



Report

Social Issues Survey



Dr. Peter
Centre

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Project: 42555-001



Introduction



Background

The Dr. Peter Centre (DPC) transforms lives and empowers communities by delivering human-centered, holistic care. Their campus is a hub of innovation, setting the standard for complex health care in Canada and ensuring that the sidelined 2% receive the care they need.

DPC partnered with Leger twice in the past few years to conduct research that examined public perceptions of the opioid/drug toxicity crisis. In 2025, we seek to take this partnership further to understand public perceptions of homelessness, addiction, and complex care so it can advocate for evidence-based solutions that improve health equity and expand access to care.

The data and insights provided by this research will be used to inform work around advocacy and policy discussions, public awareness campaigns, anti-stigma efforts and funding conversations.

Methodology

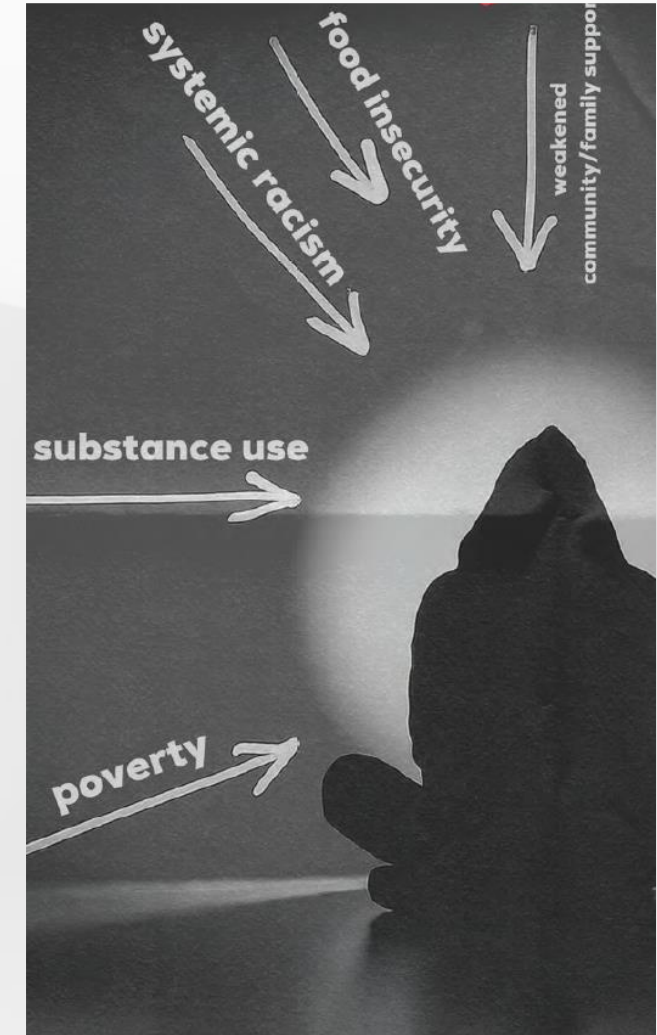
- Online survey using Leger’s Canadian omnibus.
- Fieldwork April 11-14, 2025.
- 1,630 completed surveys with a representative sample of Canadians.
- An “AB Test” was conducted with 815 per group. One group saw just the questions; the other saw a short description of the issue before answering the questions. This allows us to understand how providing information and context even at a fundamental level can shape impressions. This description is shown in the box below.
- A margin of error cannot be associated with a non-probability sample in a panel survey, but for comparison purposes, a probability sample of 1,630 would have a margin of error of $\pm 2.4\%$, 19 times out of 20 and a sample of 815 would have a margin of error of $\pm 3.4\%$, 19 times out of 20.
- Data was statistically weighted according to 2021 Census Canada figures.
- Since data presented in this report is rounded, the sums in graphs and tables (based on actual figures before rounding) may not match the manual addition of rounded numbers.

Many Canadians struggle to access food, housing, mental health care, and substance use treatment. Some face multiple challenges at the same time – like deep poverty, severe mental health issues, substance use disorders, unmet health needs and not having enough to eat. These overlapping problems make their situations even more difficult, and their care needs more complex.

