

Ipsos Reid

Canadian Medical Association

National Report Card 2003

Summary Report

July 2003

Methodology

This is the Third Annual CMA Report Card on the Health System in Canada, based on a survey of Canadians conducted by Ipsos-Reid on behalf of the Canadian Medical Association.

Between, June 25 and July 2, 2003, Ipsos-Reid surveyed 1,055 Canadian adults. This sample provides a reasonable margin of error for the overall national findings (± 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20).

The regional distribution of the sample is: British Columbia (132), Alberta (100), Saskatchewan/Manitoba (100), Ontario (385), Quebec (238) and the Atlantic Provinces (100). Weighting procedures are used to ensure the final sample reflects the regional and demographic profile of Canadians. The survey was conducted in the evening by telephone and required about 15 minutes to complete.

In the survey, Canadians were asked to rate a range of dimensions of the health care system using a letter grade (i.e., A, B, C or F with A being the highest grade and F being a failing grade). This year, several additional areas were rated that were not tested in 2001 or 2002. Further, several questions were asked regarding future trends, a care guarantee and a Health Council which did not use the letter grade scale.

Key Findings

Overall, Canadians are fairly positive about the state of Canada's health care system, with the majority awarding A or B grades to the system overall, their choice of services, and their most recent dealings with the system. The most common grade by far is B, indicating that, as in past years, Canadians are positive but not enthusiastic about the quality of health care.

Canadians with an on-going relationship with a family doctor tend to be more positive about all aspects of the health care system than are people who have no family doctor.

Canadians hold moderately positive opinions about access to primary care health services in their community, giving A or B scores to accessibility of family physicians, walk-in clinics, and services for children and seniors.

Canadians are somewhat less positive about the accessibility of primary care services outside of regular business hours. Canadians are also more critical of their access to such secondary services as medical specialists and diagnostic equipment, and more commonly rate these issues as C or F.

Public health services receive positive marks from Canadians. Most offer scores of A or B for services which protect food and water safety, control disease, respond to disasters, and promote health in the community. These scores are most commonly B rather than A, however, suggesting public health services are good but not outstanding.

In many of the areas tracked from previous years there have been small but consistent improvements in the opinions of Canadians, suggesting that small incremental improvements are being seen in Canada's health care system.

Despite some improvement over past years, both provincial and federal governments receive poor marks from Canadians for their management of the health care system in Canada. Most commonly, governments receive only a C overall for their efforts.

Canadians are also quite critical of government performance in specific areas, such as consulting with Canadians and health care providers, planning for the future demand for health care workers, and allocating health care resources properly. On these issues also, governments generally receive a C grade.

Similarly, Canadians are critical of patients, saying they do not use the health care system appropriately.

Physicians are given positive scores for their performance in using health care resources efficiently.

Canadians are mildly optimistic about the future quality of health care in Canada, as 61% expect improvements in the coming few years.

A "Care Guarantee" which would place maximums on waiting times receives the support of 85% of Canadians.

Two-thirds of Canadians (65%) believe the National Health Council would be effective in promoting accountability and improving the health care system.

Summary

The overall impression from the results of the 2003 Report Card is that the majority of Canadians remain somewhat positive about primary care services and public health, while most are negative about access to specialist services and access to advanced diagnostics. They criticize their governments for misallocating resources, failing to consult and failing to plan for the future. They also see patient behaviour as part of the problem.

Nonetheless, there are small improvements in 2003 and some sense that things are getting better rather than worse. Canadians see steps such as a Care Guarantee and the National Health Council as part of the process of improving health care. Although Canadians say we are still far from an A-grade health care system, they nevertheless feel that solutions exist and that progress is being made, albeit slowly.

Context: How Good is a “B”?

Like any school report card, the implications of the 2003 Report Card on Health depend primarily on expectations. Some parents would be satisfied if their children earn B’s, while others consider only A’s acceptable. Reaction to letter grades – whether for a student or a health care system – are subjective. However, some sound subjective conclusions are possible and they have driven our analysis of the results. Specifically:

- Grades of C or F indicate significant underperformance and a failure to meet expectations.
- B grades are awarded when something is largely acceptable – when it is “okay” – but not impressive or outstanding
- B grades are less than ideal and indicate at the very least that something is missing. B grades suggest real room for improvement.
- A grades represent a strongly positive assessment, indicating that the situation is highly satisfactory.

Without doubt, Canadians would prefer to receive A-grade health care services from the health care system, within the bounds of budgetary and practical limits. This report shows clearly the areas where performance is strongest and weakest, and shows beyond doubt that most Canadians are far from fully satisfied with the current state of the system.

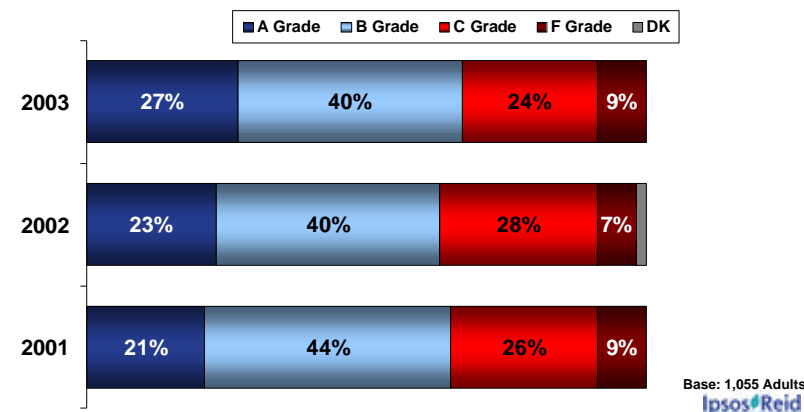
Rating the Health Care System

Respondents were asked to rate dimensions of the health care system using a letter grade as if it was being marked for a report card (i.e., A, B, C or F with A being the highest grade and F being a failing grade). These dimensions included overall views of the health care system, access to health services, and government performance in this area.

Rating Healthcare: Overall Quality

- Tracking -

What mark/letter grade would you give to: The overall quality of the healthcare services available to you and your family ?



The first few questions asked Canadians about their overall views on the health system in their community irrespective of whether they have used the health system recently or not.

