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2015 National Report Card: Canadian Views on a National Seniors' Health Care Strategy

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Introduction

These are the findings of the Canadian Medical Association's 15th annual National Report Card on the health care system in Canada. Since 2001, the CMA has asked Canadians to assign letter grades to their health care system overall and to a number of key aspects of the system.

In addition, each year the National Report Card also examines a specific area of the health care system. This year, Canadians were asked a series of questions about their views on the future of seniors' health care, including a National Strategy on seniors' care.

Methodology

From July 20th – 24th, 2015, Ipsos Reid surveyed a nationally representative sample of 2,008 Canadian adults (18 and over) online.

The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the sample of n=2,008 Canadian adults is accurate to within +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The data was weighted by region, age and gender to ensure that the sample accurately reflects the population according to Census data.



Executive Summary

Views on a National Strategy for Seniors' Health

Canadians are living longer than ever before. In 1971, seniors represented 8% of the population; today they represent 15%. By the time that all the baby boomers have reached 65 years of age, the population of seniors may be as high as 25% of the general population. Meanwhile, life expectancy in Canada has grown from 75 years in 1979 to 81 years in 2009.

This has an enormous impact on a public health care system that is struggling to adapt. Even as the population of seniors has grown, expenditures on health care for seniors has not kept pace, moving little in the past decade (from 44% of total spending in 2000 to 45% in 2011).

Canadians are aware of the problem.

Nine in ten Canadians (90%) agree that we need a national strategy on seniors health care that addresses the need for care provided at home and in hospitals, hospices and long-term care facilities, as well as end of life care. The majority (83%) also believe that such a strategy would improve the entire health care system by finding ways to keep elderly patients living at home for longer.

Concerns about the ability of the health system to adequately meet the needs of the ageing population leaves many with the challenging prospect of caring for older family members themselves. Three in five (63%) say their family is not in a good position (financially or otherwise) to care for older family members if they need long term health care, and it worries them greatly.

If put in charge of developing a national strategy on senior's health, nine in ten (92%) Canadians say that ensuring there are enough health care professionals trained to provide health care to seniors is a priority (including 61% who say it is a very high priority). Providing long-term home care (89%), increasing access to long-term care facilities (88%) and ensuring an adequate income for older Canadians (87%) are also identified as priorities.

The Role of Government

Three in four Canadians (76%) see seniors' care as a national problem requiring cooperation among governments to work closely together on a strategy to deal with it. Along with a call for cooperation, the majority of Canadians (67%) hold the view that the federal government has an important role to play in developing a national seniors' care strategy.

Nearly three in four Canadians (72%) support providing additional health care funding to provinces that have an older population. Support is fairly consistent regionally, with the exception of Alberta, where it drops to 61%.

The Impact of the Election

Nearly nine in ten Canadians (89%) agree that whoever wins the election this fall, the next Prime Minister needs to address the health care needs of Canada's aging population.

If the federal and provincial governments fail to collaborate to improve health care for the aging population, over four in five (83%) believe the responsibility and costs for seniors care will fall on younger family members.



The bottom line for many Canadians is that how they vote in the upcoming federal election will depend, at least in part, on who has the best plan to address seniors issues, including seniors' health care (57% agree).

Attitudes Towards Seniors Care

When asked to assign a letter grade, half of Canadians (49%) assign an 'A' or 'B' grade when it comes to access to health care services for seniors in their community. Seniors themselves are much more likely to assign an 'A' or 'B' grade, with the highest grades coming from those aged 75+ (66%). The lowest grades come from those approaching old age, with just forty-four percent of those aged 45-64 giving access to seniors' health care an 'A' or 'B' grade.

Only half of Canadians give access to seniors' health care an 'A' or 'B' grade (49%), and fewer still express confidence in the capacity of the system to provide adequate seniors' health care. Only one in three (33%) are confident that hospitals in their area can handle the needs of the elderly population, while fewer still are confident that there are enough long-term care facilities (24%) or enough home care and support services to help seniors live at home for longer (24%).

As the population ages, Canadians say that governments should focus on home care and community support to help seniors live at home longer as priorities. When presented with various seniors' health care measures, nearly a third of respondents (31%) select home care and community support as most important for governments to focus on.

When told that some provincial governments are in fact promoting home care as an alternative to receiving health care in an institution, three in five (61%) say this is a step in the right direction.

Concerns about the Future

Two in five (42%) Canadians say they are 'very' concerned about maintaining their health in retirement and about their financial situation in their retirement years (41%). Canadians also express high levels of concern with respect to accessing high quality acute care in retirement (35% very concerned), accessing high quality home and long term care (32%).

About only one in five (22%) have plans in place to ensure they will be able to afford home or long-term care, if needed. Half of Canadians (51%) expect that they will need to rely on the public system should they ever require home or long-term care.

Canadians Grade Health Care Services in Canada

Seven in ten (70%) Canadians give the overall quality of health care services available to them and their families an 'A' or 'B' grade. One in three assigns an 'A' grade (32%).

When it comes to accessing care in their communities, three in five Canadians grade access to a family doctor as an 'A' or 'B' (61%). About half (52%) grade access to wellness and preventative care as an 'A' or 'B'.

A higher proportion of Canadians grade access to palliative care in a hospice or hospital as an 'A' or 'B' (45%) compared to palliative care at home (38%).



About four in ten grade access to home health care services (41%) and access to mental health care services (38%) as an 'A' or 'B'.

It is interesting to note that access to each of these forms of care are much less likely to earn 'A' or 'B' grades than the system as a whole (69%).

Canadians are more likely to say that health care services have become worse in the past five years (49%), than they are to say these services have become better (37%). This is consistent with respondents giving lower grades for the health care system overall (69% graded 'A' or 'B' this year compared to 75% in 2010).

Just over one in three Canadians (35%) think that health care services in their community will get better over the next two or three years. Half of Canadians (47%) think they will get worse.



Views on a National Strategy for Seniors' Health

Over seven in ten Canadians (72%) recognize that with the baby boomers getting older, the pressure on the health care system is increasing, and say it is time for Canada to develop a comprehensive seniors' strategy for long term care and home care.

Fewer than one in ten (7%) indicate that while the baby boomers are getting older, with all of the issues currently facing the health care system today, Canada doesn't really need to focus on a seniors' strategy to improve long-term care and home care right away. A third of Canadians (72%) think it is time for Canada to develop a comprehensive senior's strategy.

