Poll Shows Canadians Warm to Health Reform

Colin Craig | December 2021

Second Street.org

Real People.
Real Stories.

Executive Summary

Since the pandemic emerged in Canada, the state-run health care system has been under the microscope. Media have frequently reported on surgical backlogs and stories of patient suffering.

SecondStreet.org recently hired public opinion firm Leger to poll Canadians on three possible health care reform options. This research endeavour found that a majority of Canadians support improving accountability in the health care system, increasing the choices available to patients and governments partnering with private providers to reduce waiting lists.

Highlights from the poll include:

- 67% of Canadians support provincial governments hiring private clinics to provide surgeries and health procedures to Canadians to reduce waiting lists (18% oppose, 15% don't know). This method is being used by several provinces to reduce their backlogs, but has faced some opposition.

- 79% of Canadians think governments should carefully track and disclose data on waiting list cases whereby patients die while waiting for care. SecondStreet.org research shows this data is often not tracked by health bodies.

- 62% of Canadians "strongly support" or "support" allowing Canadians to spend their own money for health care services at private clinics (27% oppose, 12% don't know). Support is up significantly from just prior to the pandemic; 51% in early March 2020.

Methodology

The data represented in this report is from a national online survey conducted by Leger of 1,525 Canadian adults between November 26–29, 2021. The respondents to this survey were drawn from Leger's research panel, a representative sample of the broader Canadian population. Were this a probability sample, the margin of error of a survey of this size would be +/- 2.5 %, 19 times out of 20. The numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole number and as a result, may not add up to 100. Please see appendix for polling data.

Findings

After the pandemic emerged in Canada, provincial governments across the country postponed thousands of procedures to focus the health care system's limited resources on COVID-19 patients.

To reduce waiting list backlogs created by this decision, many provincial governments hired private clinics to provide health services to patients. Provincial governments across the political spectrum have utilized this practice – even before the pandemic. SecondStreet.org wanted to assess how Canadians feel about this measure as some third party groups have criticized this approach.[1]

Q1

Which of the following best represents your view when it comes to governments using private and non-profit health clinics to reduce surgical backlogs as a result of the pandemic?

67%	Governments **should pay** private and non-profit clinics to perform surgeries, procedures and diagnostic scans to reduce waiting times for patients.
18%	Governments **should not pay** private and non-profit clinics to perform surgeries, procedures and diagnostic scans to reduce waiting times for patients.
15%	I don't know

Q2

Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the following?

Canadians should be allowed to spend their own money for the health care they want at a private clinic in Canada.

25%	Strongly support
36%	Somewhat support
15%	Somewhat oppose
12%	Strongly oppose
12%	Don't know

The data shows a majority of Canadians in all regions of the country support this policy option to reduce waiting lists. Support was lowest in Ontario (63%) and highest in Manitoba/Saskatchewan (73%). Canadians across all income, age and gender categories agree with this approach.

A second issue SecondStreet.org wanted to assess was public support for allowing Canadians to spend their own money on health services they desire at private clinics. While this option is available to patients all over the world – it remains a contentious issue in Canada.

Leger's research found 62% of Canadians either "strongly support" or "somewhat support" allowing patients to purchase the health care services they desire at private clinics. This is a significant increase from a public opinion poll commissioned by SecondStreet.org just prior to the pandemic (February 29 – March 3, 2020) which found 51% support.[2]

A majority of Canadians expressed at least some level of support for increasing patient choices in all provinces/regions. Support was lowest in Ontario (57%) and highest in British Columbia (71%). It is important to note that support in British Columbia is up significantly from early 2020 (47%). Further, readers should be aware that the British Columbia government has been in court for several years trying to prevent private clinics from providing this option to patients.

Q3

Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the following government policy? Provincial governments should carefully track anonymous data on patients who are waiting for the health care system to provide surgery and other procedures. The data should include information on how long patients waited, how that compares to the maximum professionally recommended wait time and the eventual patient outcome, including if they died while waiting for a procedure. This data should be disclosed to the public annually – without disclosing patient names.

