



# Health Care – View from Ontarians

## Ontario Medical Association's Public Survey Findings



# ONTARIANS MAKE THEIR VOICE HEARD ON HEALTH CARE

Over the last nine months, the Ontario Medical Association has engaged in the most comprehensive consultation in our 140-year history.

We involved people in every part of the province – doctors, nurses, other health-care professionals, community leaders and residents – in a discussion about how to fix the cracks in the health-care system that were exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and how to change the way health care is delivered for the better.

We launched an online survey open to every resident of Ontario so that we could hear all points of view. We asked people to tell us their health-care priorities and how health care in their community can be improved. Almost 8,000 people from hundreds of communities large and small and in every region and riding in the province took part.

Ontarians overwhelmingly want better health care. More than one-third of those who answered our survey said that improving local health care was more important than any other issue facing the province. Half said health care should be given the same high priority as economic recovery.

Ontario is a huge province and health-care priorities can vary widely. While there are differences, our survey showed that Ontarians shared many of the same concerns and views on what should be done. Improving access to health care by reducing wait times, recruiting more

doctors, investing in new hospitals, clinics and other facilities and improving access to mental health services was a common theme in all regions of the province.

What we heard was consistent with research we commissioned from IPSOS, one of Canada's leading public opinion firms, and from Advanced Symbolics Inc.

This report summarizes our survey findings.

Ontario's doctors have listened. We are leading the way forward with a plan that was developed from the grassroots up to create a more integrated and sustainable health-care system for all Ontarians.

To everyone who has engaged in this process, thank you. We look forward to sharing our plan for better health care in Ontario later this fall.



**Allan O'Dette**  
CEO

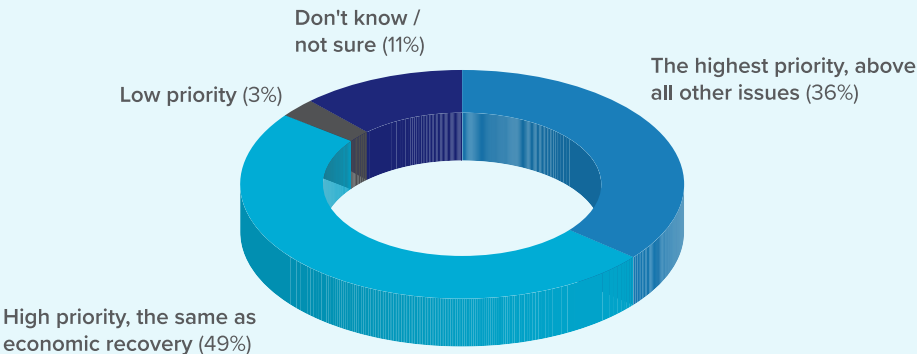
# SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

## HEALTH CARE IS A HIGH PRIORITY

Ontarians want the cracks in the health-care system that were exposed and widened during the COVID-19 pandemic to be fixed. Half the respondents to our online survey said addressing these problems should receive the same priority as economic recovery and more than one-third said they should be given the highest priority.

Despite the importance of health care, more than 80 per cent of survey respondents said that health-care issues were not being discussed or debated at all in their community, or that they were being talked about only somewhat.

What priority should be given to addressing issues in the health-care system in my community that were brought to light by COVID-19?

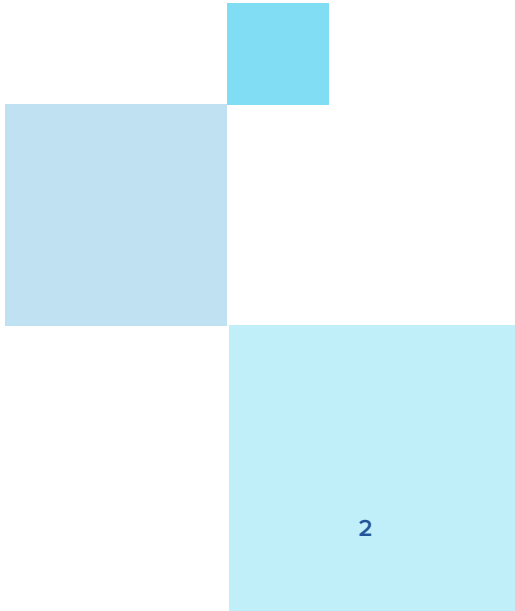


## HEALTH-CARE SYSTEM GIVEN A LOW GRADE

When asked to grade the health-care system, almost half of survey respondents gave it a C.

This criticism appears to be based on both personal experience and perception, with 12 per cent saying that either they or a relative had serious surgery or treatment for other serious conditions delayed by three to six months because of COVID-19 and another 27 per cent reporting delays of six months or more, which is significant.

However, 39 per cent of survey respondents said they had experienced no delays and another seven per cent said treatment had been delayed three months or less.



## ACCESS TO CARE MAIN ISSUE

The survey found that access to care is the main health-care issue for Ontarians aside from COVID-19.

