



Understanding the Mental Health of Canadians Through COVID-19 and Beyond: Poll #17



September 2023

Methodology

Methodology: This online survey was conducted among a sample of 3,819 adult Canadians. This was the seventeenth poll of this study (see below). Results between the polls are compared where applicable.

Weighting: National results have been weighted by the most current census data in terms of gender, age, and region to ensure the total sample is representative of the population as a whole.

National	Interview Dates	Number of Interviews	Margin of Error
Poll Thirteen	July 13 to 22, 2022	3,023	±1.8%
Poll Fourteen	October 21 to Nov 1, 2022	3,500	±1.7%
Poll Fifteen	Jan 23 to Feb 6, 2023	3,238	±1.7%
Poll Sixteen	Apr 21 to May 3, 2023	3,494	±1.7%
Poll Seventeen	July 27 to Aug 13, 2023	3,819	±1.6%

Poll Seventeen	Number of Interviews	Margin of Error
British Columbia	505	±4.4%
Alberta	505	±4.4%
Prairies	354	±5.2%
Ontario	1298	±2.7%
Quebec	853	±3.4%
Atlantic Canada	304	±5.6%

Poll 1 to 12 were collections of 1,800-4,100 respondents. This data remains available and a full methodology for these polls is available as needed.

Major Findings

- Despite most respondents (72%) feeling confident that they would know where to get mental health care if they needed it, **most do not believe that their needs would be met** (only 32%) .
 - In the past year 39% of those who accessed mental health supports used **in-person services**, 31% accessed virtual services (only), and 30% accessed both in-person and virtual services. **Respondents who used entirely in-person services are more likely to report being satisfied with their care (74%) compared** to virtual (63%) or hybrid (68%).
- **Financial concerns remain a major factor of negative mental health** among Canadians. Almost two-fifths (39%) of respondents feel the economic downturn is impacting their mental health. Those with lower income or who are in financial trouble are more likely to have high anxiety and depression and indicate signs of alcohol and cannabis dependency, are less able to handle their stress well and are less likely to say they feel happy.
 - Suicide ideation among Canadians experiencing financial challenges is extremely high with **41% reporting having thought about suicide in the last year.**
 - The impacts of inflation are affecting Canadians with **24% reporting having gone into debt** as a result. There is a correlation between experiencing debt and high self-rated anxiety and depression, indications of alcohol and cannabis dependency and severe mental health symptoms.
 - Housing and food insecurity remains high with **23% of Canadians concerned about their ability to making rent or mortgage payments, and 37% struggling to adequately feed themselves or their families.** These numbers have increased slightly (3% and 2% respectively since Poll 16). Food and housing insecurity is tied to high levels of anxiety .

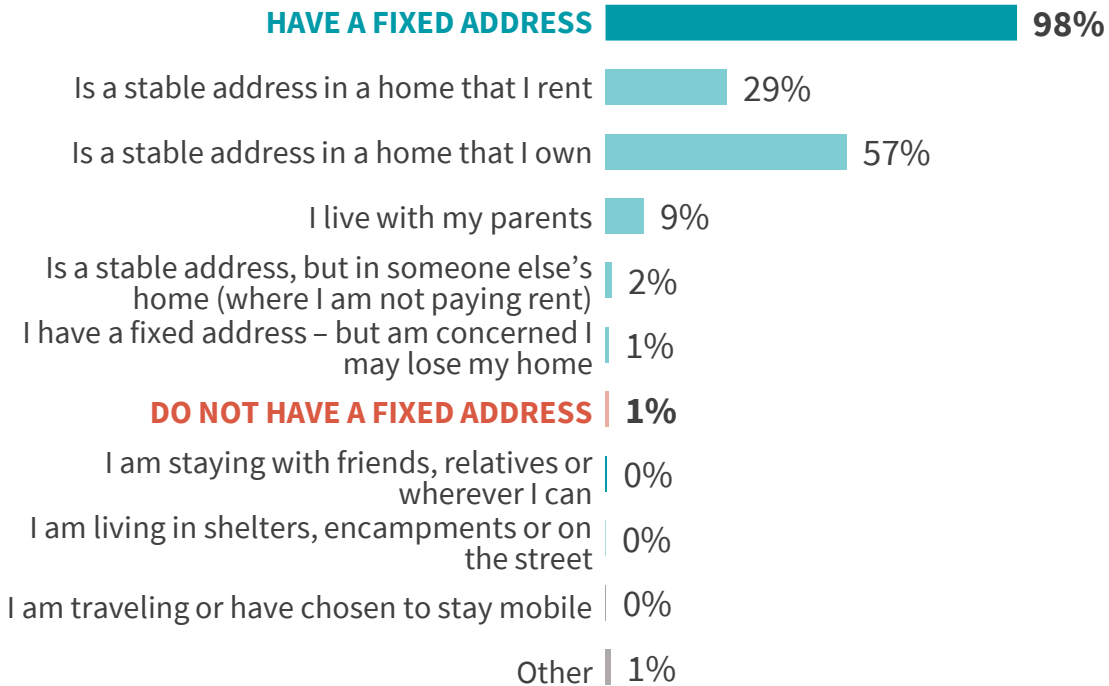
Major Findings

- There has been **an increase of 11%** (from 18% to 29%) in Canadians citing **an inability to pay** as a reason for not accessing mental health care despite needing it. This is among the top three reasons given for not seeking out care, others include preferring to manage yourself (30%) and not knowing where to get help (29%).
 - There has also been an increase in Canadians paying for mental health services out of pocket (from 23% in May 2023 to 30%) due to not having sufficient coverage through their benefits.
- **More than one quarter of Canadians (27%) are currently dealing with chronic pain.** Although more prevalent among older respondents (35%), more than one in seven (14%) younger Canadians (18-34 years old) also report currently experiencing chronic pain.
 - There are correlations between chronic pain and possible alcohol and cannabis dependency, burn out, anxiety, depression, and suicide ideation.
 - There are ties between those experiencing housing and food insecurity, and those reporting chronic pain. One is more likely to experience the other, and to be impacted by the economic downturn and inflation.
 - The most common ways of dealing with pain are over-the-counter pain killers (57%), non-pharmacological strategies (52%), and prescriptions (24%).