Which one of the following two statements is closest to your opinion...?

With the baby boomers getting older, the pressure on the healthcare system is increasing and it is time for Canada to develop a comprehensive senior's strategy for long term care and home care



Yes, the baby boomers are getting older, but with all of the issues facing the healthcare system today, Canada doesn't really need to focus on a senior's strategy to improve long-term care or home care right away.



Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)
'Neither' (9%) / 'Don't know' (13%) responses not shown.

Women (76%) and older Canadians (peaking at 83% among those 55 years of age or older) are most likely to say we need a comprehensive seniors strategy for long-term care and home care.

Concerns about the ability of the health system to adequately meet the needs of the ageing population leaves many with the challenging prospect of caring for older family members themselves.

Three in five (63%) say their family is not in a good position (financially or otherwise) to care for older family members if they need long term health care, and it worries them greatly. Despite this, only about two in five (39%) agree that their family is making plans, such as saving money, buying insurance, moving closer to ageing family, etc. to deal with senior health issues because they are not confident that the health system will adequately meet their needs.

For each of the following statements about Senior's Care, please indicate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

■ Strongly Agree ■ Somewhat Agree ■ Somewhat Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree ■ Don't know

My family is not in a good position (financially or otherwise) to care for older family members if they need long term health care and it worries me greatly.



My family is making plans such as saving money, buying insurance, moving closer to ageing family members, etc. to deal with senior health issues because we are not confident that the health system will adequately meet our needs.



Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

Nine in ten Canadians (90%) agree that we need a national strategy on seniors health care that addresses the need for care provided at home and in hospitals, hospices and long-term care facilities, as well as end of life care. The majority (83%) also believe that such a strategy would improve the entire health care system by finding ways to keep elderly patients living at home for longer.

For each of the following statements about Senior's Care, please indicate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

■ Strongly Agree ■ Somewhat Agree ■ Somewhat Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree ■ Don't know

Canada needs a national strategy on health care for seniors that addresses the need for care provided at home, care provided in hospitals, hospices and long-term care facilities and care provided at the end of life



A national strategy on senior's health would improve the entire Canadian healthcare system by finding ways to keep elderly patients living at home for as long as possible, and not in hospitals or long-term care facilities

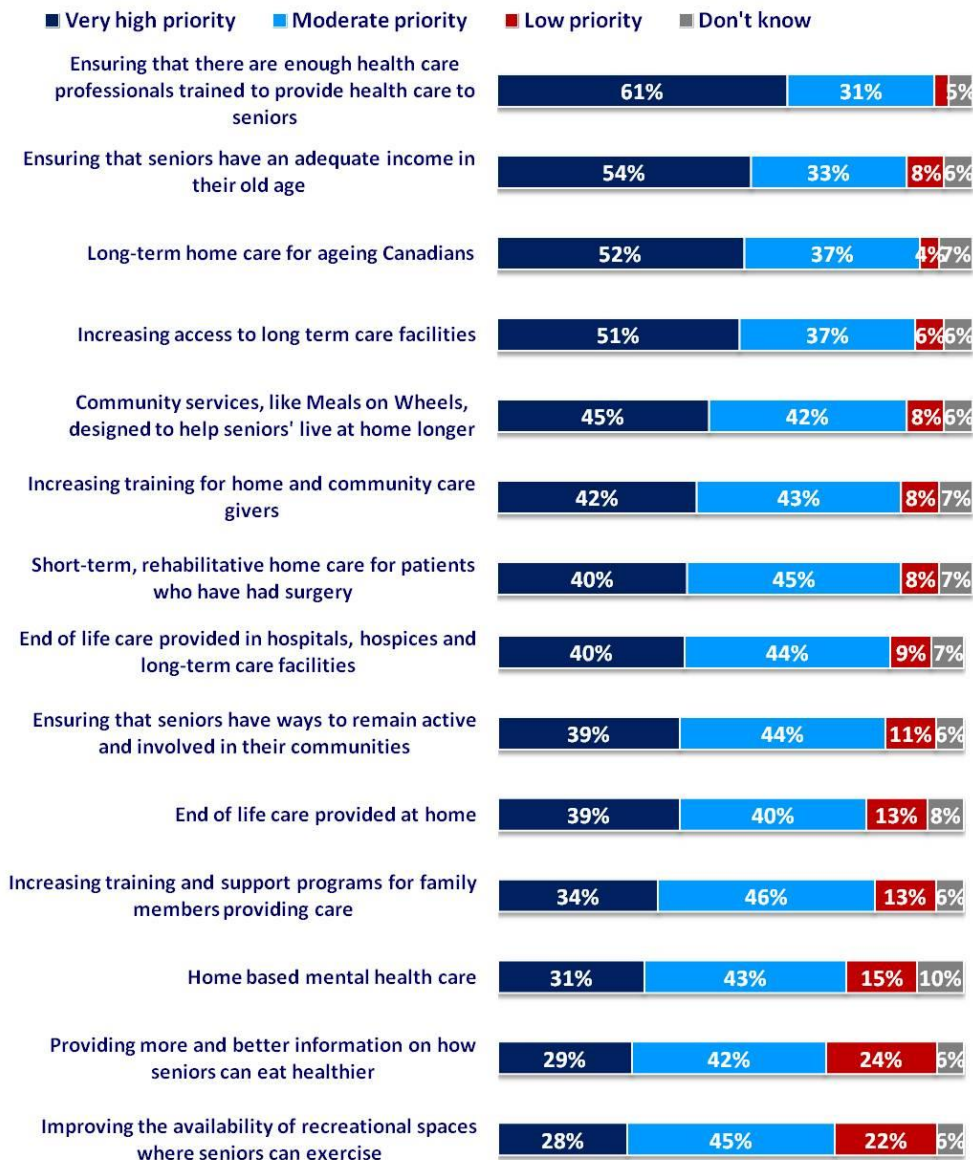


** Values <4% not labeled*

Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

If put in charge of developing a national strategy on senior’s health, nine in ten (92%) Canadians say that ensuring there are enough health care professionals trained to provide health care to seniors is a priority (including 61% who say it is a very high priority). Providing long-term home care (89%), increasing access to long-term care facilities (88%) and ensuring an adequate income for older Canadians (87%) are also identified as priorities.