For respondents, access means wait times that are too long and a shortage of doctors where they live. Wait times for diagnostic tests, some surgeries and other treatments were already an issue before the pandemic, along with being able to see a doctor quickly. We know that doctors are already seeing patients coming in sicker or with undiagnosed conditions because they avoided seeking help during the pandemic.

When asked what was the single most important thing that could be done to improve health care in their community today, 38 per cent of survey respondents chose investments in new hospitals, clinics and other facilities to improve access.

One-third of survey respondents selected prevention as a solution to improving access to care, saying a strategy to keep people healthy and out of hospitals and doctors' offices was the single most important factor in improving health-care in their community.

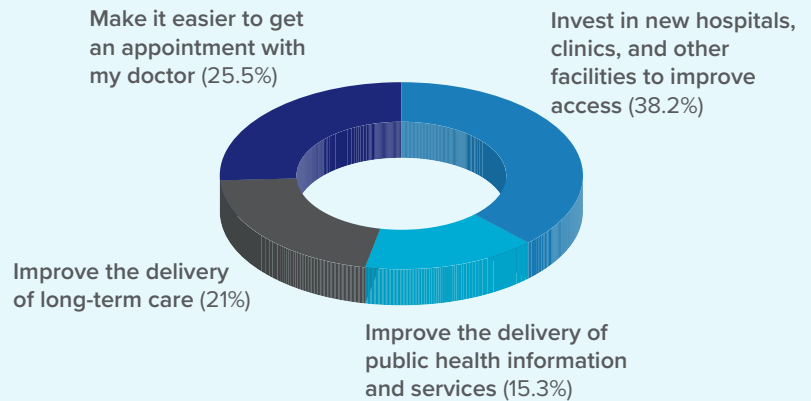
Twenty-six per cent said making it easier to get a doctor's appointment was the most critical action.

## ABOUT THIS SURVEY

The findings in this report are from an online survey consisting of nine questions about priorities for and perceptions of local health care. Respondents were presented with nine questions and asked to select from a number of options in their responses. The survey was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost 8,000 Ontarians from communities and regions across the province completed the survey. The OMA's ongoing public polls and research by IPSOS and Advanced Symbolics Inc. have found similar public sentiment.

Detailed results are included in the appendix to this report. More detailed findings for communities across Ontario can be found a [betterhealthcare.ca](https://betterhealthcare.ca).

What is the single most important thing that can be done to improve health-care services in your community today?





# DETAILED FINDINGS

## MAIN HEALTH-CARE ISSUES

Other than COVID-19, access to health care ranks as the most critical issue for those surveyed. They are concerned about wait times and the shortage of doctors available to them. As well, they are concerned about access to care for seniors and the availability of services for those struggling with mental health and addictions.

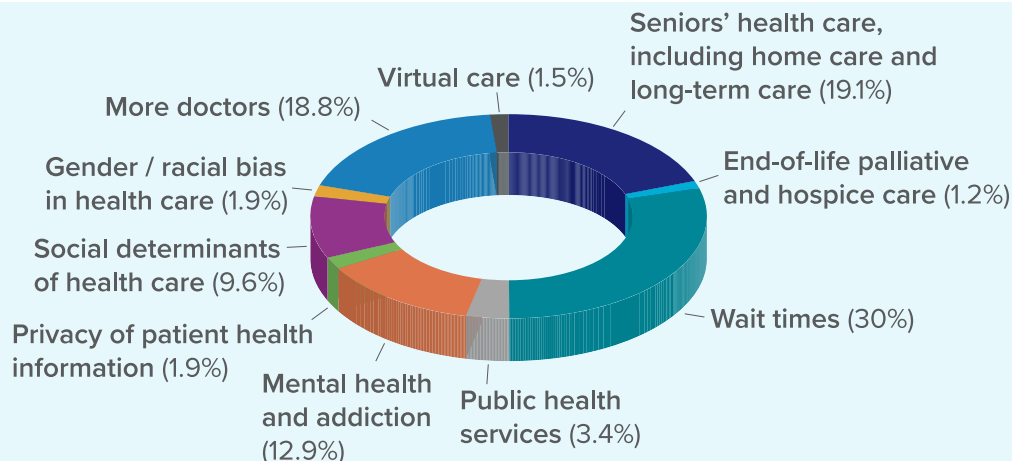
## WAIT TIMES

- About **30 per cent** of respondents identified wait times as their top choice for what should be prioritized in health care in the province, even higher than the **18 per cent** who singled it out in the OMA's survey of Ontarians by IPSOS.
- Lengthy hospital wait times and the need to reduce them was chosen by **21 per cent** of respondents as the issue that best represents their view on health-care delivery in their community.
- Investing in new hospitals, clinics and other facilities to improve access was chosen by **38 per cent** of survey respondents as the single most important action to improve health-care services in their community.
- For example, **52 per cent** of respondents in Windsor-Essex and **40 per cent** in the Niagara region identified wait times as the primary issue. In Sarnia, Chatham, Kitchener, London and surrounding areas, about one-third of respondents identified wait times as the top issue, higher than the provincial average.
- As well, **56 per cent** of respondents in Windsor-Essex, more than any other community in the province, identified investing in new hospitals and other health-care facilities as the key factor in improving health care. More than **40 per cent** of respondents in the Niagara region, Muskoka area, Guelph and Mississauga agreed.