Most Canadians continue to give the overall health care system a positive rating. Two-thirds (67%) rate the system as either an A (27%) or a B (40%). This has improved slightly since 2001, when 65% gave the overall system either an A (21%) or a B (44%). As in previous years, there remain about one-third of Canadians in 2003 who give the *overall* system either C (24%) or an F (9%).

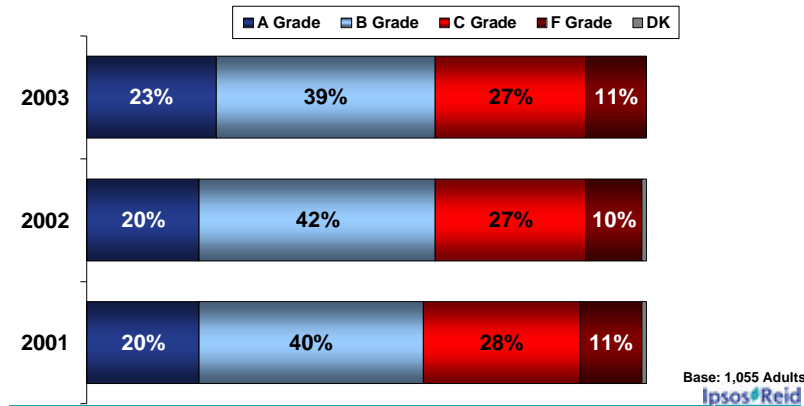
The majority feel positive about the choice of health care services in their community. Sixty-two percent of Canadians rate their choice of health care services as either A (23%) or B (39%). A significant number (38%) nonetheless rate their choice of services as either C (27%) or F (11%).

Positive assessments of the choice of services has neither improved nor declined significantly since 2001.

Rating Healthcare: Choice of Services

- Tracking -

What mark/letter grade would you give to: The choice of health services in your community?

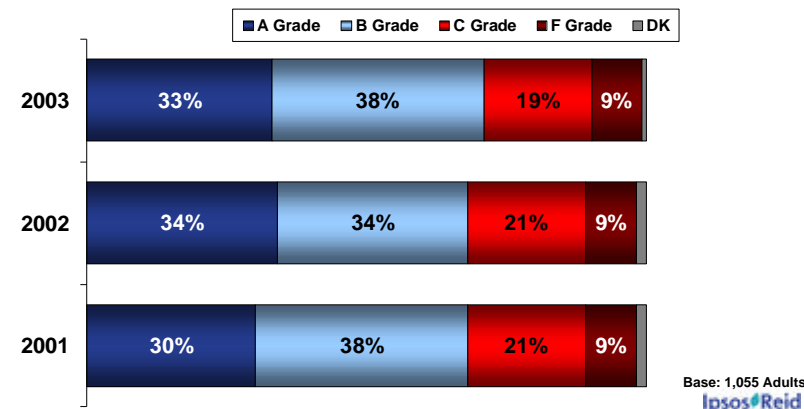


Canadians give their most positive overall assessments to their most recent dealings with the health care system. One-third (33%) rate their recent experiences as an A, while a further 38% rate them a B. As in past years, relatively few Canadians (28%) rate their recent experiences as either C (19%) or F (9%).

Rating Healthcare: Recent Experiences

- Tracking -

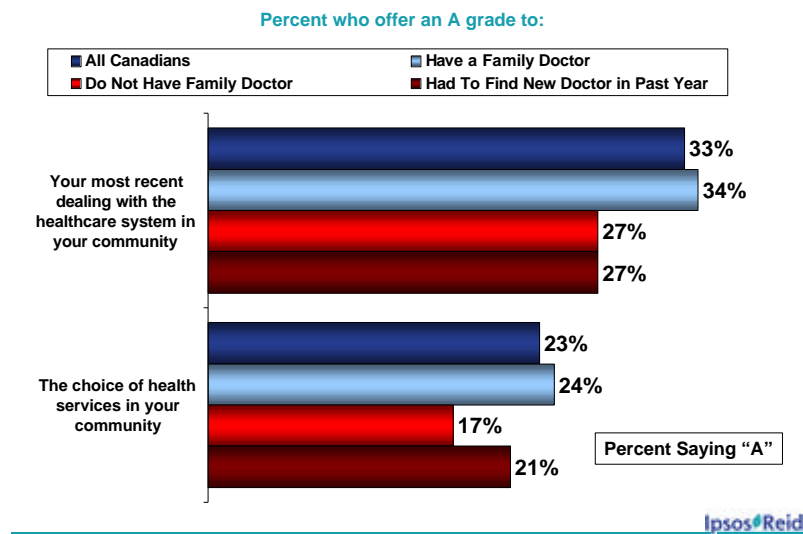
What mark/letter grade would you give to: Your most recent dealing with the healthcare system in your community



Access to Physicians Has A Positive Impact

Access to a family physician continues to be associated with better assessments of the health care system. In other words, Canadians who have an on-going relationship with a family doctor are more positive about their choice of services, and their recent dealings with the health care system.

Rating the Healthcare System Overall

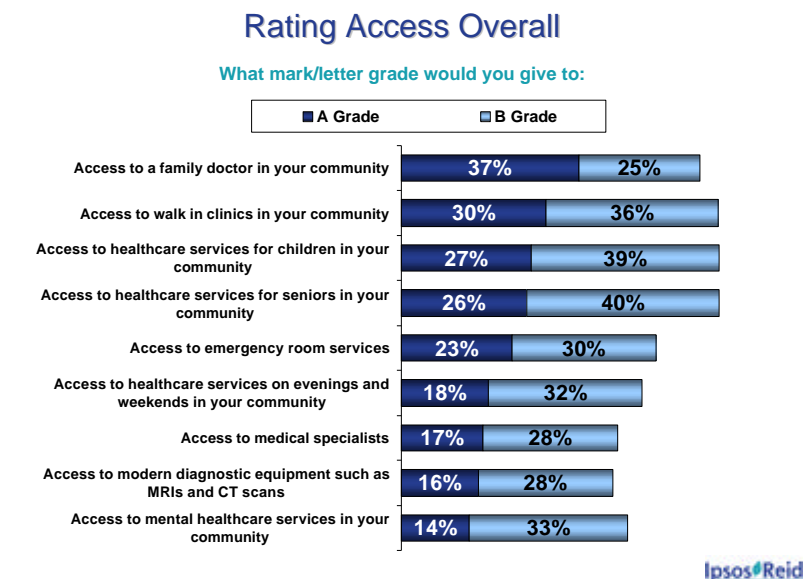


For example, the choice of services in the community receives an A from 24% of those with a family physician, but only 17% of those without. Further, recent experiences with the health care system receive an A from 34% of those with a family physician, but only 27% of those without a family physician. Those who had to find a new physician in the last year also offer lower ratings, suggesting again the value of an on-going physician relationship.