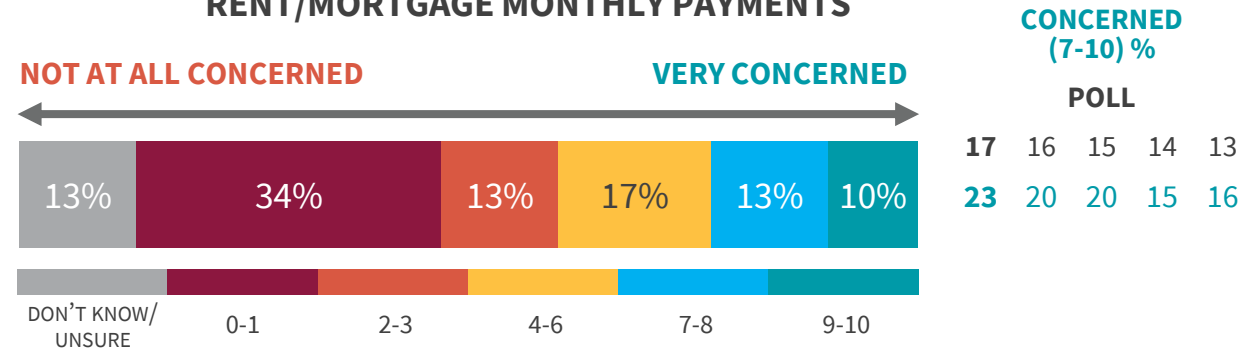
Housing concerns have increased this poll

- Rising prices and impacts of inflation (i.e., rising interest rates) are becoming more of an issue. 23% of Canadians are concerned about paying for their housing, an increase of 3% since the spring and 8% since last fall.

CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION



RENT/MORTGAGE MONTHLY PAYMENTS

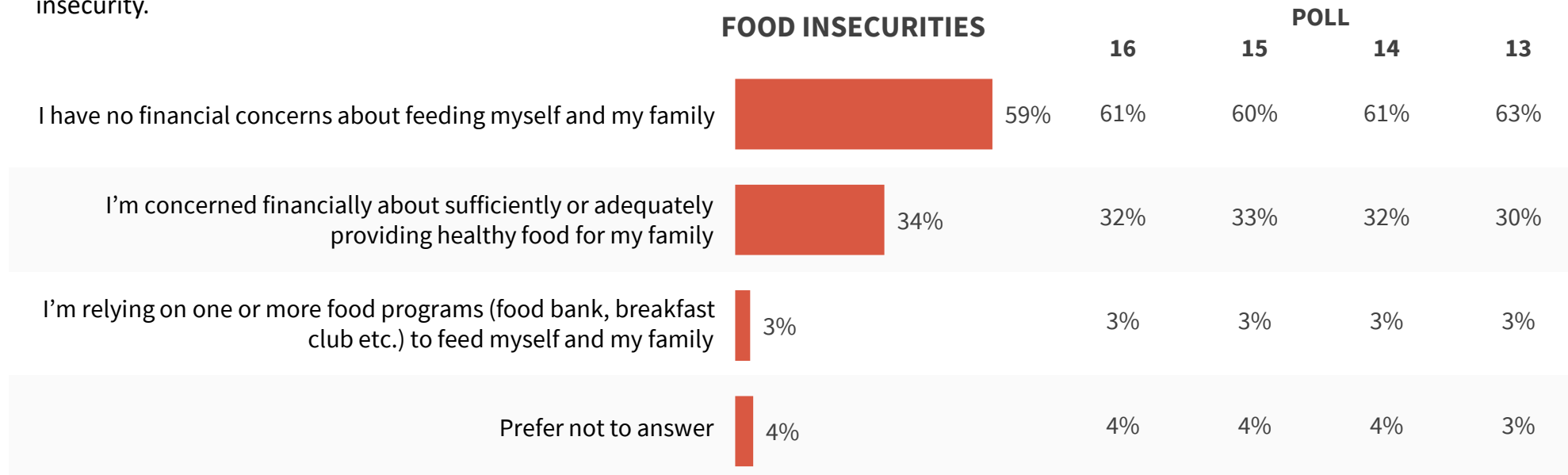


A22A: Which of the following best describes your current housing situation? Base: (Total n= 3,819)

A22B: How concerned are you about your rent/mortgage being paid each month? Base: (Total n= 3,295, Poll 14: n=2,992, Poll 13: n=2,579)

