



# Ontario's Provincial Agenda

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Level of  
Concern Over  
Education  
Up Smartly

## The Issue

An old adage claims that “few things in life are certain, except for taxes and death”—well, another certainty in life seems to be that “healthcare” and “education” will dominate the issues landscape in Ontario. But, what’s different in this most recent *Focus on Ontario* edition is that healthcare receives much stronger focus than it has before (73%, up from 59% in March), while education is pushed further away from the limelight (37%, down from 46% in March).

The stronger focus on healthcare in this poll can probably be attributed to the recent federal election campaign when all three major parties identified healthcare as a central component of their campaign platforms. Further, education received significantly less attention from the federal election contenders.

## The Highlights

- Healthcare tops the list with three-quarters of Ontarians citing this issue as the most important for their province’s leaders.
- Education (38%) and taxes (19%) are both down in terms of priority for Ontario’s leaders.
- Despite the recent pump hikes, gas prices trail distantly in the minds of Ontarians, with 4% citing this as the issue deserving the greatest attention from Ontario’s elected leaders.

from 59%) than did so at the last sounding of the *Focus on Ontario*, and twice as many Ontarians cite healthcare than cite education as the issue “which they feel should receive the greatest attention from Ontario’s elected leaders at Queen’s Park” (73% vs. 38%, respectively) (figure 1).

Across all regions of Ontario, healthcare is mentioned by a strong majority as the issue that should receive the greatest attention from Ontario’s elected leaders: 83% in Central Ontario, 76% in Southwestern Ontario, 69% in the GTA, 68% in Northern Ontario, and 67% in Eastern Ontario.

Older Ontarians aged 55 and over are more likely than all others to cite healthcare as the issue that is most

## The Findings

### Healthcare Receives Very Strong Focus From Ontarians

Substantially more Ontarians today mention healthcare (73%, up 14 points

### Ontarians' Top Public Policy Concerns

"Thinking of the issues presently confronting the province of Ontario, which one do you feel should receive the greatest attention from Ontario's elected leaders at Queen's Park, that is, the one thing they should give top priority to? What other issues do you think are important for Ontario right now?"

