COVID-19 Boosts Trust in Scientific Experts and Prompts an Increase In Support for Genomics Research Funding

A representative public opinion survey of adults in Alberta, commissioned by Genome Alberta, indicates public trust in scientific experts has risen during the COVID-19 coronavirus crisis. The online survey of 750 adults, conducted April 16-21, found that Albertans are closely following the course of events and they feel well informed about the pandemic. They also feel positively about the local, provincial and government responses to the crisis, and they want increased investments in Genomics research.

Highlights of the survey results include:

COVID-19 Dominates Agenda
• COVID-19 coronavirus concerns top the list of important issues facing Alberta (66%), ahead of concerns about the economy (47%), jobs (30%), the price of oil (30%), pipelines (27%) and healthcare (23%). Women mention COVID-19 more often than men (72% versus 60%).

COVID-19 Boosts Trust in Scientific Experts
• The COVID-19 crisis has prompted a rise in scientific credibility: 37% of Albertans say it has increased their trust in science, compared to 17% who say their trust has been eroded, for a net increase of +20. Scientific distrust is higher in remote areas of Alberta, where net scores are only +8 in small towns and -5 in rural areas. (See Figure 1)

Support for Genomics Research Funding Has Increased
• Support for government investment in genomics research continues to rise. In December 2018, 46% wanted funding to be maintained or increased, but that has shot up to 63% as of April 2020. The proportion that desire increased funding has more than doubled in the past 15 months, from 9% to 21%. (See Figure 2)

Albertans Are Staying Well Informed Via Online and TV Sources
• Most Albertans are staying informed about COVID-19 developments frequently (76% get updates daily and 12% hourly), while 95% feel informed about the crisis. (See Figure 3)
• Almost all Albertans use online sources for news about COVID-19 (95%), with close to half (48%) turning to online sources as their primary way to learn about the crisis. TV is also a frequent source, with 84% using TV at least to some extent and 37% using it as their primary means of staying informed. Radio (63%) and printed materials (58%) are used less frequently as a main source of information. (See Figure 4)
• Younger Albertans (18-34) primarily use online sources (61%) rather than TV (24%). The opposite is true for Albertans 55 years or older; 55% primarily use TV compared to 34% who primarily use online sources. (See Figure 5)
Numerous Sources Keep Albertans Informed About COVID-19

- Specific online sources include Facebook (41% of the share), CBC.ca (18%), Twitter (14%), CTV and Global News online (10% each), Instagram (8%), Linked In (7%), Google (5%) and CNN (4%).
- TV stations used most frequently by Albertans for COVID-19 information include CTV (66%), Global (65%), CBC (52%), CNN (26%), BBC World News (15%) and Fox News (8%). Half of Fox News watchers (48%) say their trust in science has eroded due to COVID-19, compared to 17% of total Albertans.
- The dominant radio source is CBC (43%), followed by 660 News (22%) and QR77 (10%), CKUA and 630 Ched (5% each).

High Ratings for Government Crisis Response

- Albertans rate all three levels of government positively in responding to COVID-19. The Government of Alberta’s response is rated as adequate or better by almost nine in ten Albertans. The Government of Canada and municipal governments are rated as responding adequately or well by four in five Albertans. (See Figure 6)

Albertans Concerned About Ability of Province to Pay for Services

- Albertans are concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on many facets of their lives, but they worry most about the impact on Alberta’s healthcare system (88%) and the ability of the province to pay for services (88%). Three-quarters also worry about their family’s health (73%) and two-thirds (66-68%) worry about finances, catching COVID-19 or their family’s mental health. (See Figure 7)

Commenting on the results of the survey, Mike Spear, Director of Corporate Communications for Genome Alberta, said:

“It is heartening to see that Albertans are staying well informed about COVID-19, and that this crisis is prompting an increase in support for scientific research like genomics, as well as a rise in overall trust in scientific experts.”

Bruce Cameron, President of Return On Insight and long-time political trend analyst, noted that:

“The high ratings given to all orders of government by Albertans during this crisis is a vote of confidence in the public health strategies being implemented. Despite the economic pain and health concerns, trust in science and government leadership remains high in Alberta, even among former critics of government.”

