



The Society We Want

DISCOVERING
Newsletter

Number 5

May 2000

Canadians Speak Out on Health Care

Canadians not only want to maintain universal access to health care; they want to expand the range of available health services. And they're willing to pay for it.

That was the overwhelming sentiment of the nearly 600 Canadians who participated in 57

The Society We Want dialogue groups on Canada's health care system. Over a four-month period in 1999, Canadians in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec discussed what type of health care system they wanted,

exchanged ideas about what aspects of the system they would like to change, and examined the tensions and trade-offs that different choices might involve.

Common themes

While opinions on the particulars of the health care system ranged widely, some common themes emerged. Most notably, the majority of participants expressed support for a universal health care system and

was even prepared to pay more to expand coverage.

In more than 80 percent of the dialogue groups, participants spoke of a need to increase health care system resources through a variety of measures that ranged from increased taxes and shifting

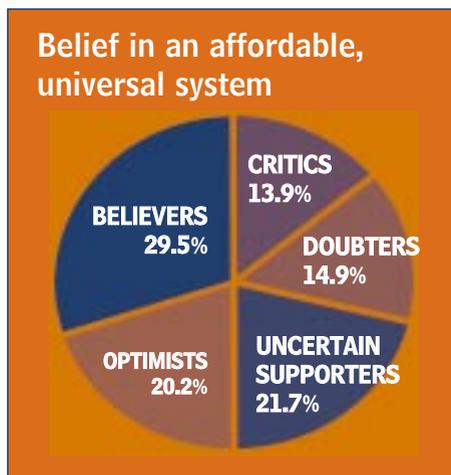
funds from other areas of the federal budget, to enhancing accountability and reducing waste. And, at the individual level, almost 90 percent agreed that access to health care was an inherently Canadian value

that needed to be upheld and protected.

At the same time, Canadians participating in at least half of the groups supported a *preventive* approach to health care, as well as increased funding for alternative medical practices like homeopathy, chiropractic medicine, and naturopathy. Moreover, participants often believed that costs could be dealt with effectively through increased support for public education and

health promotion initiatives, or through expanded coverage for professional home care, informal health care supports by family members, or self-care.

"Canadians are savvy enough to recognize that while a preventive approach may invoke some immediate, short-term costs, it's a long-term solution, in terms of both health and fiscal responsibility," says



IN THIS ISSUE

From Me to Us: Building Skills and Community through Public Dialogue	2
Building a Future for Public Dialogue	3
New Tools Facilitate Citizen-Government Interaction	3
The Next Generation of Public Dialogue Goes On-line	4
TSWW Welcomes OPC and Innovation	4
Learning to Engage: Canadians in Global Civil Society	5
Public Dialogue on the Air with Vision TV and TSWW	5
Progressive Education: Students Engage in Public Dialogue	6
Dialogue Results Help Shape Research on Work	7
Goodbye to Rhonda Ferderber	7
ISSN 1480-591X	

Joe Michalski, a senior researcher at CPRN. Michalski conducted the initial analysis of responses from the dialogue groups.

Supporters and skeptics

Not everyone, however, agreed that it was still possible to maintain an affordable, universal health care system in Canada.

As the chart on page 1 suggests, about half of the public dialogue participants could be classified as “believers” or “optimists,” who were confident that such a system was both possible and desirable. Another 22 percent were more uncertain or ambivalent about the trade-offs that might have to be made to maintain our health care system. Slightly less than 30 percent could be classified either as “doubters,” who were skeptical of the health care system’s viability, or as outright “critics,” who believed that competing tensions to ensure affordability would result in compromises in coverage, access, or both. Older participants, especially those over the age of 35, tended to be the believers and the optimists, and the most skeptical tended to be younger.

Maintain or increase funding

Overall, the dominant theme among dialogue groups was that health care funding should at least be maintained and possibly increased. Indeed, roughly three in four participants agreed with the statement that, “It is more important for us to make medically necessary health services accessible to everyone than it is to constantly think about reducing costs.”

Participants in several groups were convinced that access could be ensured partly through an increase

in the availability of services or, in some instances, broader coverage for different services. Increases in available health care workers; access to alternative medicine or innovative medical practices; and system flexibility, integration, and efficiency were often cited as important factors that could enhance access to the health care system.

At least half the groups stressed the importance of increased funding for preventive approaches and increased promotion of individual or consumer accountability. Other groups raised the issue of “user fees” as a means of ensuring accountability and maintaining solvency.

“People seem to be saying that if alternative therapies and preventive approaches are both effective *and* cost-effective, then we should support them,” says Michalski. “But, at the same time, people also want to see accountability. They support the expansion of services and more innovative practices that reflect the modern-day realities of medical care, but they also want to see evidence that these methods are effective. Further, they want evidence that people who deliver

health care services – and those who use them – are doing so responsibly.”

Indicators of success and next steps

When asked what they would point to as evidence of success, participants specified three prominent indicators: increased accessibility and availability of health care services, increased health care system resources, and evidence of cost containment. Other indicators of success included a greater focus on preventive approaches, expanded coverage for a broader range of services, increased funding for alternative medicine, and less reliance upon physicians and the health care system in general.

Participants in the dialogue groups made it clear that the society *they* want ensures everyone access to the health care system. “And they don’t want to simply maintain that system,” says Michalski. “A majority of them wants an expanded system that covers a wider range of services, even if it costs more money. That’s the bottom line.”

From Me to Us: Building Skills and Community through Public Dialogue

Dialogue participants – the people who come together to engage in discussion on issues that matter to them – are the foundation of The Society We Want. “Their voices ground CPRN’s public policy research in a real-life level,” says Miriam Wyman, project coordinator.

Since the launch of Phase Two of The Society We Want in early

1999, nearly 1,000 Canadians have discussed our health care system and the future of paid work in more than 90 dialogue groups around the country. And one thing they’ve made clear is that public dialogue is a two-way street. While Canadians who participate in dialogue groups enrich and inform our research, the feedback we’ve received from

Continued on page 8

Building a Future for Public Dialogue

It happens to most Canadian parents. They nurture and educate their children to young adulthood, and watch with pride as their offspring leave home to explore and succeed in an ever-widening world.

The Society We Want is showing us that citizen engagement and public dialogue are more than simply tools for research. They have the power to transform the way citizens interact with each other and with their governments, even the potential to change the nature of democracy. CPRN has been investing in the development work to help make public dialogue a viable tool for public consultation by governments, voluntary organizations, and possibly corporations.

Nested within CPRN, The Society We Want has been nurtured by a tremendous amount of voluntary effort from dedicated individuals and community-based organizations across Canada. Most facilitators were volunteers, and many of the groups were sponsored by voluntary agencies.

But The Society We Want and its partners realize that if public dialogue is to be used as a generic tool for engaging citizens, it needs to be organized differently. This line of thinking led CPRN to create the Next Generation Public Dialogue project, with the goal of making public dialogue a practical option for organizations – like the federal government – that want to consult citizens (see box this page).

“If public dialogue is to grow to maturity,” says Judith Maxwell, President of CPRN, “we will have to create an organization with the capacity to put together complex

national consultations in a short time frame. That organization would need to be able to mobilize teams of trained moderators, create multilingual issue guides, muster a representative sample of Canadians to participate in the dialogues, and contract with a team of experts to do the analysis on a quick turnaround.”

This resource-intensive challenge, however, goes beyond CPRN’s mandate. And so, the Next Generation Public Dialogue team began to discuss the possibility of a new, not-for-profit organization, one that could transform The Society We Want from a grassroots initiative to a larger tool for national participation in public dialogue and decision making. This

organization – a Centre for Public Dialogue – would be a centre of excellence in developing both face-to-face and on-line dialogue tools, and conducting national consultations with citizens.

The Next Generation Public Dialogue team is continuing to refine its vision for the Centre for Public Dialogue. Much feasibility work will be required before such a centre can be formally launched. Meanwhile, The Society We Want and public dialogue continue to be an important part of CPRN’s work, and two of its unique research tools.

For more information on the Centre for Public Dialogue, please contact Miriam Wyman at The Society We Want.

New Tools Facilitate Citizen-Government Interaction

The Next Generation Public Dialogue team has developed tools to facilitate and strengthen interaction between citizens and their governments.

What Is Public Dialogue? and Public Dialogue: A Tool for Citizen Engagement are, respectively, a primer on public dialogue and a step-by-step manual that guides the public dialogue process. Both tools

were based on lessons learned from The Society We Want and developed with support from 18 participating federal departments and agencies.

For more information, or to order copies of What Is Public Dialogue? and Public Dialogue: A Tool for Citizen Engagement, please contact Miriam Wyman at The Society We Want.

The Next Generation of Public Dialogue Goes On-line

Internet technology has taken the concept of public dialogue to a new, “virtual,” level.

Together, the Society We Want and CPRN’s Next Generation Public Dialogue project are exploring the possibilities for the next generation of public dialogue – on-line.

In November 1999, 11 people took part in a real-time, on-line “e-discussion” on the changing world of paid work in Canada. David Shulman, a member of the Democracy Education Network and a national advisor to The Society We Want, moderated the discussion. On-line technology, he says, holds great potential for the future of public dialogue. But it also poses significant challenges to the process.

“Internet technology is given to short, staccato kinds of communication – people tend to type in an opinion and shoot it off. Public dialogue, however, requires deliberation and in-depth discussion. And the Internet still has to prove itself effective in that regard.”

Making the Internet a useful medium for public dialogue, says Shulman, means shaping the technology to fit the high standard of

deliberative dialogue that characterizes The Society We Want. “We need to explore the possibilities for dialogue-driven technology, as opposed to technology-driven dialogue.”

On-line dialogues also raise issues of access and equity.

Participants in the on-line test ranged in terms of their poli-

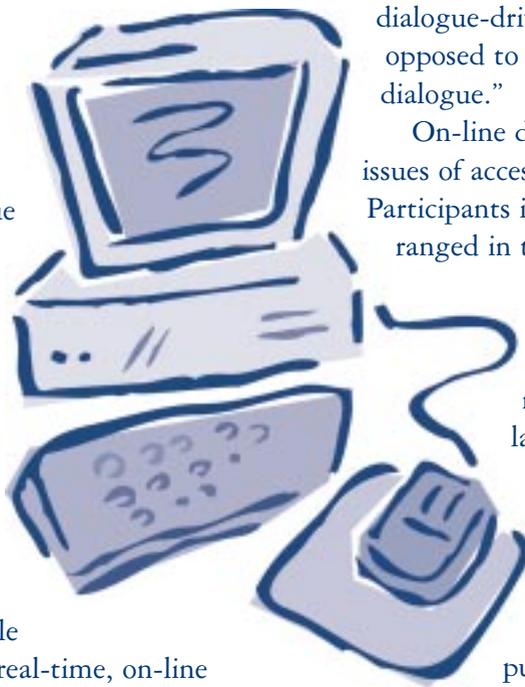
cy knowledge, level of computer literacy, economic background, language level, and computer access.

At least two-thirds of the participants did not own a computer, but had

institutional access to one through either a library, a school, or a Canada Employment Centre.

In the future, Shulman says, on-line dialogues may in fact create a more level playing field for citizen engagement. For example, on-line dialogues may provide a way for the less mobile and those who live in remote areas to participate in the process. And using a keyboard to communicate may allow participants whose first language isn’t English (or French) to participate with more confidence than they might in an oral discussion.

“It was interesting to see how technology facilitated participation that might not have taken place in a face-to-face discussion.”



TSWW Welcomes OPC and Innovaction

The Society We Want is pleased to welcome Organizations Partnerships and Communities (OPC) and its sister organization, Innovaction, to our Advisory Committee. National advisors support The Society We Want by providing advice, assisting in outreach, and helping to sponsor dialogues across Canada.

OPC is a fully networked health promotion resource centre and the coordinating body for a range of provincial health promotion resource centres across Ontario. Innovaction provides consulting services to non-profit, government, and voluntary sectors,

including the Canadian Health Network, Health Canada’s new on-line resource for health information.

“With our focus on building partnerships and communication, OPC seemed to fit intuitively with The Society We Want,” says Suzanne Schwenger, OPC’s board administrator. “Public dialogue – reaching Canadians in new and innovative ways – is something we’re becoming very interested in. OPC’s roots are very much at the community- and coalition-building level, and we were fascinated by the project’s ability to take community-building to a national level that influences the policy process.”

Learning to Engage: Canadians in Global Civil Society

How do citizens engage government on issues of concern? How “engage-able” is government? These questions emerged from The Society We Want and CPRN’s ongoing participation in the Commonwealth Foundation’s *Civil Society in the New Millennium* project.



Michael Als interviews Miriam Wyman at the Commonwealth NGO Forum

In 1999, more than 40 countries participated in a joint exploration of ways to strengthen democracy and citizen-centred development in the new millennium. *Learning to Engage: Experiences with Civic Engagement in Canada*, is Canada’s contribution to this initiative.

This report, co-authored by Miriam Wyman, David Shulman, and Laurie Ham, was presented at the Third Commonwealth NGO Forum in Durban, South Africa, in November 1999, and will be part of the International Association for Public Participation’s conference in Washington, DC, in May 2000.

Learning to Engage examined six case studies of citizen engagement within the Canadian experience.

“We looked at citizen engagement from three different

perspectives,” says Wyman, project coordinator for The Society We Want. “We examined not only how governments reach out to engage citizens, but also at how *citizens* try to engage *governments* on issues that matter to them. And we examined how Canadians have struggled to find a voice in an increasingly

global economy, where the rules for citizen engagement are being written as we speak.”

The next steps are to encourage people to take up questions of civil society, and

to begin to identify communities and organizations that are figuring out ways to engage government from a grassroots level.

“Government will always have the resources to be able to engage citizens, if and when it feels like it,”

Public Dialogue on the Air with Vision TV and TSWW

Vision TV, one of our national advisors, has taken public dialogue on the air in an innovative new television program. And The Society We Want is pleased to have played a small part in this creative venture.

On Wednesdays, viewers of any faith – or none – are welcome to tap into an interactive television forum to have their spiritual concerns, questions or problems addressed by a panel of advisors.

says Shulman. “But how do citizens create a more sustainable pipeline into government? How do we design our policymaking process so that citizens are able to opt in – or out – on a steady basis, rather than being driven by outrage or political campaigns?”

Response to the *Civil Society* project from participating Commonwealth countries has been overwhelmingly positive. In February 2000, delegates from participating countries met in the United Kingdom to discuss future steps and to propose a Citizens and Governance program for the Commonwealth Foundation.

Learning to Engage: Experiences with Civic Engagement in Canada will be available on the CPRN Web site at: www.cprn.org. For more information on Civil Society in the New Millennium, please visit the Commonwealth Foundation’s Web site at:

www.commonwealthfoundation.com

The “Phone Show” is part of *Skylight*, Vision TV’s daily human-affairs program. Vision TV’s mandate is to illuminate and reflect the broad range of religions and faiths of Canadians.

Participants in The Society We Want public dialogue groups were among the first callers to go on the air.

continued on page 7

Progressive Education: Students Engage in Public Dialogue

Public dialogue doesn't always fit into what we think of as a "traditional" university education, says Ernie Lightman, professor of social policy at the University of Toronto. But students at Toronto campuses are challenging traditional education methods by participating in The Society We Want dialogues.

"Traditional education methods aren't particularly interactive," says Lightman. "They're often based on the myth that the professor has all the knowledge, which he or she pours out into the empty vessels that are the students. Regrettably, much university education, with its emphasis on examination, memorization, and regurgitation, doesn't really have a place for consumer input. But for any kind of progressive education, public dialogue is absolutely essential."

Lightman's students in the master's program in social work at the University of Toronto held discussion groups in November. At the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Professor Daniel Schugurensky's graduate students in adult education have used The Society We Want public dialogues as a way of understanding citizenship education. And at York University, Professor Arlene Herman's social work students recently held dialogues on the health care system as part of their class on social advocacy.

All three educators agree that public dialogue is a pedagogical tool that contributes to students' understanding of democracy, citizen engagement, and social action. But participating in the process is also a chance for students to develop skills: in moderating and

facilitating discussion, and in learning how to conduct their own public dialogues.

"The intention of the groups is not to engage in debate but to create an atmosphere of respect where people can voice diverse opinions. And that's a cardinal skill for social workers," says Herman. "In their work with citizens and clients, they need to understand that there are



York University students discuss Canada's health care system

multiple 'truths,' and be able to develop a respectful process where people feel they can share their views."

Citizenship education is also an important dimension of adult education, says Schugurensky, whose own research examines citizenship, learning, and participatory democracy. He notes that Canada has a long tradition of developing good citizen education programs, like the Citizens' Forum, organized in the post-war era by the CBC and the Canadian Association for Adult Education to promote public dialogue across the country.

"Today, however, there seems to be a decline in the types of programs that actively promote participation in public affairs. The Society We Want is a very good example of how public dialogue can be conducted. The dialogue groups provided students with the know-how to implement their own public

dialogues, but they also had an inspirational element. Students could see that there are possibilities to influence change."

Students were enthusiastic about the dialogues, engaging in animated discussions and using their knowledge to come up with creative suggestions for policy. Herman's students, for example, came at the subject of health care

from a social work perspective that looked at the social determinants of health.

"They weren't comfortable talking about health care in isolation from other issues of social concern,"

says Herman. "Their perspective on health care policy was shaped by their understanding of the interrelationship between health care issues and the entire social, political, and economic landscape. And the discussion reflected that."

Many students were uncertain as to how, if at all, their viewpoints and experiences would influence government decision making.

"The political process can, in many cases, be insensitive to consumer input," says Lightman. "But a first step toward challenging that insensitivity is to have tools and dialogues like The Society We Want, whereby communities and people can come together and start to talk about matters of shared concern."

For more information on holding a public dialogue in your university class, please contact Miriam Wyman at The Society We Want.

