

Canadians back 'public solutions' to improve care, poll finds

André Picard Public Health Reporter

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An overwhelming 86 per cent of Canadians favour "public solutions" for bolstering medicare, according to a new poll.

The survey, commissioned by the Canadian Health Coalition, is being released Wednesday as a pre-emptive strike.

That is because the Canadian Medical Association, at its coming general council meeting, plans to stage a high-profile discussion about transforming medicare, and it will release its own poll on support for privately delivered care.

Michael McBane, national co-ordinator of the Canadian Health Coalition, said he has no doubt that poll will show strong support for "privatization schemes" but the "language used in the CMA survey was so vague and misleading that its results cannot possibly be interpreted as support for more for-profit medicine."

He said that the outgoing CMA president, Robert Ouellet, operates private medical imaging clinics and is promoting a personal agenda that is out of step with Canadian values.

"Canadians have told us they want to keep our health-care system public and to improve it with made-in-Canada solutions. They also have told us they flat-out reject Dr. Ouellet's proposal to provide us with American-style two-tier medicine," he said.

In fact, Dr. Ouellet has explicitly rejected a U.S.-style system. In a recent speech launching a new campaign entitled Time To Transform Healthcare, he said: "The U.S. is a very poor performer. Why look to a system that ranks below ours for lessons?"

Rather, Dr. Ouellet has actively promoted European-style health care, with a mix of private and publicly delivered care. He is particularly keen on "activity-based funding," in which hospitals would receive funding based on the number of patients they treat and their efficiency. Currently, hospitals receive block funding.

The new poll, conducted by Nanos Research, surveyed 1,001 Canadians between April 25 and May 03. The results are considered accurate within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Those polled were asked the following question: "Thinking about the future of Canada's public health-care system, would you support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or oppose public solutions to make our public health care stronger?"

A total of 86.2 per cent of respondents said they support or somewhat support public solutions, while 8.2 per cent said they oppose or somewhat oppose the approach. The balance, 5.7 per cent, said they were unsure.

"With more than eight in 10 Canadians supporting public solutions to make public health care stronger, there is compelling evidence that Canadians across all demographics would prefer a public over a for-profit

health-care system,” said Nik Nanos, president of Nanos Research.

A recent report by Health Canada, entitled Healthy Canadians – A Federal Report on Comparable Health Indicators 2008, found that 85.2 per cent of Canadians were “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with health-care services overall. That level was unchanged from 2005, the last time the survey was conducted.

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