



**The Yukon
Health Care Review**

“Taking the Pulse”

WHAT WE HEARD:

**A Public Dialogue on the
Yukon Health Care Review**

PRELIMINARY REPORT

Submitted by:

**Yukon Health Care Review Steering Committee
May 14, 2009**

Acknowledgements

Many individuals and organizations made this project possible. In particular, thank you to Yukon residents, First Nations and health care stakeholder groups who generously gave their time and shared their views.

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Executive Summary

The *Yukon Health Care Review* report proposed 43 recommendations that provide options for ways to address the broad issue of sustainability of Yukon's health care system. The Yukon Legislature set up an independent steering committee to hear what Yukoners think about the report's findings.

The "Taking the Pulse" steering committee invited all Yukoners, Yukon communities, First Nations and health care stakeholders to engage in health care discussions through meetings, a question form and a website. The feedback and results are not a statistical sample of all Yukoners. This preliminary report is a summary of what the steering committee heard from the people who responded. The final report will include an appendix containing input and comments from all meetings and question forms.

"Taking the Pulse" affirmed that Yukoners care deeply about health care. In addition to participants who attended meetings, over eight hundred people took the time to complete and mail in question forms. Such a strong response rate indicates residents care about the health care system and its future.

The steering committee consistently heard that Yukon's health care system generally delivers excellent service, Yukoners appreciate and value our health care system, and they want to see it maintained. Though subtle differences emerged between some urban/rural responses, urban and rural respondents generally share views on many health care issues.

Yukoners were asked about health care priorities to ensure our health care system provides timely, appropriate access to services and is affordable now and in the future. Their priorities fall within four core themes:

1. Improve efficiency of the health care system
2. Prevention and personal responsibility
3. Long-term care and community-based options
4. Mental health, addictions, and drug and alcohol abuse

When asked what is working well in our health care system, respondents said they are highly appreciative and satisfied with the quality of our health care system. In addition to generally



positive comments about the level of care available, survey respondents listed many examples of what's working well.

Yukoners were also asked what is not working well in our health care system. Respondents identified a wide range of issues including wait times, lack of family doctors, access to long-term, palliative and home care, fraudulent use of Yukon's health care system, lack of an limited substance abuse treatment and programming, medivac issues, limited mental health services, lack of prevention programs, and human resource and training issues in communities.

Yukoners offered many suggestions for improving our health care system. Respondents want to see a stronger focus on recruitment and retention of health care professionals; emphasis on and integration of prevention, education and wellness programs; better long-term care, home care and community-based options; more collaborative and alternative health care options; and some carefully planned private/user fee health care services.

"If people can afford to pay for services, they should, but those who can't should still get the service."

"Keep health care free!"

"Increase residency requirement and monitor abuse."

"A local doctor recently took 3 hours to talk to a patient about palliative care. Few places in Canada provide this kind of care."



Introduction

In April 2008, the Premier and Minister of Health commissioned a health care review to examine the sustainability and affordability of Yukon’s health care system over the next decade. The Health Care Review Committee was tasked with exploring ways of transforming the Yukon health care system that would focus on its long-term sustainability.

Following extensive research, fact-finding and interviews, the committee completed a report containing 43 recommendations that provide options for ways to address the broad issue of sustainability of Yukon’s health care system. In November 2008, the Yukon government released the *Yukon Health Care Review* report.

Before making any decisions about any of the recommendation in the report, the Yukon Legislature agreed to set up an independent steering committee to hear what Yukoners think about the report’s findings. The steering committee on health care sustainability was comprised of health care and medical professionals and financial and First Nations officials. The committee was asked to undertake this dialogue and prepare a report – *WHAT WE HEARD* – which would be provided to an all-party oversight committee for presentation to the Legislature in the 2009 spring sitting.