If you were in charge of developing a national strategy on senior’s health, how much of a priority would you make each of the following?



** Values <4% not labeled*

Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

Those more likely to rank each items as a ‘very high priority’ include women, older Canadians, those with lower incomes, lower education, and those residing in Quebec.



Role of Governments in a National Strategy

Three in four Canadians (76%) see seniors' care as a national problem requiring cooperation among governments to work closely together on a strategy to deal with it.

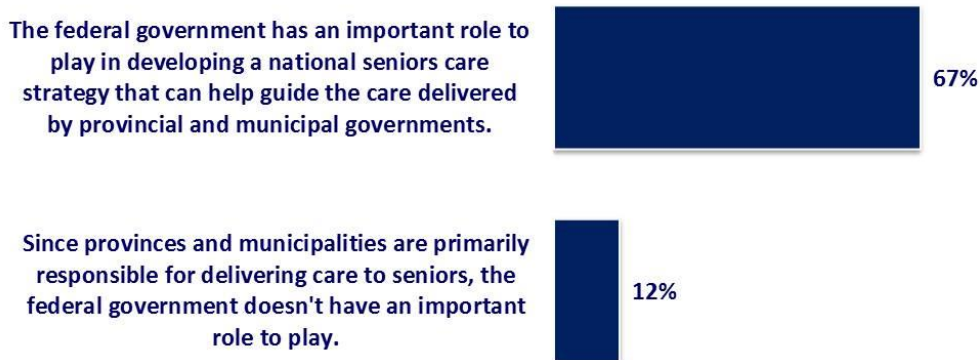
Which of these views is closest to your own?



Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)
'Don't know' (14%) responses not shown.

Along with a call for cooperation, the majority of Canadians hold the view that the federal government has an important role to play in developing a national seniors' care strategy.

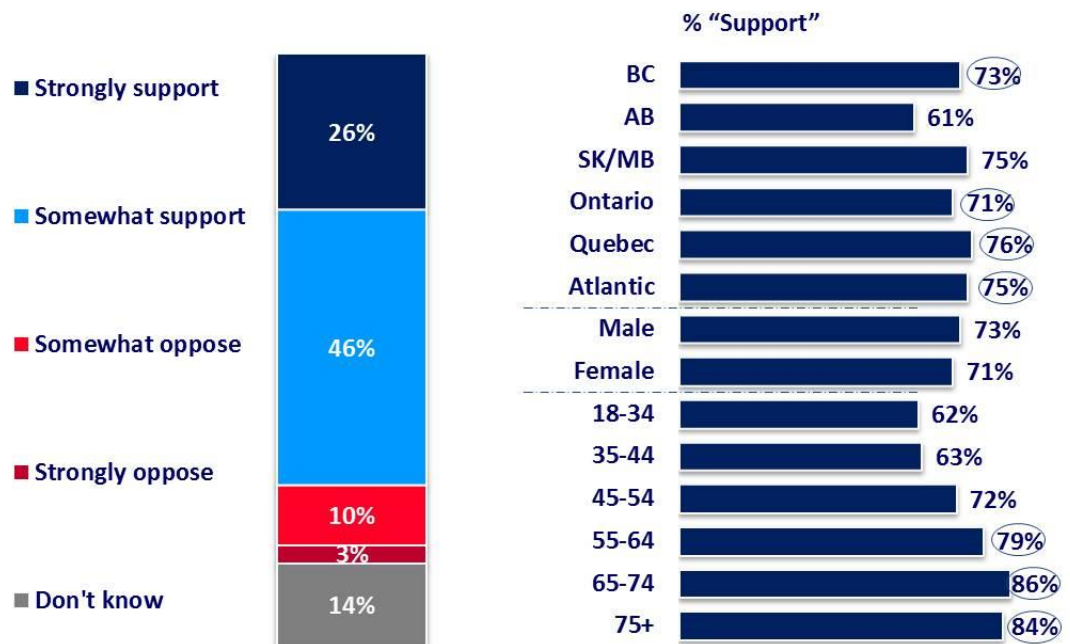
Which of these views is closest to your own?



Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)
'Don't know' (21%) responses not shown.

Nearly three in four Canadians (72%) support providing of additional health care funding to provinces that have an older population. Support is fairly consistent regionally, with the exception of Alberta, where it drops to 61%.

The federal government currently transfers health care funds to provinces based on the overall population of the province. Would you support or oppose providing additional funding to provinces based on the age of their population, so that provinces with an older population receive more money?



Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

Impact of the Election Outcome on Seniors Health Care

Nearly nine in ten Canadians (89%) agree that regardless of the outcome of the election this fall, the next Prime Minister needs to address the health care needs of Canada's aging population.

If the federal and provincial governments don't work together to improve health care for the aging population, over four in five (83%) believe the responsibility and costs for seniors care will fall on younger family members.

The bottom line for many Canadians is that how they vote in the upcoming federal election will depend, at least in part, on who has the best plan to address seniors issues, including seniors' health care (57% agree).

For each of the following statements about Senior's Care, please indicate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

■ Strongly Agree ■ Somewhat Agree ■ Somewhat Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree ■ Don't know



