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Most consumers and businesses expect recession: Bank of Canada

Most consumers and businesses think Canada will enter a recession, according to new surveys from the Bank of Canada, but businesses expect upward pressure on prices and wages to ease while consumers are still pessimistic about inflation in the short run.

The third-quarter business outlook and consumer expectations surveys, released Monday, showed consumers have become more pessimistic about inflation over the next one to two years, while business expectations for inflation have eased.

With inflation well above the bank's two per cent target, the central bank is monitoring how inflation expectations develop amid concerns that elevated expectations could feed into even higher prices and wages.

The annual inflation rate was 7.0 per cent in August, the most recent available number. Statistics Canada is set to release September inflation data on Wednesday.

Sai Guanteri, a senior economist with BMO, said while the widespread perception among businesses that Canada is entering a recession is bad news, their expectations for inflation are headed in the right direction.

"The good news, especially for the Bank of Canada in those same firms are seeing moderation in price and wage pressures," Guanteri said.

For Canadians in general, the consumer survey showed inflation expectations for the next one to two years have gone up since the last survey, as consumers anticipate supply chain disruptions will persist and oil prices stay high.

The bank says consumers still believe those external forces will keep inflation high, but views on what domestic factors are affecting inflation are now more polarized.

As well, "some people think high government spending and price gouging by domestic retailers are also playing a role," the Bank of Canada said.

To cope with high inflation, almost half of consumers report buying less and buying more items on sale.

About one in five consumers said they have not changed their shopping habits because of high inflation.

Meanwhile, consumer expectations for inflation five years from now have eased to near pre-pandemic levels. Still, consumers were more divided this quarter about where inflation will be in the long run.

CIBC chief economist Avery Shenfield said consumers are more pessimistic about inflation than businesses because they "aren't as sophisticated in how they look at the economy and translate that into expected inflation."

"It's not surprising that with all the focus on inflation in the media, and some fairly high price increases starting them in the face right now, they expect that high inflation will continue," he said in an interview.

In contrast, the business outlook survey showed business expectations for inflation over the short-term have eased, but remain above the Bank of Canada's target.

The survey also found businesses expect to raise prices more slowly and wages increases to slow.

Business confidence has also taken a hit as they expect sales to grow at a slower pace over the next year.

In the long run, businesses expect

Canada's ERs are under intense pressure - and winter is coming

Hospital emergency departments are jammed up in much of the country even before the traditional flu season begins, raising concerns about the winter months ahead.

In Montreal, for instance, ERs hovered at about 150 per cent capacity for much of the past week - and some surpassed 200 per cent.

Dr. Judy Morris, head of the Quebec Association of Emergency Physicians, said the sustained pressure on the system from the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent staffing shortages has taken a toll.

"It's kind of unusual to have that over such a long period," said Morris, an emergency physician at Saint-Coeur hospital in Montreal.

"Certainly the lack of personnel - all types of personnel, but mostly nursing personnel - is hurting us across the health-care system."

The situation is also troubling in other parts of Canada, including Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario.

"I've been in emergency medicine for almost 19 years now, and I have never seen the waits that our patients have to endure at all," said Dr. Carolyn Snider, the head of emergency medicine at St. Michael's Hospital in downtown Toronto.

"I think what's most concerning about it is that it doesn't feel like there's an end in sight for so many of us."

Dr. Supriya Sharma, Health Canada's chief medical adviser, noted that another COVID-19 wave is beginning in Europe.

"There's concerns that we might see a worse flu season than we've seen from the last couple of years and as well as keeping an eye on COVID cases," she said.

It's a matter of really being watchful and putting in place as many of our multi-layered of our multi-layered public health approach as we possibly can."

Wait times up, rural ERs scaled back

An Ontario Health report leaked by the Liberal opposition last week illustrates the extent of the problem in that province.

Patients in an emergency room waited more than 33 hours for an inpatient bed in August, a 54 per cent increase compared with the same month a year earlier. Ambulance offload times also rose, with patients waiting up to 83 minutes before entering the hospital.

At the local level, authorities are warning the public of a challenging fall and winter ahead and urging residents to get their influenza and COVID-19 booster shots.

In eastern Ontario, Hastings Prince Edward Public Health, which is based in Belleville, issued a statement on Friday pointing to the continued prevalence of COVID-19, along with an expected resurgence of influenza and a health-care system already under strain.

"This year, residents are encouraged to get the influenza vaccine when it becomes available, and to stay up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccines, to reduce their risk of severe illness and to reduce the risk of spreading illness to others," said Dr. Elhan Tounsi, medical officer of health at the unit.

Emergency rooms in British Columbia are also under strain, said Aman Grewal, head of the B.C. Nurses' Union.

