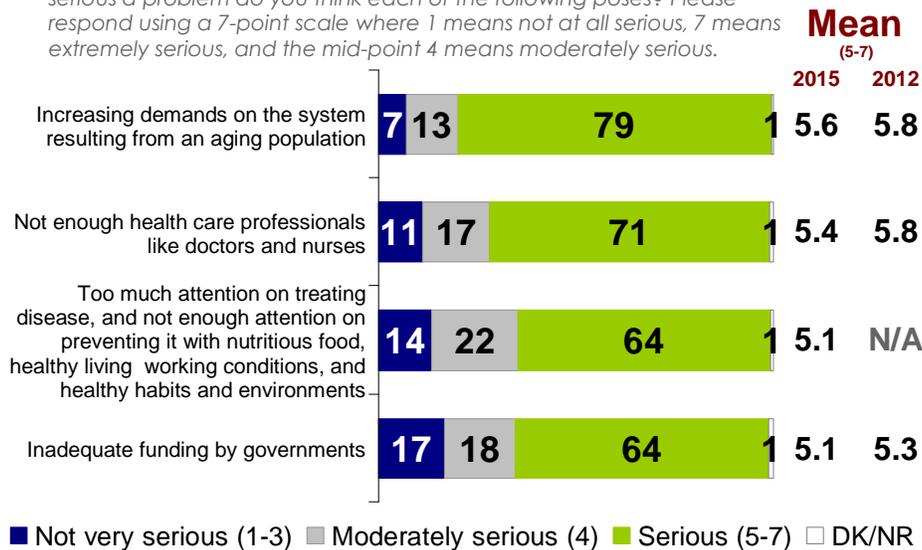


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BASE: Canadians; September 14-22, 2015 (n=2,011), MOE +/- 2.2%, 19 times out of 20

Seriousness of issues facing health care

Q. Thinking about Canadians' health and the health care system, how serious a problem do you think each of the following poses? Please respond using a 7-point scale where 1 means not at all serious, 7 means extremely serious, and the mid-point 4 means moderately serious.

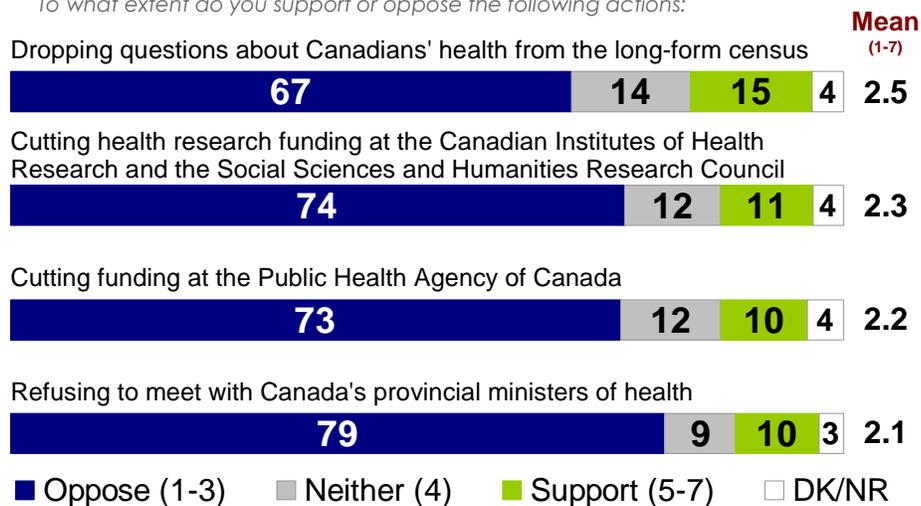


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BASE: Canadians; September 14-22, 2015 (n=2,011), MOE +/- 2.2%, 19 times out of 20

Support for Harper's health care strategy

Q. Since Stephen Harper became Prime Minister in 2006, the federal government has made several changes to how the federal government approaches public health and health care. Some of these changes have been met with criticism. To what extent do you support or oppose the following actions:



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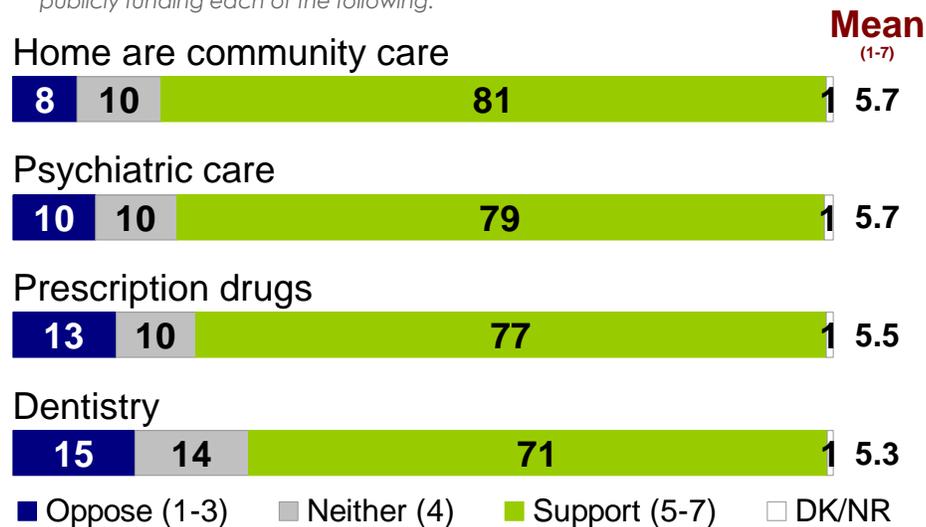
What should we do?

