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## Is the U.S. Health Care System the “Envy of the World”? Not in Canada

*An 82% to 8% majority of Canadians believe their system is superior to the U.S. system*

**ROCHESTER, N.Y. – August 12, 2009** – As members of Congress return to their states and districts to debate the merits of the Democrats’ proposals for health care reform, critics of the proposals may repeat the phrase used by some Republicans, newspaper editorials and bloggers that ‘the American health care system is the envy of the world.’

If so, they should read the results of a recent Harris/Decima poll in Canada that found a 10-to-1 majority of Canadians believed their system was “superior” to the U.S. system. They might also note that a 70% majority of Canadians thought their system was “performing well”; and that a majority favored an expansion of public sector health care (i.e., “government-run” health care in the current debate) over private sector health care.

These are some of the results of a recent Harris/Decima telephone survey conducted between June 4 and 8, 2009 by Harris/Decima among 1,000 Canadian adults.

The main findings were:

- A 70% majority of Canadians thought their system was performing either “very well” (12%) or “fairly well” (58%). Only 28% thought it was performing “not well at all” (9%) or “not that well” (19%).
- Most people (55%) favored an expansion of the public sector. Just over a quarter (27%) of Canadians thought that the Canadian system had got the balance between public and private sector health care right. Only 12% favored a tilt towards the private sector.
- An 82% majority of Canadians believed their country’s health care system was superior to the U.S. system. Only 8% thought the U.S. system was superior.

### The Results of Other Harris Surveys in Other Countries

#### “Our System Is the Envy of the World”

In June 2008, a [Financial Times/Harris Poll](#) found that 59% of British adults and 70% of French adults believed their countries’ health care systems were “the envy of the world.”

This can be compared to a [Harris Poll](#) in the United States, conducted with the Harvard School of Public Health in March 2008 that found that only 45% of Americans believed that they had “the best health care system in the world.”

### The Popularity of the Health Care Systems in the United States and Nine Other Countries

Another [Harris Poll](#) report, published July 2, 2008, compared the popularity of the health care systems in 10 countries. The United States system was the most unpopular. It

reported that 33% of Americans felt there was “so much wrong with the health care system, we need to completely rebuild it.” In the other nine countries between 9% (in the Netherlands) and 20% (in Italy) felt this way. Only 12% of Americans thought that “the system works pretty well.”

**So What?**

Canadians probably know more about the U.S. health care system than people in other countries and, whether or not they are well informed, they certainly do not admire our system. Neither do the British or the French.

People who make statements about what foreigners think (about health care or anything else) might want to check the opinion polls there before they do so. They would learn that the U.S. health care system is not the “envy of the world.”

**TABLE 1  
HOW WELL IS CANADIAN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PERFORMING?**

“Overall, would you say that Canada’s health care system is performing very well, fairly well, not very well, or not well at all?”

Base: All Canadian Adults

	<b>Total</b>
	%
Very well	12
Fairly well	58
Not that well	19
Not well at all	9
Not sure	2

**TABLE 2  
SHOULD HEALTH CARE TILT MORE TO PRIVATE OR PUBLIC SECTORS?**

“While emergency care, necessary treatments and trips to a family doctor are covered under the Canada Health Act, other services such as private hospital rooms, and certain medical procedures such as dentists, chiropractors and massage therapists are subject to user fees. Considering both cost and patient care factors, do you think that the current approach strikes that right balance between publicly funded and pay-per-use care, should there be more elements included in private health care, or should there be more elements included in public health care?”

Base: All Canadian Adults

	<b>Total</b>
	%
More elements should be included in public health care	55
Balance is about right	27
More elements should be included in private health care	12
Not sure	6

**TABLE 3**  
**HOW CANADIAN AND U.S. HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS COMPARE**

“Would you say that Canada’s health system is superior to the U.S. health system, or is the U.S. system superior to the Canadian one?”

Base: All Canadian Adults

	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>
Canadian system superior	82
U.S. system superior	8
Not sure	10

### Methodology

The Harris/Decima poll was conducted by telephone in Canada between June 4 and 8, 2009 among a nationwide cross section of 1,010 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, number of adults in the household, number of phone lines in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

***These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.***

***The Harris Poll® #89, August 12, 2009***

By Humphrey Taylor, Chairman, The Harris Poll, Harris Interactive

### About Harris Interactive

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### Press Contact:

Corporate Communications  
 Harris Interactive  
 585-272-8400  
[press@harrisinteractive.net](mailto:press@harrisinteractive.net)