

# A Shifting Agenda for the Public

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The last few years have not been easy for healthcare providers and decision makers in Canada, as the hot glare of the spotlight has shone ever more intensely on their work through the lens of public opinion.

Healthcare emerged as the most pressing problem in the public's eyes in late 1998 and early 1999, and has been firmly ensconced there ever since. A consensus of concern was in place. That meant new challenges for coping with these pressures, but it also meant that decision makers in government felt the heat as well.

POLLARA's most recent national public opinion tracking indicates that this situation may be about to change. Rising concerns and pessimism about the economy, if unchecked, mean that this issue will soon replace healthcare as the country's most pressing problem in the public's eyes.

But that is only part of the story. Canadians are responding to recent announcements by government of funding injections into the healthcare system. As a result, optimism about the healthcare system is up across the country. For the first time in half a decade, a majority of Canadians say that they expect to see improvements in the quality of healthcare in the coming year. Optimism is particularly strong in Ontario, but weaker in British Columbia.

## WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?

Not much yet. It is still early to say whether these findings represent a trend or a blip. And problems in the healthcare system will always be in the news, in the same way that startling medical breakthroughs will always be in the news. If the economy seizes the public consciousness again, as it did

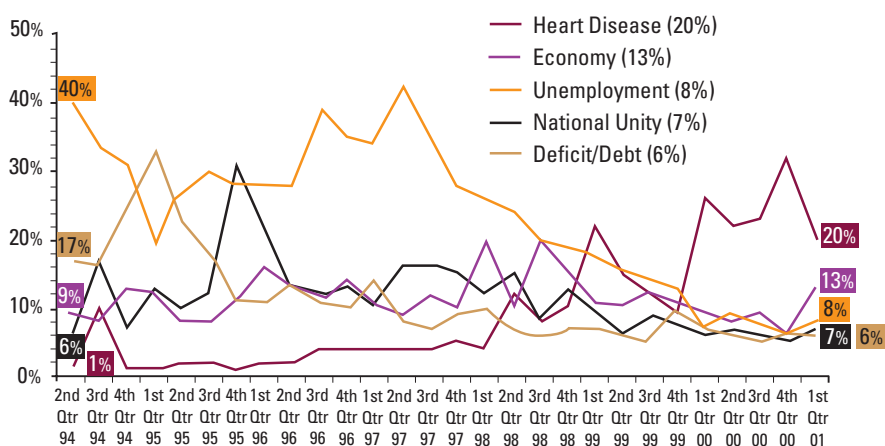
for most of the early part of the 1980s and 1990s, the national energy, attention and urgency devoted to solutions to challenges in the healthcare system could begin to shift to other pressing issues. This means extra effort will be needed to keep a focus on finding and funding innovative healthcare solutions for the problems of today and the future.

Don Guy is Senior Vice President with POLLARA Inc.

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Most Important Issue Facing Canada: Tracking



After a full year of being the dominant issue nationally, there has been a sharp decline in the number of people who tell us, in their own words, that healthcare is the most important problem facing the country. At the same time, mentions of economic issues have spiked upward.