* Values <4% not labeled

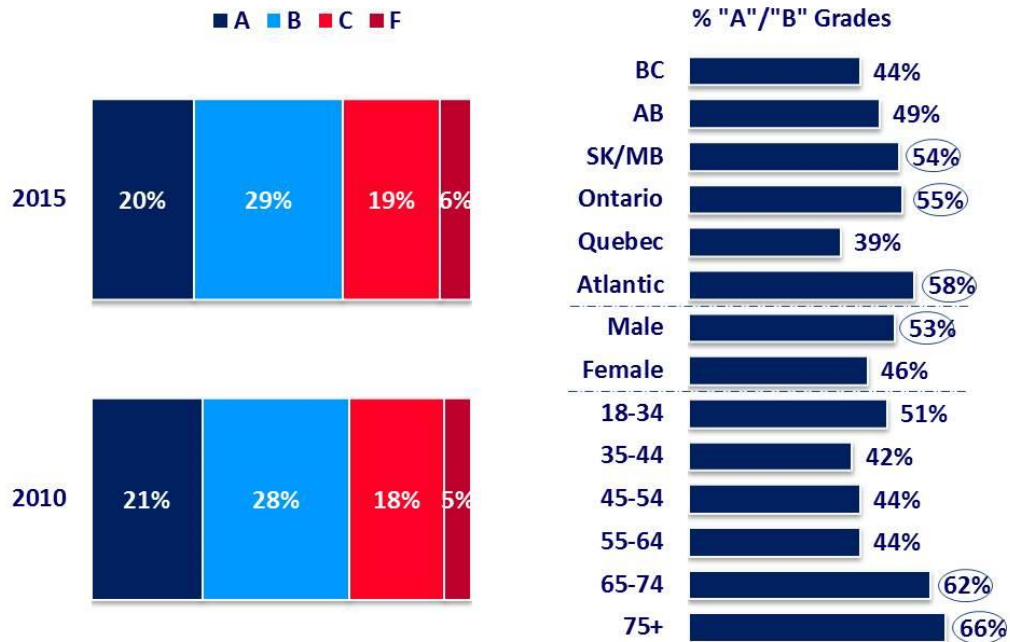
Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)



Attitudes Towards Seniors Care

When asked to assign a letter grade, half of Canadians (49%) assign an 'A' or 'B' grade when it comes to access to health care services for seniors in their community. Seniors themselves are much more likely to assign an 'A' or 'B' grade, with the highest grades coming from those aged 75+ (66%). The lowest grades come from those approaching old age, with just forty-four percent of those aged 45-64 giving access to seniors' health care an 'A' or 'B' grade.

Access to healthcare services for seniors in your community



Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

Q. The next question is about your ability to access healthcare services in your community. By "access" we mean you can get prompt health care services for you and your family when you need to. Again, please grade each of the following aspects of the health system with a letter grade, that is an "A", a "B", a "C" or an "F", with "A" being the highest grade and "F" being a failing grade.

Regionally, the highest grades for access to seniors' health care come from Saskatchewan and Manitoba (54% A or B grades), Ontario (55%) and Atlantic Canada (58%), while Quebec residents grade seniors' care the lowest (only 39% grade as an A or B). Those who care for other adults in or outside the home are more likely to grade access to seniors' care as an 'A' or 'B' compared to others (55% vs. 49%).

Only half of Canadians give access to seniors' health care an 'A' or 'B' grade (49%), and fewer still express confidence in the capacity of the system to provide adequate seniors' health care. Only one in three (33%) are confident that hospitals in their area can handle the needs of the elderly population, while fewer still are confident that there are enough long-term care facilities (24%) or or enough home care and support services to help seniors live at home for longer (24%).

For each of the following statements about Senior's Care, please indicate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

■ Strongly Agree ■ Somewhat Agree ■ Somewhat Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree ■ Don't know



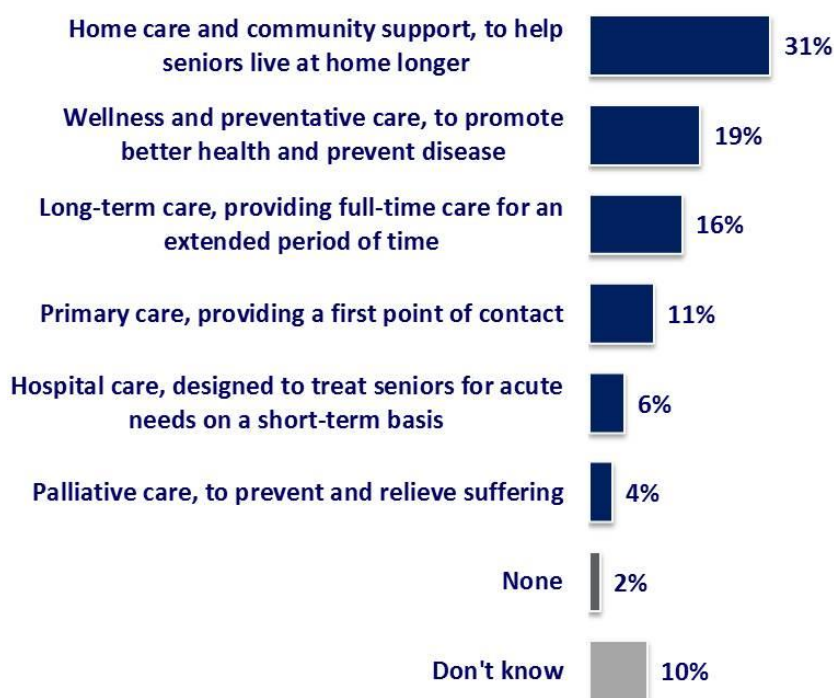
* Values <4% not labeled

Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

As the population ages, Canadians identify home care and community support to help seniors live at home longer as a key priority that governments should focus on. This is especially true among respondents 55 years of age and older.

When presented with various seniors' health care measures, nearly a third of respondents (31%) select home care and community support as most important for governments to focus on, followed by wellness and preventative care to promote better health and prevent disease (19%) - which is a particular priority among the younger 18-34 cohort (27%) - and followed next by long-term care, providing full-time care for an extended period of time (16%).

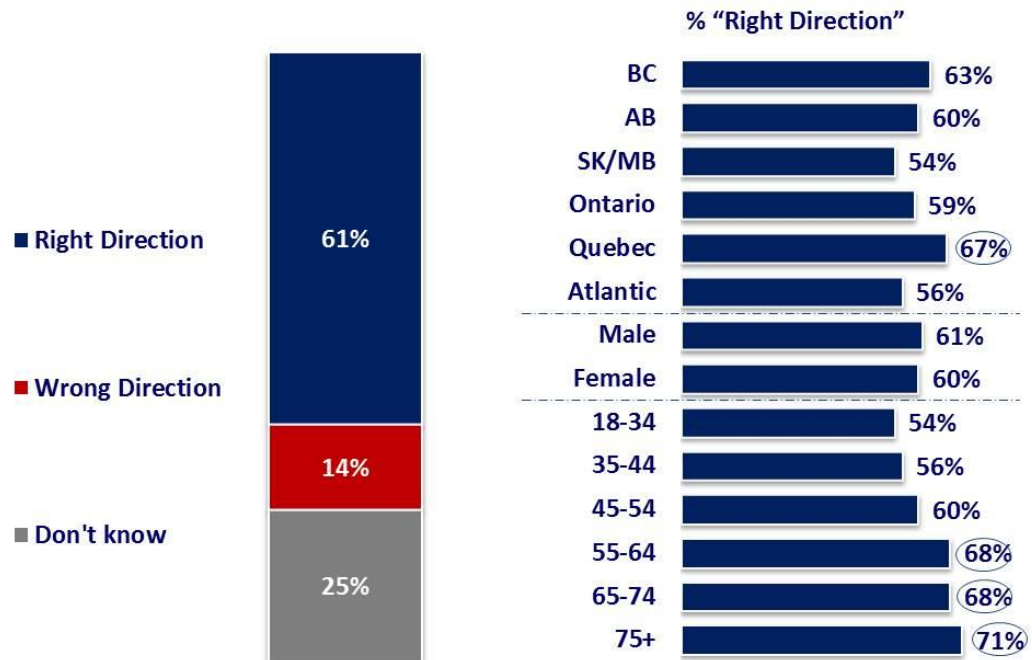
Among these six types of care, please indicate which one you think is most important for governments in Canada to focus on as more and more Canadians become senior citizens?



Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

When told that some provincial governments are in fact promoting home care as an alternative to receiving health care in an institution, three in five (61%) say this is a step in the right direction.

Some provincial governments are now promoting home care as an alternative to receiving health care in an institution such as a hospital or a long term care facility for elderly patients suffering from poor health. Do you personally think this is a step in the right direction or a step in the wrong direction?

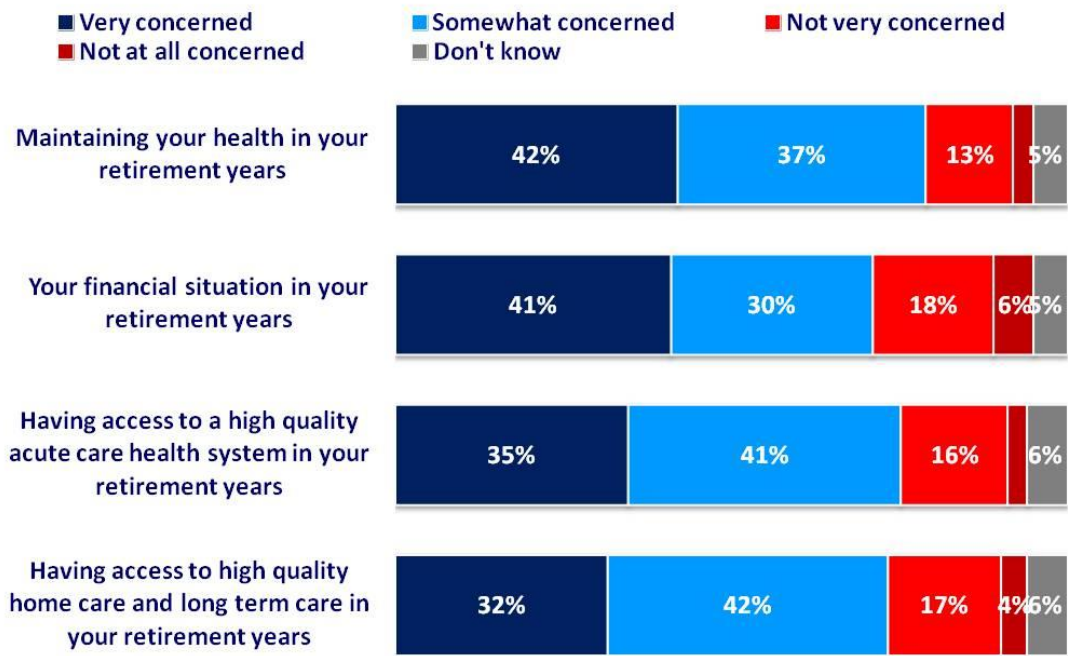


Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

Concerns about the Future

Two in five (42%) Canadians say they are very concerned about maintaining their health in retirement and about their financial situation in their retirement years (41%). Canadians also express high levels of concern with respect to accessing high quality acute care in retirement (35% very concerned), accessing high quality home and long term care (32%).

Thinking about your personal preparations for retirement, please indicate whether you are very concerned, somewhat concerned, not very concerned or not at all concerned about each of the following:

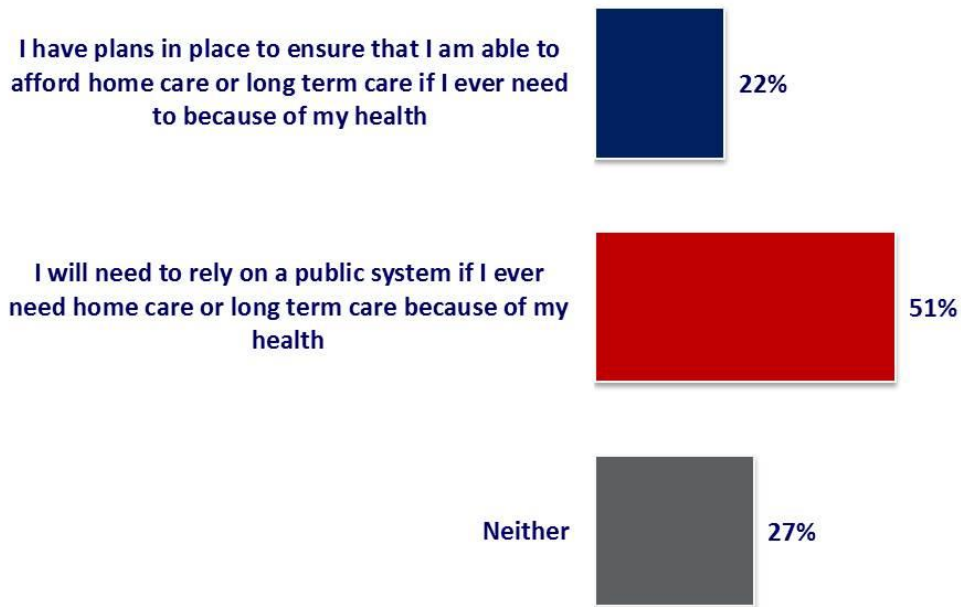


* Values <4% not labeled

Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

Half of Canadians (51%) expect that they will need to rely on the public system should they ever require home or long-term care. About one in four (22%) have plans in place to ensure they will be able to afford such care, if needed. A quarter of respondents (27%) opt out of the question altogether, saying that they neither have plans in place if they need home or long term care nor will they need to rely on a public system should the need arise.