Our earlier trade-off analysis reveals that the top priorities centre on preventative medicine and promoting public health, rather than treating existing problems; this view is also reflected in the high percentage of Canadians (64%) who see a lack of focus in this area a serious concern. Survey results reveal broad support for expanding medicare into new areas, such as home and community care, psychiatric care, prescription drugs, and dentistry.

Whatever the solution(s) may be, there is broad opposition to creating a two-tiered system where individuals can pay for quicker access to health services. Naturally, Conservative supporters are more open to this idea.

Support for extending public medicare

Q. As you may know, many health services used by Canadians are not generally paid for by public medicare. To what extent would you support or oppose publicly funding each of the following:



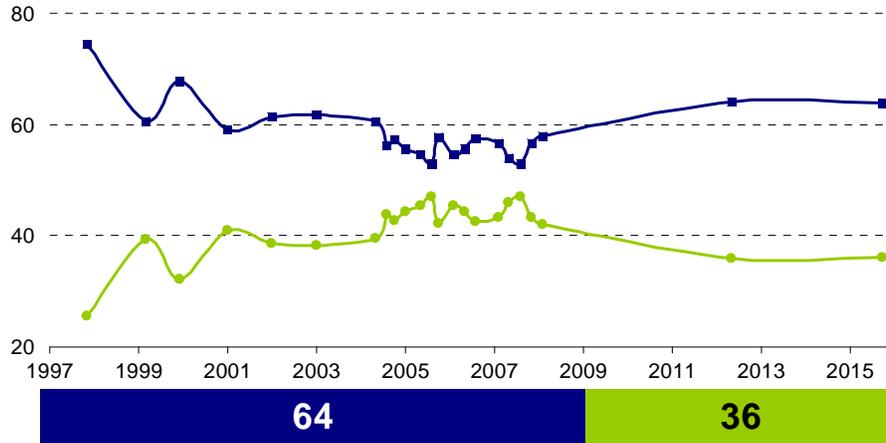
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BASE: Canadians; September 14-22, 2015 (n=2,011), MOE +/- 2.2%, 19 times out of 20

Support for two-tier health care

Q. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement:

"Individuals should be allowed to pay extra to get quicker access to health care services."



Note: Figures adjusted to exclude those who selected "neither" or who skipped the question.

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■ Disagree ● Agree

BASE: Canadians; September 14-22, 2015 (n=2,011), MOE +/- 2.2%, 19 times out of 20

Who should take the lead?

Given the perceived decline in the quality of health care in Canada, it is perhaps not surprising that Canadians express comparatively more confidence in their provincial governments when it comes to promoting, protecting, and improving Canadians' health. This finding of course varies depending on who you ask – Conservative supporters are more confident in the federal government while progressive voters are more trustful of their (predominantly Liberal- and NDP-led) provincial governments.

Nevertheless, a clear majority of Canadians want the federal government to play a lead in health and health care. In Quebec, however, a narrow majority of respondents would prefer a more "made in Quebec" solution.

Division of federal-provincial responsibilities

Q. Overall, when it comes to protecting, promoting, and improving Canadians' health, would you say...

...your provincial government or the Government of Canada should **take the lead**?



n=981, MOE +/- 3.1%, 19 times out of 20

...you have more **confidence** in your provincial government or in the Government of Canada?



n=1,030, MOE +/- 3.1%, 19 times out of 20

■ Provincial government ■ Government of Canada ■ DK/NR

Who can we trust?

Finally, we asked Canadians which party they trust most to manage the various challenges of Canada's health care system. Interestingly, even though results fall mostly along party lines, the NDP ranks first on all four indicators; meanwhile, the Liberals consistently rank second and the Conservative Party is in a distant third.

The NDP holds a clear lead in expanding publicly funded health care to include services previously not covered and addressing the challenges coming from Canada's aging population, although the Liberals remain competitive on issues related to co-operation with the provinces and funding medical research.

Party most trusted to manage health care

Q. Which federal political party do you trust most to... ?

Expand publicly funded health care system into new areas

(e.g., home care, prescription drugs, dentistry)



Manage the challenges that come with Canadians living longer and Canada's aging population



Work out a deal with the provinces to fund public health and healthcare adequately



Give funding and support to health and medical research in Canada



■ NDP
 ■ Liberal Party
 ■ Conservative Party
 ■ Green Party
 ■ Bloc Québécois
 ■ Other
 Skip

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Methodology:

This study was conducted using EKOS' unique, hybrid online/telephone research panel, *Prob/t*. Our panel offers exhaustive 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. All respondents to our panel are recruited by telephone using random digit dialling and are confirmed by live interviewers. Unlike opt-in online panels, *Prob/t* supports margin of error estimates. We believe this to be the only probability-based online panel in Canada.

The field dates for this survey are September 14-22, 2015. In total, a random sample of 2,011 Canadian adults aged 18 and over responded to the survey. The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/- 3.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Please note that the margin of error increases when the results are sub-divided (i.e., error margins for sub-groups such as region, sex, age, education). All the data have been statistically weighted by **age, gender, region, and educational attainment** to ensure the sample's composition reflects that of the actual population of Canada according to Census data.