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About two thirds of Canadians support increasing defence spending to reach NATO target: Nanos

Most Canadians support increasing defence spending to reach the two per cent target for NATO allies, according to a national survey conducted in 2021. Canada spends around 1.4 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on national defence, falling short of NATO's two per cent target. The country has not achieved this defence spending target since the 1980s.

Nanos asked 1,080 Canadians how they felt about the country's defence spending and meeting NATO's target. The majority of respondents (64 per cent) said Canada should increase its spending to reach the NATO target, while about one in five (21 per cent) said the country should maintain its current level of spending at 1.4 per cent of its GDP. Seven per cent answered Canada should spend less than the 1.4 per cent of its GDP it currently allocates to defence, and eight per cent said they were unsure.

A majority of people in all demographics surveyed except for younger Canadians aged 18 to 34 agreed Canada should up its spending on defence to meet NATO's targets.

People in Ontario were most likely to prefer Canada increasing defence spending (87.6 per cent), while people in British Columbia were least likely to support the idea (57.7 per cent). However, a majority of people in all regions across Canada prefer increasing defence spending.

Nanos also asked respondents if they were concerned about Canada's military operational abilities causing tension with other NATO allies and



decrease its involvement, and five per cent said they were unsure.

People living in the Prairies were most likely to want Canada to increase its military patrols in the Arctic (64.3 per cent), while men (64.3 per cent) and Canadians aged 55 and older (66.7 per cent) were most likely to say the same.

Nanos researchers also asked Canadians about expanding the country's role in Haiti. Respondents were asked if they support Canada expanding that commitment to also send military troops to Haiti.

A narrow majority of Canadians said they either support (22 per cent) or somewhat support (33 per cent) putting Canadian boots on the ground in Haiti to help stop violence in the country. One in five respondents (20 per cent) said they somewhat oppose the idea, while 19 per cent said they outright oppose it.

The U.S. has asked Canada to lead a multi-national security mission to help stop violence in Haiti, which has been overrun with gang violence following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. Canada has already committed to sending Royal Canadian Navy vessels.

People living in the Prairies (61.4 per cent) and people aged 35 to 54 (61 per cent) were most likely to support Canada sending troops to Haiti.

The Ontario government has passed a bill allowing private clinics to conduct more OHIP-covered surgeries as advocates warn of potential legal action.

Bill 60, also known as the Your Health Act, was passed by the Doug Ford government Monday at Queen's Park and will go into effect once it receives Royal Assent.

The legislation was first tabled in February by Health Minister Sylvia Jones, who argued it was necessary to reduce the province's large surgical backlog.

"People should not have to wait for months for diagnosis, and if necessary, surgeries," Jones said on Feb. 21.

Under the bill, both for-profit and not-for-profit clinics will be allowed to conduct cataract surgeries, MRI and CT scans, minimally invasive gynaecological surgeries and, eventually, knee and hip replacement under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan.

The legislation was met with immediate backlash from advocates and experts concerned about oversight, staffing and quality.

The province's official opposition has repeatedly said the plan will result in a two-tiered system leading some patients to "jump to the front of the line."

"Today is a sad day, a day that will go down in history of our province as the day that the Ford government delivered a fatal blow to our treasured Medicare," NDP Health Critic France Gelinas said.

Some experts have previously told CTV News Toronto that allowing private clinics to perform more procedures does have the potential to help relieve some of the pressure

Ontario passes health-care bill allowing private clinics to conduct more surgeries



of the backs of sick people."

The NDP has said it presented 74 amendments to the Your Health Act in committee, but none were accepted or even considered by the Doug Ford government.

"They did not engage in discussion. I would say they did not even listen to what we were saying," Gelinas said.

A revised version of the legislation shows only one change, and it appears technical in nature.

The legislation, also known as Bill 60, specifies that a physician at a private clinic shall not turn a patient away for choosing to pay with their OHIP card.

Some experts have previously told CTV News Toronto that allowing private clinics to perform more procedures does have the potential to help relieve some of the pressure

being put on province's health-care system, however they also suggested that a plan for staffing, as well as transparent funding and oversight, will be necessary.

The province has said it will designate "expert organizations" to work with Ontario Health and the Ministry of Health to ensure quality and safety standards are met at every clinic. The director of this third-party or the ministry may issue an inspection of a facility if necessary.