41%	Strongly support
38%	Somewhat support
6%	Somewhat oppose
3%	Strongly oppose
12%	Don't know

The final question SecondStreet.org examined pertains to the tracking and disclosure of waiting list data. Specifically, whether or not the public believes provincial governments should track and disclose waiting list data for cases where patients pass away.

Since 2019, SecondStreet.org has been examining data on waiting list deaths across Canada. Many provincial governments, health regions and hospitals simply do not track data on patients dying while waiting for surgery, diagnostic scans and other procedures. For example, while researching this issue in early 2020, SecondStreet.org was unable to obtain data from most health regions in Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, two major health regions in British Columbia, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and several hospitals in Ontario.[3]

Considering the government has a monopoly on most health care services in the country, there is a strong argument to be made that the system needs to be accountable when it comes to patients suffering on waiting lists. It is startling that so many government bodies do not feel it is important to track data on waiting list deaths and review the information internally.

Leger's research shows the vast majority (79%) of Canadians believe governments should track and disclose information on patients dying while waiting for health care services. This holds true across the country and for each category examined (gender, income, age).

Conclusion

This research endeavour found that a majority of Canadians support improving accountability in the health care system, increasing the choices available to patients and governments partnering with private providers to reduce waiting lists for Canadians.

Support for these reform options exists across the country and, generally speaking, crosses gender, income and age categories.

About the Author

Colin Craig is President of SecondStreet.org. He has an MBA and a BA (Economics) from the University of Manitoba and is the author of *The Government Wears Prada*, a book that examines how governments could be more cost-effective. Most recently, Colin authored several chapters for *Life After COVID: What's next for Canada?* He has contributed to public policy changes at the federal, provincial and municipal levels in Canada.

About Leger

Leger is the largest Canadian-owned, market research and analytics company with more than 600 employees in eight Canadian and US offices. Leger has been working with prestigious clients since 1986. Please visit Leger.com to learn more.

References

1. Ontario Health Coalition news release. September 24, 2020. https://www.globenews-wire.com/news-release/2020/09/24/2098958/0/en/Health-Coalition-Demands-that-Ford-Government-Stop-Privatizing-Health-Care-Under-Cover-of-COVID-19-There-is-no-excuse-not-to-use-reopen-ramp-up-existing-capacity-in-public-system-C.html

2. Craig, Colin. "Poll Results: Canadians' thoughts on health care." April 2020. Page 3. https://secondstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SecondStreet.org-Health-Polling.pdf

3. Craig, Colin. "Policy Brief: Died on a Waiting List." June 2021. https://secondstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Policy-Brief-Died-on-a-Waiting-List-June-2021.pdf

Photo credit: Tung Nguyen

**SecondStreet.org:
Surgical Wait Times Poll**

November 2021

DATE 2021-12-02   **PROJECT NUMBER** 45915-005

METHODOLOGY

Methodology

Study Population
- Canadian residents, ages 18 and older.

Data Collection
- A total of n=1525 online surveys were conducted via Leger's online LEO panel.
- Interviews were conducted from November 26 to 29, 2021.

Statistical Analysis
- As a non-probability online survey, a margin of error is technically not to be reported.
- If the data were collected through a probability sample, the margin of error would be (n=1525) ±2.5%, 19 times out of 20.
- Using data from the 2016 Census, results were weighted according to age, gender, and region in order to ensure a representative sample of the population.
- The numbers presented have been rounded to the nearest whole number. However, raw values were used to calculate the sums presented and therefore may not correspond to the manual addition of these numbers.