Dialogue Results Help Shape Research on Work

The Society We Want dialogue groups provide researchers and policymakers with direct input from Canadians about issues that matter to them, like the health care system and employment. And this kind of citizen participation is indispensable as CPRN conducts research on policy that affects all Canadians.

"The Society We Want is a valuable tool on a number of levels," says Graham Lowe, the director of CPRN's Work Network. "It goes beyond the rarified policy environment in Ottawa to tap into people's actual experiences, and gives us a chance to have citizens engage with and validate the issues that we identify as

important through our research. Results from dialogue groups feed into our research and help shape projects."



Graham Lowe

This Spring, for example, as it develops a project on Quality of Employment Indicators, the Work Network will use feedback from The Society We Want dialogues to help identify Canadians' priorities on the issue of paid work. And Lowe envisions a public dialogue component to future

Work Network projects. "These kinds of discussions have the potential to be a very powerful research tool."

The Society We Want invites you to add your voice to the dialogue by hosting or participating

in a dialogue group. Issue guides on "Adapting to the Changing World of Paid Work" are available by contacting The Society We Want.

continued from page 5

"When the show first started, we needed to solicit people to phone in," says Rita Deverell, *Skylight's* senior producer. "It was very important for us to tap into some groups that understood and were accustomed to participating in public dialogue and contributing to an open-forum discussion about their ideas and concerns. And so we called on people who had been through dialogue processes like The Society We Want."

If you would like to be involved with the "Phone Show," please call 1-888-321-2567, or visit Vision TV's Web site at www.visiontv.ca

Goodbye to Rhonda Ferderber



In December 1999, The Society We Want bid a fond farewell to project manager Rhonda Ferderber, who returned to Health Canada after a 20-month secondment at the Canadian Policy Research Networks. While Rhonda has moved on, she's left an indelible stamp on The Society We Want.

"Rhonda really did transform The Society We Want," says CPRN President Judith Maxwell.

"As a result of her work, the new kits have demonstrated that you can get sound research results from a process that still permits a great deal of spontaneity and that encourages creativity. CPRN as a whole really benefited from her ideas."

"Rhonda was the architect behind Phase Two of the project," says Miriam Wyman, project coordinator. "Working with limited staff and resources, she evaluated what we had learned in the first two years of the project, and did a major rethink of the way the issue guides and kits should be designed and the results analyzed. Her approach is to dig in, figure it out, and make it happen, with expertise, patience and good humor."

We wish Rhonda the best of luck and thank her for her ongoing contributions to The Society We Want.

continued from page 2

participants and moderators makes it evident that citizens also benefit, directly and indirectly, from the opportunity to come together to deliberate on issues of concern.

Dialogue groups, for example, can help to give people skills that they can transfer to other areas of citizen participation. And they create an environment where people can speak out without fear of sanction.

Carol Aird, for example, moderated one discussion at the Women's Health Care Centre in Peterborough, Ontario.

"The dialogues provided a safe environment for the women who participated to talk about some pretty serious issues," she says. "And for democracy to really be participatory, you've got to give people the self-esteem, skills, and information to be able to participate. The Society We Want can be a format for doing that. It raises issues, but it also teaches skills that make people more able to participate in democracy."

Dialogue is also about community building, and creating

possibility for change through deliberation.

Audrey Salahub, who moderated a number of dialogue groups in British Columbia on the health care system, between May and August 1999, describes one of the most striking aspects of deliberative dialogue as its ability to make people confront – and sometimes change – long-held opinions. One participant, for example, came to a dialogue with the strong conviction that individual Canadians who could afford to pay for their own health care should be able to do so.

"By the end of the discussion, she had completely reversed her opinion," says Salahub. "And that kind of radical shift – from 'me' to 'us' – can only happen through dialogue. When we started to talk about health care issues and how they affected us as a community, she became part of a community. She walked in as an individual, but she left as a community member. That's not something you could have engendered with an opinion poll or survey."

About The Society We Want

The Society We Want is a national public dialogue project that brings Canadians together to think and talk about the issues that shape the future of our country. People meet in small, moderated groups to deliberate on key social and economic issues. The Canadian Policy Research Networks uses information from these dialogues in its research, which it shares with participants, governments, community associations, national organizations, the media, and other research groups. In these ways, The Society We Want brings the voices of Canadians – on the issues that matter most – to the attention of decision makers.

Our Web site provides more information about The Society We Want and CPRN.

<http://www.cprn.org>

Ce document est aussi disponible en français. Téléphone : (613) 567-7500

To order issue guides on "Adapting to the Changing World of Paid Work" and "The Health Care System," please contact The Society We Want.

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