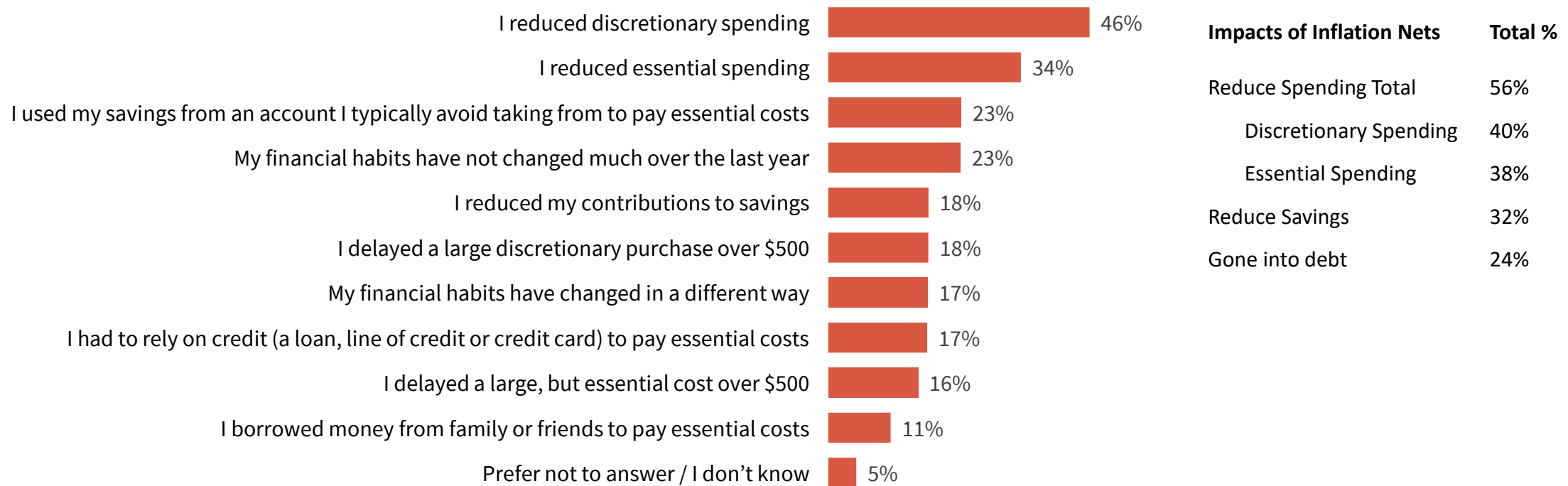
A third of Canadians continue to worry they can't afford healthy food for their family

- There has been no relief for those with food insecurities, with 34% (a slight increase of 2%) continuing to worry that they cannot afford sufficient and healthy foods and 3% being dependent on food programs.
- Quebec is experiencing the lowest food insecurity, with 24% being concerned and 2% relying on food programs.
- **Profile of those with healthy food insecurity:** younger Canadians (18-34 46%, 35-54 41%), women (36%), those who have children under 9 (49%), unemployed (45%), racialized Canadians (41%) and those who currently have chronic pain(40%) . While those with a physical impairment are more likely to have food insecurities compared to those who do not (42% vs 33%), this has declined significantly since Poll 16 (from 63%).
- Those experiencing high levels of anxiety or depression are significantly more likely to experience food insecurities (anxiety/depression rated 8-10, 53% and 56% respectively). Those with symptoms of a severe (60%) or moderate (55%) mental health disorder are also more likely to have food insecurity.



One-quarter of Canadians have gone into debt due to inflation

- Three-quarters of Canadians (77%) say that inflation has impacted their financial life in the past year, **an increase of 4%** since Poll 16. One-third (32%) have reduced their savings, either by dipping into their savings or by reducing their savings contributions. Almost one-quarter (24%) have increased their debt, either by relying on credit cards or borrowing money, and increase of 3% since last poll.
- Those in Quebec are least likely to have taken on debt (19%). Those who rate their anxiety and depression as very high (9-10) are more likely to have gone into debt (56% and 54% respectively), as are those likely to have symptoms of a severe mental disorder (54%) and who have possible alcohol or cannabis dependency (59% and 61%).

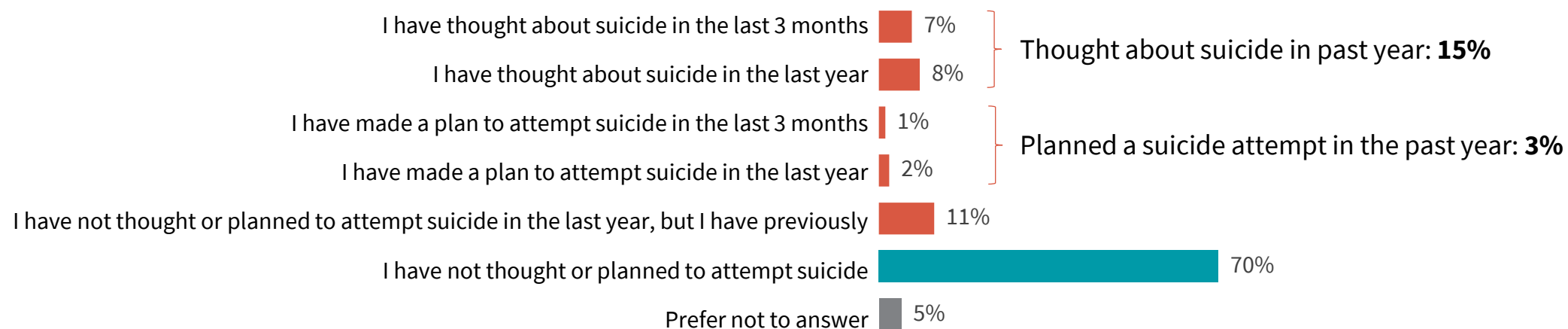


A25: In what ways has inflation (the rising cost of goods and essentials – food, gas, etc.) impacted your life in the past year? Base: (Total n=3,819)