The Ontario Health Coalition, which advocates for publicly-funded health care while representing more than 500 member organizations and individuals, has said this oversight is not enough to combat what it has previously called "manipulative upselling" at private clinics.

"Before they brought in the

possible following the passing of Bill 60.

"If you think you're going to set up shop here and charge OHIP and charge patients on top, you have another thing coming."

While the Your Health Act does say that all private clinics will need to show they have a staffing model in place that won't detract from other facilities, experts and unions say they remain concerned that staff will leave the public sector in exchange for better hours or pay at a private clinic.

"The idea is good, but there's still there's a tremendous lack of human resources to be able to sort of pull this one off," Doug Angus, professor emeritus at the University of Ottawa's Telfer School of Management at the University of Ottawa, told CTV News Toronto in January.

John Fraser, interim Liberal leader, reiterated this in a statement issued Monday, saying the health-care system as it stands now is under stress and needs more support.

"What should be of great concern to all Ontarians is that the government's solution to the healthcare human resources crisis - which will be the biggest ongoing challenge in this province for some time to come - is to set up a parallel system that will compete for the nurses, doctors, and frontline workers that our hospitals and long-term care homes desperately need," Fraser said.

"There should be only one shareholder when it comes to our healthcare system, and that's the patient."

The province has said there are more than 200,000 people in Ontario waiting for surgical procedures.

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Ontario to launch audits of six municipalities' housing finances

Ontario's minister of municipal affairs and housing is moving forward with audits of six municipalities to see if there will be any "potential or perceived" financial hits from a provincial housing law.

Municipalities have been raising concerns about a housing law, that, in part, freezes, reduces and exempts fees developers pay on certain builds such as affordable housing.

These fees go to municipalities to pay for infrastructure to support new homes, such as roads and sewers, and they say the provincial changes will leave them \$5 billion short.

Minister Steve Clark has expressed some skepticism about the impacts, and in late November he announced he would launch third-party audits of "select" municipalities.

Clark announced Thursday that he's looking for auditors to go over the books of Toronto, Newmarket, Peel Region, Mississauga, Caledon and Brampton - the latter three are part of the upper-tier municipality of Peel

Region.

"The province intends to use these audits to reach a shared understanding of any potential or perceived impacts of the More Homes Built Faster Act as regards changes to development-related fees and charges," he wrote in a statement.

"These audits will inform the province's efforts to ensure taxpayers receive maximum value for money and the best possible services... These audits may find duplicate services on back-office supports that would be better spent expanding frontline services."

Clark's statement does not explain why he chose those municipalities.

Premier Doug Ford has specifically called out Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie and Newmarket Mayor John Taylor at news conferences for their opposition to the housing law.

Taylor said he was not told why Newmarket was chosen for an audit, but said he looks forward to a "productive dialogue to better understand the audit process" and how it will help keep municipalities whole, as Clark's proposed.

"I think they believe perhaps the impact is not as great as we believe, so they want maybe to have an analysis of that," he said in an interview.

"The good news is this is the first important step in being kept whole... Municipalities are generally, in public and behind closed doors, very, very concerned about the financial stability of cities and communities across Ontario as a result of Bill 23," she wrote.

Clark has said the province will ensure there is no funding shortfall "for housing-enabling infrastructure" as a result of the law, as long as municipalities meet the housing targets he assigned them.

Crombie wrote in a statement that she welcomes the audit.

"Like many cities across the province, Mississauga is starting to feel the impacts of lost development charge revenues as a result of Bill 23," she wrote.

"As Ontario's third-largest city, this translates to a loss of nearly \$1 billion in revenue in the next decade that we use to pay for new parks and infrastructure like roads, trails, community centres, fire stations,

libraries, and other housing-enabling infrastructure."

Crombie has expressed concern about making the promise of keeping municipalities whole contingent on meeting the province's housing targets - 120,000 homes for Mississauga, for example.

There are a lot of factors out of a municipality's control, such as labour shortages, supply chain issues, or financing challenges faced by developers, she said.

"Cities can spend up approvals and permits, but rubber stamps alone won't build housing," Crombie wrote in her statement Thursday.

Peel Region is also among the communities subject to a municipal governance review and Crombie noted her pitch to get her city out of the upper-tier municipality.

"(The) 120,000 homes in 10 years is an ambitious target and one I think we can only meet as an independent Mississauga, a city that is 'right-sized' to run efficiently and develop creative solutions to the unique challenges before us," she wrote.

The government said the audits would also be used to develop future policies and programs supporting sustainability and housing-related infrastructure investments.