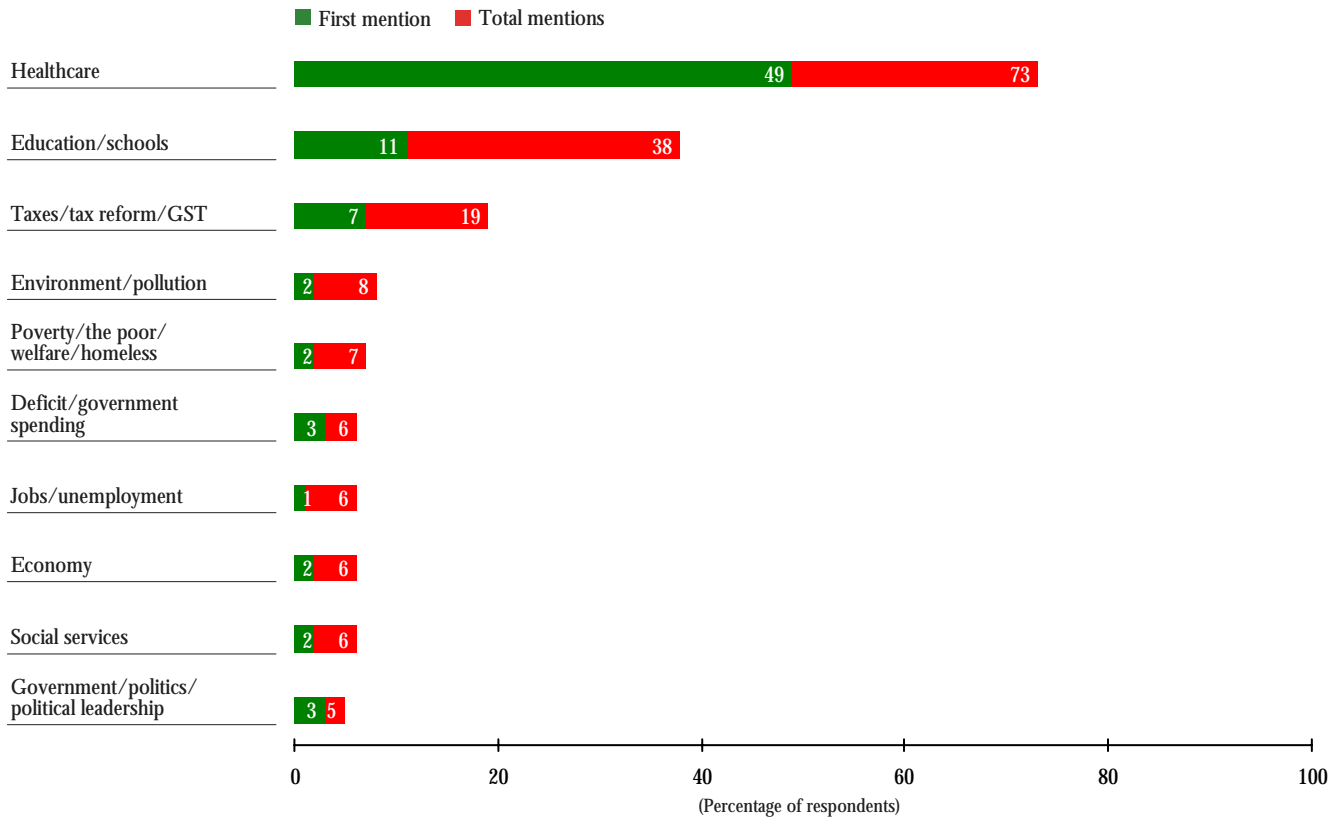


figure 1

deserving of the greatest attention from Ontario's elected leaders (78% vs. 71%). As well, women are more likely than men to say that healthcare should be a top priority for Ontario's political leaders (75% vs. 70%).

University graduates (79%) are more likely than those with lower levels of education (68%) to say that medicare/healthcare should receive attention from the province's leaders.

Similarly, Ontarians with an annual household income greater than \$30,000 (76%) are significantly more likely than those with an annual household income of less than \$30,000 (63%) to say that healthcare should receive the

greatest attention from Ontario's elected leaders at Queen's Park.

#### While Education Takes a Small Drop

As healthcare is being assigned more importance by the residents of Ontario, education drops 8 points on the radar screen. In this most recent sounding, 4 in 10 (38%) Ontarians mention education as a top issue of concern for Ontario's leaders, down from nearly 5 in 10 (46%) who mentioned education at the last sounding (figure 2).

Education is mentioned as one of the most important issues for Ontario's leaders by approximately 1 in 4 in Southwest Ontario (43%), Central

Ontario (39%), Eastern Ontario (39%), and the GTA (37%), and by 32% in Northern Ontario.

Those Ontarians who are most involved and exposed to Ontario's educational system (younger Ontarians aged 18 to 34) are more likely than older residents to mention education as the issue that should receive the greatest attention from Ontario's elected leaders (41% vs. 33%). This is also true for university graduates (48%) who are more likely than those with some post-secondary (37%), a high school diploma (31%), or less than a high school education (22%) to say that education is one of the most important issues.

Ontarians with an annual household income of \$60,000 or more are more likely than those with an annual household income of less than \$60,000 to cite education as one of the most important issues facing the province's leaders today (43% vs. 35%).

Women are also significantly more likely than men to believe education should receive the greatest attention (42% vs. 34%).

**Taxes Receive Substantial Amount of Attention**

Given that this survey was conducted just after the introduction of a largely unpopular provincial budget that included a high profile healthcare

premium or "tax," it is not surprising that the issue of taxation arose among a substantial portion of Ontarians as a top issue of concern. One in five Ontarians (19%) believe taxes/tax reform/GST are the issues that should attract the most attention from Ontario's politicians. This is up smartly from 11% who said so during the last *Focus on Ontario* survey.

As is usual in previous *Focus on Ontario* surveys, men are considerably more likely than women to say that taxes and tax reform are important issues that need to be a priority for the provincial government (24% vs. 15%). In another expected case, those who have an annual household income of

\$30,000 or more are more likely than all others to cite taxes as important (20% vs. 11%).

**Other Issues Register Low on the Issue Radar Screen for Ontarians**

With healthcare, education, and taxes dominating the social policy landscape of Ontario, other social issues are far less prevalent in the minds of Ontarians. Other issues that small percentages of Ontarians think should receive the greatest attention from their elected leaders are the environment/pollution (8%), poverty and homelessness (7%), deficit and government spending (6%), jobs/unemployment (6%), the economy

**Tracking of Ontario Issues**

"Thinking of how you feel right now, if a provincial election were held tomorrow, which of the following parties' candidates would you, yourself, be most likely to support?"