Clearly, an on-going relationship with a family doctor has a positive impact on perceptions and experiences of the health care system.

Access to Health Care Services

Canadians offer mixed assessments of their access to various parts of the healthcare system. Overall, they are most positive about their access to primary care, while offering somewhat less positive assessments of access to specialists, advanced diagnostic tests, and health care services outside of business hours.



Sixty percent or more of Canadians offer an A or a B rating for access to walk-in clinics (66%), access to health services for children (66%) and seniors (66%), as well as access to a family doctor (62%),

Somewhat fewer Canadians offer an A or B for access to emergency rooms (53%), weekend and evening services (50%), specialists (45%), and advanced diagnostic equipment (44%).

With regard to access to mental health services, 47% offer either an A or a B, but these *relatively* low results are driven somewhat by the fact that 12% of Canadians cannot offer an opinion on this question.

Access to Family Physicians

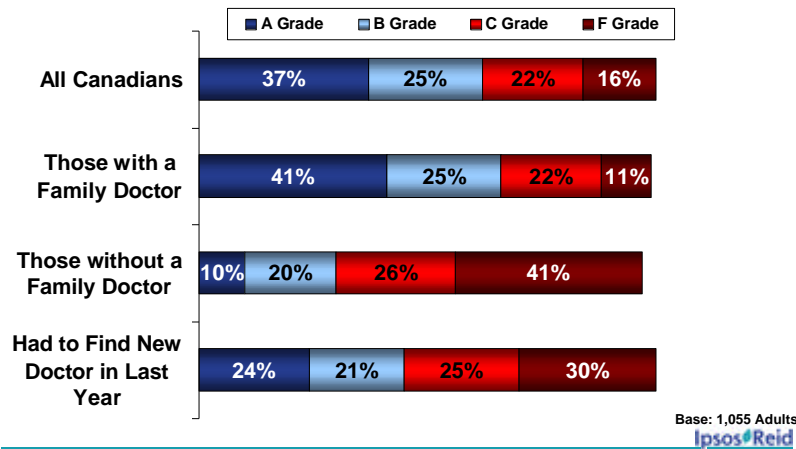
Perceptions of access to family doctors are polarized. While 37% assess this as an A, 38% rate it as either a C or F. This polarization appears to be driven by access itself. While 41% of those with a family physician (the vast majority of Canadians) rate their access an A, only 10% of

those without a family physician rate their access as an A. Indeed, 41% of those without a family doctor score their access as an F.

Similarly, Canadians who had to find a new doctor in the last year also offer much less positive ratings of access to family physicians – 55% say either C or F on this question.

Rating Access: Family Physicians

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Access to a family doctor in your community

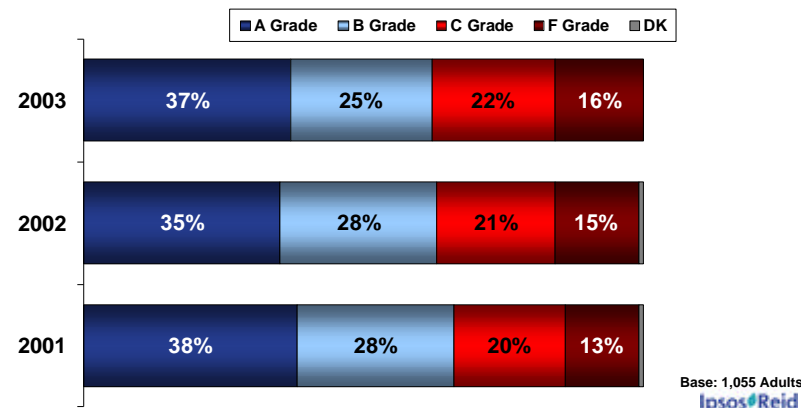


Overall perceptions of access to family physicians have not changed markedly from 2001, when 66% rated it as either A or B.

Rating Access: Family Physicians

- Tracking -

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Access to a family doctor in your community

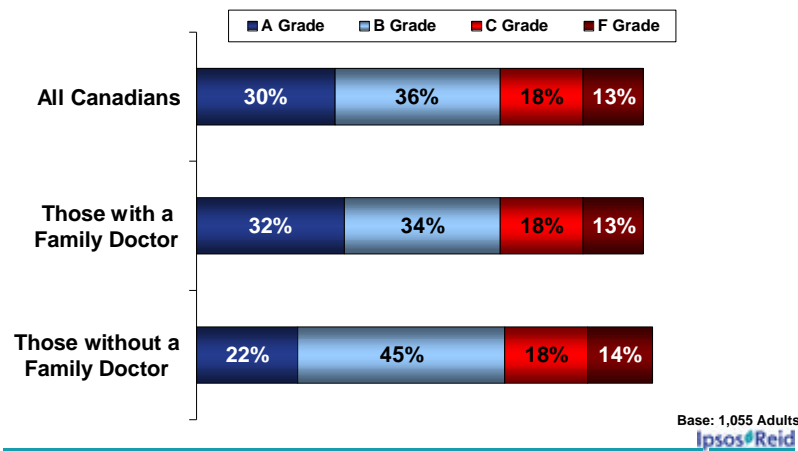


Access to Walk-in Clinics

Satisfaction with access to walk-in clinics is relatively positive. Two-thirds of Canadians (66%) rate their access as A (30%) or B (36%), while one-third are less positive. Satisfaction with walk-in clinics is somewhat lower among those who have no family doctor of their own: 32% of those with a doctor offer an A on this question, compared to 22% of those without a family doctor. The latter group is more likely to rate their access to walk-in clinics as a B.