These views were particularly pronounced in communities west of Toronto.

In northern Ontario, lengthy travel times to access health care was singled out as an issue, with **12 per cent** of respondents saying they have to travel too far — more than double the provincial average of five per cent.

Aside from COVID-19, what, in your view, should be the top priority for health care in Ontario?



## MORE DOCTORS

Respondents identified doctor shortages as a key factor in their inability to access care.

- Next to COVID-19, **18.8 per cent** of respondents ranked the need for more doctors as the most pressing health-care priority. (It was virtually tied with seniors' health care). That's in line with the **15 per cent** who identified the doctor shortage as a top issue in the IPSOS survey for the OMA.
- The doctor shortage is of particular concern to respondents in northern Ontario and the Kingston area, where **40 per cent** of respondents said there were not enough doctors. In Chatham, Peterborough, Grey Bruce, Thunder Bay and surrounding areas about one-third of respondents identified not enough doctors as a primary issue, almost twice the provincial average.
- Indeed, when asked what statement best represented their views on the way health care is delivered in their community, one quarter of respondents chose "we don't have enough doctors."
- Conversely, making it easier to get a doctor's appointment was selected by **26 per cent** of respondents as the single most important action to improve health-care services in their community.
- This view was particularly pronounced in Sarnia and Lambton County as well as communities in northern Ontario and Grey Bruce, where respectively **48 per cent** and **35 per cent** of respondents said easier access to appointments with their doctor was the most important way to improve local health care.

## SENIORS' HEALTH CARE

Ontarians are singling out care for seniors, whether at home or in long-term settings, as a top health-care priority.

- Aside from COVID-19, seniors' health care including home care and long-term care effectively tied for the second most frequently selected issue that should be the top priority for health care in Ontario. At **19.1 per cent**, it is the same proportion of respondents who identified more doctors as the top priority. The ranking is comparable to the **18 per cent** who spontaneously called out this issue as a priority in the OMA's quarterly tracking survey conducted by IPSOS.
- Seniors' care was particularly important to respondents in Mississauga where it was selected as the top priority by **31 per cent** of survey respondents, well above the provincial average of **19 per cent**.
- In another question, improving delivery of long-term care was selected by **21 per cent** of respondents as the statement that best captures their view on health-care delivery in their community.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION

Ontarians also want access to services that address mental health issues and addiction to be made a health-care priority in the province.

- Aside from COVID-19, **13 per cent** of respondents selected mental health and addiction as health care's top priority, in line with the **12 per cent** who prioritized access to these services in the IPSOS survey for the OMA.
- Correspondingly, **17 per cent** of Ontarians said improving access to these services best represents their view on health-care delivery in their community.

Addressing mental health and addiction was particularly important to respondents in northern Ontario and GTA/905 regions.

## PREVENTION AS A SOLUTION TO ACCESS ISSUES

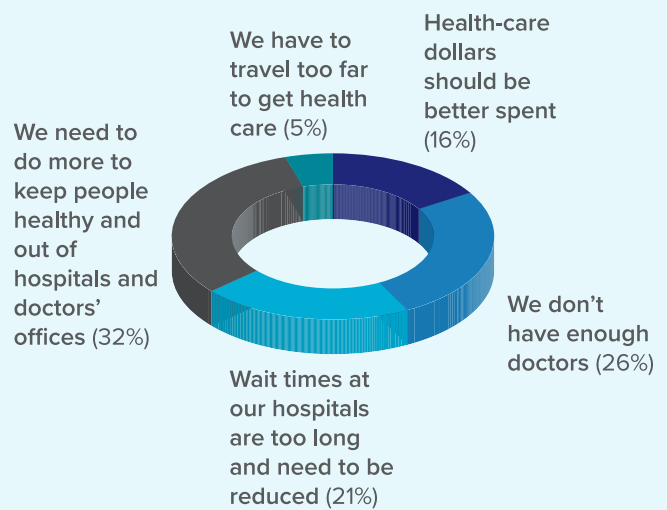
Ontarians recognize the positive role that prevention can play in improving access to health care.

In fact, doing more to keep people healthy and out of hospitals and doctors' offices emerged as the single most important step identified by respondents to improve health-care delivery. About **32 per cent** of respondents said a prevention strategy best represents their view on how to address health-care delivery in their community.

This was particularly so in Toronto, Mississauga, and Cambridge, where about **50 per cent** of respondents identified prevention as a key health-care strategy.



The following statement most represents my views on the way health care is delivered in my community.