One-in-seven Canadians have thought about suicide in the past year

- Thoughts of suicide continue to be more predominant among younger people. These thoughts are particularly high among 16–17-year-olds (29%) and 18–34-year-olds (25%).
- Those with children under 9 are more likely to have thought of suicide in the past year (22%), and in 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, 32% have thought about suicide and 9% have made a plan in the past year.
- Financial instability is impacting suicide ideation, with those experiencing money problems being more likely to have considered it. Specifically, those **who are unemployed (24%), have an income below 30K (21%), have financial troubles (41%) or have gone into debt due to inflation (30%)** indicated having had suicidal thoughts in the past year.
- Those who rate their anxiety and depression as high (rated 9-10) have more thoughts of suicide. Half (54%) of those with high self-rated depression have thought of it in the past year and one-in-eight (17%) have planned an attempt in the past year. Of those rating their anxiety as high, 47% have thought about suicide in the past year and 18% have planned an attempt in the past year.

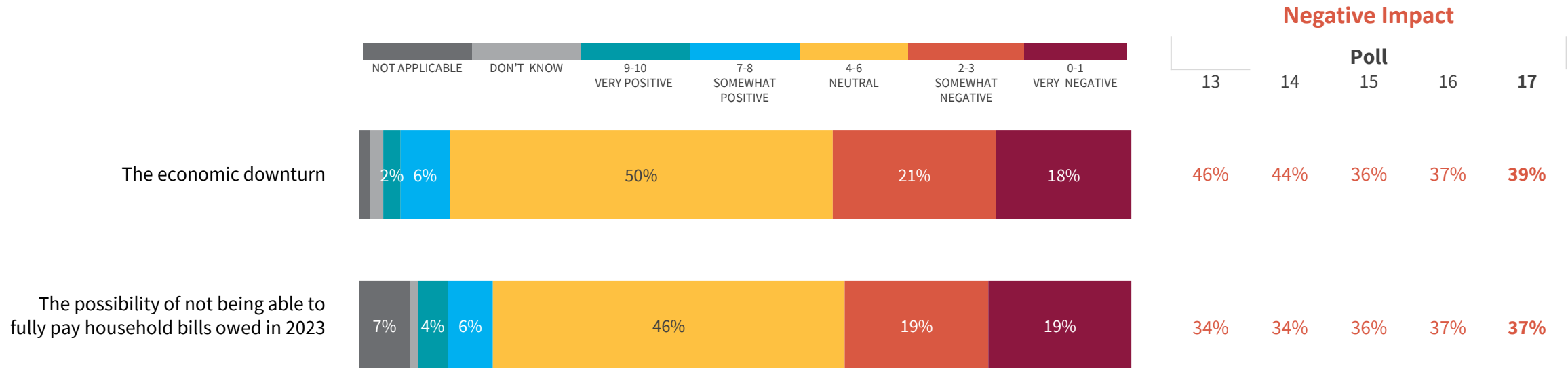
THOUGHTS RELATING TO SUICIDE



The negative impact of economic issues is gradually increasing

- Almost two-fifths (39%) have been negatively impacted by the economic downturn. This has seen a gradual increase the past two polls (+3) but is not back to the levels seen in fall 2022. Just over one-third have been negatively impacted by the possibility that they will not be able to pay all their bills (37%).
- The financial conditions have had the most impact on younger Canadians (18-34 46% for both economic downturn and inability to pay bills). Those who are dealing with chronic pain (economic downturn 47%, in ability to pay bills 43%) and dealing with a physical impairment (economic downturn 53%, inability to pay bills 48%) are also more impacted by these financial conditions.
- Those who have high anxiety or depression (rated 8-10 economic downturn 56% each, inability to pay bills 57% and 56%) as well as those with symptoms of a severe mental health disorder (economic downturn 59%, inability to pay bill 57%) are most impacted by these financial conditions.

Impact on Mental Health

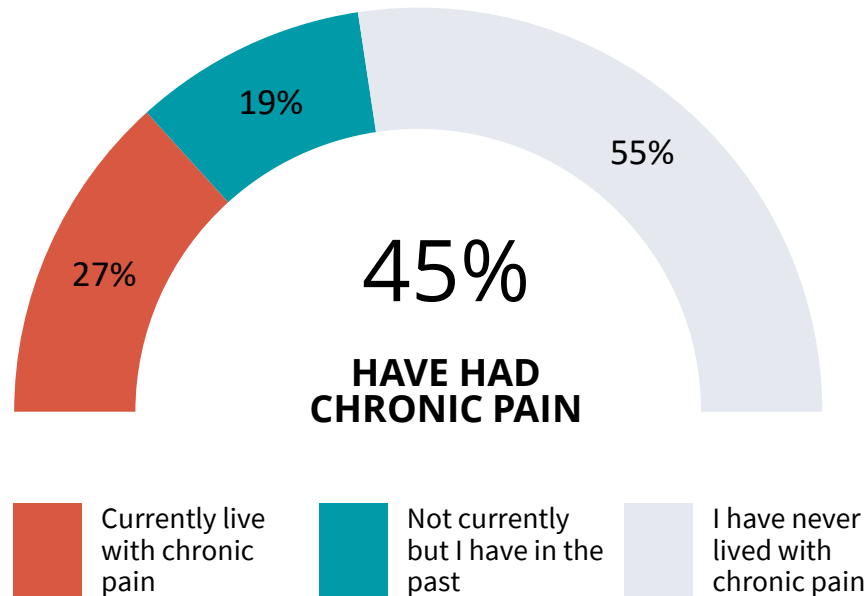


A3A. During the current Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in Canada, please rate each of the following in terms of the impact they are currently having on your mental health, if any:
 Base: (Total n= 3,819),