Rating Access: Walk-in Clinics

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Access to walk in clinics in your community



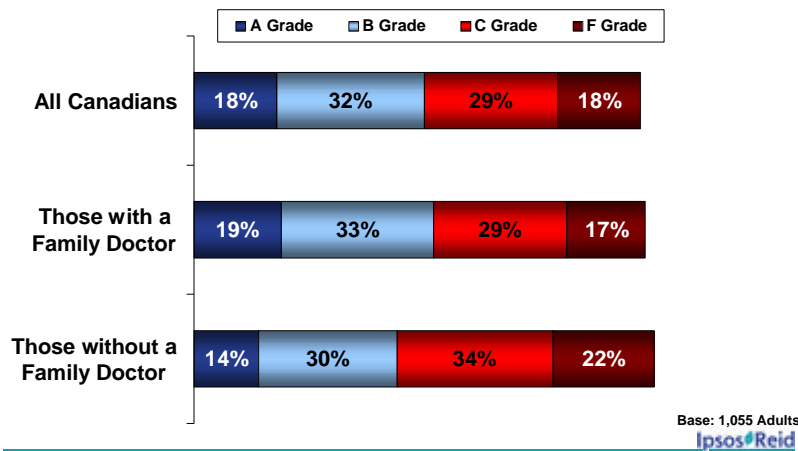
Combined A/B scores for access to walk-in clinics have increased very slightly (4% overall) since 2001.

Access to Weekend and Evening Services

Canadians are split in their ratings of access to evening and weekend services. While 50% rate this as A (18%) or B (32%), 47% rate it as either C (29%) or F (18%). Interestingly, scores for evening and weekend services are somewhat more positive among Canadians with a family physician.

Rating Access: Evening and Weekend Care

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Access to healthcare services on evenings and weekends in your community

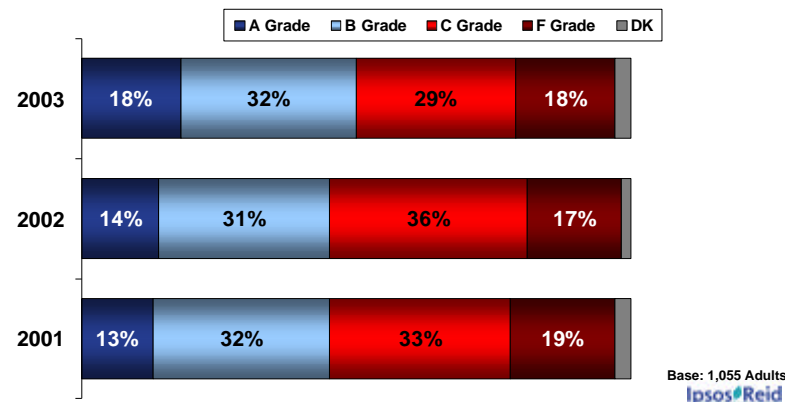


The proportion of Canadians assigning a grade of A for access to healthcare services on evenings and weekends has increased by 5 percentage points since 2001.

Rating Access: Evening and Weekend Care

- Tracking -

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Access to healthcare services on evenings and weekends in your community



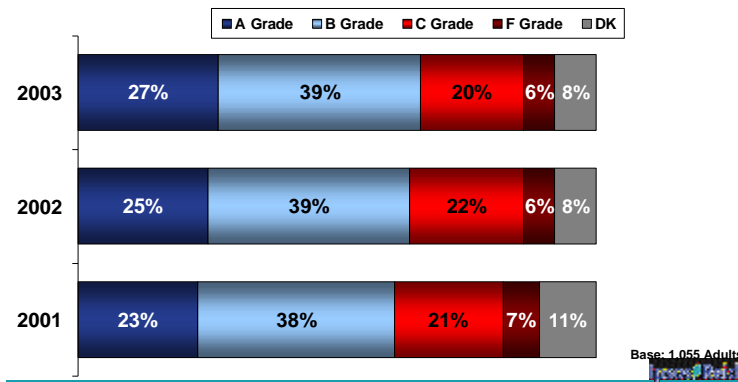
Access to Services for Children and Seniors

As with family physicians and walk-in clinics, most Canadians feel positive about health care services in their community intended for seniors and for children. Two-thirds (66%) rate access to children's services as either A (27%) or B (39%). This positive group has increased by 5% since 2001.

Rating Access: Care for Children

- Tracking -

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Access to healthcare services for children in your community

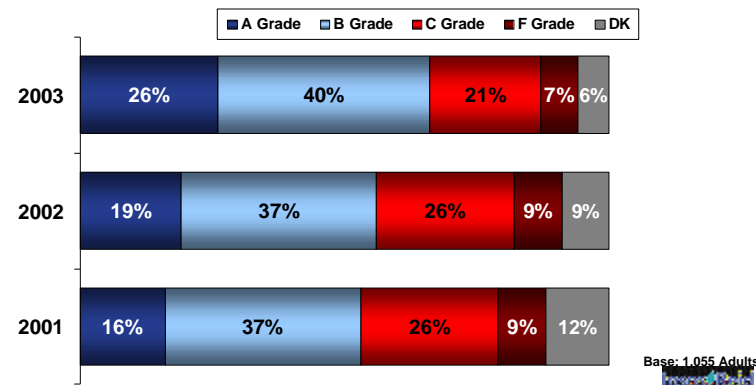


Access to services for seniors has, in the view of Canadians, improved markedly in recent years. The percentage of Canadians rating this issue as an A or B increased to 66% in 2003, up from 53% in 2001 and 56% in 2002. Some of this improvement - which amounts to 13% over two years - stems from increased numbers of Canadians who feel able to offer an opinion on this issue.