A Note on Methodology:
The representative survey of residents of Alberta was conducted via an online panel, ensuring that a statistically accurate cross-section of the province was interviewed, based upon region, gender and age. Return On Insight conducted the survey, which included 750 competed surveys, collected between April 16 and 21 2020. A probability sample of 750 is accurate to within +/-3.5% at a 95% confidence level. The results of this survey are likely to be within 3.5 percentage points of a complete census of the opinion of Albertans, 19 times out of 20.

To learn more about the numbers and what they mean, contact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mike Spear</th>
<th>Bruce Cameron</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director Corporate Communications, Genome Alberta</td>
<td>President, Return On Insight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@mikesgene 403-813-5843</td>
<td>@ROITweets 403-850-4068</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Figure 1**

**Increases in Scientific Credibility More Pronounced in Urban Areas of Alberta**

“During this public health crisis related to COVID-19 coronavirus, would you say your trust in what scientific experts are saying has increased, stayed the same or decreased?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Stayed same</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Decreased</th>
<th>Decreased A Bit</th>
<th>Decreased A Lot</th>
<th>Net Impact on Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Albertans (750)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>+20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgary (258)</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>+22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmonton (246)</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>+22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other AB Cities (101)</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>+24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Towns (90)</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>+8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Areas (58)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2**

**December 2018-April 2020**

**Desired Extent of Investment in Genomics Research Is Increasing**

“Do you think that the Alberta Government should invest more than it currently does into Genomics research, the same amount of money, or less money than it is currently investing?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Invest More (Invest More)</th>
<th>Same Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018-Dec</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-Dec</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 April</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Albertans Closely Follow COVID-19 Developments & Feel Well Informed

Following News Developments

“How frequently do you follow news or developments about the COVID-19 coronavirus?

- Daily, 76%
- Weekly, 9%
- Fairly well informed, 64%
- Very well informed, 31%
- Less often, 4%
- Hourly or more often, 12%
- Not very well, 3%
- Not at all, 1%

Perceived Extent of Information

“How informed are you about what is happening with respect to the COVID-19 coronavirus?

- Very well informed, 31%
- Fairly well informed, 64%
- Not very well informed, 3%
- Not at all, 1%

Sources of Information for COVID-19 in Alberta

“Where do you access news and information about the COVID-19 coronavirus? How much of your news and information do you get from the following sources?”

- Online sources
  - Most, 48%
  - Some, 33%
  - A Bit, 14%
  - Total, 95%
- TV coverage
  - Most, 37%
  - Some, 30%
  - A Bit, 17%
  - Total, 84%
- Radio programs
  - Most, 6%
  - Some, 25%
  - A Bit, 32%
  - Total, 63%
- Written printed materials
  - Most, 6%
  - Some, 24%
  - A Bit, 28%
  - Total, 58%
Figure 5

Reliance on TV and Online Sources Differs by Age in Alberta

"Where do you access news and information about the COVID-19 coronavirus? How much of your news and information do you get from the following sources?"

![Bar chart showing the reliance on TV and online sources by age group.](chart)

- 61% of 18-34 Year Olds access news mostly online.
- 48% of 35-54 Year Olds access news mostly online.
- 34% of 55+ Albertans access news mostly online.

Figure 6

Rating Government Responses to COVID-19
(4 in 5 Say Adequate or Better)

"In general, how do you think the Government of Alberta is handling the COVID-19 coronavirus crisis?"

- 24% of Albertans rate the Government of Alberta as "Very good".
- 39% rate it as "Fairly good".
- 25% rate it as "Adequate".
- 88% of Albertans rate the Government of Alberta as "Very good", "Fairly good", or "Adequate".

- 17% of Albertans rate the Government of Canada as "Very good".
- 36% rate it as "Fairly good".
- 28% rate it as "Adequate".
- 81% of Albertans rate the Government of Canada as "Very good", "Fairly good", or "Adequate".

- 14% of Albertans rate their local municipal government as "Very good".
- 37% rate it as "Fairly good".
- 30% rate it as "Adequate".
- 81% of Albertans rate their local municipal government as "Very good", "Fairly good", or "Adequate".
"Given the stay-at-home directive that has been issued to try to slow down the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak, how concerned are you about?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Very Concerned</th>
<th>Somewhat Concerned</th>
<th>Total Concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The strain on Alberta’s healthcare system</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strain on Alberta’s ability to pay for services</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your family’s physical health</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household finances</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catching the COVID-19 virus</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your family’s mental health</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alberta Science Survey for Genome Alberta April 2020-Highlights