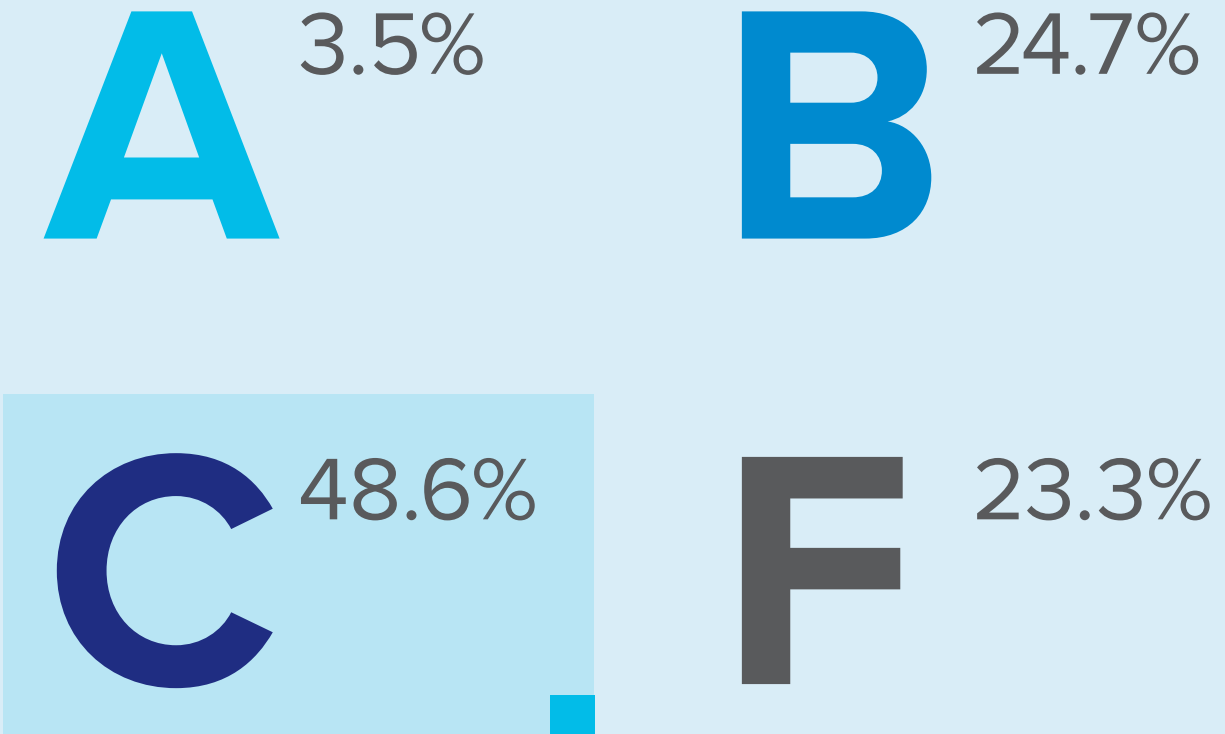
# SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

Our survey showed that Ontarians are highly critical of their health-care system, with most respondents assigning it a mediocre to failing grade; **49 per cent gave it a C** and **23 per cent an F**.

Just **25 per cent** of respondents gave the health-care system a **B** and only **four per cent an A**.

These scores are significantly lower than those in the OMA's survey by IPSOS where more than half of study participants assigned the system a B or higher. It is unclear whether this represents a decline in perception or is a result of the different methodologies and samples.

If you were to give a grade on the health-care system in your community today, what would it be?





As well, the OMA survey showed that perceptions of the health-care system have deteriorated during the pandemic for most Ontarians. About **59 per cent** of respondents said their view of the way health care is delivered in their community had worsened, while **31.7 per cent** said their impression hadn't changed and only **9.4 per cent** said their perception had improved.

Negative views of the health-care system may be related to concerns about access. Access was raised frequently by Ontarians, who chose addressing it as their top choice for the single most important thing that can be done to improve health-care services in their community. Examples identified were investing in new hospitals, clinics and other health-care facilities and making it easier to get an appointment with a doctor.

Survey respondents in Toronto and northern Ontario were less critical of the system, although they were not far below the provincial average. Sarnia and Lambton County were most critical, with **74 per cent** saying health care had worsened during the pandemic. Respondents in Brantford, Woodstock and Mississauga also topped the provincial average; more than two-thirds of respondents said their impression of health care had grown worse over the past 18 months.

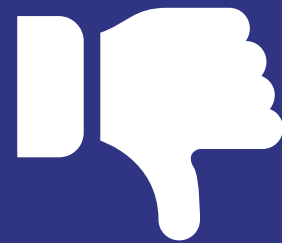
Perception as well as personal experience appears to be influencing views on access to care and system performance. Among respondents, **40 per cent** have not experienced a delay in serious surgery or treatment for other serious conditions delayed for themselves or a family member due to COVID-19 and seven per cent had experienced delays of three months or less. However, about **27 per cent** have experienced a delay of more than six months and another **12 per cent** had experienced delays of three to six months, which is significant.

