

CANADIAN SENIORS' USE & VIEWS OF ASSISTIVE DEVICES FOR MOBILITY

Ipsos Reid Poll Commissioned by the BC Institute of Technology's Living Laboratory



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Vancouver, BC – An Ipsos Reid telephone poll commissioned by the BC Institute of Technology's Living Laboratory reveals Canadian Seniors outside Quebec views and use of mobility issues and assistive devices (e.g. canes, walkers, motorized scooters, and hip protectors).

Canadian Senior's Use of Mobility Aids

- Overall, 22% of Canadian Seniors say they use at least one of the mobility aids listed in the research (i.e. a cane, a walker, an electronic/motorized scooter, or a hip protector). And, more than a third use grab bars. Use of canes (19%), specifically, is much more predominant than other mobility aids. Walkers are the next most used aid (9%).
- Among the 36% of Seniors who use grab bars, the vast majority (78%) say they had them installed in their home, either by family/friends or doing it themselves. One-in-five found them installed when they moved into their home.
- The main reason Canadian Seniors use mobility aids is a combination of seeing some direct benefit – preventing falls (28%), feeling steady or balanced (24%), and needing to use them due to a medical condition (26%).
- For Seniors who don't use mobility aids, they largely believe they don't need them (84%). Other less important reasons for non-use are tied to usage difficulties (difficult to handle – 16%, uncomfortable to use – 13%), cost (too expensive – 22%), and looks (don't like the way they look using them – 16%).
- The research shows that mobility aids are not being used by many Seniors who would likely benefit from them. Overall, 46% of Canadian Seniors who report having a mobility or health issue do not use a mobility aid. Among those who have a medical condition that could affect their mobility, just 25% currently use a mobility aid (which is 20% of all Seniors). Among those who report a health or mobility issue, only 33% currently use a mobility aid (22% of all Seniors).

- Groups of Seniors most likely to use mobility aids include: women, 85+ years of age, lower income (less than \$45K in annual household income), and those who have a medical condition.

Canadian Senior's Perceptions of Mobility Aids

- In general, Canadian Seniors have a positive perception of mobility aids. They see them as a good way to **prevent falls** (96%), something that allows them to continue to live an **active and social** life (91%) and makes them look like they are **taking control** of their life (91%).
- The main perceived weakness mobility aids have is related to security: **two-thirds** of Seniors believe mobility aids make them greater **targets for crime**. Still, a third have negative perceptions of the image mobility aids give to Seniors who use them – i.e. “old and frail” (33%) and “losing their independence” (33%).

Contradictions in Canadian Seniors' Mobility Status, Use and Perceptions of Mobility Aids

- There are some clear contradictions among some Canadian Seniors who have mobility issues when it comes to their perceptions and use of mobility aids. In essence, despite having a medical condition or limited mobility that could benefit from the use of a mobility aid, these Seniors do not use these aids even though they profess to see their benefits. There are 4 main contradictions:
 - First, of the 20% of Canadian Seniors who've had a fall in the past 12 months, a very high 63% don't use mobility aids. This represents 13% of the total Senior population in Canada outside Quebec. The vast majority of these same Seniors – 95% – believe that using mobility aids is a good way to prevent falls. Yet, 86% say they don't need them.
 - Second, of the 36% of Canadian Seniors who say they have a physical problem that limits them in their daily life, half (51%) don't use mobility aids. This represents 18% of the total Seniors population. The vast majority of these same Seniors – 91% – believe that people who use mobility aids look like they're taking control of their lives. Yet, 78% say they don't need a mobility aid.

- Third, of the 21% of Canadian Seniors who say they have reduced their social activities over the past year due to a physical limitation, 45% don't use mobility aids. This represents 9% of the total Seniors population. The vast majority of these same Seniors – 87% – believe that people who use mobility aids continue to lead an active and social life. Yet, 74% say they don't need a mobility aid.
- Fourth, among the 54% of Canadian Seniors who have a number of mobility issues (i.e. need to use a handrail, need assistance to get in/out of the tub, need to hold on to furniture to get around their home), fully 45% don't use mobility aids. This represents 31% of the total Senior population in Canada. Fully 92% of these same Seniors believe that people who use mobility aids look like they're taking control of their lives. Yet, they don't use mobility aids, largely because they feel they don't need them (76%).

Canadian Seniors' Information Sources for Mobility Aids

- More than a quarter of Canadian Seniors outside Quebec (26%) who use mobility aids got information about mobility aids on their own without any help. Another one-in-ten (13%) turned to family or friends. While family doctors (23%) and pharmacists (20%) were relevant sources of information for users, a certain number also obtained information in hospitals (13%) and from occupational therapists (9%).
- Canadian Seniors who do not use mobility aids are much less likely than users to look for information about mobility aids by themselves (only 3% would do so, though 12% would look on the Internet). Non-users are, however, more likely to look to health care professionals – 37% would turn to their family doctor, and 35% would ask the pharmacist. And, many would also look to health care institutions, mostly medical devices stores (21%).

Canadian Seniors' Medical and Health Condition & Their Mobility Status

- At least eight-in-ten Seniors across Canada suffer one of a number medical conditions that could limit their mobility. These include arthritis, chronic pain, respiratory problems, diabetes type 2, high blood pressure, osteoporosis or history of heart attack.
- Four-in-ten Seniors report having “a health issue that limits them in their daily life”.
- When it comes to the different types of issues that affect their daily life, seven-in-ten Seniors report at least one of the following: a fall in last year, a health problem that limits their daily life, mobility issues (need to hold onto furniture to help balance, need to use a handrail to climb stairs or require grab bars), or reduced social activities because of mobility limitations.
- In particular, more Seniors report using handrails on stairs (42%) and having limitations due to health issues (36%) than other mobility issues like holding onto furniture to help balance (15%) and having had a fall (20%)

These are the findings of an Ipsos Reid telephone poll conducted between January 15th and 21st, 2009 on behalf of the BC Institute of Technology's Living Laboratory. The survey was conducted among a representative sample of 1,000 Canadian Seniors outside Quebec (70+ years of age) in four markets: British Columbia, Ontario, Atlantic Region, and Rest of Canada (excluding Quebec). Sample was drawn randomly from Ipsos Reid's Canadian Offline panel. The panel is comprised of individuals who have committed to take part in market and social research studies with Ipsos Reid. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire Canadian Seniors population (70+) outside Quebec been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual seniors population outside Quebec according to 2006 Census data.

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