Which of the following statements best represents your personal situation...?

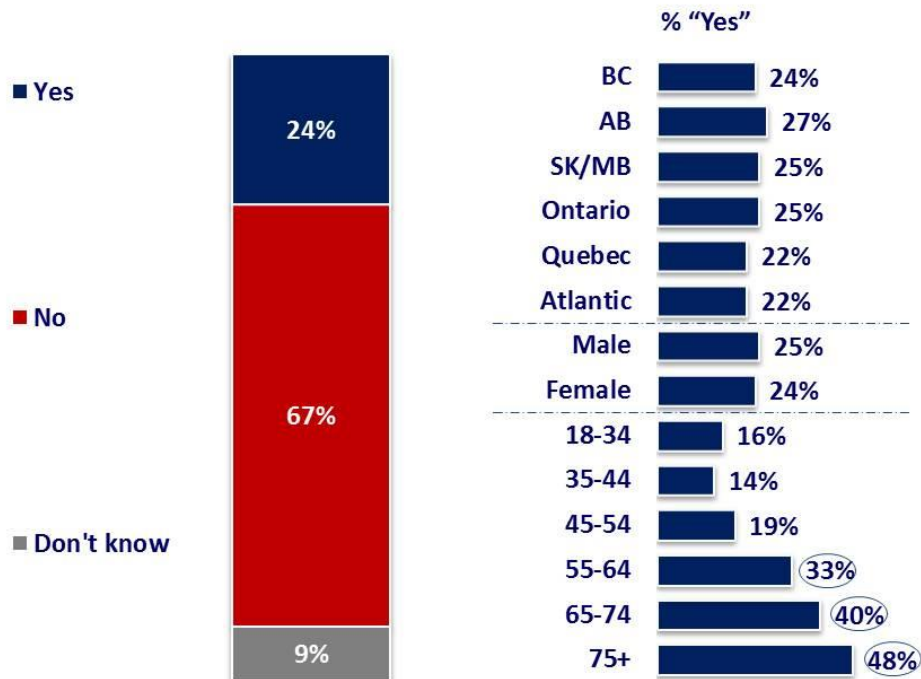


Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

Few Canadians have Advanced Care Plans

Most Canadians (67%) do not have an advanced care plan to specify their desired level of care, should they become incapacitated, while one in four (24%) Canadians say they do have an advanced care plan. Older Canadians are much more likely to say they have an advanced care plan, peaking at 48% among those 75 years and older.

Do you have an advanced care plan to specify what level of care you want should you be incapacitated?

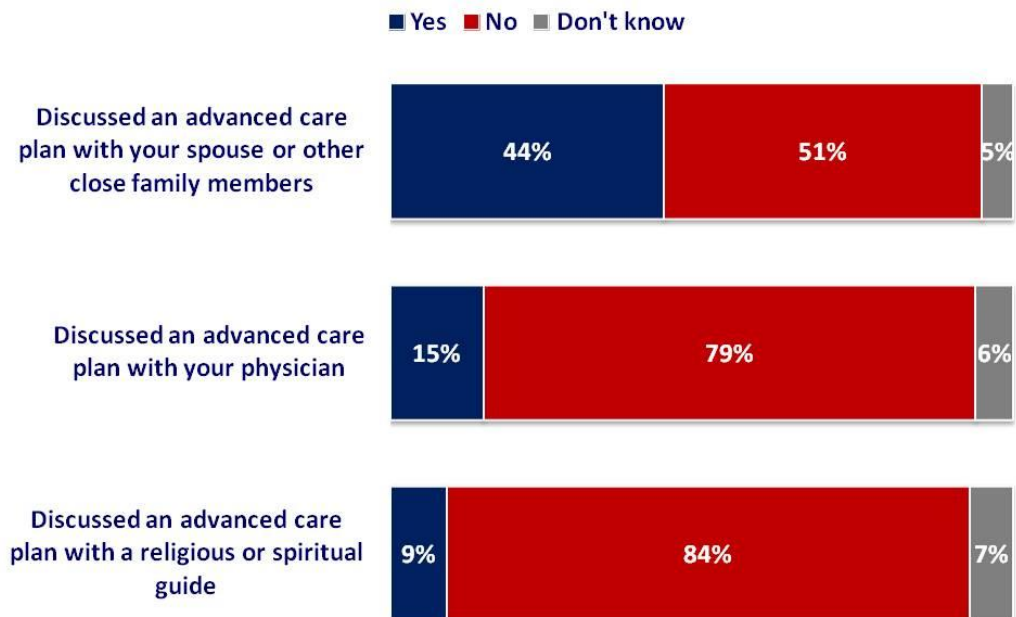


Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

Fewer than half (44%) of Canadians have discussed an advanced care plan with loved ones. Fewer still have had this discussion with their doctor (15%) or talked about advanced care plans with a religious or spiritual guide (9%).

An advanced care plan, sometimes called a 'living will', is a way for patients to have more control over decisions about their health care in the event that they become incapacitated or unable to communicate.

Thinking about the care that you might receive should you become incapacitated, have you ever done any of the following?