Results

Nearly 7 in 10 Canadians think governments should pay private clinics in order to help reduce wait times
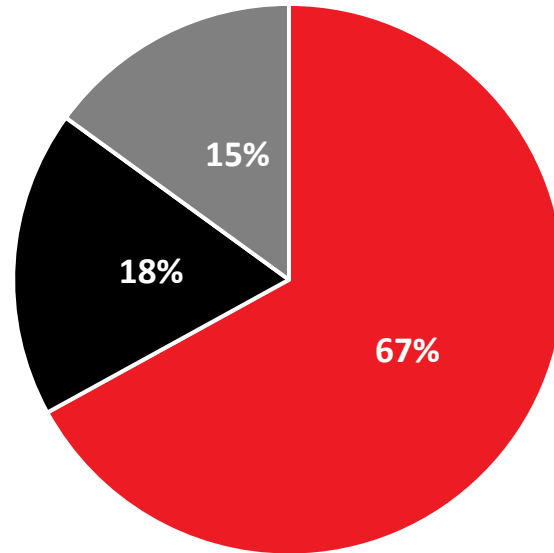
Q1: Which of the following best represents your view when it comes to governments using private and non-profit health clinics to reduce surgical backlogs as a result of the pandemic?

- ■ Governments should pay private and non-profit clinics to perform surgeries, procedures and diagnostic scans to reduce waiting times for patients.

- ■ Governments should not pay private clinics to perform surgeries, procedures and diagnostic scans for patients to reduce waiting times for patients

Base : Canadian Residents (n=1525)

62% feel Canadians should be allowed to spend their own money for the health care they want at a private clinic

Leg**er**

Strongly support	25%
Somewhat support	36%
Somewhat oppose	15%
Strongly oppose	12%
Don't know	12%

Total Support 62%

Total Oppose 26%
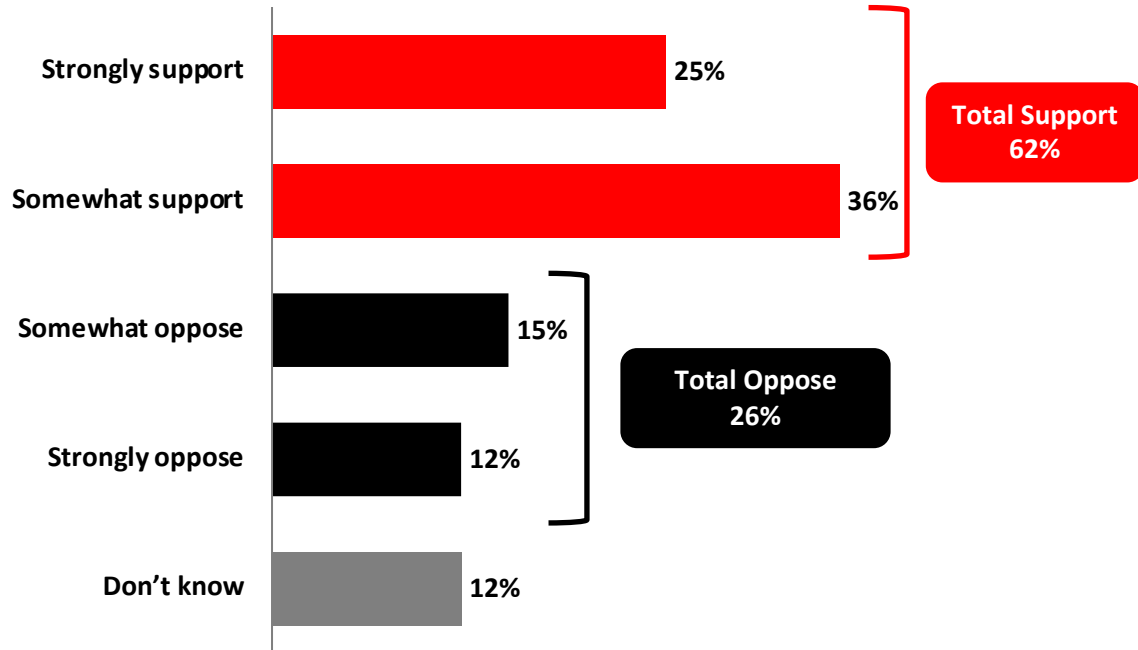
8 in 10 Canadians support provincial governments releasing annual anonymous data that tracks procedure wait times and eventual patient outcomes – including death