Called “Taking the Pulse,” this dialogue with the Yukon public began in early March and extended into early May. During this two month period, the steering committee prepared a Background Paper about the Yukon Health Care Review report, met with communities, First Nations and health care stakeholders throughout the territory, and mailed a question form to Yukon households and businesses asking for input. This dialogue yielded a very high level of public engagement about health care.

“Many of the recommendations in the report are very realistic in terms of sustainability.”

“Best health care in Canada, so let’s keep it that way. The people that abuse it will ruin it for the rest of us.”



Methodology

The “Taking the Pulse” steering committee used the following five different approaches to engage Yukoners in health care discussions.

Public Meetings in Communities

The steering committee held public meetings in six Yukon communities: Whitehorse, Watson Lake, Dawson City, Mayo, Haines Junction and Faro. The meetings were advertised in local newspapers, local radio stations and community posters.

Meetings with First Nations

The steering committee sent letters of invitation to all Yukon First Nation governments to meet in person, at their convenience, or to provide input or comments through teleconference, videoconference, online or written submission.

Stakeholder Meetings

The steering committee sent invitations to health care-related stakeholder groups to meet in person, at their convenience, or to provide input or comments through teleconference, videoconference, online or written submission.

Question Form

The steering committee developed a question form (available in both of Canada’s official languages) to invite Yukoners to provide comments, opinions and suggestions on Yukon’s health care system as well as comment on the recent *Yukon Health Care Review* report and some selected recommendations.

Results Disclaimer

While the input and comments received throughout “Taking the Pulse” are reflective of Yukoners’ views about health care, the results from this process are not a statistical sample of all Yukon residents.

The steering committee welcomed input from all Yukoners who chose to participate in this dialogue. Data and results presented in this report are a summary of the input received by the steering committee. Any data or results from this process should be referenced carefully.

A Background Paper summarizing the *Yukon Health Care Review* report was attached to the question form. The form was sent through Canada Post to all Yukon residences and businesses, and it was also available online.



Website

The steering committee developed a website to provide information about their process to engage Yukoners in discussions about health care. The site included a link to the *Yukon Health Care Review* report, an online question form available in English and French, and some background information about the report and the steering committee. Newspaper and radio ads informed the public of the website and provided contact information.

Between early March and early May the steering committee hosted six public meetings, four meetings with Yukon First Nations and at least sixteen meetings with health care stakeholder groups. Throughout the territory, residents engaged in informed and respectful dialogue about our health care system. Response to the question form was strong – Yukoners mailed in over 840 completed question forms.

Meetings were held with:

Public

Dawson City
Faro
Haines Junction
Mayo
Watson Lake
Whitehorse

First Nations

Council of Yukon First Nations & Social Development Commission
First Nation of Na-cho Nyäk Dun
Teslin Tlingit Council
Vuntut Gwitchin Government

Stakeholder Groups

ElderActive Recreation Association
Hospice Yukon
L'Association franco-yukonnaise
Ombudsman, Information & Privacy Commissioner
Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon
Second Opinion Society
Sport and Recreation Branch, Yukon Government



St. Elias Seniors, Haines Junction
Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition
Yukon College Student Union
Yukon Council on Aging
Yukon Medical Association
Yukon Medical Council
Yukon Registered Nurses Association
Yukon Wholistic Health Network
Yukoners for Funded Midwifery

Written Submissions

Ombudsman, Information & Privacy Commissioner
Sport and Recreation Branch, Yukon Government
Yukon Advisory Committee on Nursing
Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition
Yukon Wholistic Health Network
Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board
Yukoners for Funded Midwifery

“More tax on alcohol and tobacco and put revenue back into health care.”

“Focus on education, treatment, prevention and recovery programs.”

“Health should be looked at holistically. If a person has poor housing, their health might not be good.”

“Allow Yukoners more access to registered alternate medicine practitioners, prevention and recovery programs.”



What We Heard

“Taking the Pulse” affirmed that Yukoners care deeply about health care. The steering committee consistently heard that Yukon’s health care system generally delivers excellent service, residents appreciate and value our health care system, and they want to see it maintained.