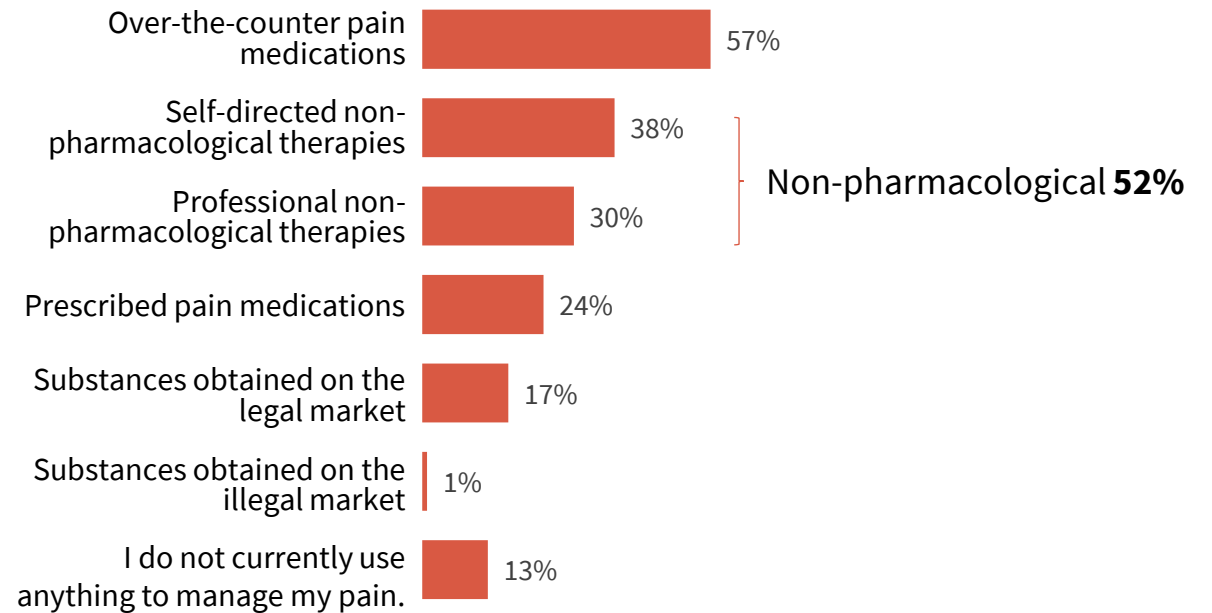
More than one-quarter of Canadians are currently dealing with chronic pain

Thanks to the Health Canada Chronic Pain Policy Team for their guidance in the area of chronic pain, including question formation and definitions.

- Over one quarter of Canadians (27%) are dealing with chronic pain. While half depend on non-pharmacological methods (52%), slightly more use over-the-counter pain medications (57%), 24% use prescription pain medications and 17% depend on substances such as alcohol or cannabis.
- While chronic pain is more common among older Canadians (35% are currently suffering, 52% have ever suffered,), 9% of 16–17-year-olds and 14% of 18–34-year-olds are currently suffering. Current chronic pain is also more common among women (30%), frontline health care workers (29%), and those indicating hazardous cannabis disorders (45%). Those suffering from pain tend to have a lower income (under 50K 31%) and have financial concerns (32%) or troubles (43%).
- Those rating their anxiety or depression as high (9-10) are more likely to also be suffering chronic pain (46% and 43%), as are those with symptoms of a severe mental health disorders (41%).



STRATEGIES TO MANAGE CURRENT CHRONIC PAIN



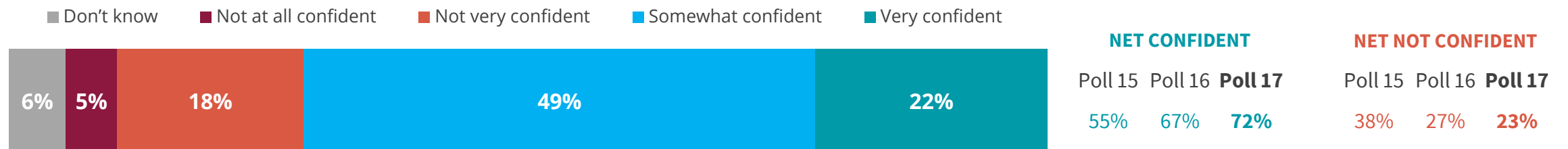
A10NEW1: Chronic pain is defined as pain that persists or recurs for more than 3 months. Which of the following describes you best? Base: (Total n= 3,819)

A10NEW2: What strategies do you use to manage your chronic pain. Base: (Total n= 1,708)

Confidence in knowing where to get mental health supports continues its incline this poll

- More than seven-in-ten (72%) are somewhat (49%) or very (22%) confident they would know where to get mental health support for themselves or loved ones. This is an increase of 5% since Poll 16 and 17% since Poll 15.
- Those who have accessed mental health supports in the past year are more likely to feel very confident (31%), consistent with Poll 16 findings.
- Those with a diagnosis are more likely to feel confident (74% +11), however those with ratings of high (8-10) anxiety are less confident in getting these supports (65%).
- Confidence is similar across all regions this poll.