Leʒ**er**

Strongly support	41%
Somewhat support	38%

Total Support 79%

Somewhat oppose	6%
Strongly oppose	3%

Total Oppose 9%

Don't know	12%

Q3: Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the following government policy? Provincial governments should carefully track anonymous data on patients who are waiting for the health care system to provide surgery and other procedures. The data should include information on how long patients waited, how that compares to the maximum professionally recommended wait time and the eventual patient outcome, including if they died while waiting for a procedure. This data should be disclosed to the public annually--without disclosing patient names. Base: Canadian Residents (n=1525)

Appendix

Detailed Data Tables

Q1: Which of the following best represents your view when it comes to governments using private and non-profit health clinics to reduce surgical backlogs as a result of the pandemic?
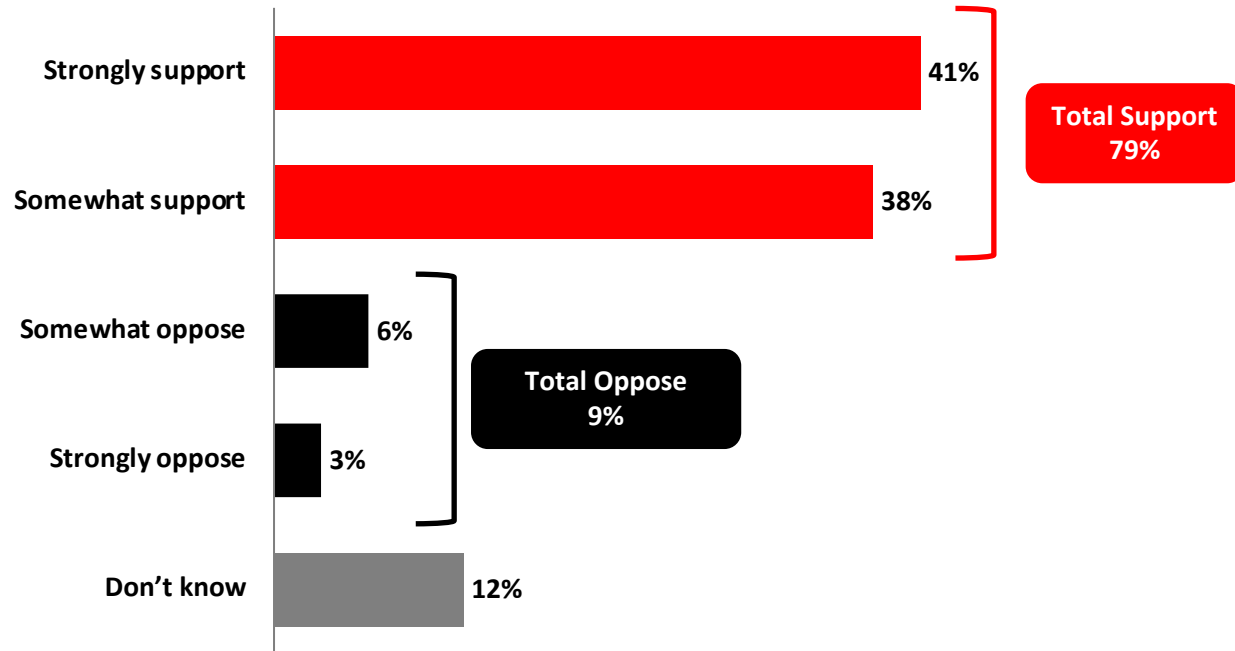
		Gender		Age			Region						Household Income				
	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Atl.	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC	<40k	40-59k	60-79k	80-99k	100k+
N=	1525	741	784	416	520	589	105	358	585	99	171	207	359	258	218	186	384
Governments should pay private and non-profit clinics to perform surgeries, procedures and diagnostic scans to reduce waiting times for patients.	67%	66%	68%	67%	64%	70%	68%	71%	63%	73%	71%	66%	65%	68%	74%	65%	68%
Governments should not pay private clinics to perform surgeries, procedures and diagnostic scans for patients to reduce waiting times for patients.	18%	20%	15%	19%	19%	16%	18%	14%	20%	15%	17%	20%	19%	17%	16%	15%	22%
I don't know	15%	14%	17%	14%	18%	14%	14%	16%	17%	12%	12%	15%	17%	15%	11%	20%	10%