Yukon residents committed a lot of time to engage in dialogue about health care. In addition to participants who attended meetings, over 840 Yukoners took the time to complete and mail in question forms. Such a strong response rate indicates residents care about the health care system and its future. This high level of interest in health care was demonstrated consistently throughout the “Taking the Pulse” dialogue. Engagement was strong by both urban and rural residents.

Question Form Response Rates

	Total	Urban		Rural	
Question Forms Sent Out	12,448	8,788	71 %	3,660	29 %
Question Form Responses	830	598	72 %	232	28 %

While comments were wide-ranging in their scope and level of detail, key themes emerged and remained consistent through the process. Input from community, First Nation and stakeholder meetings, written submissions and question forms were recorded and will be presented as an appendix to the final report. The ideas, concerns and observations contained in this archive of public input will be a valuable reference for the development of health policy in the Yukon.

“Thank you for all you are doing for us and the opportunity to provide feedback.”

“Yukoners expect too much of the system.”



Affordability and Making Choices

As a Yukoner, what do you think are the priorities to work on, to help make sure our health care system provides timely, appropriate access to services and is affordable now and in the future?

Key Themes:

1. Improve Efficiency of our Health Care System

“811 is working well – it’s good for small communities.”

“Invest in medical/diagnostic equipment to reduce medivacs and travel outside.”

“More focus and promotion of holistic approaches and alternatives.

Alternative therapies would cost the system less.”

“Telehealth has been great and very cost-effective.”

2. Prevention and Personal Responsibility

“Healthier lifestyles = healthier bodies.”

“Multi-level collaborative care – well-baby clinics are a good example.”

“Health awareness and education reduces demands and costs on system”

“We’ve been taking health care for granted and it’s grossly abused.

The public must be made to take more responsibility.”

3. Long-term Care and Community-based Options

“Being able to stay in my community is important to me.”

“There is no formal palliative care delivery, community members look after one another as best as they can.”

“People are choosing to retire in the Yukon because of its great health care system.”

4. Mental Health, Addictions, and Drug and Alcohol Abuse

“Alcohol and drug rehabilitation – more support needed in communities for social lifestyle changes.”

“We need to address addictions in our community.”

“Focus more on mental health.”

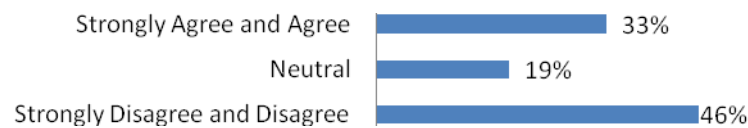


If getting more revenue from an outside source is not possible or is not enough to meet rising demands and expectations, which of the following options would you support as the best ways to manage health care costs in the Yukon:

Manage within the money available by:

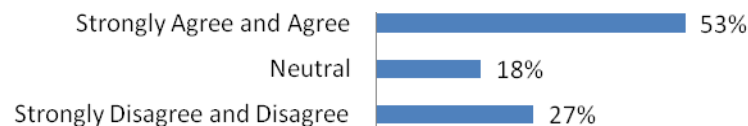
a) Making choices within the health care budget so that if something is added or expanded, something else is reduced.

- Respondents' views vary widely on this question. Only 8% strongly agree with this approach.



b) Spend more of government's overall budget on health care, leaving less money for other government services.

- Though more than half of respondents agree, the results are mixed. More people feel neutral than strongly agree with this approach. Rural residents are more divided: a higher proportion of rural residents both strongly agree AND strongly disagree.



Increase government revenues for health care by:

a) Increasing taxes

- Respondents' views vary widely on this question. Only 7% strongly agree with this approach.



b) *Have individuals pay an appropriate fee for some of the health services they use.*

- **Almost as many respondents agree with fees (42%) as those who disagree (44%). Those who disagree with fees as a means to increase government revenues feel more strongly about this issue than those who agree.**



c) *Do you have any further suggestions about:*

How the Yukon government should manage and make health system choices within the money available?

