

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

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Poll Shows Canadians Have High Hopes for First Ministers' Commitments but Doubtful They Will Deliver on Time

A new poll conducted for the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) and the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) by Ipsos-Reid shows that while Canadians believe the first ministers' September 2004 commitments on wait times and access to health professionals will help improve the health-care system, they doubt that they will deliver on time.

On the eve of the first anniversary of the 10-year plan to strengthen health care, a majority of Canadians (54%) are less optimistic about the future of health-care services in their community than they were one year ago.

A key component of this plan was to establish benchmarks for medically acceptable wait times for the treatment of cancer and heart ailments, diagnostic imaging, joint replacements and sight restoration by December 1, 2005.

Three out of four Canadians agree that wait time benchmarks are a good idea because they will lead to better access to health services (76%) and that establishing them is a first step toward making lasting improvements to Canada's health-care system (74%).

However, only one out of three Canadians (33%) is confident that the federal government and their provincial/territorial government will live up to their commitment to establish these wait time benchmarks by December 2005.

A clear majority of Canadians (58%) would prefer to have national wait time benchmarks that allow for comparison across provinces and territories rather than each province and territory establishing their own benchmarks that may not permit such comparisons (39%).

As part of the 10-year plan, first ministers also committed to establishing targets for the training, recruitment and retention of health professionals by December 31, 2005.

Almost nine out of 10 Canadians agree that establishing targets for health professionals is a good idea because they will lead to better access to health services (89%) and that this is the first step in ensuring that enough health professionals are trained and educated in Canada (88%).

As in the case of wait time benchmarks however, only one in three Canadians (34%) is confident that governments will live up to this commitment by December 31, 2005.

When asked what the federal government should do if a province or territory does not meet its commitments on wait times or health professionals, a majority of Canadians (62%) agreed that the federal government should withhold some (41%) or all (21%) of its portion of increased health funding until the commitments are met. Just one out of three Canadians (34%) agreed that increased funding should not be withheld and that the province/territory should be given an extension.

The survey results were obtained from telephone interviews among 1,001 adult Canadians between September 6 and September 8, 2005. A sample of this size has a margin of error of 3.2%, 19 times out of 20. Margins of error are higher within regional and demographic subgroups.

CNA is the professional voice of registered nurses in Canada. It is a federation of 11 provincial and territorial professional associations and regulatory bodies for registered nurses. CNA believes that the sustainability of a publicly funded, not-for-profit health system rests upon a vibrant nursing workforce.

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