Q2: Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the following? Canadians should be allowed to spend their own money for the health care they want at a private clinic in Canada.

	Total	Gender		Age			Region						Household Income				
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Atl.	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC	<40k	40-59k	60-79k	80-99k	100k+
N=	1525	741	784	416	520	589	105	358	585	99	171	207	359	258	218	186	384
Strongly support	25%	27%	24%	24%	27%	24%	24%	23%	22%	26%	28%	36%	25%	20%	28%	29%	29%
Somewhat support	36%	36%	37%	38%	38%	34%	43%	39%	35%	39%	35%	35%	34%	37%	39%	35%	39%
Somewhat oppose	15%	15%	14%	13%	13%	17%	15%	15%	16%	11%	12%	13%	10%	15%	16%	12%	17%
Strongly oppose	12%	11%	12%	10%	12%	13%	5%	11%	13%	14%	14%	8%	13%	13%	9%	16%	9%
I don't know	12%	11%	13%	15%	10%	12%	13%	12%	14%	10%	11%	9%	18%	15%	9%	8%	6%
SUPPORT	62%	63%	61%	62%	65%	58%	67%	62%	57%	65%	63%	70%	59%	57%	67%	64%	68%
OPPOSE	26%	27%	26%	23%	25%	30%	21%	26%	29%	25%	26%	20%	23%	28%	25%	28%	26%

Q3: Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the following government policy? Provincial governments should carefully track anonymous data on patients who are waiting for the health care system to provide surgery and other procedures. The data should include information on how long patients waited, how that compares to the maximum professionally recommended wait time and the eventual patient outcome, including if they died while waiting for a procedure. This data should be disclosed to the public annually--without disclosing patient names.

	Total	Gender		Age			Region						Household Income				
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Atl.	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC	<40k	40-59k	60-79k	80-99k	100k+
N=	1525	741	784	416	520	589	105	358	585	99	171	207	359	258	218	186	384
Strongly support	41%	44%	39%	35%	39%	47%	43%	36%	40%	40%	54%	42%	40%	39%	44%	42%	46%
Somewhat support	38%	39%	38%	39%	38%	38%	30%	41%	41%	37%	32%	36%	35%	38%	42%	39%	38%
Somewhat oppose	6%	6%	7%	8%	7%	5%	10%	7%	6%	6%	2%	8%	4%	10%	5%	7%	7%
Strongly oppose	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%	1%	2%	3%	5%	4%	2%	6%	3%	2%	2%	1%
I don't know	11%	9%	14%	15%	13%	7%	15%	13%	11%	12%	8%	12%	15%	10%	7%	10%	8%
SUPPORT	79%	82%	77%	74%	77%	85%	73%	78%	80%	77%	86%	78%	75%	77%	86%	81%	84%
OPPOSE	9%	9%	10%	11%	9%	8%	11%	9%	9%	12%	6%	10%	10%	13%	7%	9%	8%

RESPONDENT PROFILE

RESPONDENT PROFILE - *Canada*

	Weighted
n=	1525
Gender	(%)
Male	49
Female	51
Age	
18 to 34	27
35 to 54	34
55 years of age or older	39
Household Income	
Less than $40,000	24
$40,000 to less than $80,000	31
$80,000 or more	37

	Weighted
n=	1525
Gender	(%)
British Columbia	14
Alberta	11
Saskatchewan	3
Manitoba	4
Ontario	38
Quebec	23
Atlantic Canada	7

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We know Canadians