

# Health Care

Canadians have long been proud of their country's public health care system, and consider it to be one of the defining symbols of national identity (confirmed once again on this latest survey). The health care system is also becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, as costs are consistently rising faster than inflation – so that provincial governments are spending proportionately more on health care every year (and less on everything else).

At the same time, health care is often described as “the third rail of Canadian politics,” in that it can be political suicide for leaders to openly raise with citizens and voters the difficult

questions around the sustainability of the system, and the need for new revenue through higher taxes and/or user fees. For this reason, governments have focused on other issues, and health care has virtually disappeared from the policy agenda and the media (except when a scandal breaks concerning misspending or other abuse of the system).

How do Canadians view their health care system today? Is there evidence of growing public concern about the future of the system or willingness to support fiscal reforms to ensure it will be there for them in the future?

## Current state of the health care system

### IS THE SYSTEM IN GOOD SHAPE OR IN CRISIS?

Despite growing pressures on the country's health care system, public confidence has strengthened since 2010 to an unprecedented level. For the first time since 2002, as many Canadians believe the health care system is basically in good shape (49%) as say the system is in a state of crisis (48%).

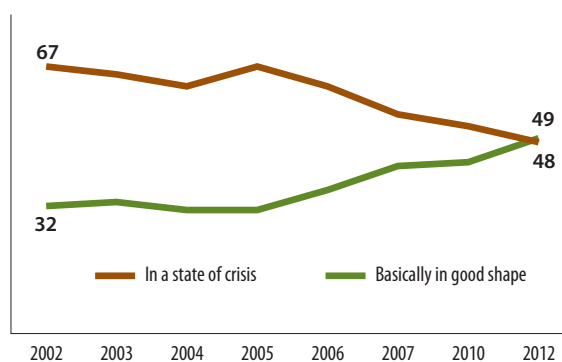
This reflects a positive shift since 2010, and a very different view than was expressed in the 2002 – 2006 period when more than six in ten Canadians described the country's health care system as being in crisis.

This growing confidence is evident across most of the country, but most noticeably in Ontario (where confidence is now the highest at 58%, up 8 percentage points since 2010) and Saskatchewan (53%, up 9), as well as among women, rural residents and those in the lowest income bracket.

A positive view of the health care system continues to be least evident in Quebec (31%, up 6 points), although opinions have also improved in this province over the past two years.

### State of the health care system

2002 – 2012



Q.38

*Which of the following is closer to your point of view...?*

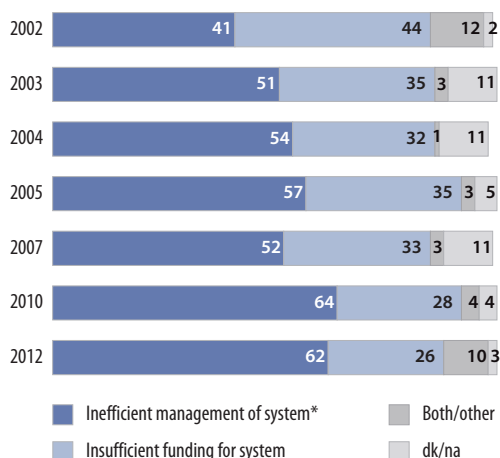
**MAIN SOURCE OF PROBLEMS.** When asked about the main cause of problems in the health care system, a majority of Canadians continue to point to inefficient management of the system (62%) over insufficient funding (26%). The balance volunteer that both are equally at fault (or identify other problems) (10%) or do not offer an opinion (3%).

Over the past decade, the balance of opinion has shifted clearly to focus on inefficient management over insufficient funding. Since 2010, these opinions have changed little at the national level, but there have been notable shifts across regions.

A focus on inefficient management has increased steadily in Quebec since 2007 (rising from 49% to 80%). Elsewhere in the country, opinions on this question are more divided (30% insufficient funding versus 56% inefficient management), and the emphasis on management problems actually declined since 2010, most noticeably in B.C. and Saskatchewan (both to 53%, down 14 points).

Inadequate funding is the minority view across the population, but is most evident among residents of Atlantic Canada and Saskatchewan, rural residents and Canadians with the lowest incomes.

