

New report finds broad support among Canadians for increasing mandatory contributions to WHO

Study questions Canadians on foreign policy priorities ahead of possible election

[Brennan MacDonald](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jun 29, 2021 2:03 PM ET | Last Updated: July 16



World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus attends a news conference organized by the Geneva Association of United Nations Correspondents (ACANU) at the WHO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland on July 3, 2020. (Fabrice Coffrini/Reuters)

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Editor's Note: This article was inadvertently published before the editing process was completed. It has been updated.

As the world continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, a new study suggests broad support among Canadians for an increase in annual mandatory funding for the World Health Organization to build up global health infrastructure.

According to the new report [Foreign Policy by Canadians](#), 63 per cent of Canadian participants supported the idea of increased mandatory funding for the WHO, while 21 per cent of participants were opposed.

The WHO is the United Nations agency that directs and coordinates the global response to health emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

Former U.S. president Donald Trump [pulled funding from the WHO last year](#) over the agency's early response to the COVID-19 pandemic, claiming "China has total control" over the agency.

President Joe Biden restored U.S. funding to the WHO in the early days of his presidency.

Canada has provided an average of about \$18 million annually to the WHO over the past five years in assessed contributions — the dues countries pay in order to be a WHO member state.

Former deputy prime minister Anne McLellan, who co-chaired the group of former parliamentarians and public servants that advised on the report, said she wasn't surprised by the high level of support for increased mandatory contributions.

"I think, overall, that Canadians understand ... that a global pandemic is just that — it's global. And that Canada working alone cannot protect its citizens, and therefore we need to be part of a larger global enterprise. And the WHO is one of the vehicles by which we participate in that global reaction," McLellan told reporters in a press conference.

A majority of participants in the study also said Canada should push to legally authorize the WHO to inspect countries independently when an outbreak is suspected; 70 per cent of participants supported the proposal and 16 per cent opposed it.

China has been heavily criticized for its actions in the early days of the novel coronavirus outbreak. One report says [China waited six days](#) in January 2020 before warning the world that it faced a possible pandemic.



Security personnel keep watch outside the Wuhan Institute of Virology during a visit by the World Health Organization (WHO) team tasked with investigating the origins of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Wuhan, Hubei province, China February 3, 2021. (Thomas Peter/Reuters)

The study also found that 83 per cent of participants said Canada should maintain high restrictions on international travel from high-risk countries until most Canadians have been vaccinated against COVID-19.

Canadians are more divided on the question of sharing vaccines with low-income nations — at least as long as there is still a need for vaccine doses here in Canada.

Fifty-six per cent of participants say Canada should contribute COVID-19 vaccines to "poor" nations as it distributes doses at home. Twenty-nine per cent of participants opposed that idea, while 11 per cent said they were "in the middle" on the issue.

Canada has donated \$440M to COVAX, a global vaccine sharing program, and has committed to sharing up to [100 million COVID-19 vaccine doses](#).

Wealthier nations have fared the best in the early stages of the global vaccine rollout.

WHO Director General Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that at the beginning of the month, just 0.4 per cent of the 1.8 billion vaccine doses delivered globally had been administered in low-income countries.

The study also asked participants about the Global Public Health Intelligence Network, a federal government-run [monitoring and analysis unit](#) that was partially shuttered in 2019.

Sixty-eight per cent of participants expressed support for reinstating the network and protecting the international warning system from future cutbacks. Twelve per cent of participants opposed reinstating the network.

The Public Health Agency of Canada has made moves on this file already — quietly reorganizing its internal divisions and [assembling a security and intelligence section](#) tasked with providing better, faster warnings of future pandemics.

'Deliberative polling'

The new report is the product of a joint initiative by the Canadian International Council, the Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health and Global Canada, a non-profit, multi-stakeholder organization that aims to enhance "Canada's global impact and reputation."

The questionnaire and discussion groups were convened on the Stanford Platform for Online Deliberation, which practices "deliberative polling."

Deliberative polling is a Stanford University polling method that first polls a random, representative sample on specific issues.

Participants are then invited to gather in small groups to discuss the issues. Participants are provided with "carefully balanced briefing materials" and are given the opportunity to direct questions at "panels of experts holding diverse views."

At the end of the process, participants are asked to complete the same questionnaire they completed at the beginning of the process.

The values quoted in this article reflect the post-deliberation results of the questionnaire.

"They were briefed up almost as if they were a cabinet minister," said former Conservative cabinet minister Lisa Raitt, who co-chaired the group of former parliamentarians and public servants that advised on the report.

"The briefs that they received, the ability to ask questions — it was like sitting in the seat as a minister where you would receive briefings and you make decisions and you ask questions and you come forward with what your final deliberation is."

Corrections

- This story has been updated from an earlier version that misstated Canada's average annual assessed contributions to the WHO as \$6.8 million. In fact, Canada's assessed contributions have been about \$18 million annually over the past five years.

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