How to increase Yukon government revenues for health care?

Examples of suggestions:

- **Cut administration, upper management, bureaucracy**
- **Cut down on expensive travel/medivacs**
- **More can be done by nurses**
- **Increase accountability for spending**
- **Health promotion, early intervention**
- **More partnerships, collaborative approaches**
- **User fees based on income**
- **Reintroduce Health Care Premiums**
- **Tax increases, tax harmful substances**
- **Monitor residency to reduce fraud and abuse of the system**



What's Working and What's Not

In your opinion:

a) *What is working well in our health care system?*

- Respondents are generally appreciative and satisfied with the quality of our health care system. In addition to the generally positive comments about the level of care available, survey respondents echoed the following examples of what's working well:
 - Whitehorse General Hospital
 - Outstanding nurses, doctors, health care professionals
 - Home care service and home care workers
 - Specialist services
 - Acute Care
 - Chronic care
 - Community health centres, public clinics
 - Pre-natal/baby care, immunizations
 - 811 and telehealth

b) *What is not working well in our health care system?*

- Respondents identified a wide range of issues such as:
 - Wait times to see a doctor or specialist
 - Lack of family doctors
 - Access to long-term, palliative, and home care
 - System fraud
 - Substance abuse treatment and programming
 - Mental health
 - Problems with medical travel
 - Need more prevention programs
 - Volunteers, training inadequate in communities



c) *How could this be improved?*

- **Yukoners offered many suggestions for improving our health care system such as:**
 - **Recruitment and retention of health care professionals**
 - **Focus more on prevention, education, wellness**
 - **More long-term care facilities**
 - **Offer expanded health care services in the communities, and provide training and education for community members to have the skills to provide these services**
 - **Expand home care services, especially in the communities**
 - **Partnerships with First Nations to deliver home care and palliative care services**
 - **More collaborative and alternative health care options**
 - **Some private/user fee services**

“I don’t believe decisions should be made just because it is something other jurisdictions do.”

“Increasing services in Whitehorse instead of Vancouver would reduce costs.”

“Wait times for surgeries and specialists.”

“People should be informed about how much their health care costs.”

“I have no problem with the health care system, everything works, all services working well.”



Recommendations in the Yukon Health Care Review

Here are some key recommendations from the review. Tell us what you think about these.

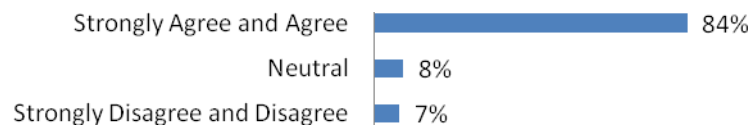
a) *Do you agree with expanding awareness and marketing campaigns and offering education programs for these areas of high risk behaviours?*

- **Urban respondents agree more strongly with this recommendation. Though relatively small in number, a higher proportion of rural respondents are neutral or strongly disagree with this strategy.**



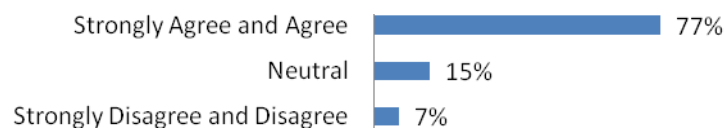
b) *Free or low cost immunizations and flu programs should continue to be provided by Yukon government.*

- **With 57% of respondents in strong agreement, support is very strong for continuing Yukon Government's immunization and flu programs.**



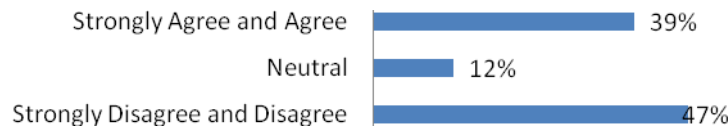
Immunization programs should be expanded if they will help reduce the risk of a disease.