As a result of the pandemic, have your views changed on the way health care is delivered in your community?



**31.7%**

said it stayed the same



**59%**

said it became worse



**9.4%**

said it improved



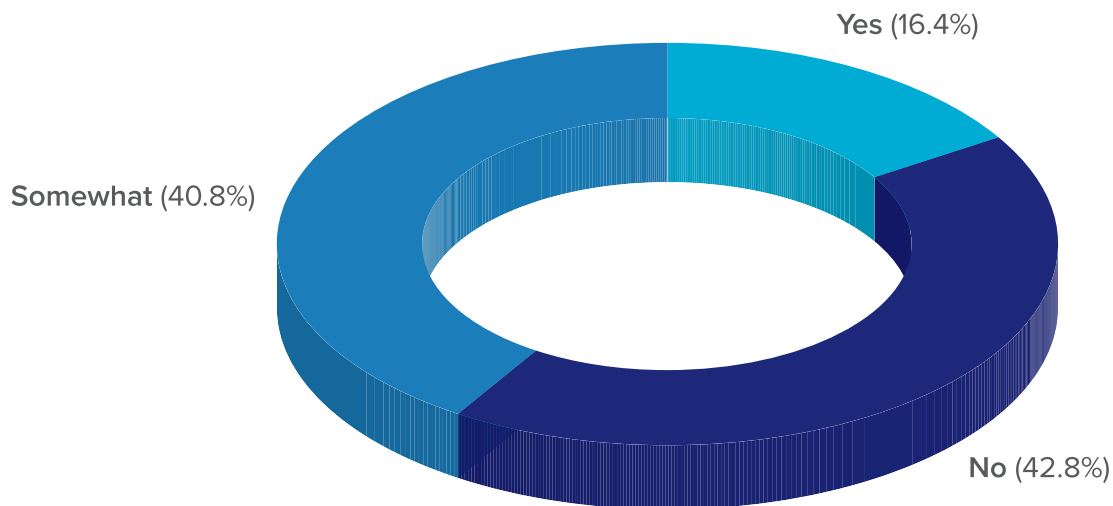
**BETTER  
HEALTH  
CARE  
STARTS  
HERE**

## **APPENDIX – SURVEY FINDINGS BY QUESTION**

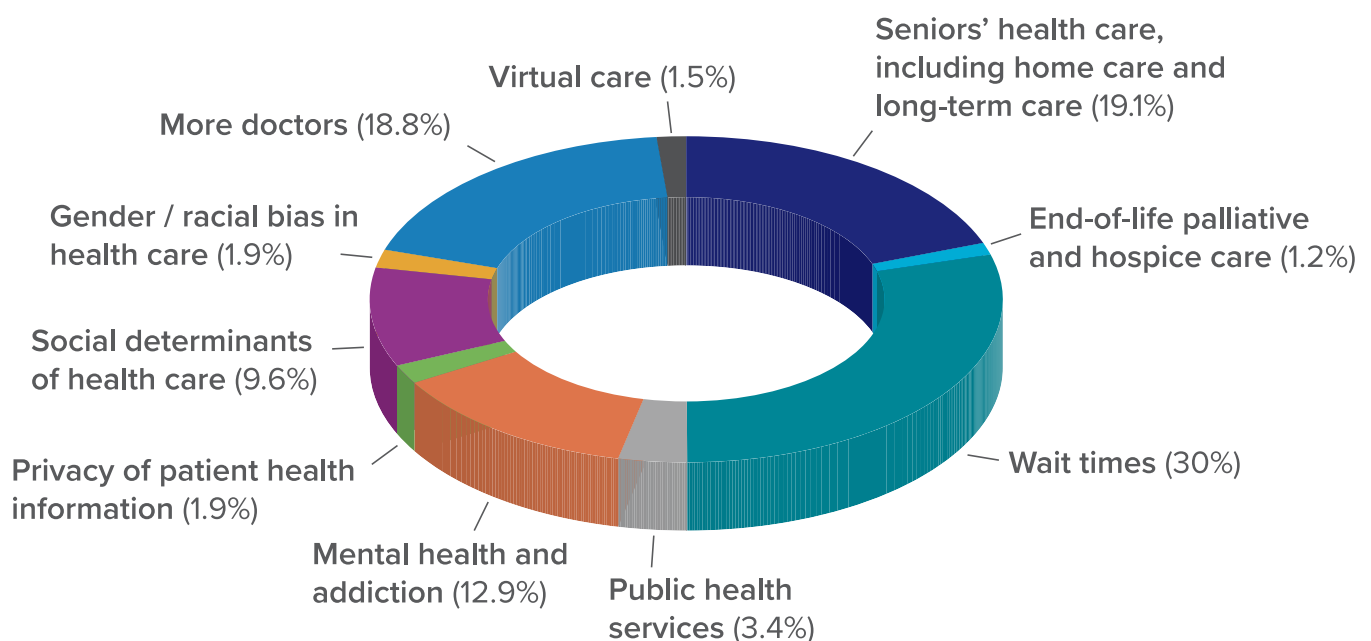
# RESULTS

PLEASE NOTE: PERCENTAGES MAY NOT TOTAL 100 DUE TO ROUNDING.