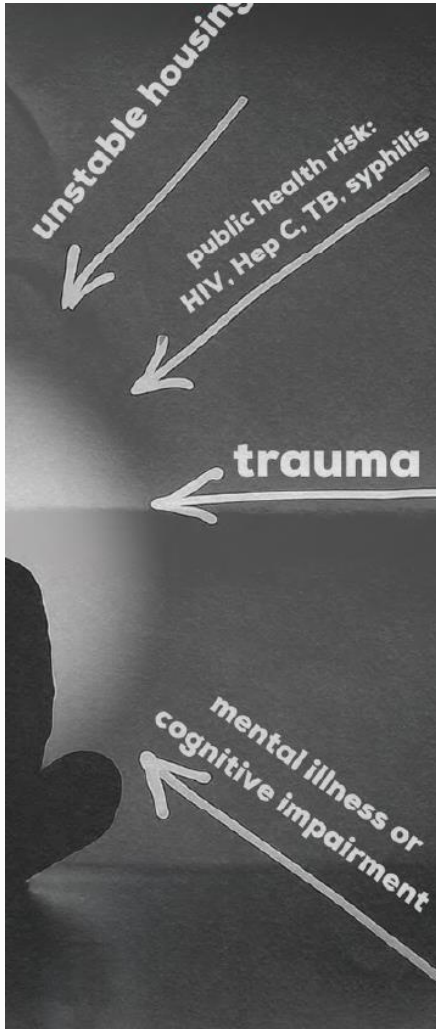
These individuals need support from many different services, but Canada lacks the resources and a dedicated system to meet this need. Without coordinated support, people can be overlooked and left behind. As a result, healthcare, justice, and social services are left to absorb the cost—without addressing the underlying issues.

Key Insights

- Overall, results reveal that Canadians express high levels of concern about the relevant issues, have empathy for those suffering and are looking for more to be done to resolve the overlapping challenges faced by the sidelined 2% (especially by the government). But at the same time, NIMBYism is alive and well, stigma clearly exists and there are conflicting views on the “fairness” of the vulnerable being given priority in the context of a healthcare system that is perceived to be insufficient and ineffective in general. As such, while this study provides plenty of positive and affirming results, they also reveal that there is significant opportunity for greater education and more work to be done.
- It is particularly fascinating to see that while a very large majority of Canadians (83%) agree that everyone should have equal access to healthcare (even individuals with greater need), a plurality (60%) also agree that the most vulnerable groups in society should be given disproportionately more care. Clearly many Canadians are able to simultaneously hold both opinions, even though they contradict. Still, the fact that the universality of care is more widely agreed to, and more Canadians express a strong level of agreement to this in comparison to protecting the vulnerable, there is a mind shift that likely needs to happen here for DPC’s approach to be more widely accepted.
- While there is much support for many potential solutions to address the overlapping challenges, none are seen as highly effective by a majority and there is also no consensus on the causes of the issue are. This suggests Canadians are largely not entirely certain about the challenges and what should be done to address them. This likely leaves the door open to further shaping of views in the future and presents an opportunity for organizations like DPC to lead the way.