- **Though small in number, rural respondents account for an unusually high proportion of strong disagreement with this approach.**



c) *The Yukon Health Care Review recommended that the government should consider a user fee for **non-emergency** out-of-Yukon medical travel based on ability to pay with an annual maximum amount. Do you agree with this type of fee?*

- **30% of respondents strongly disagree with a user fee for non-emergency out-of-territory travel as described. A higher proportion of rural respondents strongly disagree. Those who agree with this recommendation feel less strongly about it.**



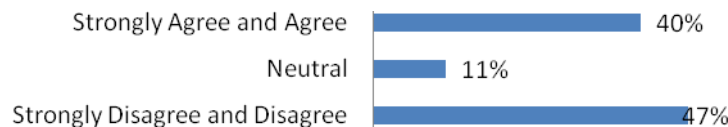
d) *The Yukon government’s Chronic Disease and Disability program provides drugs and other medical supplies to people to manage specified diseases/health conditions. Do you think that Yukon should increase the maximum deductible amount that users pay to an amount similar to what other Canadians pay?*

- **30% of respondents strongly disagree with increasing the maximum deductible. A higher proportion of rural respondents strongly disagree with this recommendation. Those who agree with this recommendation feel less strongly about it.**



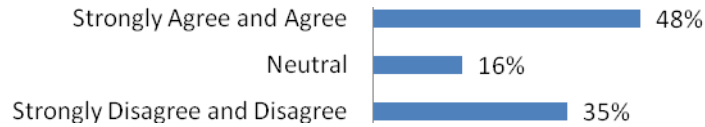
a) *Do you think that the Pharmacare and Extended Health Benefits programs should include an annual maximum deductible (based on the ability to pay) similar to what seniors in the rest of Canada pay?*

- **22% of respondents strongly disagree with an annual maximum deductible similar to what seniors in the rest of Canada pay. A higher proportion of rural respondents strongly disagree with this recommendation. Those who agree with this recommendation feel less strongly about it.**



Do you think these two programs should be restricted to people who are 65 or older?

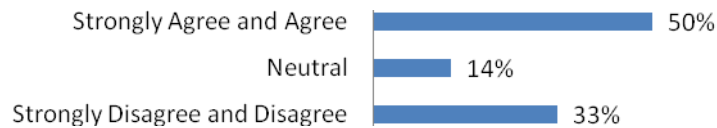
- **A higher proportion of rural respondents strongly disagree with the recommendation to restrict Pharmacare and Extended Health to age 65 or older.**



b) Do you agree with the following recommendations from the Yukon Health Care Review?

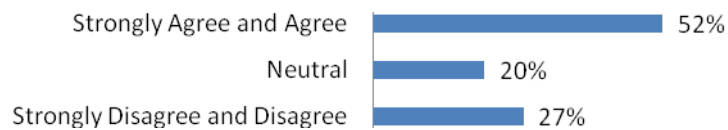
The daily accommodation rates charged residents living in the government’s long-term care facilities should be closer to rates charged in the provinces.

- **A very high proportion of rural respondents disagree with this recommendation.**



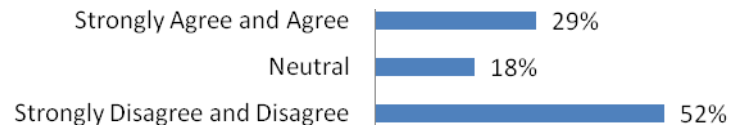
New rates should be gradually increased, possibly grandfathering existing residents at existing rates.