What the end of the COVID emergency means for Canada

The World Health Organization has ended the global COVID-19 emergency, citing increased immunity, fewer deaths and less pressure on hospitals. But while the situation with the virus has improved worldwide, it has also exposed major issues with Canada's health-care system.

Canadian experts said Friday that regardless of WHO's decision, COVID will remain a challenge to public health for years to come and has left lasting scars on the health-care system.

Dr. Ronnie Henry, British Columbia's provincial health officer and chair of the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health, told CBC News that while the emergency phase of the pandemic is ending, COVID shed light on problems in long-term care and hospitals that need to be addressed.

"We have to pay attention to ensuring that we have that surge capacity in our health-care systems," she said, adding that COVID also exposed "basic societal inequities" around pay and staffing in the system.

"This is another virus that is in our communities, it's going to be with us for a period of time and it adds to that baseline number of people that are going to require hospital care periodically in our community," Henry said. "So we need to add that on top of, and not go back to, the very stretched system we had before."

The pandemic, which was first declared an international crisis by WHO, the United Nations' health agency, on Jan. 30, 2020, resulted in unprecedented lockdowns, economic upheaval and the deaths of at least seven million people worldwide and more than 52,000 people in Canada.

But the death toll is likely much higher than reported, and WHO estimates it could be more than 20 million globally.

"It's with great hope that I declare COVID-19 over as a global health emergency," WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Friday. "That does not mean COVID-19 is over as a global health threat."

Following WHO's declaration, the Public Health Agency of Canada said in a statement that it will "continue its work with provinces and territories to implement a long-term, sustainable approach to the ongoing management of COVID-19."

Lessons for a fragile health-care system that don't necessarily fit well together," Bogoch said.

"Many people working in health care would have told you this year before the pandemic, but it was exposed during the pandemic," Dr. Prabhat Jha, a professor of global health epidemiology at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health, said the global reality is that we now have stronger population immunity from a combination of infection and vaccination - but the crisis isn't over.

"We still have incredible challenges when it comes to our health-care system, particularly when it comes to primary health," he said, adding that vaccination infrastructure needs to be maintained in Canada for COVID and other viruses to prevent a further burden on hospitals.

"What is needed is to strengthen public health systems, strengthen the surveillance, the ability to get out



COVID hospitalizations still remain stubbornly high in Canada, with 2,881 hospital beds occupied by COVID patients across the country, according to the latest federal data, despite continuing to decline since the beginning of the year. But the numbers are a far cry from where they once were.

"We had some very, very challenging times with COVID," said Dr. Isaac Bogoch, an infectious diseases physician at Toronto General Hospital, recalling instances where adults had to be treated in pediatric wards and authorities built tents outside ERs to treat the overflow of patients in the spring of 2021.

He said that WHO's declaration should be treated as an opportunity to reflect on the country's flawed health-care system and how it can be improved going forward.

In many parts of the country, emergency rooms remain under immense strain despite the decline in COVID hospitalizations.

"It's a patchwork of many different systems that don't necessarily fit well together," Bogoch said.

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"What is needed is to strengthen public health systems, strengthen the surveillance, the ability to get out

rapid tests and vaccination. In peacetime, you don't let the entire infrastructure erode."

More than 77 per cent of Canadian young adults (aged 17 to 24) are estimated to have previously had the disease as of mid-January, according to national blood donor data from the federal government's COVID-19 Immunity Task Force.

Those high levels of infection, combined with the more than 83 per cent of Canadians who've received at least two doses of a COVID vaccine, better treatment access and less severe infections than previous strains, have led to stronger immune protection against a virus that continues to spread globally.

But only about two-thirds of Canadians over the age of 60 have been previously infected, and that in the past few months, meaning there is still a significant part of the population vulnerable to infection and hospitalization.

Past and future challenges Experts have warned that the pandemic's ongoing burden on the health-care system will be felt for years to come, with long COVID affecting a subset of those infected, and delays for cancer screenings and surgeries causing massive backlogs in Canada's system.

Dawn Bowdish, an associate professor at McMaster University in Hamilton and a Canada Research Chair in Aging and Immunity, said maintaining vaccination rates, particularly among more vulnerable populations, will be crucial going forward.

"COVID is still worse than the flu," Bowdish said. "COVID is in now the top three causes of death and will probably persist - and that means just like the flu will have surges where health-care capacity is at its maximum and there will be compromises for other treatments."