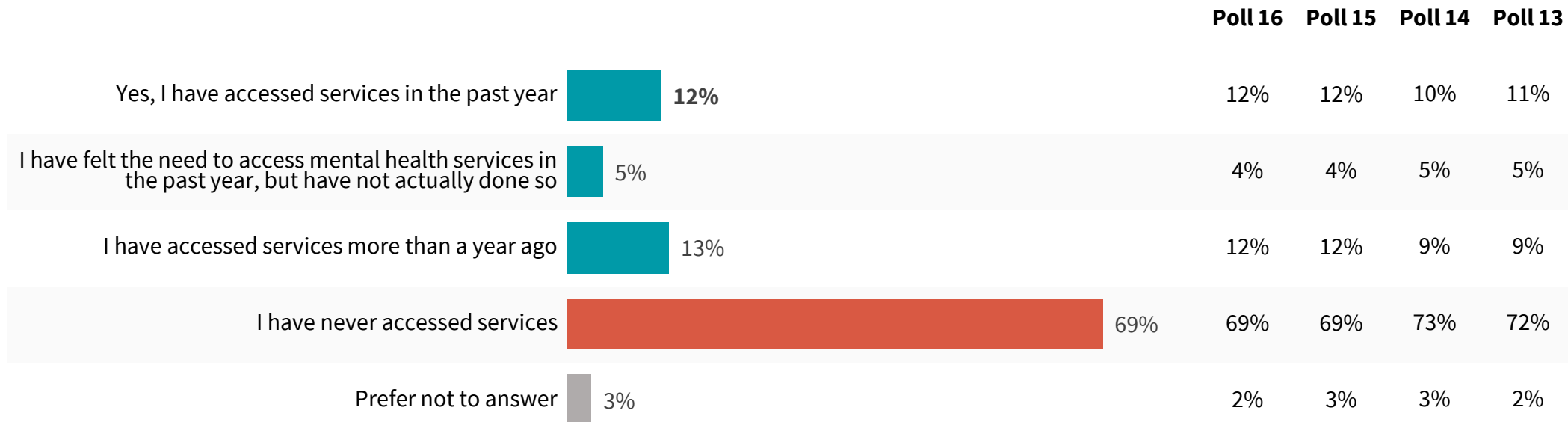
If you or someone in your immediate family or circle of friends needed mental health supports, how confident are you that you would know where to get them?



B25: *If you or someone in your immediate family or circle of friends needed mental health supports, how confident are you that you would know where to get them?*
 Base: (Total n= 3,819)

One-in-ten accessed mental health support in the last year, consistent with past polls

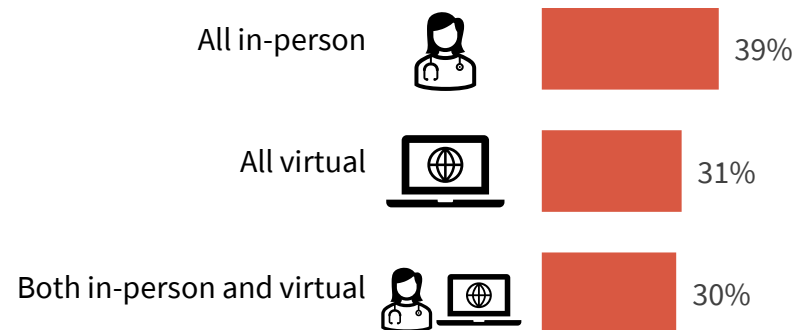
- One-in-ten (12%) reported accessing mental health services in the last year while 5% felt they needed support but didn't access it. 13% accessed services more than a year ago, with 3% doing between 1 and 2 years ago and 10% more than 2 years ago. Results have been consistent since Poll 13.
- Seven-in-ten (69%) reported they never accessed any mental health services.
- Younger (18-34: 19% , 35-54: 14% vs. 55+: 6%), women (14%), those who are unemployed (19%) or students (17%), members of 2SLGBTQIA+ community (25%), those with high anxiety (26%) and depression (25%); those with financial troubles (26% -8), those currently experiencing chronic pain (16%); and those who are dependent on cannabis (22%) or alcohol (24%) are more likely to have accessed the mental health services in the past year.



Canadians are accessing a mix of in-person and virtual mental health supports

- Those who have accessed mental health supports in the past year are split as to how these supports have been accessed. Almost two-fifths (39%) accessed only in-person supports, with three-in-ten accessing all their supports virtually (31%) or a mix of both (30%).
- Age has little impact on how mental health supports are accessed.
- Women are more likely than men to depend solely on virtual supports (35% vs. 22%), as are those who have not received a mental health diagnosis (45%).
- Those with children are more likely to access in-person supports (48%).
- Members of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities are more likely to have used a hybrid of support (45%) and are less likely to have depended solely on in-person (28%).
- Those who access supports through public health supports (43%) or free services (39%) are more likely to have a hybrid of virtual and in-person. Those who have paid for the services are more likely to have used virtual, and those who are more likely to have used their benefits are more likely to have had in-person support.