- **A higher proportion of rural residents disagree with increasing new rates.**



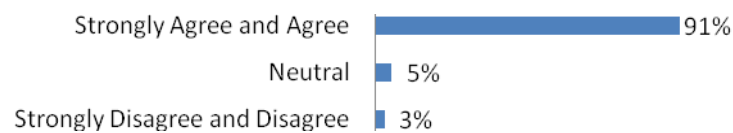
c) *Do you think the government should consider re-introducing health care premiums to help pay the cost of health care services in Yukon?*

- **Over half of respondents disagree – most quite strongly – with the idea of re-introducing health care premiums.**



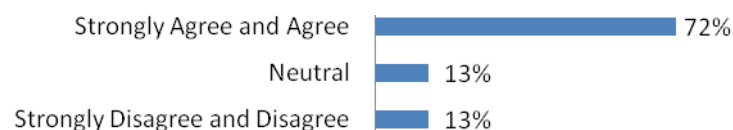
d) *The Yukon Health Care Review report recommends that government should continue to invest in expanded home care, community support programs and supported/assisted living as it keeps people out of institutional long-term care while providing services at a lower cost. What do you think about this?*

- **Support is very strong (59% strongly agree) for investing in expanded home care, community support programs and supported/assisted living, and this support is particularly high among rural respondents.**



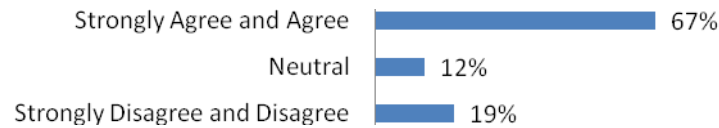
e) *Do you think the Yukon government should look at ways to get its costs for drug programs closer to what is paid in the provinces?*

- **Support is very strong (40% strongly agree) for bringing costs for drug programs closer to other provinces.**



f) *As one way to help reduce alcohol abuse, do you agree that liquor taxes should be at levels comparable to, or above other Canadian jurisdictions?*

- **Support is very strong (43% strongly agree) that liquor taxes should be at levels comparable or above other Canadian jurisdictions.**



“‘Stay healthy’ programs are a good investment.”

“People should be informed about how much their health care costs.”

“Yukoners are privileged to have the health care system that we have.”

“Increase the role and use of nurse practitioners.”

“Focus on wellness, healthy living, prevention, diet, home and community-based treatment.”

“Stop spending on upper management. We need hands-on workers in health care, not more management.”



Key Findings

- Yukoners care deeply about health care. Respondents appreciate and value our health care system, and they reported that it generally delivers excellent service.
- Yukoners were highly engaged, knowledgeable and had a good understanding of the public health care system.
- Respondents' priorities and concerns are organized around four central themes:
 - 1. Improve Efficiency of our Health Care System**
 - Maintain the high quality of existing programs and services valued by Yukoners: Residents frequently cited pre-natal/baby care, immunizations, home care, specialist services, 811, telehealth and Whitehorse General Hospital.
 - Reduce fraud and abuses of our health care system.
 - Find ways to pay for our health care system at the current or better standard of care (eg. improve efficiencies, cut costs, taxation, explore fee-based approaches).
 - Focus on human resources (eg. recruitment and retention, training, community volunteers, nurse practitioners, more doctors).
 - 2. Prevention and Personal Responsibility**
 - Invest in health promotion, prevention, early intervention, and wellness and education programs, approaches and incentives, particularly among young people.
 - Support collaborative and alternative health care options (eg. alternative therapies, midwifery, partnership approaches).
 - Promote personal responsibility and educate people about the real costs of our health care system.
 - 3. Long-term Care and Community-based Options**
 - Improve health care services to allow Yukoners to receive care in their own communities and to support an aging population (eg. community-based health infrastructure, seniors programs, home care, long-term care, palliative care)
 - Provide training and education to prepare communities to meet these challenges.
 - 4. Mental Health, Addictions, and Drug and Alcohol Abuse**
 - Invest more resources in mental health and addictions/substance abuse.



Appendices

The following appendices are being compiled and will be attached to the final report:

Background Paper

Question Form

List of Participants

Meeting Notes (Communities, Stakeholders and First Nations)

Written Submissions

Question Form Data Summary

Rural Question Form Comments

Whitehorse Question Form Comments