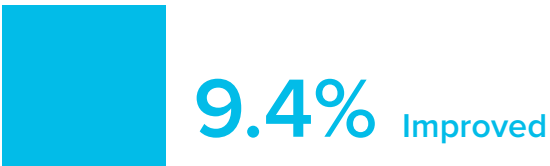
1. The health-care issues that are important to me and my community are being discussed and debated by community leaders.



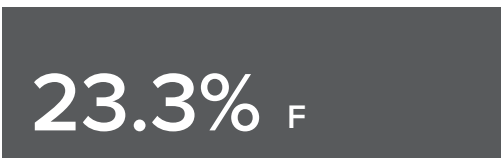
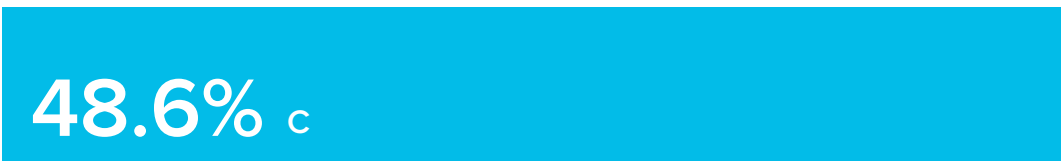
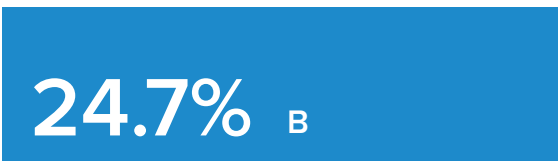
2. Aside from COVID-19, what, in your view, should be the top priority for health care in Ontario?



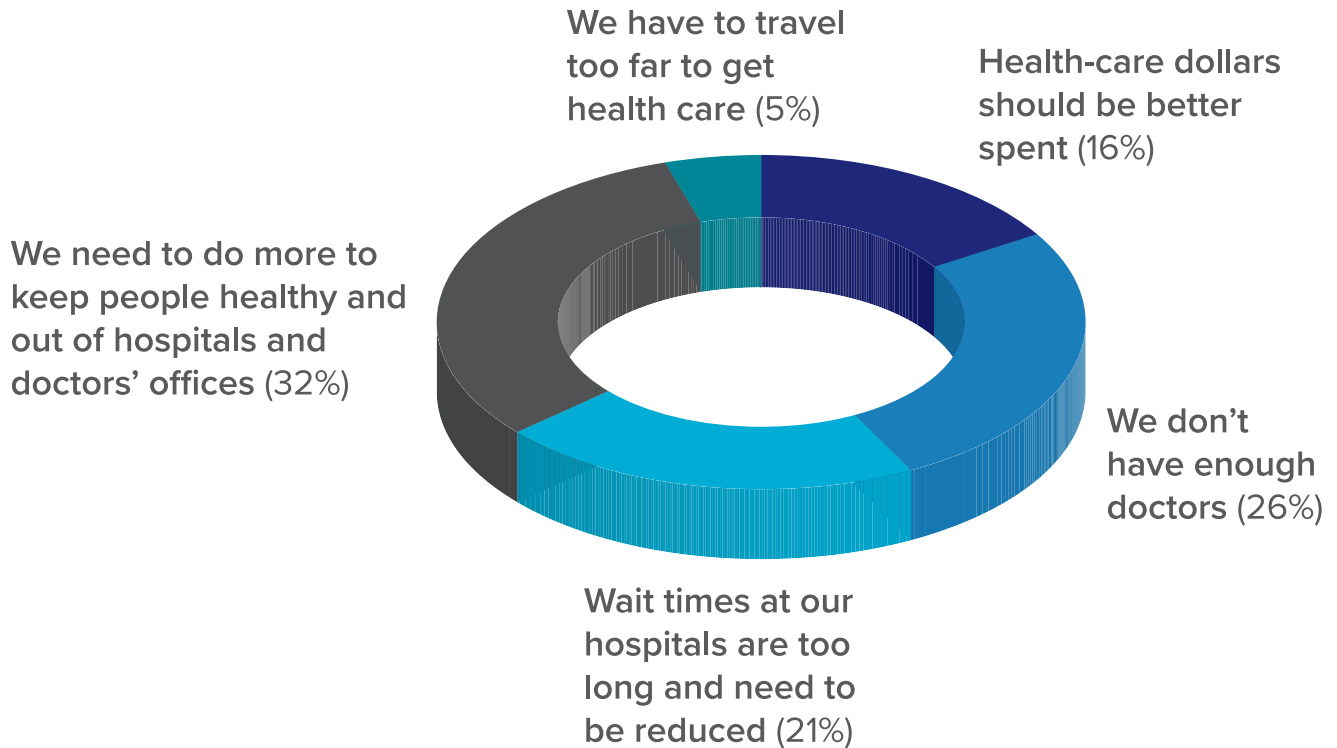
3. As a result of the pandemic, have your views on the way health care is delivered in your community?