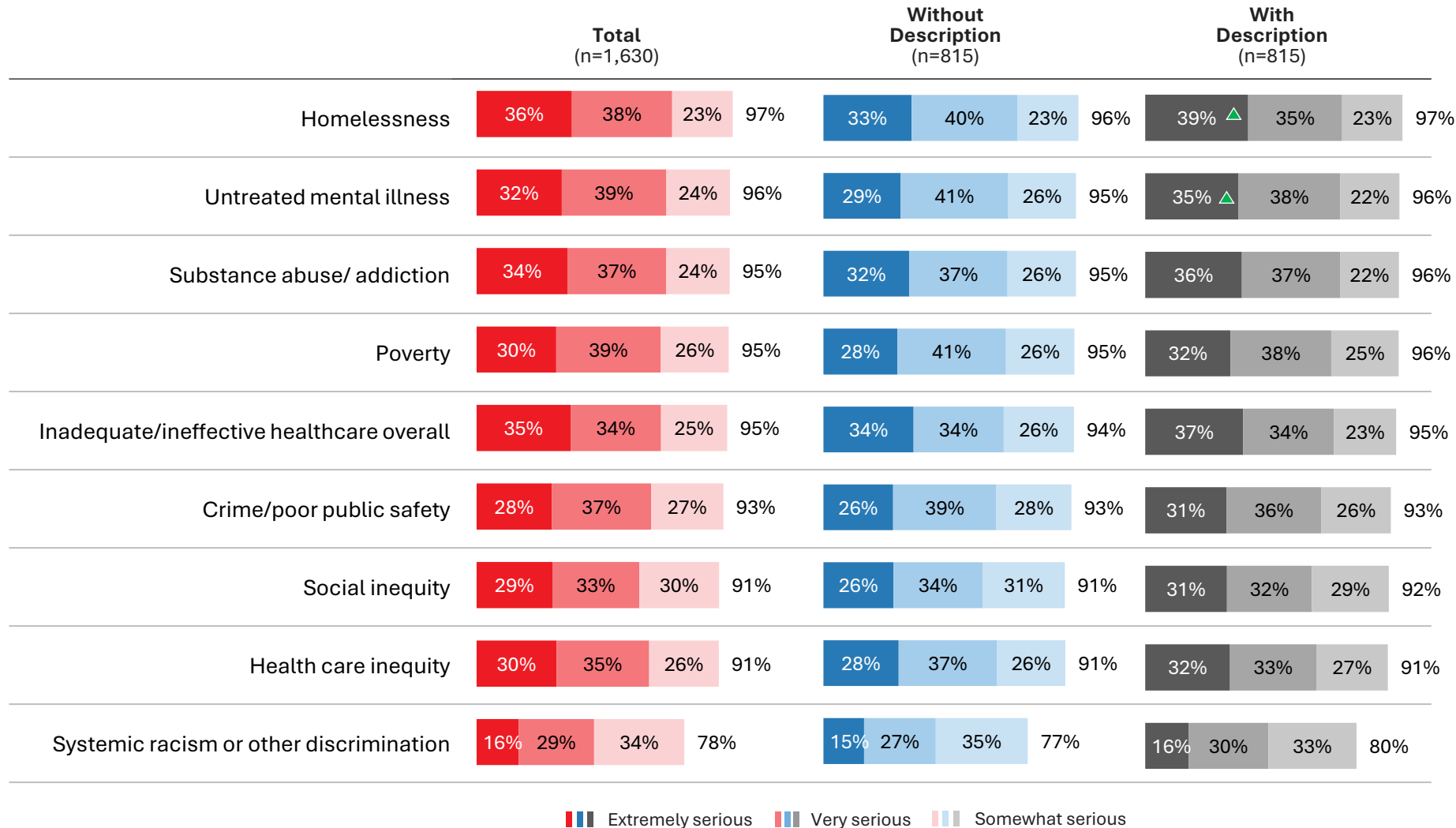


Key Insights (cont.)



- The description used in this survey to inform Canadians about the issue proved to have a limited impact on perceptions. There were many directional differences, and most are in the degree of the opinion rather than the absolute holding of them; there are only a few, however, that are statistically significant. It may be that the description used was not sufficiently in-depth and/or “persuasive” enough to have a notable impact. But where it did sway opinions, it appears to have made Canadians more empathetic; it did not, however, appear to reduce NIMBYism much nor to impact views of who should do more to address the issue.
- In summary, statistical differences are:
 - Increased degree to which homelessness (39% “extremely serious” among those who saw the description versus 33% among those who did not) and untreated mental illness (35% “extremely serious” vs. 29%) are seen as serious issues.
 - Decreased the intensity of feelings of being “unsafe” around homeless people (16% strongly agree vs. 20%).
 - Decreased the degree of individual choices and blame (“People who are homeless or addicted to substances have often made individual choices that got them where they are; they need to take personal responsibility) – 31% of those who saw the description disagree somewhat with this versus 25% of those who did not.
 - Increased understanding that social inequity (42% vs. 34%) and discrimination/systemic barriers/ lack of inclusiveness (32% versus 26%) are causes of the issue.