Rating Access: Care for Seniors

- Tracking -

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Access to healthcare services for seniors in your community



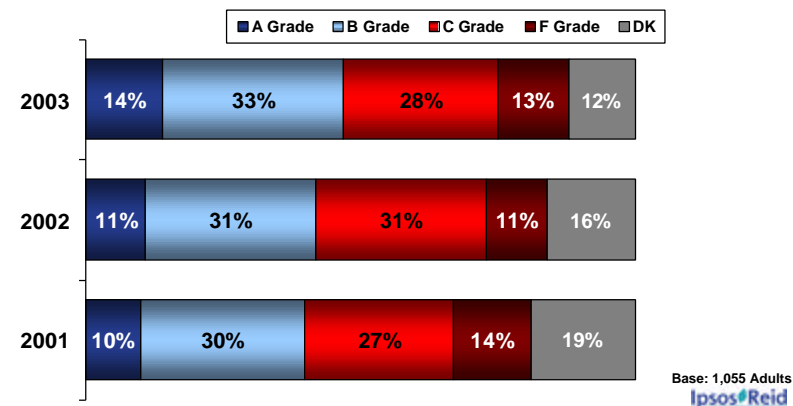
Access to Mental Health Services

Another area that has seen improved marks due to increasing public awareness is access to mental health services. Overall combined scores in 2003 are 47% (14% A and 33% B), compared to 40% in 2001. Since that time, the percentage unable to answer this question declined from 19% to 12%. Despite these improvements, access to mental health services is still scored poorly by many Canadians. Forty-one percent rate access as either C (28%) or F (13%).

Rating Access: Mental Health

- Tracking -

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Access to mental healthcare services in your community



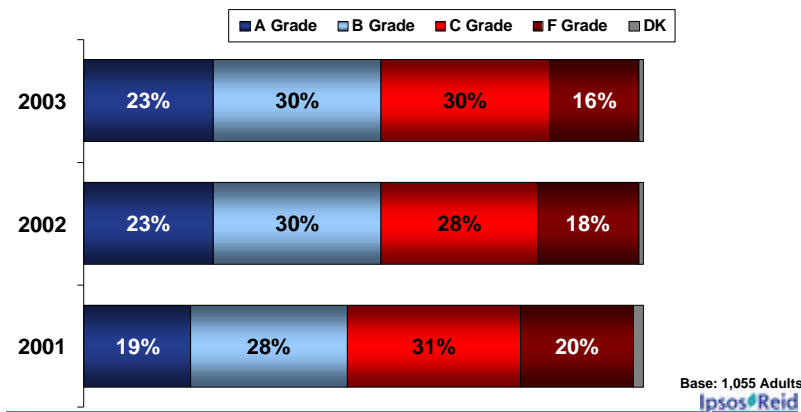
Access to Emergency Rooms

Fifty-three percent of Canadians rate their access to emergency rooms as either an A (23%) or B (30%). However, almost as many (46%) rate their access as either a C (30%) or an F (16%). Clearly there are many who are unhappy with this aspect of urgent care. Nonetheless, combined A/B scores for access to emergency rooms have improved slightly (by 6 points) over the last two years.

Rating Access: Emergency Rooms

- Tracking -

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Access to emergency room services?

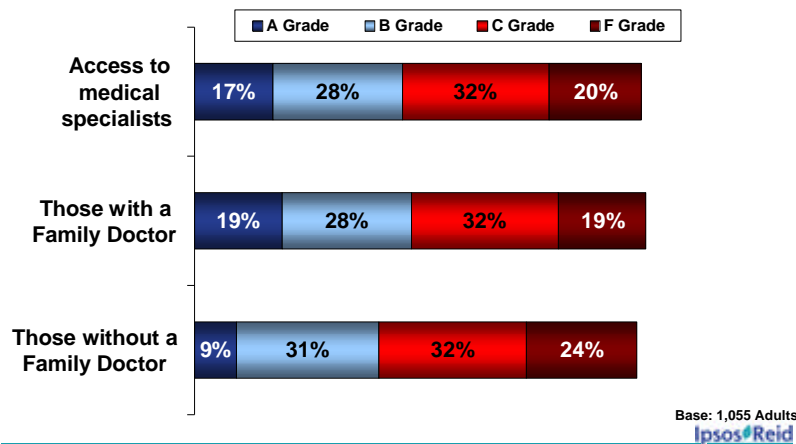


Access to Medical Specialists

In contrast to the accessibility of family physicians, access to medical specialists is clearly a sore point for many Canadians. A slight majority of Canadians (52%) rate their access to specialists as either C (32%) or F (20%). Less than one-fifth rate this an A (17%). There is a clear tendency for Canadians with family physicians to offer more positive ratings for access to specialists as well.

Rating Access: Specialists

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Access to medical specialists

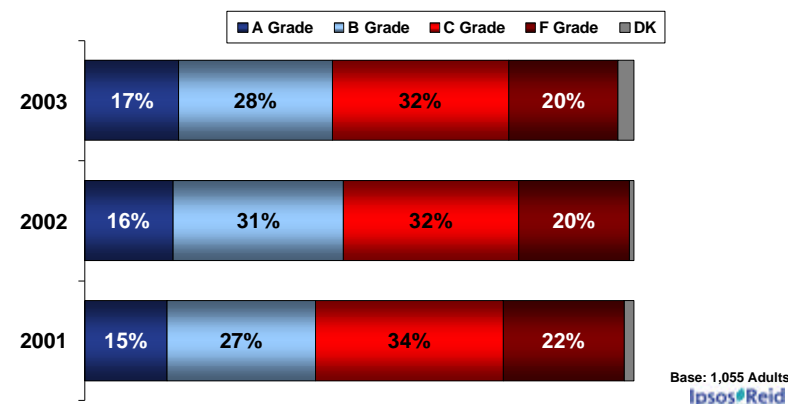


Perceptions of access to specialists has neither improved nor declined significantly since 2001.

Rating Access: Specialists

- Tracking -

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Access to medical specialists



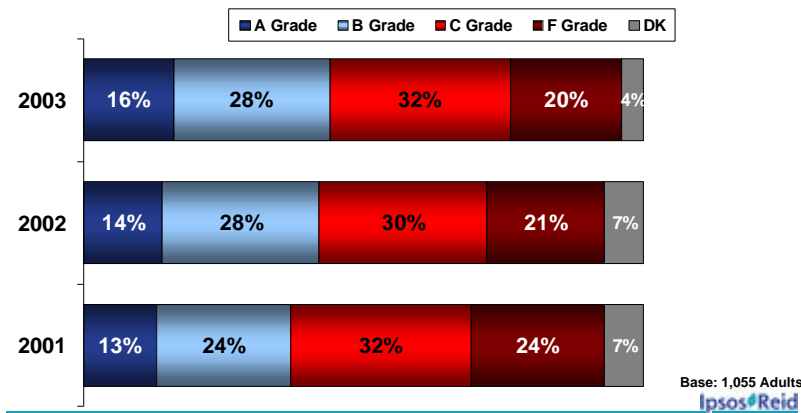
Access to Advanced Diagnostic Equipment

Many Canadians consider access to advanced diagnostic equipment to be lacking. Overall, 52% rate this as either a C (32%) or an F (20%). Only 44% rate this as A (16%) or B (28%). However, combined A/B scores access to advanced equipment have improved (by about 7 points) since 2001.

