

Orthopedic surgery in Canada: Most had positive outcomes, but one-in-four found the wait too long

In B.C., the number of patients reporting ‘unreasonable’ wait times jumps to one-in-three

July 24, 2017 – As [news reports](#) profile orthopedic surgery patients frustrated with lengthy wait-times, a unique Angus Reid Institute survey of more than 1,500 Canadians who have undergone orthopedic surgery within the last ten years finds large majorities satisfied with their surgeon, hospital, and surgery outcome, but a significantly smaller number satisfied with the amount of time they had to wait.

More than one-in-five say they waited an “unreasonable” amount of time for treatment, a number that suggests more than 300,000 Canadians have experienced unreasonable waits for orthopedic surgery in the last decade.

In British Columbia, where Dr. Brian Day is [challenging the provincial government](#) over his Cambie Surgery Clinic’s right to charge patients for surgery, the percentage reporting an unreasonable wait time rises to one-in-three (34%).

Fully half (51%) of those who deem their wait time unreasonable waited more than a year for treatment. If they had to do it again, more than one-in-three of these patients (36%) would pay out-of-pocket in order to speed things up.

Key Findings:

- One-in-six orthopedic surgery patients who found their wait times unreasonable (17%) were on waiting lists for two years or more before their operations. Half (51%) waited at least a year, and fully eight-in-ten (81%) waited longer than the Canadian Institute for Health Information’s benchmark of six months

Thinking about your most recent orthopedic surgery, would you say you were satisfied or dissatisfied with each of the following aspects of the process?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 29 – June 5, 2017, among a randomized sample of 1,512 Canadian adults who have had orthopedic surgery within the last ten years and are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250-899-0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

- More than one-in-three who had unreasonable wait times (36%) say they would pay their own money to speed up the process if they needed orthopedic surgery again in the future
- