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- THE PUBLIC AGENDA -

- HEALTHCARE OVERTAKES ALL ISSUES ON PUBLIC AGENDA -

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This Angus Reid Group/CTV/Globe and Mail Poll was conducted by telephone between June 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 1998 among a representative cross-section of 1,504 Canadians.

These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to the 1996 Census data.

With a Canada-wide sample of 1,504, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results are within +/-2.5 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire adult Canadian population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population.

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Since it appeared among the top-three issues facing Canada's leaders early this year (March 1998), healthcare has for the first time surpassed other matters as the number-one priority on the public agenda. Canadians participating in this most recent National Angus Reid Poll were asked to think about the issues presently confronting Canada and to indicate which issues they feel should receive the greatest attention from Canada's leaders (up to three responses were accepted). Healthcare (36%) has overtaken unemployment/jobs (30%) and national unity/Quebec (28%) in this most recent sounding of public opinion.

A re-shaped top-tier of public concern has witnessed a decline in the importance of some economic matters along with heightened attention to some social issues. Looking specifically at changes since July 1996, Canadians' concerns about healthcare (*late-June 1998: 36%; July 1996: 13%*) and education (*late-June 1998: 17%; July 1996: 6%*) have increased while their concerns with deficit/debt/spending (*late-June 1998: 15%; July 1996: 23%*) and jobs/unemployment (*late-June 1998: 30%; July 1996: 44%*) have decreased. This does not suggest that economic matters are not important to Canadians. In fact, economic matters continue to fare quite prominently on the public agenda (jobs/unemployment ranks second, the economy ranks fourth and deficit/debt spending ranks sixth).

In addition, unlike November 1993 when unemployment/jobs (58%), deficit/debt/spending (33%) and the economy (21%) seized the public agenda, the gap between issues today is far less pronounced. Specifically, the top-three issues on the public agenda are only separated by 8 percent.

Presented in order of their presence on the public's agenda, these are the results gleaned from this sounding of public opinion:

- At the top of the public agenda, the state of Canada's **healthcare** system is viewed as the most pressing concern by 36 percent of Canadians. This is double the number recorded in January 1998 (17%). In addition, it is four times as high as it was in November 1993 (9%).
- **Jobs/unemployment** is considered among the most important issues facing Canadians by 30 percent of the electorate. Throughout the last parliament, jobs and unemployment consistently topped the public agenda. Its presence in the electorate's mind peaked immediately after the

Liberal's 1993 victory (58% in November 1993) and began to wane shortly there-after resurging in the month after their most recent electoral victory (49% in July 1997). While still an important issue on the public agenda, jobs/unemployment has been declining since July 1997.

- **National unity/Québec's future** was mentioned by 28 percent of respondents.
- The overall state of **the economy** was cited by 20 percent of Canadians polled.
- Issues concerning **education** were mentioned by 17 percent of respondents.
- **Government deficits/debt** was cited as a public policy priority by 15 percent of surveyed Canadians, virtually unchanged from January.
- Consistent with recent soundings, Issues relating to **poverty** were singled out by 7 percent of surveyed Canadians.
- Seven percent of respondents mentioned **taxes/taxation** as a critical issue facing Canada and its leaders today.
- The **environment** was mentioned by five percent of those polled as a pressing national concern.
- **Other social services** were cited by five percent.
- **Crime/justice** issues also received mentions from four percent of surveyed Canadians.

A number of other issues were mentioned by smaller numbers of survey respondents, including: government/politics (4%); issues relating to the military/defence (3%); immigration/refugees (3%); natural resources/fisheries (3%); the value of the Canadian dollar (3%); others issues were cited by still fewer respondents.

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