

# ALBERTANS' EVALUATE THE PROVINCE'S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

APRIL 2000

# ANGUS REID

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## WORLD WIDE

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## **ALBERTANS EVALUATE THE PROVINCE'S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM**

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**Calgary, Alberta** -- The results of a recent Angus Reid/Calgary Herald province-wide survey shows that healthcare dominates the Provincial Issue Agenda in Alberta, with over seven-in-ten (72%) respondents saying healthcare is the most important issue facing the province today. Previous tracking has shown a marked increase in top-of-mind concern about healthcare over the past four months (up from 47% in October 1999). This trend is attributed to the current debate over Bill 11 rather than to significant shifts in perceptions about the quality of health services in the province recently.

The results indicate that while Albertans offer less than favourable ratings of the province's healthcare "system" (particularly compared to 1993 results), evaluations have actually improved nominally over the past five years. Currently only 28 percent of Albertans believe that the Alberta healthcare system is "excellent" (6%) or "very good" (23%), compared to 32 percent who say it is "fair" (22%) or "poor" (10%).

Despite reservations about the quality of health services in the province, a sizable majority (77%) of Albertans have used the system in the past year, and on this front, their personal experiences have been decidedly positive (80% are satisfied with the service they received).

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*These are the findings of an Angus Reid Group / Calgary Herald poll conducted between March 17<sup>th</sup> and March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2000. The poll is based on a randomly selected sample of 1,071 adult Albertans. The results can be considered accurate to within +/- 3.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult Alberta population been polled. Within each of Alberta's major urban centres, Calgary and Edmonton, a total of 400 interviews were conducted, yielding a maximum margin of error of +/- 4.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, in those cities. The margin of error will be larger within various sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional, age and gender composition reflects the actual Alberta population according to Statistics Canada Census Data.*

### ***At 72% on the Alberta Issue Agenda, Top-Of-Mind Concerns About the Healthcare System Continue to be the Highest Ever Recorded in the Province***

When asked about the most important issues facing the province today, a total of 72 percent of Albertans spontaneously mention healthcare (as either the number one or number two issue of concern, total mentions). This finding mirrors the February 2000 findings and represents the continued highest ranking of healthcare on the Alberta Issue Agenda since the Angus Reid Group began its tracking in 1989, and a 25 percentage point jump in mentions of this issue since October 1999. Continuing down the list, education (30%), the economy and taxes (12% each), government overspending and debt (5%), unemployment and government spending cutbacks (4% each), the environment (3%), inflation, crime, bad politicians and farming concerns (2% each) are also indicated. (SEE TABLE 1)

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***In Rating the Province's Healthcare System, Albertans Are Less Than Enthusiastic – 29% Rate It “Excellent” or “Very Good” Vs. 32% Assigning A “Poor” or “Fair” Grade. Although Current Evaluations of Alberta's Healthcare System Are Well Below Those Offered in 1993, Opinions Have Improved Nominally Since 1995***

The mid-March survey finds Albertans less than enthusiastic about the state of the province's healthcare system. Presently only 6 percent of the province believes that healthcare in Alberta is “excellent”, while another 23 percent rate it as “very good” and 39 percent “good”. Roughly one-third of our survey respondents are more negative in their ratings, with 22 percent saying the healthcare system in Alberta is only “fair” and 10 percent believe it is “poor”. (SEE TABLE 2A)

- In terms of the regional breakdown in favourable ratings of the province's healthcare system, Edmonton and Calgary offer the greatest perceptual disparity. Nearly one-third (32%) of Calgarians say healthcare in the province is excellent or very good, compared to only one-quarter (24%) of Edmonton residents.

Although Albertans' appraisal of the healthcare system this March is well below those offered in January 1993, they have actually improved modestly since 1995 when the bulk of spending cuts were making their way through the system. In 1993, nearly two-thirds (65%) of Albertans believed the province's healthcare system was either “excellent” or “very good”, compared to only 8 percent rating it “fair” or “poor”. This rather “glowing” assessment had eroded significantly by August of 1995, when only 27 percent offered positive and 38 percent negative ratings of the system. Compared to March of this year, the proportion of Albertans

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assigning “fair” or “poor” evaluations has declined by six percentage points, a nominal improvement over the past five years. (SEE TABLE 2B)

***Although Their Views of the Healthcare “System” Are Not Especially Positive, Nearly Eight-In-Ten (77%) Albertans Have Availed Themselves of Health Services in the Province Over the Past Year and These Personal Experiences Are Overwhelmingly Positive. Fully 80% of Those Who Have Used Alberta’s Healthcare System in the 12 Months Are Satisfied With the Service They Received – A Figure Consistent With 1995 Results***

A large majority (77%) of Albertans has a personal experience with the healthcare system in province – they have used it in the past year at least once. This contact with the “system” takes place most of the time at a family doctor’s office for check-ups of scheduled appointments (68%) or a lab or clinic for special tests (53%). Nearly four-in-ten Albertans have used the services of a walk-in clinic or medical specialist in the past 12 months (37% each), while three-in-ten (30%) residents have seen the inside of an emergency room as a patient recently. Just over one-in-five survey respondents this March report they received “out-patient” services within the past year, either at a hospital (23%) or at a doctor’s office (22%), while 7 percent stayed in a hospital at least one night and 2 percent got laser eye surgery at a private clinic. (SEE TABLE 3)

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Although Albertans do not have a particularly high regard for the quality of the province's "healthcare system", their own personal impressions based on their experiences is decidedly positive. Over four-in-ten (44%) say they were "very satisfied" with the experience, while another 36 percent report they were at least "somewhat satisfied". Only one-fifth (20%) of healthcare service users record any degree of dissatisfaction with the experience. (SEE TABLE 4A)

- Again, Edmonton residents report the lowest levels of satisfaction with their personal healthcare experience – 74 percent satisfied vs. 25 percent dissatisfied.

Compared to five years ago, personal evaluations of health services in Alberta have remained very stable. (SEE TABLE 4B)

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