

IN THE WAKE OF THE CHAOULLI DECISION BY SUPREME COURT

Canada's Doctors and Public Reflect on Possible Implications for Their Health Care System



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Toronto, ON – On June 9th, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down a Quebec prohibition on private health insurance, saying the public system has failed to deliver medical care in a timely, reliable way.¹ An Ipsos-Reid study conducted among physicians and the public on behalf of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) in the wake of the decision has found that just over half of Canadians and an even greater proportion of physicians view the recent Supreme Court ruling on Canada's health care system favourably and feel it will have a number of positive impacts such as reduced wait times and increased services, but both groups also foresee some less positive consequences to the decision.

When the Canadian public and physicians are asked whether or not they personally perceive the ruling by the Supreme Court of last June 9th, which in effect allows for private health insurance in the province of Quebec, in a favourable or unfavourable light, just over half of Canadians (52%) and eight in ten physicians (83%) express favourable views.

There are strong sentiments amongst both groups that this decision will have major implications for the health care system in Canada. Majorities of Canadians (70%) and physicians (75%) agree that the Supreme Court ruling will pave the way for a two-tiered health care system in Canada. And the majority of Canadians and physicians are also of the

¹ On August 4, the Supreme Court granted Quebec's request for a partial rehearing. The Court's judgement is stayed for a period of 12 months from June 9, 2005.



view that the decision will encourage the growth of private clinics (physicians 91% vs. 78% among Canadian public).

Most Canadians and physicians see benefits to the decision, agreeing that the Supreme Court ruling will have the effect of reducing waiting lists by increasing the supply of services, although physicians demonstrate a higher level of agreement than the Canadian public (81%, compared to 65% of Canadians).

But optimism about this decision is higher among physicians than among the Canadian public when it comes to several considerations:

- Physicians are more likely than Canadians to be of the opinion that the recent decision by the Supreme Court is a good thing in that it will allow individuals choice and the ability to control their own health care (75%, compared to 43% among Canadians),
- Physicians are less likely than Canadians to agree that the Supreme Court's decision could have the consequence of encouraging an exodus of doctors toward private practice (46% vs. 65% among Canadians), and
- Physicians are more likely than Canadians to disagree that the decision will result in a reduction of services in the public sector (70% vs. 49% among Canadians).

However, many physicians also express reservations about the ruling. A majority of physicians (58%) feel that most of their patients will either not qualify for insurance or won't be able to afford private health insurance.

And in terms of ensuring the best health outcomes, a majority of physicians (88%) and Canadians (77%) favour a health care system where core services are funded by governments, and which includes a guarantee of timely access to services backed by



adequate new resources rather than the status quo or a system with a private pay/insurance option.

These are the findings of Ipsos-Reid/Canadian Medical Association polls among the public and physicians. The poll among Canadians was conducted from July 11th to July 15th, 2005. For the survey, a representative randomly selected sample of 1,006 adult Canadians were interviewed by telephone. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 3.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, 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. These data were weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to the 2001 Census data.

The poll among 200 physicians was conducted between June 28th and July 18th, 2005. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 6.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire physician population been polled.

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