Main cause of problems in health care system  
2002 – 2012



\* In 2004, "Inefficient management"

Q.39

In your opinion, are problems in the health care system mainly due to...?

## Reforming the system

Canadians are more likely than not to favour having the option to purchase private health care to ensure timely access, and there is widespread support for expanding drug plan coverage. At the same time, opinions are divided on various reforms to control rising health care costs, with delisting services the least popular option.

### PURCHASING ACCESS TO PRIVATE HEALTH CARE.

Rising public satisfaction with the current health care system does not mean Canadians oppose changes to health care delivery which are seen as improvements. Timely access to needed services has been one of the public's main concerns, and this translates into modest support for allowing citizens to purchase care outside of the public system if it is not readily available within the system.

A small majority (54%) agree that *“individual Canadians should be given the right to buy private health care within Canada if they do not receive timely access to services in the public system, even if this might weaken the principle of universal access to health care for all Canadians because some people might have quicker access to services,”* compared with 43 percent who disagree.

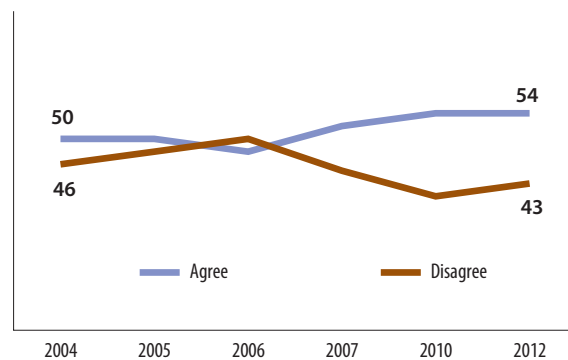
Opinions are unchanged from 2010, and support for the right to buy private health care is up marginally from earlier in the decade.

Support for private health care options continues to be most popular in Quebec (66%), where this view has strengthened over the past two years (as it has in Atlantic Canada), while Ontario (46%) and Alberta (48%) stand out as the two provinces with the lowest public support for buying private health care.

Opinions are generally divided across all groups, but support for private health care is most likely to come from Canadians aged 30 to 44, men and federal Conservative Party supporters, while opposition is most evident among residents of major urban centres, Canadians with a university education and federal NDP supporters.

### Canadians should have the right to buy private health care to ensure timely access

2004 – 2012



Q.40

*Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree that individual Canadians should be given the right to buy private health care within Canada if they do not receive timely access to services in the public system, even if this might weaken the principle of universal access to health care for all Canadians because some people might have quicker access to services?*

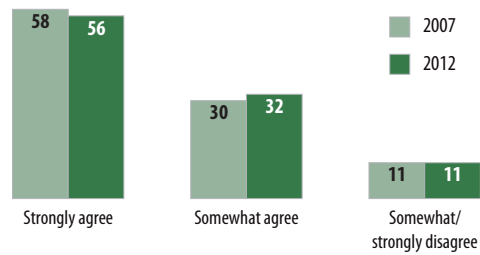
**EXPANDING GOVERNMENT DRUG PLANS.** One type of change that consistently garners widespread public support is expanding the coverage of pharmaceuticals within the public health care system.

Nine in ten Canadians strongly (56%) or somewhat (32%) agree that ***“the government drug plans should provide coverage for any medications that patients and their doctor agree are the most effective treatment,”*** unchanged from 2007. Only one in ten (11%) somewhat or strongly disagree with this type of plan.

Expanding drug coverage attracts majority support across the country, but strong agreement is most widespread in Atlantic Canada and Manitoba, among Canadians aged 60 plus and those who consider themselves to be in the lower economic classes, while less evident among residents of Quebec and Saskatchewan, and those placing themselves in the upper classes.

No more than one in six from any group disagree with expanding the coverage of pharmaceuticals within the public health system.

## Government drug plans should cover all effective medications 2007 – 2012



Q.42

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: Government drug plans should provide coverage for any medications that a patient and their doctor agree are the most effective treatment.

## REFORMS TO CONTROL HEALTH CARE COSTS.

Openness to change is less apparent when it comes to specific reforms for controlling rising health care costs, and the public appetite for such change has not grown over the past decade.