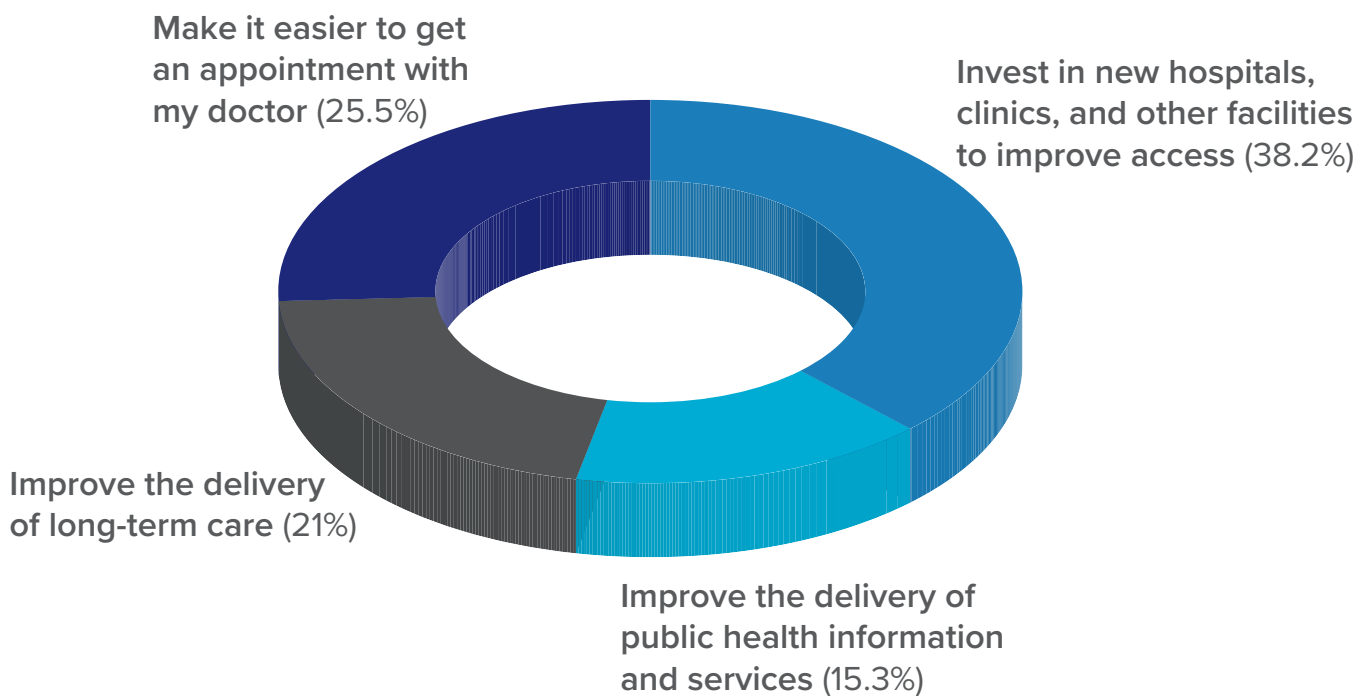
4. If you were to give a grade on the health-care system in your community today, what would it be?



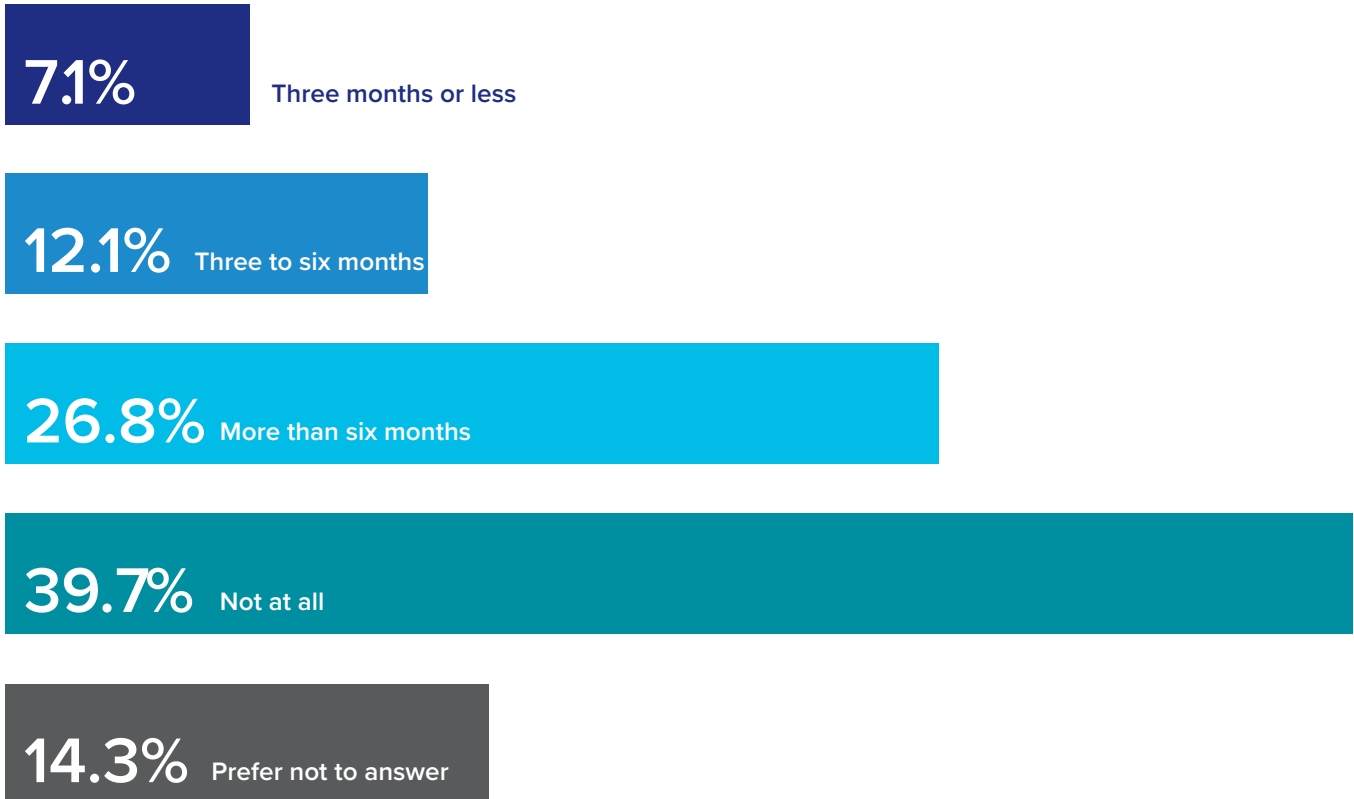
5. The following statement most represents my views on the way health care is delivered in my community.



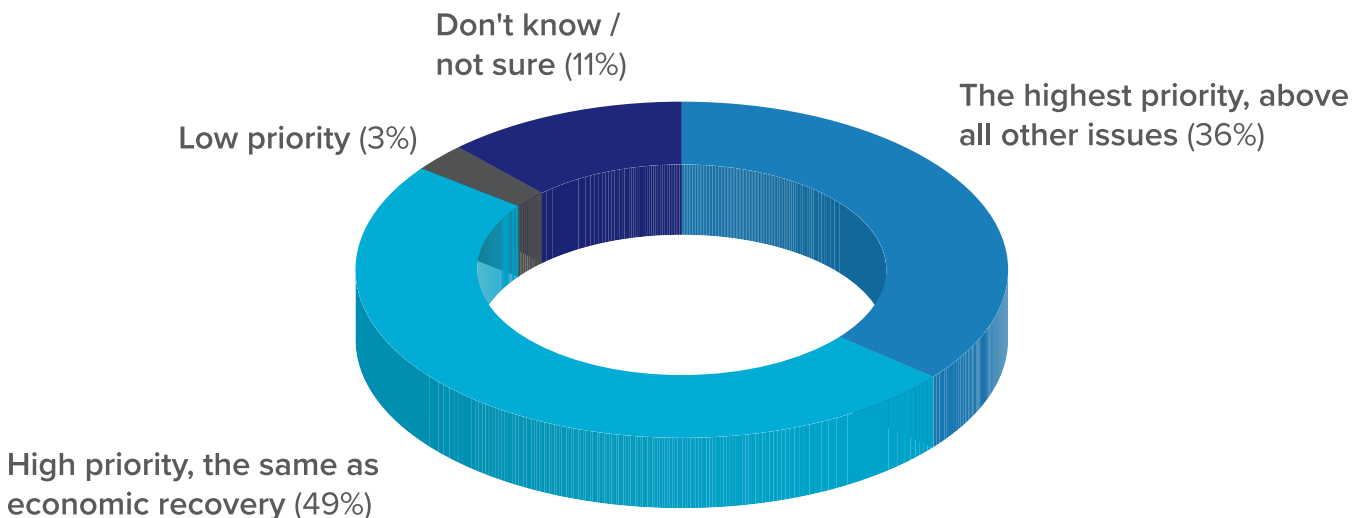
6. What is the single most important thing that can be done to improve health-care services in your community today?



7. Either I or a member of my family has had serious surgery or treatment for other serious conditions delayed because of COVID-19 by:



8. What priority should be given to addressing issues in the health-care system in my community that were brought to light by COVID-19?



# 9. I have received or will get a COVID-19 vaccination