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Police recovering human remains from submerged vehicle in Lake Ontario

Ontario Provincial Police say they found a vehicle with human remains inside, which had been in the water for "many years," while searching Lake Ontario near Kingston for a completely different vehicle earlier this year.

In a news release sent Wednesday, the police detachment for Lennox and Addington counties said the original discovery was made in January and the remains - which have not been identified - were confirmed last month.

Det.-Const. Shannon Cork said the vehicle was found covered in debris, making it clear it's been on the bottom of the lake for some time.

The way the remains were found was unusual, the officer said, adding she had never before come across this type of discovery during her 21-year career in policing.

"Who knows how many years would have gone by if we hadn't had that incident in January?" Cork said.

A barge with an excavator and police officers, including two divers in cold-water gear, could be seen floating in the water a little ways from shore near two red buoys on Wednesday.

Investigators will comb through missing persons reports, as well as pull the licence plate number and other identification from the vehicle to determine who it belonged to, she added. "Everybody will be interested to find out who it is, and somebody will be happy that they find that their loved one is found again," said Cork.

Neighbourhood lives reports news. Alan Champagne lives across the road from the lake and said there's a sad history of vehicles going into the water there.

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Canada announces extension to the Agri-Food Pilot, facilitating access to permanent residence for workers and their families

L'Original, Ontario—The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of supporting the agri-food sector's labour market needs and strengthening Canada's food supply system. One key to success for Canadian farmers and food processors is their ability to recruit and retain skilled workforce. The Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, today announced the extension of the Agri-Food Pilot, which will now run until May 14, 2025. Launched in May 2020, the pilot helps facilitate the transition of experienced workers in agricultural and food industries to permanent residence in Canada. To support employers and candidates, the Minister also announced the removal of the annual occupational caps, or the limits for how many candidates can apply for a specific occupation under the pilot. Removing these limits will provide an opportunity for more eligible candidates to apply. By the end of the year, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) intends to introduce new changes to the pilot in stages, including "expanding open work permit access to family members of all participants in the Agri-Food Pilot regardless of the participant's job skills level" allowing unions to attest to a candidate's work experience, as an alternative employer reference letters giving applicants residing in Canada the option to either meet the job offer requirement, including the median wage requirement for the job offer, or

The Agri-Food Pilot complements Canada's existing suite of economic immigration programs, which includes the Atlantic Immigration Program, the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, the caregivers pilots, the Global Skills Strategy, Express Entry, and the Provincial Nominee Program. It continues to promote the skills and labour required in the agriculture and agri-food sector while also providing an opportunity for these workers to settle in Canada and contribute to our economy.

"Our farmers and food processors depend on the steady arrival of foreign workers so that planting, harvesting and food processing activities can take place throughout the year, and they need our continued support to attract and retain these talented workers. Extending the Agri-Food Pilot helps these sectors find the employees they need, so we can be confident that our food security, economy and living standards for Canadians across the country will continue to improve and grow."

—The Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

a no-brainer," says Petty Officer 2nd class Kyle Medwid. "You get free food, free living (quarters). You get to go on a ship and travel to different areas like I have experienced; a whole plethora of things that normal citizens will never be able to do."

Medwid tells CTV News he just returned from his fifth tour with the Navy, this time near Mexico on an anti-drug smuggling "run" where they intercepted a vessel carrying approximately 755 kilograms of cocaine head northbound.

"We got to work with the US Coast Guard Cutter Benjamin Bottom, says Medwid. "We use their 'hit run' unit which is essentially a guy with a sniper and a helicopter shooting out their engines. (It was) very exciting."

O'Donohue says participants in the program will be exposed to the wide range of careers the Navy offers so they can then make a more informed decision about joining the Navy before having to sign a three to five year contract.

Free living expenses and a salary: Canadian Navy offering 'no strings attached' employment

HMCS Hunter in Windsor is part of a new recruitment initiative called the "naval experience program". It gives Canadians between 17 and 57 (years of age) the opportunity to join the Navy for one year," says Mark O'Donohue, deputy commander Canadian fleet Pacific. "At the end of the year, they can either choose to sign on and become a member of the Royal Canadian Navy or they can walk away."

O'Donohue says the program is open to Canadians and permanent residents. "We want to get a variety of Canadians," says O'Donohue. "We really want to tap into that group of people that you know, may not normally join the military to give them this opportunity to check it out."