**Paying out-of-pocket for faster service.** Of the five reforms presented, Canadians are most likely to support having the option of paying out-of-pocket for faster access to hospitals and specialized services (e.g., MRIs, cancer care), where opinions are evenly divided (48% support versus 49% oppose, (unchanged from 2007, and up only marginally from 2002).

**Paying a small user fee for every visit.** Fewer than half (46%) would endorse a policy of having people pay a small user fee every time they use the health care system, such as for doctor visits or a trip to the emergency room, versus 51 percent who are opposed. Opinions are unchanged over the past decade, but marginally lower than in 2002 (when 50% expressed support).

**Paying extra for use beyond allotted amount of care.** Four in ten (41%) support allowing people a certain amount of routine health care services every year, and requiring all patients (except those with serious medical problems) to pay extra if they use more than the amount allotted. A majority (56%) oppose this type of revenue policy, with three in ten strongly opposed. Support has declined (down 5 points) from 2007.

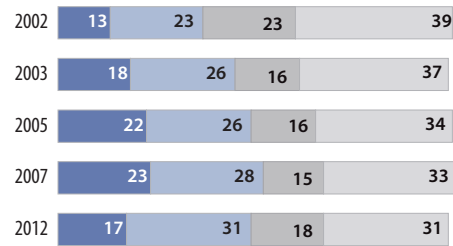
**Raising taxes.** Taxes are never popular, and only four in ten (42%) express support for raising taxes in order to have more money for health care, versus 56 percent who oppose this way of paying for health care. Support is down marginally from 2007 (down 4 points), reversing a modest upward trend dating back to 2003.

**Cutting back on covered services.** Canadians are least likely to support controlling health care costs by cutting back on the types of services that are covered by the health care system and currently free to the general public. Only one in four (24%) endorse such a change (down 2 points since 2007), compared with 72 percent who oppose it.

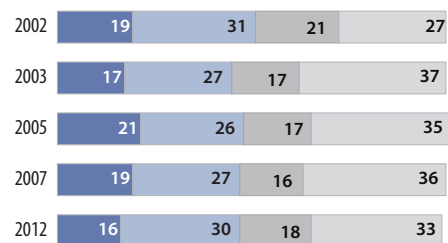
Quebecers are more likely than other Canadians to endorse these types of reforms, with the notable exception of higher taxes, where Quebecers' support has plummeted 25 points since 2007 (to 23%). Elsewhere, public support for higher taxes for health care has held steady (and rising in B.C.).

## Support for specific financing reforms 2002 – 2012

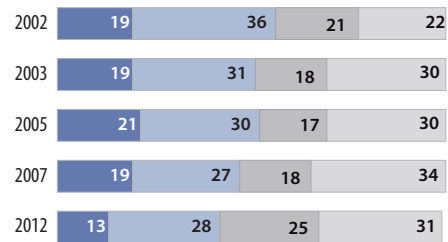
### Option to pay out-of-pocket option for faster service



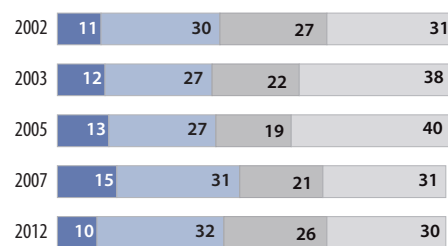
### Small user fee for every health care visit



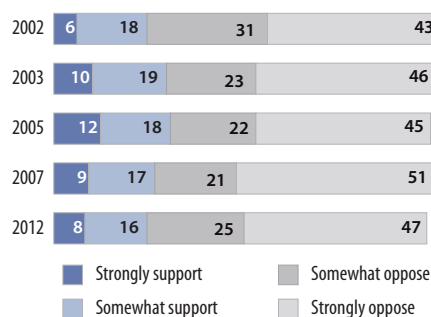
### Pay extra for use beyond routine services



### Raise taxes to help cover health care costs



### Cut back on services offered for free



Q.41a-e  
Now, we would like to ask you about different ideas people have to help finance our current health care system. How much do you support or oppose the following? Is that strongly or somewhat?