She said many hospitals in rural areas have, at times, scaled back services or closed on the weekends due to a staffing shortage - putting more pressure on larger hospitals.

"Those patients that would have gone to that hospital are now having to travel an hour and a half to two hours to a more tertiary site," Grewal said. The staffing shortage will only get worse, she said, if governments

Canada's ERs are under intense pressure - and winter is coming

hospital with COVID-19 climbed beyond 2,000 last week for the first time since August, prompting the province's health minister, Christian Dubé, to once again encourage people to get their booster shots.

"Patients have gotten more complex," Snider of St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto said the problem isn't likely to be solved any time soon. Put simply, the number of patients coming into the hospital is greater than the number going out, she said.

"I think everybody can sort of grasp that, and there's only so many beds in the end," she said.

"As our patients have gotten more complex, as our patients are getting older, we need more and improved care far from when they leave."

In an attempt to free up hospital beds, the Ontario government made the controversial decision to allow seniors to be sent up to 150 kilometres away for long-term care.

Snider said authorities will need to move quickly to free up space in the winter months and should think creatively in doing so.

"Do we need to take over hotels, do we need to take over apartment buildings and ensure that good care is being provided in different spaces than we're used to, because we're at such a crisis state in our health-care system," she said.

"The other very important piece of this is: Who are the humans that are going to take care of our patients and our loved ones - and that continues to be a problem across Canada? I would say that most of our nurses, if not all, are really not paid for the hard work that they do."

don't put money into education programs for young nurses, as well as provide better salaries and working conditions to retain those on the job.

In Quebec, more than 4,000 health-care workers were off the job on Friday due to COVID-19, the highest number in nearly two months.

Morris, head of the province's emergency physicians' association, said the lack of staff, a resurgence in COVID-19 patients and backlogs elsewhere in the system are all contributing to overloaded ERs.


"When patients have nowhere to go, they come to the emergency room, and that's why our numbers are high. But mostly we need personnel in order to open up more beds so that they can be in the right place to get the care they need," she said.

"We're feeling this way going into what is traditionally one of the busiest seasons with flu and another wave in front of us or upon us with COVID as well, and it's pretty worrisome."

The number of Quebec patients in

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COVID-19 hospitalizations on the rise in Canada

More than two-and-a-half years into the pandemic and hospitals across the country continue to grapple with the effects of COVID-19.

According to data from the Public Health Agency of Canada, between Sept. 15 and Oct. 15, 2022, Canadian hospitals saw an average of about 4,700 hospitalizations a day due to COVID-19. During the same period last year, the average had only been 2,000 per day.

Among the hardest hit provinces, Quebec reported over 2,000 COVID-19 hospitalizations for the first time since August as the province's minister of health urged residents to get their boosters for added protection.

Ontario health officials have also reported similar trends as hospitalizations rose to 1,629 this week marking the highest number of COVID-19 related hospitalizations since May 4 of this year. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are also seeing increased hospitalizations among older patients between the



ages of 70 and 80 years-old.

Infectious disease experts have previously reported an uptick in COVID-19 cases was likely to happen in the fall as the influenza season approaches. However, a myriad of factors like emerging variants, other viruses and health concerns have put a strain on hospitals.

Toronto-based infectious disease expert Dr. Abdu Sharkawy told CTV's Your Morning on Monday that with health-care resources stretched thin, it is difficult to deploy

physicians and nurses to help manage patients with COVID-19, many of whom are quite sick.

"We don't see patients dying on ventilators that commonly anymore with COVID-19 but we still see patients getting very, very sick and exacerbating their underlying conditions - and that's something we really need to take very seriously, with an upcoming respiratory virus season that's probably going to be a lot worse than any that we've had in the past several years," he said.

Pirzada warns emerging variants pose an additional threat similar to what the U.K. and Singapore are currently experiencing with their cases linked to the BQ.1.1 and XBB subvariants.

Sharkawy recommended ways to ensure your home is as safe as possible, including cracking open windows to create a flow of air, having HEPA filters and even a CO2 detector to measure air quality.

Swabbing not only the nose but also the back of the throat using at-home rapid antigen tests would also help, he said, along with not relying on just one negative result but multiple, wearing a mask and staying up to date on vaccinations.

Toronto-based emergency room physician Dr. Kashif Pirzada says hospitals have been overwhelmed recently with an increase of children hospitalizations not just from COVID-19 but from other respiratory viruses and influenza.

"It's not quite clear why this is happening, considering the normal season for these viruses is much later in the winter," Dr. Pirzada said to CTV News on Monday.

"The shortage of pediatric Advil and Tylenol is a reflection of this surge."

Canada says U.S. holding NEXUS travel program 'hostage'

Out with the old irritants, in with the new ones in Canada-U.S. relations.

A disagreement has surfaced in a moment of relative calm as a trade disagreement now resolved and pandemic travel restrictions eased.

This new dispute has been quietly simmering for months and boiled over on public stage Thursday.

It involves dysfunction in a Canada-U.S. program for pre-screened travellers, who can cross the border more quickly with what's known as NEXUS.

The U.S. has shuttered offices in Canada that process applications for these cards while it presses for changes to the program.

A Canadian official made clear her country's displeasure in an unusually clear assessment before a high-level audience in Washington.

"I'm going to be super diplomatic and blunt here because I think this is important for friends and family," said Kirsten Hillman, Canada's ambassador to the U.S.

"The [NEXUS] program is being held hostage... it's disappointing and it's frustrating."

She aired those feelings in the presence of numerous government and industry officials at a conference hosted at the Canadian Embassy and organized by the Future Borders Coalition. The commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Chris Magnus, was seated in the front row, metres away.

The closure of facilities stems from a disagreement about immunity from prosecution - not unlike the protections for diplomats.

The U.S. government contends that its employees in NEXUS offices deserve similar immunity from Canadian prosecution while doing their job in Canada.

These protections already exist for U.S. border agents at Canadian airports working in customs pre-clearance lanes in the U.S. view, some of these NEXUS offices are co-located in the same facility and it makes no sense for different rules to apply in different parts of the office.

U.S. view: Canada has had years to make this change



The U.S. says it's repeatedly informed Canada for several years that this was a priority. And there's apparently been little progress.

"This is not new news," a U.S. embassy spokesperson in Ottawa said Thursday.

"The United States stands ready to reopen NEXUS centres in Canada once Canada addresses these concerns."

Both countries closed their processing centres during the pandemic. This spring, the offices in the U.S. reopened; but the ones in Canada stayed closed because the Americans refused to staff them.

The head of a Canada-U.S. business group says it's not the Americans holding the program hostage.

Maycott Greenwood said Canada has known for years that this is a non-negotiable condition for the U.S. to maintain the program; she said American officials even made clear, when offices were shut during the pandemic, that they wouldn't reopen again unless they gained legal protections for their offices.

She said Canada has dragged its feet on addressing the issue and could easily have introduced a regulation extending the airport pre-clearance rules to NEXUS.

"Canada kept saying, 'Soon, soon, soon,'" said Greenwood, a Washington-based lobbyist and head of the Canadian American Business Council.

"The real question is, 'Does Canada want the NEXUS program or not?'" She said that if Canada doesn't want NEXUS anymore the U.S. has a worldwide trusted-traveler program, Global Entry. But the disadvantage there is Global Entry is a unilateral

U.S. program and doesn't allow speedy entry into Canada.

Hillman said Canada is willing to find a solution. But she said it's a complicated issue and may not even be possible under Canadian law.

It's the U.S. hardball approach she said she resents.

"What I do question are the tactics, to be honest with you: I feel the tactics are heavy-handed and not indicative of the relationship we have," Hillman said.

In an interview later with CBC News she added: "It's not how friends do business. It's unacceptable. We're increasingly frustrated. I think it's important to say so."

Could online interviews solve impasse?

There's now a backlog of more than 334,000 people awaiting NEXUS cards and Hillman said it's getting worse every day.

She disputed news reports that indicated that the core irritant involves whether U.S. officials can carry guns on Canadian soil.

Hillman told CBC News that's not the issue. "They're not asking for the right to carry firearms. They're not." She said the issue is Americans wanting immunity from prosecution for acts committed by Americans while working in a Canadian-based office.

She said it's complicated and these offices are not like airport pre-clearance facilities, because some are located within Canadian cities.

She said she's discussed the issue with the head of the Department of Homeland Security, Alejandro Mayorkas, and he's committed to the NEXUS program.

A Canada Border Services Agency officer speaks with a traveller at the Nexus office at the airport in Ottawa in this 2012 photo. (Adrian Wyll/The Canadian Press)

Nexus office at the airport in Ottawa in this 2012 photo. (Adrian Wyll/The Canadian Press)

A predecessor to Mayorkas who held the role in the Trump administration said the issue had already started bubbling up when he was in office.

Kevin McAleenan said he didn't want to comment much and deferred to the current administration on the issue.

But the Trump-era head of the U.S. border-protection agency and interim head of the Department of Homeland Security suggested a longer-term solution: Move everything online.

"I would recommend that they look at remote solutions to bridge this gap," McAleenan told CBC News.

"We've done that in other contexts."

Trump official: I love ArriveCan

Speaking of moving processes online, McAleenan and several other speakers at the conference offered their opinions on the controversial ArriveCan app.

Several defended the much-criticized app and regretted that it was viewed by the public as a pandemic-related program.

One attendee described it as a way of digitizing the customs process and called it a step toward a long-term goal: eliminating physical customs kiosks from airports altogether, simplifying travel.

"I'm a fan of the ArriveCan app," McAleenan told one panel.

"We don't have that in the U.S. We should've had that before the pandemic."

Speaking on the same panel, his former Canadian counterpart expressed regret about how the app was designed.

Use of ArriveCan is now optional, after a public backlash.

"It was a super-important opportunity for us and I'm disappointed about how a vocal minority gave it such a bad rap in a very short period of time," said John Osowski, the former president of the Canada Border Services Agency.

He said the program became a poster child for resistance against vaccine mandates, when it was really an attempt to build a next-generation customs system.

He also ridiculed reports that programmers had managed to replicate the \$54 million app in two days: "Did you build in the AI tools?" Osowski said. "Did you do 70 different versions of it? Did you get it approved in the App Store?"

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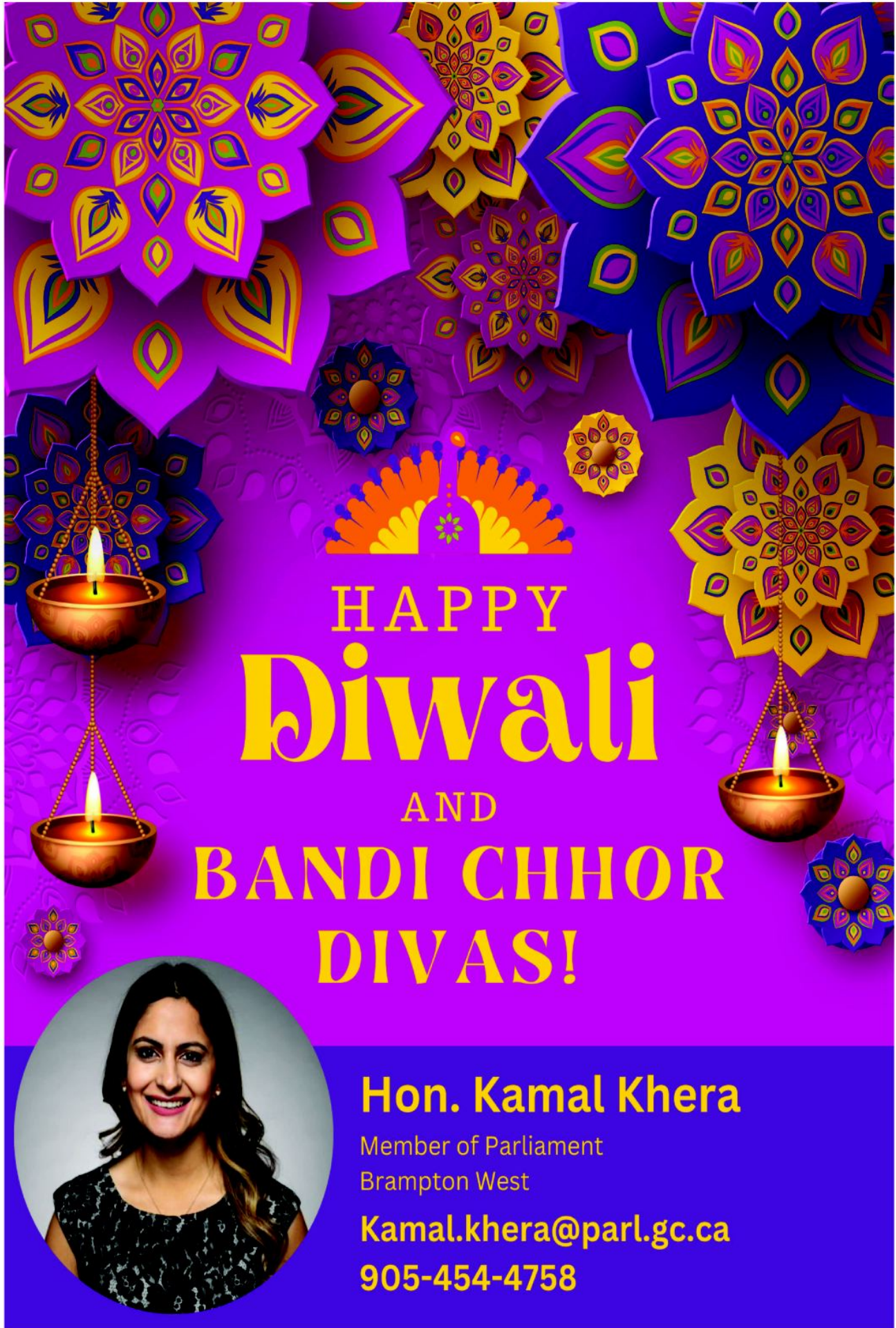
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