Perceived Severity of Issues

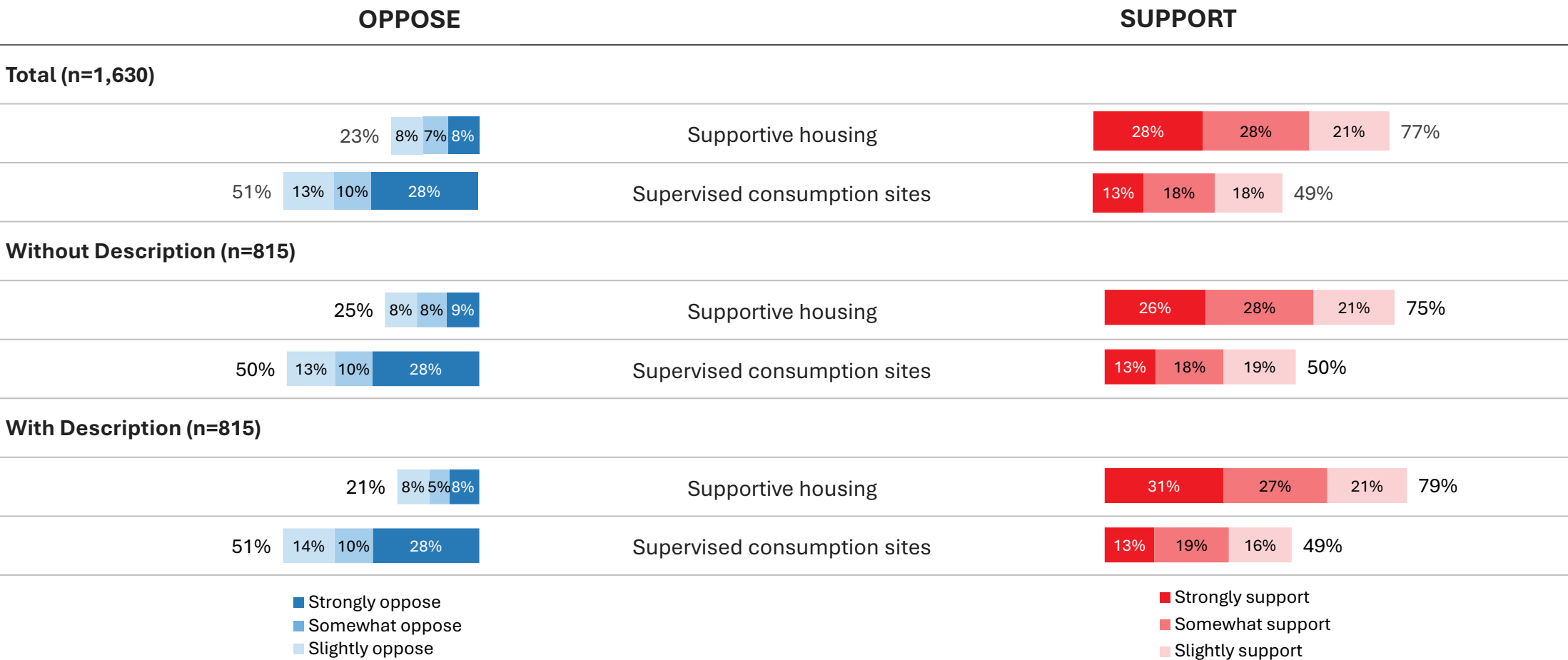


- All issues presented are seen to be serious by a large majority of Canadians but none as extremely serious by more than one-third.
- With the exception of systemic racism/ other discrimination (which is seen as serious by a smaller number and has a lower degree of seriousness), all of the issues are seen as serious by a similar number and have quite similar perceived levels of severity. This makes it somewhat difficult to “differentiate” between what might be more or less resonant as an issue among Canadians but at the same time confirms all are relevant.
- Consistent with other results in this study, there are very few statistically significant differences between those who saw the description and those who did not, suggesting its impact was minor. Still, the degree of seriousness of all issues is heightened when the description has been read (extremely serious ratings are at least directionally higher in all cases). This difference is statistically significant for the top two items, which suggests messaging of this type can underscore how serious and important issues are.