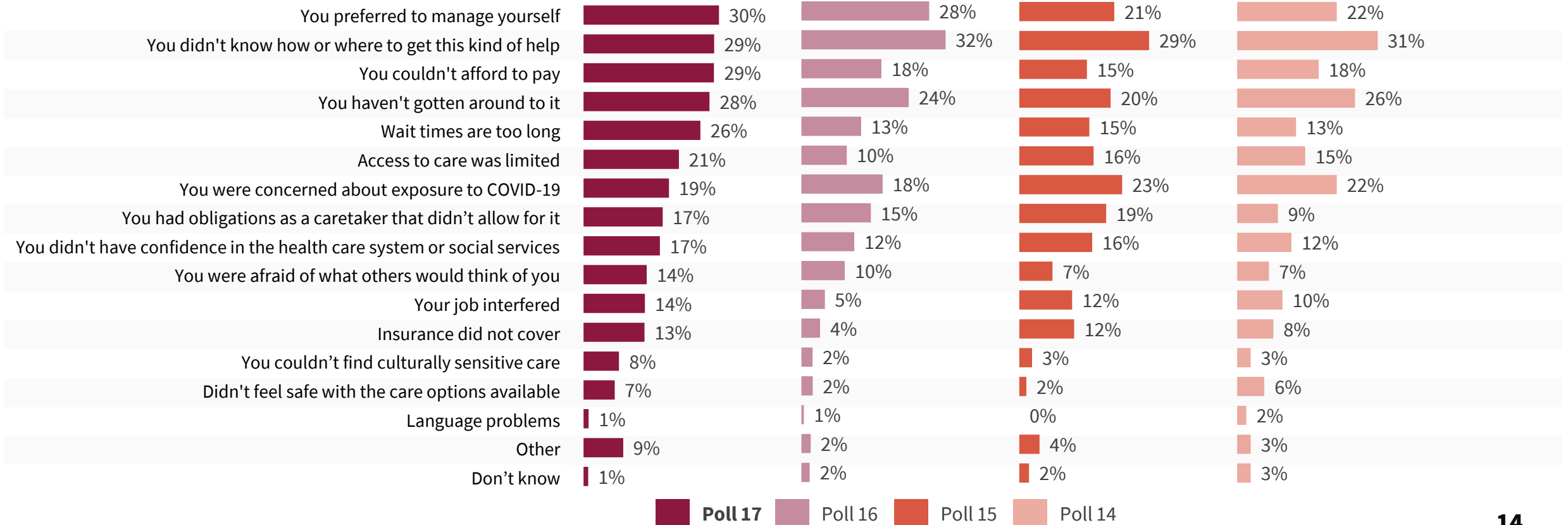
MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS



Those who have not accessed mental health care are more likely to cite finances as the reason

- Of those who felt they needed mental health support but didn't access it, almost one-in-three (29%) said they couldn't afford to pay for it. This is an increase of 11% from Poll 16 and 14% from Poll 15.
- One-in-three (30%) prefer to manage it themselves or don't know where they can get this kind of help (29%).

REASONS FOR NOT ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH

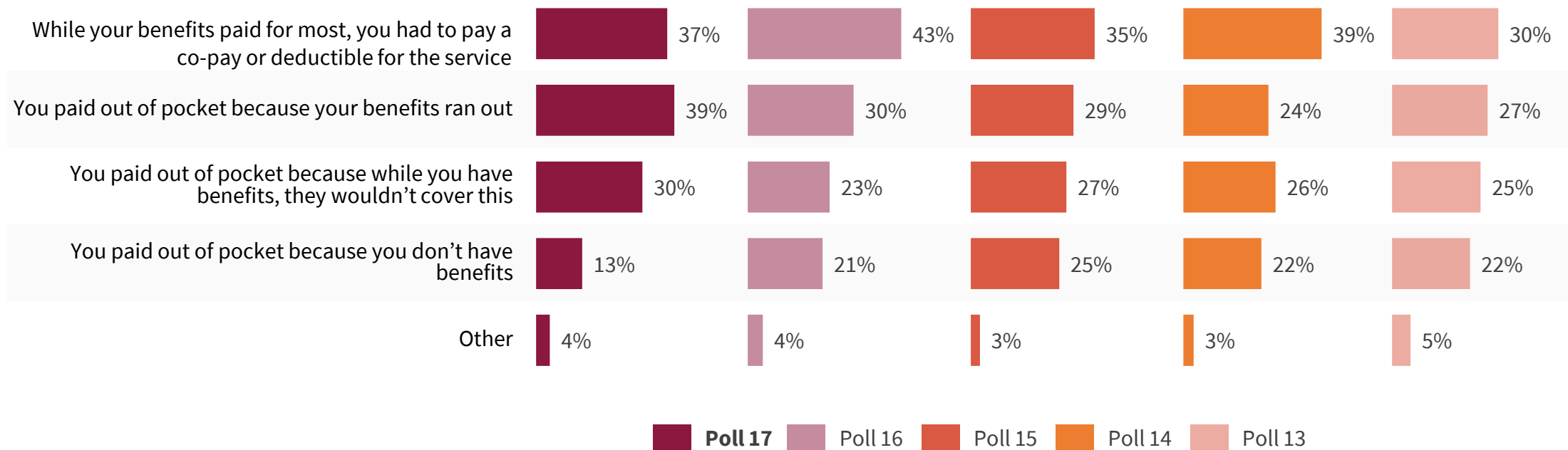


B12B. Why did you choose to not access the support of a mental health professional when you felt you needed it? The skip has changed due to removal of another question. Track to the same spot in merged data. Base: (Has felt the need to access mental health in the past year but have not actually done so Poll 17: n=171, Poll 16: n=146, Poll 15: n=105, Poll 14: n=167, Poll 13: n= 153)

An increasing number of Canadians are paying out of pocket because they did not have sufficient coverage

- The most frequently given reason for paying out-of-pocket was because benefits ran out (39%) an increase of 9% since Poll 16. Additionally, paying because benefits wouldn't cover what they needed also increased this poll (30%).
- More than one-third (37%) said they had to pay a deductible.