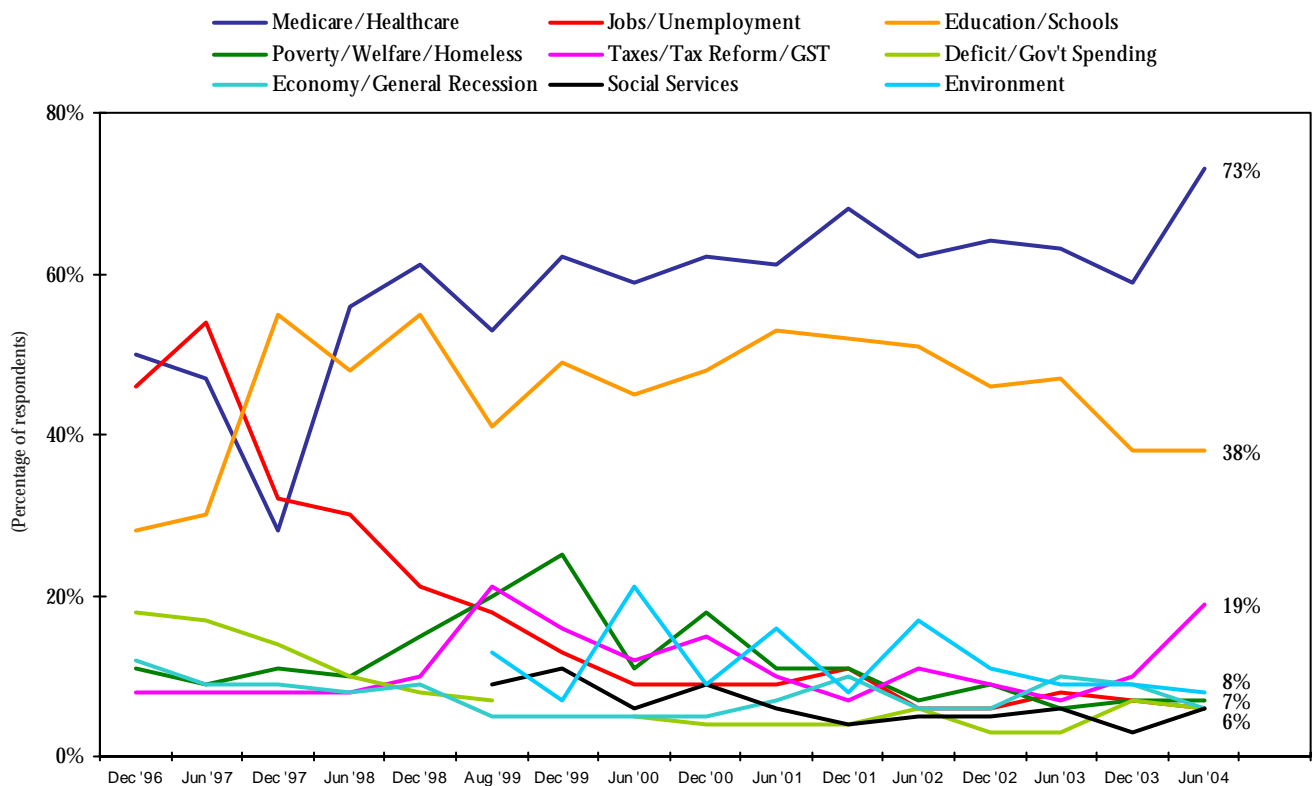


figure 2

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(6%), and government/politics (5%). All other issues were mentioned by fewer than 5% of respondents.

What is particularly interesting about this list of secondary issues is that despite the soaring price of gasoline at the pumps this summer, the issue of gas prices registers quite low at 4% of respondents. This apparent blind eye to the issue of gasoline prices may in part be reflective of a public that at the time of the survey was largely preoccupied with federal election issues.

### The Bottom Line

The fact that Ontarians most commonly mention healthcare, education, and taxes when asked what issues they “feel should receive the greatest

attention from Ontario’s elected leaders at Queen’s Park” does not come at any surprise. After all, the provision of healthcare and education are the two most primary functions of provincial government—while taxes are the funding mechanisms for these programs.

But it is somewhat interesting that healthcare so clearly distances itself from all other issues in terms of the level of focus it receives from Ontarians. Clearly, when considering government in Ontario, it’s all about healthcare, healthcare, healthcare—and then everything else. Given this, it’s clear that in the federal seat-rich province of Ontario, prime ministers can expect to be crowned (or dethroned) on the basis of their healthcare policy plans (or records). ❖