Harm Reduction Services in Neighbourhood

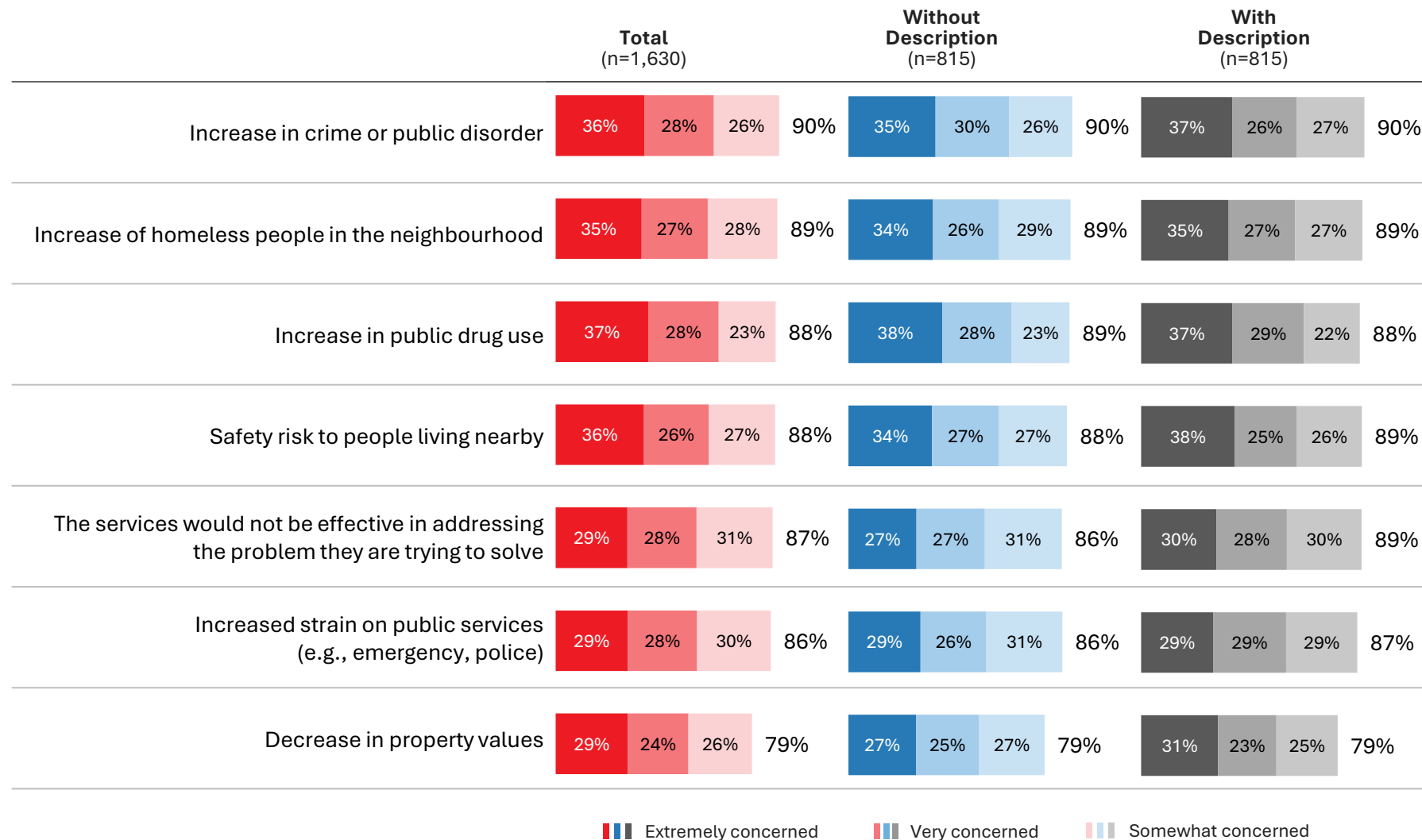
- Support for harm reduction services being in Canadians’ own neighbourhoods is divided, particular for supervised consumption sites, where equal sized groups support and oppose their presence. There is greater acceptance for supportive housing, with fully three-quarters in support of the idea.
- There are no significant differences between those who saw the description and those who did not, although again, there is a directional impact with slightly more support and slightly less opposition after the description is read.

NET Support	
Support both	48%
Oppose both	22%
Mixed	31%



Concern about Public Safety from Harm Reduction Services in Neighbourhood

- Across the entire population, there are high levels of concern of potential negative consequences of harm reduction services in Canadians' own neighbourhoods. Concern varies only slightly across the 7 different potential consequences with all concerning to a large majority.
- Further, even among the 48% of Canadians who support the concept of both services being in their neighbourhood, the concern is widely present – between 70% and 82% have concern for each item (this compares to between 91% and 98% concern among those who oppose both). As such, there are clearly perceptions that are in the way of full acceptance of these services in communities.
- Again, the impact of the description on views is minor, with just a very small, directional (not significant) difference in the degree of concern across most attributes.



