

Survey Finds Most Fear Boomers will Cripple Health Care System

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Four in every five Canadians believe that the demands placed on the health system by aging Baby Boomers will result in reduced access and lower quality care, a poll commissioned by the Canadian Medical Association reveals.

There are also widespread fears - by close to 75 per cent of respondents - that growing health costs will result in significant tax hikes and an inability of seniors to afford health care as they age.

At the same time, the survey shows strong support for user fees and having well-to-do Canadians pay more out-of-pocket to help attenuate the impact of caring for a growing population of seniors.

According to the poll, younger Canadians in particular (those born after 1966) are willing to adapt to the pressures on the medicare system by buying private health insurance to supplement publicly provided care, using their retirement savings to pay for health care and going into debt to pay the health costs of their parents and themselves.

"What we see in these poll results is a refreshing acknowledgment of reality," Anne Doig, president of the CMA, said in an interview.

"Canadians are not giving up on medicare but they're recognizing that medicare needs to be transformed to deal with current realities, demographic and otherwise," she said.

Aging boomers

A poll by the Canadian Medical Association shows widespread fears over cost and services for an aging population.

Please use the scale to indicate how concerned you are about the following:

- extremely concerned
- somewhat concerned
- neither concerned nor unconcerned
- not very concerned
- not at all concerned

Having to pay more taxes so that the health system can provide services to the baby boom generation.



That the health system will not be able to offer the same level of coverage as the baby boom generation reaches retirement age.



That the quality of health care in Canada will decline as a result of increased strain on the health care system as the baby boom generation gets older.



Not having enough money to maintain my health as I get older.



That the health care system will not be able to adequately look after my parents.



Based on a poll of 3,483 Canadians

THE GLOBE AND MAIL » SOURCES: CANADIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION/IPSON-SIY

The poll, which is being released Monday at the CMA general council meeting in Niagara Falls, Ont., dovetails nicely with a report released earlier this month entitled *Health Care Transformation in Canada: Change that Works, Care that Lasts*.

In that document, the CMA, the group representing Canada's 72,000 physicians, argues that the current health system cannot meet future needs, in part because of the aging population. It calls for significant changes, including a universal prescription drug plan, a charter that enshrines the rights of patients, an independent body that can monitor whether health dollars are being spent efficiently, and monetary incentives for doctors and hospitals to treat more patients. The proposals are based on the premise that health care in Canada needs to be more patient-centred, with a greater focus on prevention and ensuring that geography, income level and age are not a barrier to getting quality, timely care.

Dr. Doig said the poll results show Canadians are pretty savvy about the challenges facing the health system.

Asked to rank who or what is most responsible for increased demand for health-care services, survey respondents blamed individual Canadians not taking responsibility for their own health (33 per cent), the large number of Baby Boomers reaching retirement age (30 per cent), higher demands and expectations by all Canadians (21 per cent) and new medical advances (16 per cent.)

Dr. Doig expressed concern that fingers would be pointed unfairly at Baby Boomers (those born between 1947 and 1966) for many of the woes of the health system.

"I worry that the blaming will happen," she said. "We don't want intergenerational tension, we want intergenerational fairness."

Dr. Doig said she takes comfort in the fact that the younger Canadians who were polled "are being extremely realistic about the limits of medicare and so-called free health care."

For example, the survey found that, among Canadians under the age of 46, 44 per cent said they were willing to buy private health insurance to supplement the publicly funded system; 37 per cent said they would also buy insurance to ensure their long-term care when they were elderly; and 29 per cent said they would save specifically to pay for health costs after retirement.

Ipsos Reid polled 3,483 Canadian adults online between June 8 and June 21. A sample of this size is considered accurate within 1.66 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The survey, which has been conducted annually by the CMA for the past 10 years, also asks Canadians to rank the performance of governments in managing the health-care system as they would on a report card.

The marks awarded remained virtually unchanged over the past year: 41 per cent of respondents assigned either an A or B grade to the federal government performance (as 40 per cent did in 2009). Similarly, 41 per cent of Canadians awarded their provincial government either an A or B, consistent with the 2009 results (42 per cent).

Overall, 35 per cent of those polled said they thought health-care services would improve in the next year, while 51 per cent predicted they would get worse.

Health-care spending in Canada was an estimated \$183-billion last year, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information.