

PUBLIC VIEWS OF HEALTH CARE IN BC



Ipsos Reid

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Vancouver, BC - This report presents the findings of a new Ipsos Reid poll in British Columbia that was conducted on behalf of the BC Medical Association (BCMA).

Top Issues in Health Care

Top of Mind Issues

Wait times and doctor shortages are the two biggest top-of-mind problems or challenges that British Columbians think are facing health care in their province today. One-in-four (25%) residents mention “wait times/ waiting lists” while nearly two-in-ten (18%) mention “doctor shortages”. Other top-of-mind health care issues include “aging population” (10%), “general staffing shortages” (9%) and “hospital overcrowding/ lack of beds” (8%).

Prompted Issues

Similar items top the issue agenda when respondents were asked to select three items from a list of seven possible priorities for helping BC’s health care system deal with the impact aging boomers will have on the system in the next few years. Number one on the priority list is “reducing surgical waitlists” which is selected by two-thirds (64%) of British Columbians as a top-three priority. Next highest is “ensuring everyone has a family doctor” (49%) and “ensuring quick access in emergency rooms” (43%).

Lower ranked priorities include “expanding prevention services” (35%), “building public long term care beds” (30%), “expanding prescription drug coverage” (30%) and “ensuring rural areas of the province have greater access to care” (27%).

Differences across demographics include the following:

- “Reducing surgical waitlists” is more likely to be selected by older residents (70% among 55+ years vs. 60% among 18-34 years, 63% among 35-54 years).
- “Ensuring everyone has a family doctor” is more likely to be selected by Vancouver Island residents (60% vs. 47% in Metro Vancouver, 45% in Interior/North) and women (53% vs. 44% of men).
- “Ensuring quick access in emergency rooms” is more likely to be selected by younger residents (45% of 18-34 years, 49% of 35-54 years vs. 35% of 55+ years).
- “Expanding prevention services” is more likely to be selected by older residents (36% of 55+ years, 38% of 35-54 years vs. 29% of 18-34 years).
- “Building public long term care beds” is more likely to be selected by older residents (37% of 55+ years vs. 23% of 18-34 years, 29% of 35-54 years).

- “Ensuring rural areas of the province have greater access to care” is more likely to be selected in the Interior/North (37% vs. 23% on Vancouver Island, 22% in Metro Vancouver).

Provincial Government Performance and Spending

Health Care Approval

British Columbians generally disapprove of the job the current provincial government is doing when it comes to managing health care in British Columbia. Only one-third (35%) of residents say they approve of the government’s performance, including 4% who ‘approve strongly’ and 31% who ‘approve somewhat’. Six-in-ten (60%) say they disapprove, including 27% who ‘disapprove strongly’ and 33% who ‘disapprove somewhat’.

- Government approval on health care is higher among men (42% vs. 28% among women).

Health Care Spending

British Columbians are split on the idea of whether the provincial government should set a limit on health care spending so that it does not increase beyond 50% of the budget. Nearly half (45%) of residents say they support this limit on spending, including 11% who ‘support strongly’ and 35% who ‘support somewhat’. Four-in-ten (40%) oppose a 50% spending limit, including 16% who ‘oppose strongly’ and 24% who ‘oppose somewhat’. Fourteen percent of British Columbians are undecided about this idea.

- Support for a 50% spending cap is higher among men (52% vs. 39% among women).

Personal Health Care Accountability

Overall Views

British Columbians are generally supportive of the provincial government taking action to make people more responsible for their own health. Three-quarters (76%) of residents agree that “the provincial government should do more to hold British Columbians accountable for the decisions they make that impact their personal health,” including 28% who ‘agree strongly’. Only two-in-ten (19%) disagree that the provincial government should be doing more in this regard (7% ‘disagree strongly’).

- Agreement with this statement is higher among men (81% vs. 70% among women).

Support for Specifics

While British Columbians generally support the provincial government doing more to hold British Columbians accountable for their health related decisions, there is some variation in support depending on how that accountability is enforced or encouraged.

The vast majority of British Columbians like the idea of the government using financial incentives with nearly nine-in-ten (86%) agreeing “the provincial government should offer more financial incentives (e.g. tax credits and rebates) to encourage British Columbians to engage take actions that improve their health” (45% ‘agree strongly’). Only 11% of residents disagree with this idea (2% ‘disagree strongly’).

A lesser majority, but still two-thirds (67%) of residents agree with using financial disincentives, as in “the provincial government should use more financial disincentives (e.g. tax surcharges) to encourage British Columbians to avoid actions that might worsen their health” (25% ‘agree strongly’). About one-quarter (26%) disagree with using more financial disincentives (‘11% ‘disagree strongly’).

And residents are divided down the middle as to whether access to care should be restricted for those who knowingly engage in risky behaviours. Half (50%) agree that “in some cases, access to health care should be restricted for British Columbians who have engaged in behaviours known to put their health at risk” (16% ‘agree strongly’), while 44% disagree with this idea (19% ‘disagree strongly’).

- Agreement with this statement is higher among men (57% vs. 43% among women).

Family Doctors

Preferred First Point of Contact

Six-in-ten (62%) British Columbians say they want a ‘doctor’ as their first point of contact with the health care system. This places doctors well ahead of ‘nurses’ (13%), ‘nurse practitioners’ (12%) and ‘pharmacists’ (2%).

Preferred Personal Health Coordinator

Nearly eight-in-ten (78%) British Columbians say they would most like to have a ‘family doctor’ coordinating their overall health care. This puts family doctors far ahead of ‘nurse practitioners’ (7%), ‘nurses’ (3%) and ‘pharmacists’ (1%).

Regular Family Doctor

Roughly one-in-ten (11%) British Columbians say they do not have a regular family doctor, but are looking for one. Eighty-three percent have a family doctor and 6% have no family doctor and are not looking for one.

- Younger residents are the most likely to be looking for a family doctor (17% among 18-34 years vs. 12% among 35-54 years, 3% among 55+ years).

These are the findings of an online Ipsos Reid poll of 822 adult British Columbians conducted using Ipsos Reid's online household panel between August 16 and 22, 2011. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of ± 3.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error would 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 BC population according to 2006 Census data.

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For more information on this news release, please contact:

Kyle Braid
Vice-President
Ipsos Reid Public Affairs
778-373-5130

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