Public Perceptions

- Various statements reveal that while many Canadians have empathy for those experiencing challenges, perceptions exist that represent barriers to overcoming them.
- Overall, Canadians largely seem to understand that addressing these overlapping challenges needs to be done using a holistic approach and that addressing causes will actually save money in the long term. This provides a good foundation for acceptance of efforts to help.
- However, there is more support for “equal” healthcare for all, regardless of need, than there is for taking care of the most vulnerable. While the two are not seen as entirely mutually exclusive (many agree with both), equal outweighs need. As such, disproportionate funding for the most vulnerable may not be an entirely palatable proposal among many Canadians.
- There is also a very wide-spread level of agreement that individual choices have been a cause of homelessness and addiction, and many feel unsafe around homeless people, which confirms the existence of some of the stigma surrounding these individuals.

	Total (n=1,630)			Without Description (n=815)			With Description (n=815)		
Everyone should have the same level of access to healthcare – no individual or group should be given priority, even if they have greater need	44%	39%	83%	44%	38%	82%	43%	40%	83%
Providing funding for services to address causes of homelessness, addiction and mental illness will save money in the long term because it will reduce healthcare and other societal costs	33%	49%	82%	31%	49%	80%	35%	48%	83%
Homelessness, addiction and mental illness are issues that need to be addressed together, not separately	36%	43%	79%	35%	43%	79%	38%	43%	80%
People who are homeless or are addicted to substances have often made individual choices that got them where they are; they need to take personal responsibility	19%	46%	65%	20%	48%	67%	19%	43%	63%
I often feel unsafe around homeless people	18%	44%	62%	20%	43%	63%	16%	46%	61%
The most vulnerable groups in our society should be given disproportionately more care than others	14%	47%	60%	14%	46%	59%	14%	48%	61%

Perceived Causes of Overlapping Challenges

- Understanding the various causes of these challenges varies from over six-in-ten to just one-quarter. While some of those presented are understood by a majority to be causes, none are universally understood to be so, which means there is much opportunity to enhance Canadians’ knowledge and empathy further.
- In keeping with discrimination being seen as a less serious issue in Canada relative to others, this is one of the least widely understood causes of the problem. This is basically tied in last place in our list with a lack of access to harm reduction services, which are clearly not something many Canadians are entirely comfortable with.
- While there are again few differences of note between the two groups, the description did have some apparent impact here – while still in the minority, those who saw the description are significantly more appreciative of how social inequity and discrimination have played a role than those who did not see the description.

	Total (n=1,630)	Without Description (n=815)	With Description (n=815)
Poverty / financial hardship	63%	64%	62%
Lack of effective mental health treatments	61%	60%	63%
Lack of affordable housing	58%	57%	59%
Past trauma / abuse / harm	58%	57%	59%
People making poor personal choices	54%	54%	54%
Unemployment / lack of access to employment and training opportunities	47%	45%	48%
Lack of social housing (below market rate)	42%	41%	43%
Social inequity	38%	34%	42% ▲
Lack of access to healthcare	37%	34%	39%
Discrimination / systemic barriers / lack of inclusiveness	29%	26%	32% ▲
Lack of access to harm reduction services	27%	26%	28%

Base: All respondents
DP6. Homelessness, poverty, substance abuse/addiction, mental illness, and other chronic health issues are often **overlapping challenges**, and some Canadians experience many or all of them. In your opinion, which of the following are the main **causes** of these challenges?