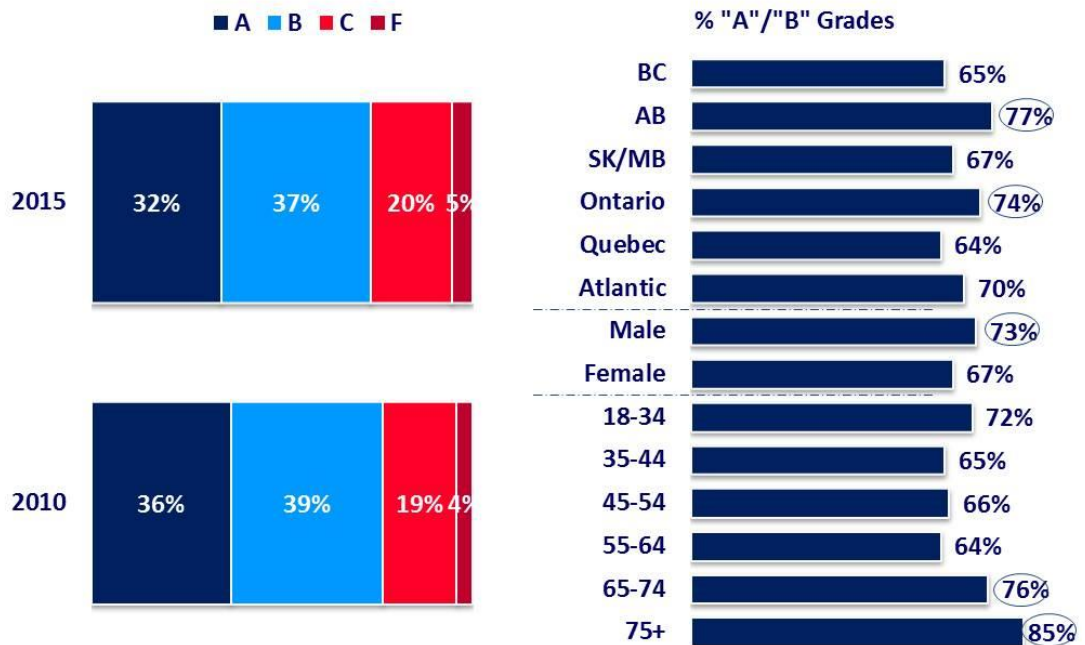
Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

Canadians Grade Health Care Services in Canada

Seven in ten (70%) Canadians give the overall quality of health care services available to them and their families an 'A' or 'B' grade. One in three assigns an 'A' grade (32%).

Residents of Alberta (77%) and Ontario (74%) are most likely to assign an 'A' or 'B' grade, while residents of B.C. (65%) and Quebec (64%) are least likely to do so. Older respondents aged 65+ are much more likely than younger respondents to give the system an 'A' or 'B' grade.

The overall quality of the healthcare services available to you and your family

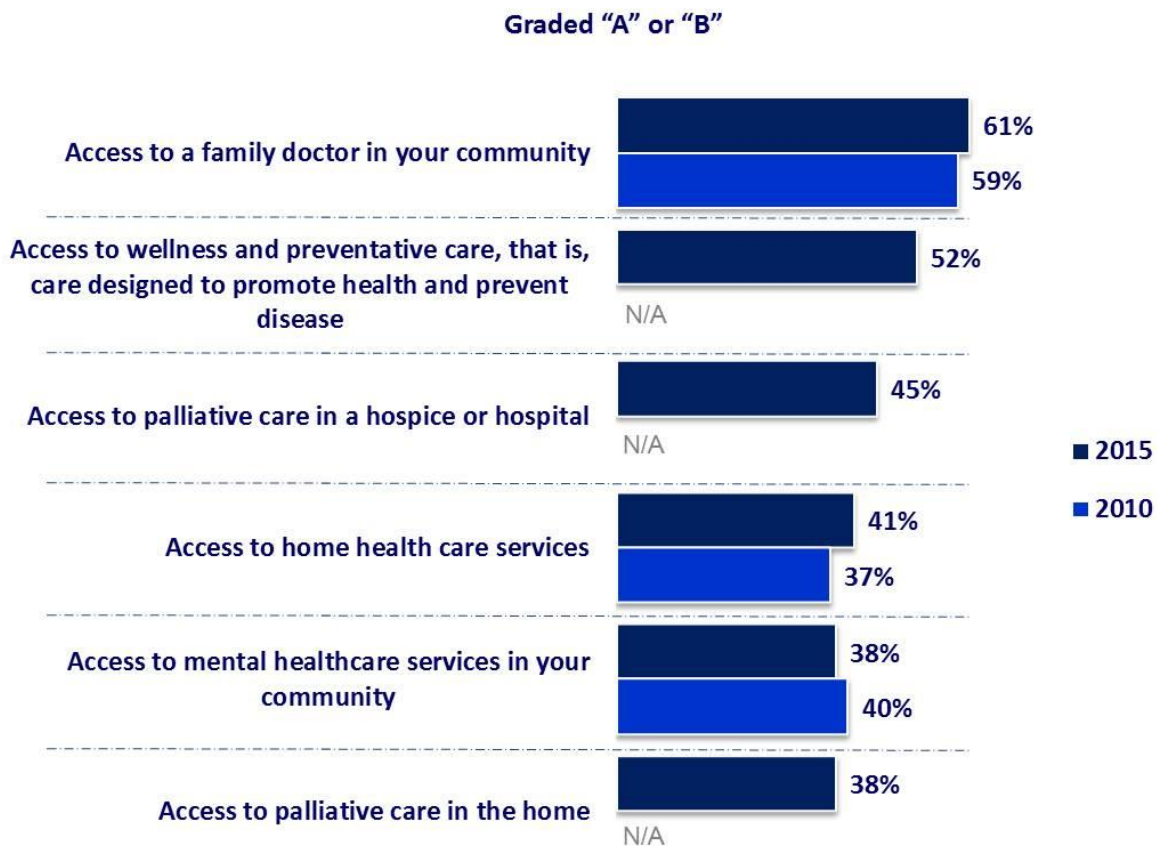


Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

Q. The following questions are about your overall views on the health system in Canada. Regardless of whether you have used the health system recently or not we would like to know your opinions. I would like you to grade each of the following aspects of the health system in your community with a letter grade, that is an "A", a "B", a "C" or an "F", with "A" being the highest grade and "F" being a failing grade



When it comes to accessing care in their communities, three in five Canadians grade access to a family doctor as an ‘A’ or ‘B’ (61%). About half (52%) grade access to wellness and preventative care as an ‘A’ or ‘B’. A higher proportion of Canadians grade access to palliative care in a hospice or hospital as an ‘A’ or ‘B’ (45%) compared to palliative care at home (38%). About four in ten grade access to home health care services (41%) and access to mental health care services (38%) as an ‘A’ or ‘B’. It is interesting to note that access to each of these forms of care are much less likely to earn ‘A’ or ‘B’ grades than the system as a whole (69%).



Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

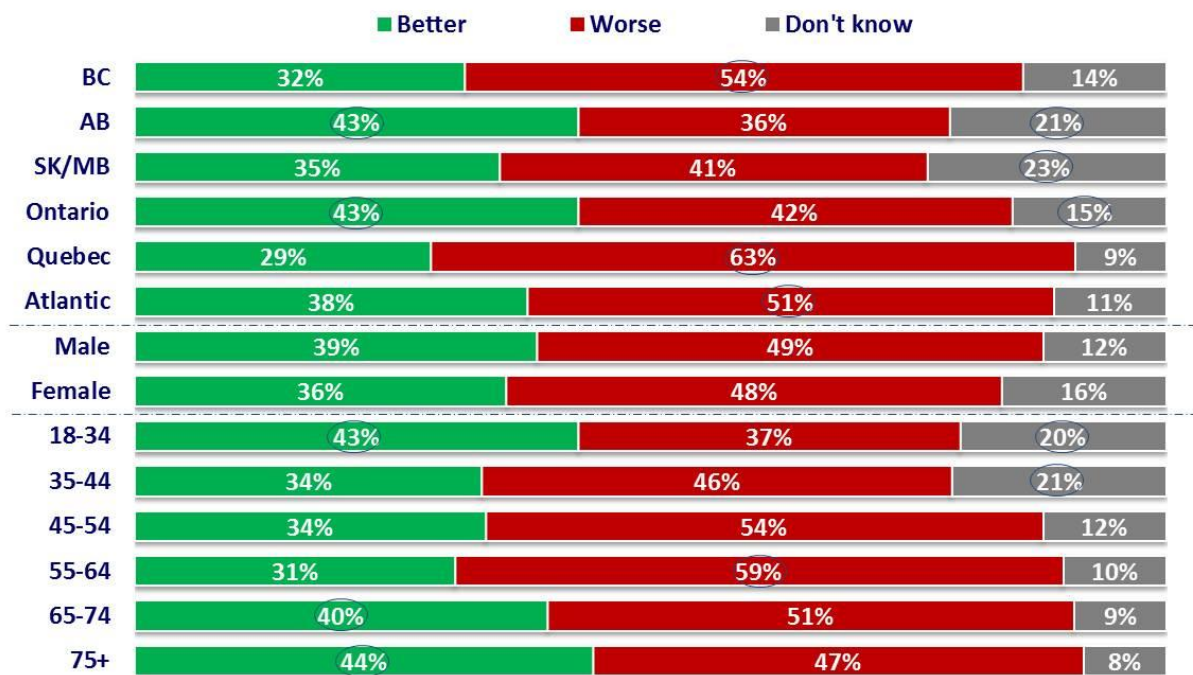
‘N/A’ Indicates that this question was not asked within the survey that wave.

In 2015, Canadians are more likely to say that health care services have become worse in the past five years (49%), than they are to say these services have become better (37%). This is consistent with respondents giving lower grades for the health care system overall (69% graded 'A' or 'B' this year compared to 75% in 2010).

Those in Alberta and Ontario are more likely to think that health care services in their community have improved compared to five years ago, as do younger respondents aged 18-34 (43%) and those aged 65+ (43%) and those aged 65+.

Looking back, do you think health care services in your community are much better, somewhat better, somewhat worse or much worse compared to five years ago?

■ Much better ■ Somewhat better ■ Somewhat worse ■ Much worse ■ Don't know



Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)



Just over one in three Canadians (35%) think that health care services in their community will get better over the next two or three years. Half of Canadians (47%) think they will get worse.

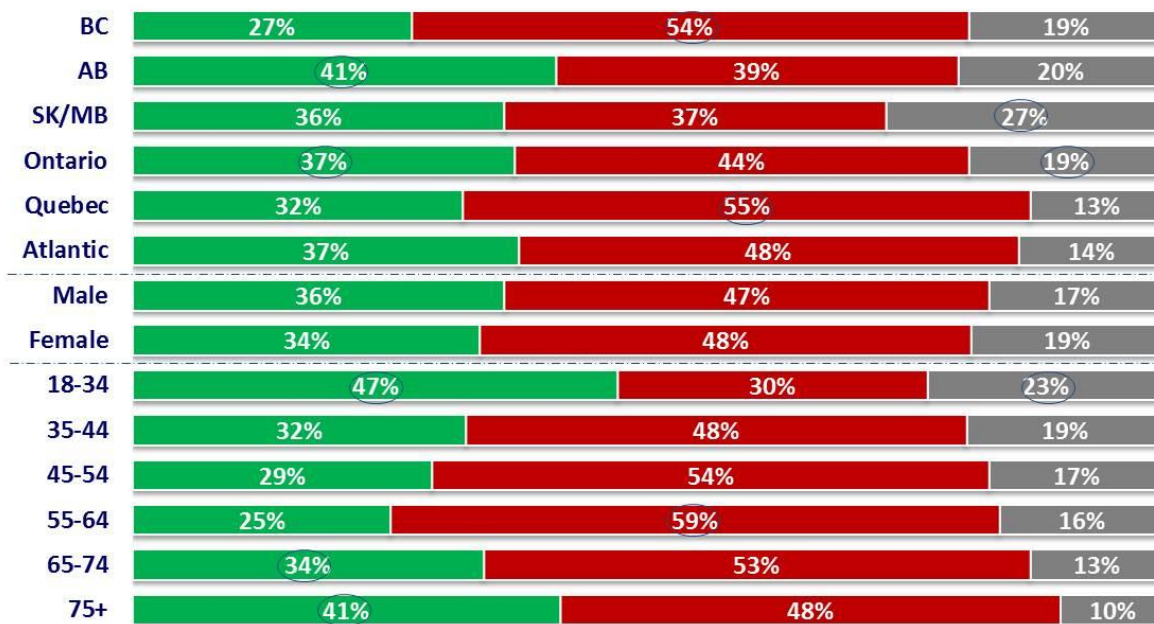
Albertans (41%), men (36%), and younger Canadians (47% for those aged 18-34) are more optimistic when it comes to their outlook on the future of health care services in their community. Near retirees (55-64 years) are the least optimistic (25% expect the system to get better compared to 35% on average).

Overall, do you think health care services in your community will get much better, somewhat better, somewhat worse or much worse over the next two or three years?

■ Much better ■ Somewhat better ■ Somewhat worse ■ Much worse ■ Don't know



■ Better ■ Worse ■ Don't know



Base: All Respondents (n=2,008)