Rating Access: Advanced Equipment

- Tracking -

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Access to modern diagnostic equipment such as MRIs and CT scans



Rating Health Care Performance

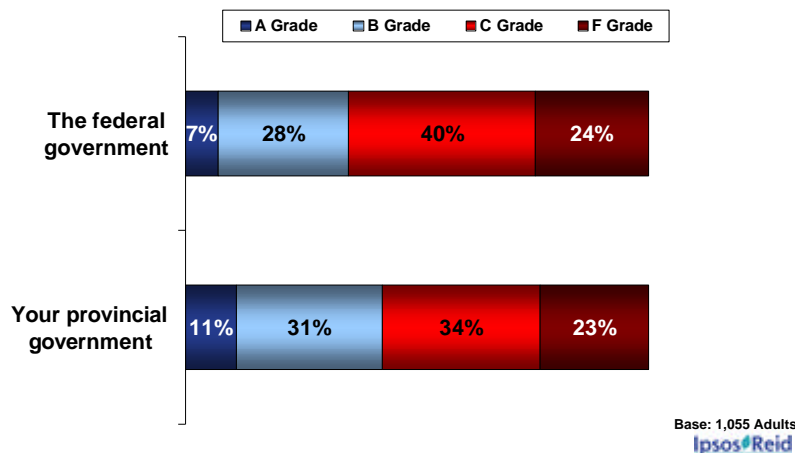
In addition to the access and service issues discussed already, Canadians were asked to rate the performance of various stakeholders in the health care system, including governments, physicians and patients.

Government Performance

The federal and provincial governments receive poor marks for their performance in managing the health care system. In both cases, the majority of Canadians offer either a C or F rating. Indeed, F's outnumber A's by two or three to one.

Rating Performance: Governments

What mark/letter grade would you give to: The federal government's performance in dealing with healthcare in Canada

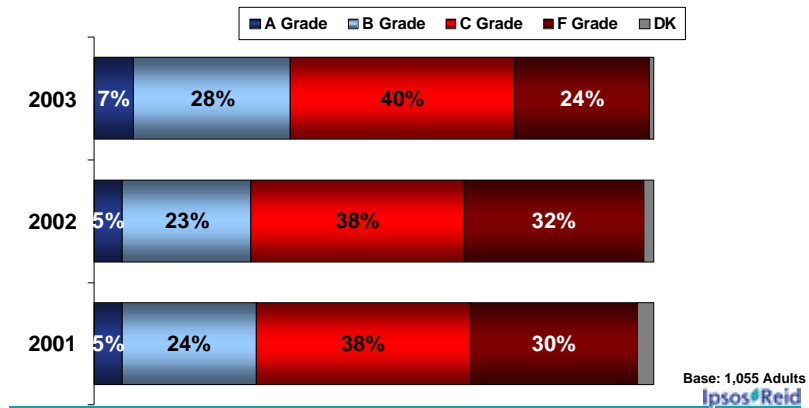


While perceptions of federal performance are decidedly negative, there has nonetheless been mild improvement over the last two years. The percentage of Canadians offering either an A or a B grade to the federal government has increased by 6 points since 2001, from 29% to 35%.

Rating Performance: Federal Government

- Tracking -

What mark/letter grade would you give to: The federal government's performance in dealing with healthcare in Canada

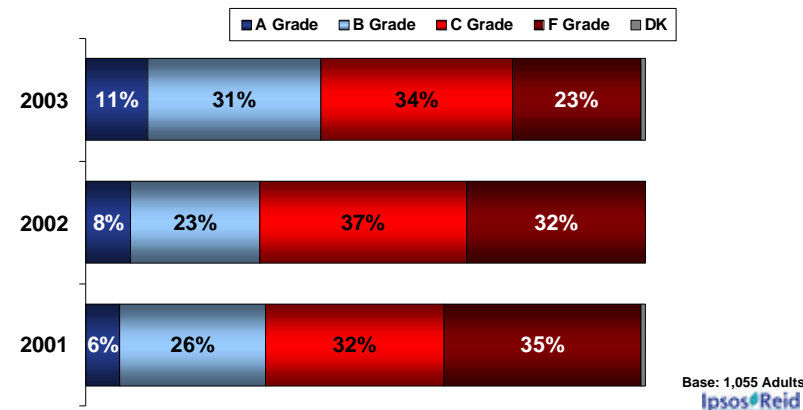


At the provincial level, improvements are also evident. Although, the majority (57%) continue to rate their provincial government as either C or F, the percentage saying A or B has increased from 32% to 42% since 2001.

Rating Performance: Provincial Government

- Tracking -

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Your provincial government's performance in dealing with healthcare in your province



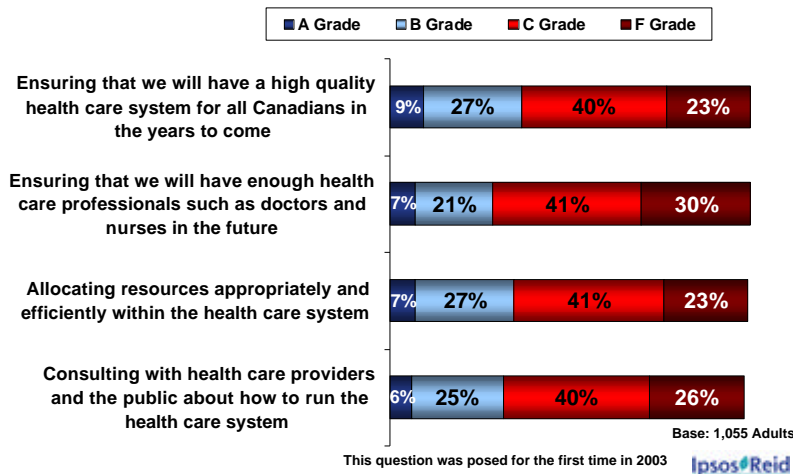
New Government Performance Questions in 2003

Governments in Canada receive poor marks in a number of specific areas tested for the first time in the report card this year. These include planning, consultation, and resource allocation.