▲ / ▼ Significantly higher/lower than other subgroup

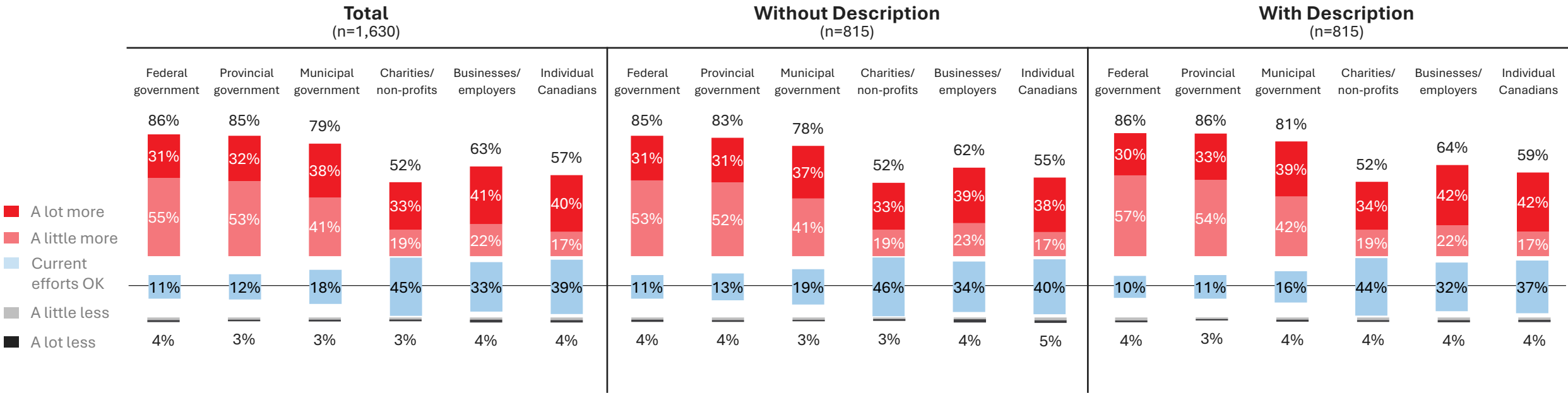
Perceived Effectiveness of Potential Solutions for Overlapping Challenges

	Total (n=1,630)				Without Description (n=815)				With Description (n=815)			
Accessible mental health treatment and support	26%	31%	32%	89%	28%	29%	33%	90%	25%	34%	30%	88%
Approaches that address the root cause of the problem, not current challenges	27%	29%	32%	87%	25%	29%	33%	87%	28%	29%	31%	88%
Supportive housing, which would include on-site supports like health care, mental health support and addiction services	22%	30%	33%	84%	22%	29%	32%	83%	21%	30%	34%	86%
Support services offered by community groups such as peer support, drop-in centres, street outreach, community kitchens etc.	14%	30%	41%	84%	14%	28%	41%	84%	14%	32%	40%	85%
Integrated approach to all aspects of care for these individuals, including housing, financial support, and mental and physical health care	21%	30%	32%	84%	22%	30%	31%	83%	21%	31%	34%	86%
Substance use treatment and detox programs	19%	29%	37%	84%	19%	29%	36%	84%	19%	28%	37%	83%
Better law enforcement such as stricter drug laws and more policing	20%	21%	28%	69%	19%	24%	26%	69%	21%	18%	30%	68%
More financial assistance to at-risk individuals	10%	17%	34%	60%	9%	16%	33%	58%	10%	17%	35%	62%
Harm reduction services such as supervised consumption sites and safe supply of drugs	9%	16%	33%	58%	9%	17%	32%	58%	8%	15%	35%	58%

- Many potential solutions are seen as effective (at least somewhat) by a majority of Canadians. While this means Canadians have faith in many of these solutions, the small proportion who think any to be “extremely” effective also reveals a sense of incompleteness to their beliefs.
- The relative ranking of the items in this list aligns with other results in this study in that they show wide-spread appreciation for a holistic approach, support for providing various types of support but also resistance to some kinds of solutions (particularly harm reduction services).
- Notable is the finding that there is much more wide-spread support for treatment and detox programs than harm reduction services.
- There is little difference between the two groups on these metrics, suggesting that the description has moved views relatively little.

Perceived Effort

- There is a high degree of consensus among Canadians that the government at all levels should be doing more to address the overlapping challenges described in this study. Support is equally high for federal and provincial governments doing more and only slightly lower for municipal government.
- Charities are the group that are most often seen to be doing enough, but even these organizations could be doing more according to about half of Canadians.
- The sense that individual businesses/employers should do more is widespread– ahead of that of charities but not quite as strong as any of the three levels of government.
- While not entirely taking responsibility for making more effort (since four-in-ten think current efforts are OK), many do recognize that individual Canadians should be doing more to address these challenges.
- There is little to suggest that the description had any impact as the results here among the two groups are very similar.



Base: All respondents
DP8. To what extent do you think each of the following groups should be doing more or less to address these overlapping challenges in Canada today?

▲ / ▼ Significantly higher/lower than other subgroup

Contact Us

For more information on this study, please contact our experts:



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