

REPORT CARD SHOWS CANADIANS ARE SLIGHTLY MORE POSITIVE ABOUT THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Survey Also Finds That Canadian Parents View Their Own Children's Health Through Rose-Coloured Glasses



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Toronto, ON – The sixth annual Report Card on the Health Care System in Canada, an Ipsos-Reid study conducted on behalf of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), finds that Canadians today feel slightly more positive about the health care system in a number of areas than they have in the past, specifically: the overall quality of health care, the performance of the federal and provincial governments and expectations for improvement. But it also highlights some areas of concern for the nation's children, suggesting that Canadian parents may view their own children's health through rose-coloured glasses.

As in years past, Canadians were asked to grade a number of aspects of the current health care system and rate their level of access to services. In this year's survey, parents of children under the age of eighteen were also asked to assess the overall health of Canadian children, their support for children's health policy initiatives and their access to various child-related health services.

Canadian Children and Healthy Living

Canadian parents, while concerned about the overall health of Canadian children, are considerably less likely to feel that there is a problem in terms of the weight, diet or level of physical activity of their own children than statistics and conventional wisdom would suggest. For example:

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- While only 6 percent of parents give the overall health of Canadian children an “A”, at least 4 in 10 give their own children’s level of physical activity and diet an “A”.
- Only nine percent of parents report that their child is somewhat or very overweight, in contrast to Statistics Canada findings that show that 26 percent of children under 18 are overweight or obese.
- Just under four in ten (37%) parents rate their child’s access to community based recreational activities/sport leagues as an “A”.
- Only one in five parents (21%) assign an “A” grade to the physical activities programs in their child’s school.

There is strong support for a kids health agenda, with a majority of parents supporting initiatives designed to improve the health, diet and level of physical activity of Canadian children.

Physical Activity

- 93% of parents strongly (71%) or somewhat (21%) support “a mandatory physical activity period in all schools for all children under the age of 18.”
- 87% of parents strongly (60%) or somewhat (27%) support “a mandatory school curriculum for all children and youth on the benefits of physical activity and a healthy diet.”

Junk Food, Nutritional Information and Warning Labels

- 81% of parents strongly (57%) or somewhat (24%) support “removing food that is high in fat, sugar and salt – such as processed meats, candy, chocolate and salty snacks from school vending machines.”
- 84% of parents strongly (55%) or somewhat (29%) support “nutritional information on fast food and other food that is high in fat, sugar and salt.”
- 72% of parents strongly (41%) or somewhat (31%) support “health warning labels, similar to the ones on cigarette packages, on food that is high in fat, sugar and salt – such as processed meats, candy, chocolate and salty snacks.”

Tax Incentives for Healthy Living

- 80% of parents strongly (51%) or somewhat (29%) support “tax deductions for parents to offset the cost of having their children participate in sports programs or other physical activity.”
- 63% of parents strongly (37%) or somewhat (26%) support “tax breaks for people who purchase healthy foods in restaurants or grocery stores.”



Children with Special Needs

Most parents of children with special needs feel the mental health needs of children and youth are unmet.

- Only 7 percent of parents of children with special needs assign an “A” letter grade for “access to children’s mental health services such as psychological testing, counselling and diagnostic services.”
- Close to three-quarters (74%) of parents of children with special needs strongly (33%) or somewhat (41%) agree that “there are not enough mental health services in Canada for children and youth.”
- Close to two-thirds (66%) of parents of children with special needs strongly (39%) or somewhat (27%) agree that “the mental health problems of children and youth are unmet because their families cannot afford the required mental health services.”

Report Card Overall Shows Slight Improvements

In addition to important information on the health of Canadian children, this year’s Report Card on the Health Care System in Canada also provides Canadians’ assessments of the health care system and highlights several areas of slight improvement.

- Canadians’ assessment of overall quality of the health care system is up slightly over last year, with two in three (67%, up 4 percentage points from 2005) Canadians giving the health care system a B grade or better.



- Canadians' assessment of the federal government's performance in dealing with health care in Canada is also up slightly over last year, with nearly four in ten (38% up 7 percentage points from 2005) Canadians providing a B grade or better.
- Likewise, Canadians' assessment of their provincial government's performance in dealing with health care in Canada is also up slightly over last year, with just over four in ten (43% up 5 percentage points from 2005) Canadians providing a B grade or better.
- A slim majority (56%) of Canadians say that health care services in their community will get much better (8%) or somewhat better (48%) over the next two or three years. This is an improvement over last year when just under half of Canadians (47%) held similar views.

These are the findings of Ipsos-Reid/Canadian Medical Association polls between June 20th and 25th, 2006 (1,007 adult Canadians), between June 20th and July 29th (593 parents of children under the age of 18 and 129 parents of children with special needs). With samples of these sizes, the results are considered accurate to within ± 3.1 percentage points (1,007 adult Canadians), and ± 4 percentage points (593 parents of children <18yrs) and ± 8.6 percentage points (129 parents of children with special needs), 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire populations 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.



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