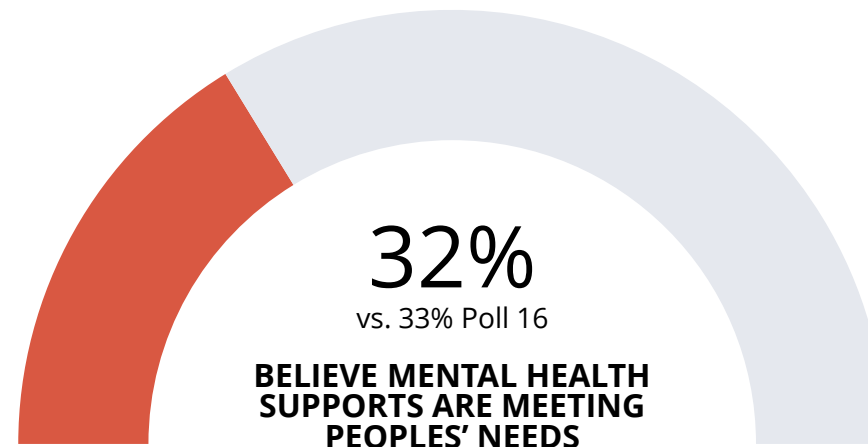
REASONS FOR PAYMENT OUT OF POCKET



Only one third believe mental health supports are meeting the needs of Canadians

- One-third of Canadians believe the mental health supports available in this country are meeting people's needs. This remains consistent to last poll, after an increase of 8% in Poll 16.
- Those who have accessed supports in the past year are less likely to hold this belief compared to those who have not (26% vs. 33%).
- Residents of Quebec are most likely to feel that needs are being met (37%). Younger Canadians (particularly 16–17-year-olds, 55%) and racialized Canadians (38%).
- Those with a mental health diagnosis are less likely to say needs are being met (28%), as are those likely to have symptoms of a severe mental health disorder (25%). Those who are currently experiencing chronic pain are also less likely to believe this (27%).

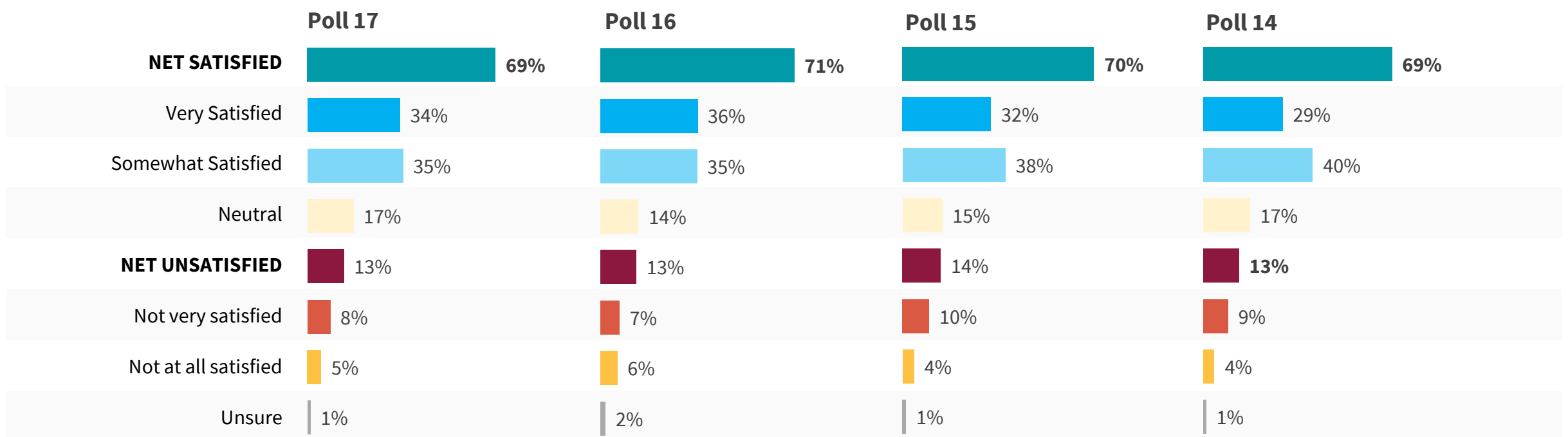
Do you believe the mental health supports available in Canada are meeting peoples' needs?



Most are satisfied with the support they have received in the past year

- Seven-in-ten who have received support in the past year are somewhat (35%) to very (34%) satisfied with it. Satisfaction has remained consistent with the last three polls.
- In-person supports garner higher satisfaction than virtual supports, with three-quarters (74%) of those who received solely in-person support being satisfied and almost two-fifths (38%) very satisfied, compared to only 63% of those who received all supports virtually being satisfied and one-quarter (25%) very satisfied. Of those who received both, two-thirds are satisfied (68%) and one-third are very satisfied (36%).

SATISFACTION WITH THE SUPPORT RECEIVED IN PAST YEAR





Lesli Martin, Senior Vice President, Pollara

Michael Cooper, Vice President, Development and Strategic Partnerships, MHRC

Brittany Saab, Manager, Partnerships and Strategic Initiatives, MHRC