Most Canadians offer either C or F grades to government performance in planning for a high quality system (63%), planning for enough doctors and nurses (71%), allocating resources properly (64%), and consulting with health care providers and the public (66%). (Readers should note that these questions were posed about “governments in Canada”, not specifically the federal or provincial levels of government.)

Rating Performance: Governments

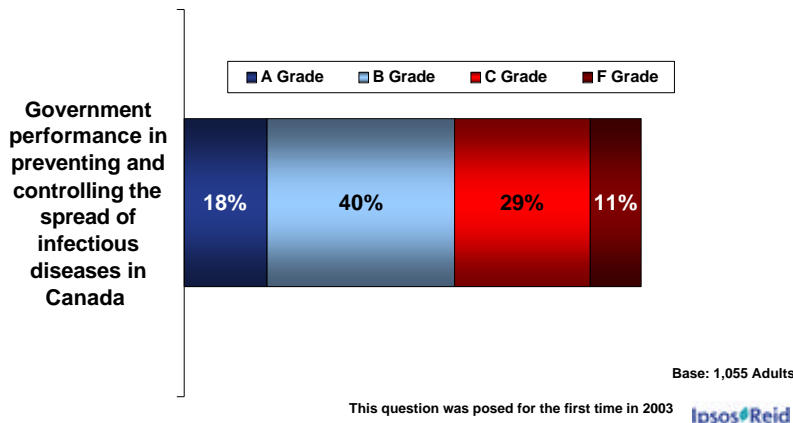
What mark/letter grade would you give to: Government performance in ...



In contrast to these negative assessments, Canadians are *comparatively* positive about government performance in controlling and preventing the spread of disease. While 40% offer governments in Canada either C (29%) or F (11%) in this area, the majority (58%) nonetheless offer either an A (18%) or B (40%).

Rating Performance: Gov't Disease Control

What mark/letter grade would you give to: Government performance in preventing and controlling the spread of infectious diseases in Canada

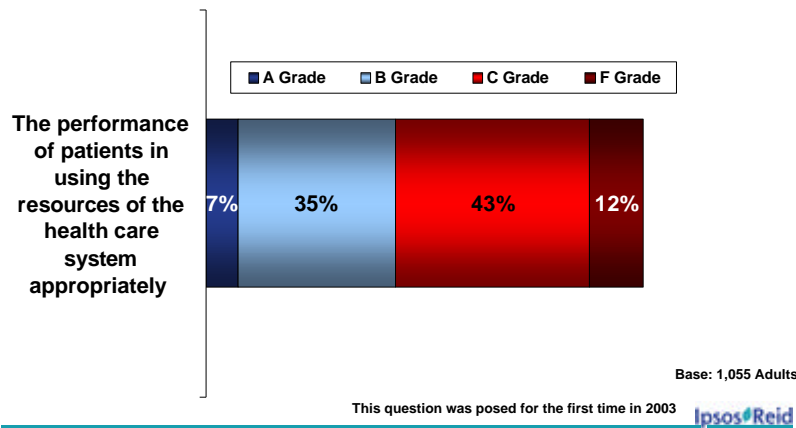


Patient Performance (New in 2003)

Canadians are critical of *each other* regarding their use of the health care system. The majority (55%) offer a C (43%) or F (12%) grade to “the performance of patients in using the resources of the health care system appropriately.” In contrast, only 7% rate patient behaviour as an A.

Rating Performance: Patient Behaviour

What mark/letter grade would you give to: The performance of patients in using the resources of the health care system appropriately

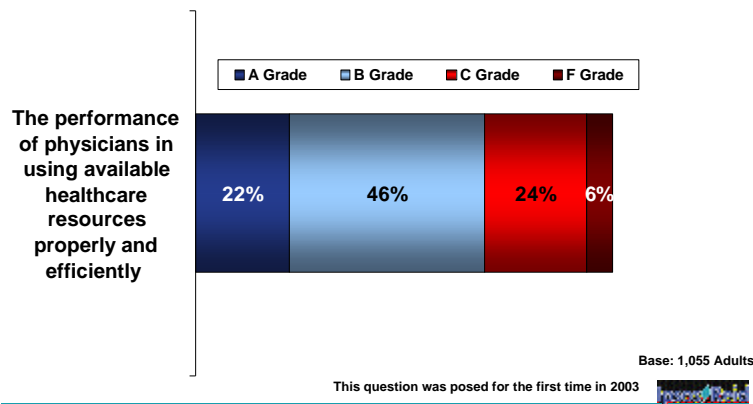


Physician and Health Care Provider Performance (New in 2003)

Most Canadians (68%) rate physician performance in allocating resources as either A or B. Specifically, 22% rate it an A, while 46% rate it a B. Thirty percent rate physician performance in allocating resources as either C (24%) or F (6%).

Rating Performance: Physician Use of Resources

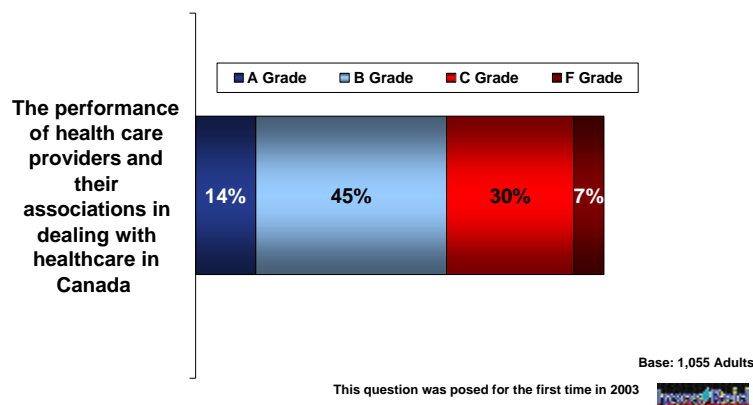
What mark/letter grade would you give to: The performance of physicians in using available healthcare resources properly and efficiently



Compared to the ratings they give governments, Canadians also give comparatively positive marks to health care providers and their organizations. Overall, 59% give health care providers and their associations either an A (14%) or B (45%) for their performance in dealing with health care. Their performance receives either a C (30%) or F (7%) from just over one-third of Canadians.