The program includes:

- \$42,000 salary approximately
- food and living quarters paid for
- 20 vacation days
- choice of east or west coast



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Close to 30,000 people now displaced as Alberta continues battling wildfires

A change in weather conditions has helped firefighters fight the wildfires that have forced thousands of Albertans to flee their homes this past week, officials from the Alberta Emergency Management Agency and Alberta Wildfire said Sunday.

"Today we've seen some light scattered showers in the southern part of the province, as far north as Fox Creek. The good news is that it did have an impact on fire behaviour today in that area," Christie Tucker, information unit manager with Alberta Wildfire, told an afternoon news conference in Edmonton.

"It allowed firefighters to get a chance to work on the areas of some wildfires that they haven't been able to get close to because of extreme wildfire behaviour."

While the province is battling fires using air tankers and helicopters, Tucker said the change in weather conditions has been most beneficial to firefighters on the ground.

"When we see that lifting in conditions, a little bit of humidity and coolness, it means that our firefighters can actually get a little closer to areas of the fire that they had not been able to get into before and that can be very big for us," she said.

"Unfortunately in the north of the province, [firefighters] will continue to be challenged with the conditions that they're seeing. Our priorities today have been and always are wildfires that are threatening communities or human lives."

108 fires, 31 out of control

As of Sunday afternoon, there were 108 active wildfires across Alberta, with 31 wildfires classified as out-of-control. The wildfires have forced more than 29,000 Albertans from their homes.

Conditions remain volatile as officials say the extent of damage is difficult to determine as the situation develops.

"In some cases, ongoing smoke and fire conditions prevent us from fully assessing property loss and until we can do that, we are limited in the details we can provide," said Colin Blair, executive director of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. "But our first priority is protecting lives and dealing with the emergency response."



Blair asked for patience from rural residents who have been displaced by the fires.

"I've got a great sense of gratitude for them for following the evacuation orders. This is a very significant life event to be taken out of your home as a result of a wildfire," he said.

"But fundamentally, we do have to wait for the qualifiers to get under control before we can start making those steps."

Help from across country, and U.S. Alberta has received help from across the country with additional support equipment from Ontario.

An incident management team from B.C. arrived Sunday to take over the wildfire near Edson and the Pembina complex in the northern Rocky Mountain House area.

Firefighters from Ontario and Quebec arrived in the province Saturday and have been deployed to assist in various regions.

The change in weather away from the hot and windy conditions is welcome, but more rain will be difficult to determine as the situation develops.

"We did see some much needed rain overnight last night, actually, primarily to the north and west of Edmonton is where we did see the heaviest rain," Erin Staunton said in an interview with CBC on Sunday. Overnight Saturday into Sunday morning, five to 12 millimetres of

"We'll see if they have any engineering support in the event that there needs to be berm or fire breaks. We're going to see water treatment specialists."

Smith also said that support from the federal government would be assessed in helping First Nations communities return back to their communities.

"The Disaster Recovery Program allows for the federal government to assist us in financial aid if we get to that point," Smith said.

On Twitter Sunday, Smith said she met earlier in the day with NDP Leader Rachel Notley, "to share experiences of how to support Albertans during these wildfires." The premier said she'd continue to keep Notley informed on the wildfire situation.

In a statement, Notley said she "met briefly" with Smith, offering her insights and experience from the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfire.

Notley was premier during the Fort McMurray fire, which forced 80,000 people to flee their homes and became the most expensive natural disaster in Canadian history for insurance providers.

Hot, dry and windy conditions have been cited as the main challenge in tackling the wildfires.

"We are still seeing relatively brisk gusty winds blowing from the southeast," Staunton said, with winds expected to reach between 40 to 50 kilometres per hour throughout Sunday.

"We do expect those winds to ease somewhat through Monday [and] Tuesday, we are expecting much weaker winds compared to what we've seen over the past few days."

Temperatures have also dipped between low teens and 20 C, compared to earlier in the week which saw temperatures as high as 30 degrees.

204 of the Chagnoy Creek wildfire forced thousands of people from their homes in northwestern Alberta and destroyed more than a dozen homes on the Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement.

By late August of 2019, the fire was under control. It burned more than 331,000 hectares. The province declared it out in October of 2020.

As our climate changes, experts warn that the frequency and intensity of wildfires will increase.

Average temperatures across the Prairies are 1.9 C warmer since the mid-20th century, according to Environment and Climate Change Canada.

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