Rating Performance: Provider Associations

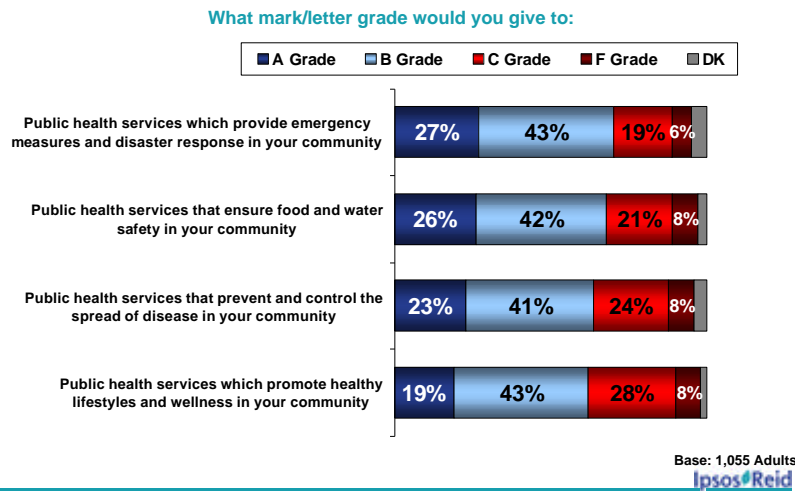
What mark/letter grade would you give to: The performance of health care providers and their associations in dealing with healthcare in Canada



Rating Public Health Services (New in 2003)

Overall, most Canadians offer positive assessments of public health services. This includes food and water safety, disease control, disaster response, and health promotion. Between 62% and 70% of Canadians rate these services as either A or B. Between 25% and 36% rate these services as a C or F.

Rating Public Health Services



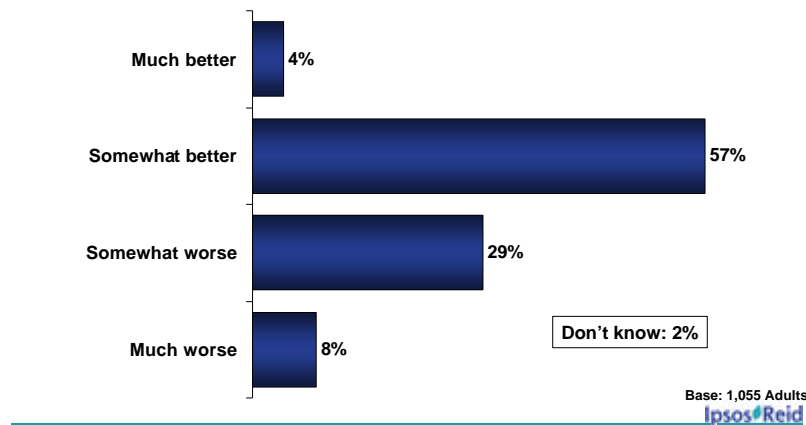
The overall profile of public health services appears to suggest that – in the eyes of Canadians – they are acceptable but not outstanding.

Expectations of the Future (New in 2003)

Overall, Canadians are mildly optimistic about the future of Canada's healthcare system. Sixty-one percent of Canadians say the system will get better in the next two or three years. However, the vast majority of this optimistic group expects the system to get *somewhat* better rather than *much* better.

Expected Trends in Health Care

Overall, do you think health care services in your community will get much better, somewhat better, somewhat worse or much worse over the next two or three years

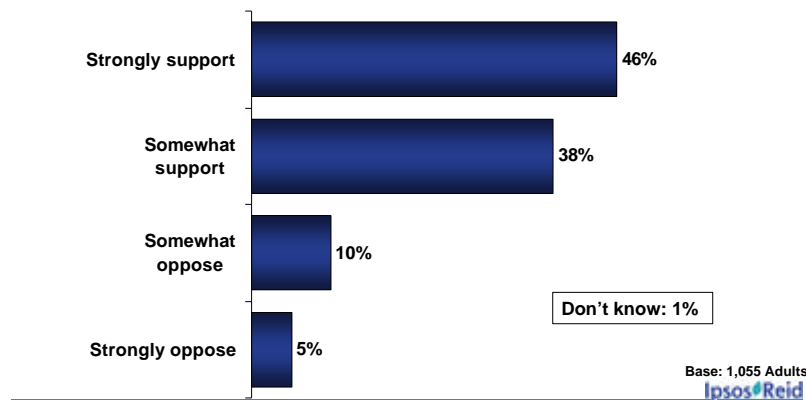


Support for a Care Guarantee (New in 2003)

There is strong support among Canadians for the idea of a “care guarantee” which would specify maximum waiting times for medical services. Fully 84% of Canadians support such a guarantee that would guarantee limits on waiting times for medical services. Only 15% of Canadians oppose this idea.

Support for “Care Guarantee”

Some people have also suggested that Canadians should be given a CARE GUARANTEE which would guarantee limits on waiting times for medical services. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this idea ?



Expectations of the Health Council (New in 2003)

Before delays emerged in the implementation of the National Health Council in July, the majority of Canadians were optimistic about the eventual effectiveness of the new body. Two-thirds (65%) of Canadians believed the Health Council would be effective in increasing accountability and improving the health care system. This number includes 57% who thought the council would be *somewhat effective* and 8% who expected it to be *very effective*.

Expected Effectiveness of Health Council

As you may know the government will soon announce a [National Health Council](#) that will be made up of representatives of governments, experts (including health care providers) and the public. This Council will provide advice to government health ministers and report to Canadians on the state of the health care system. Overall, do you think the new Health Council will be very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective or not effective at all in helping to increase accountability and improve Canada's health care system

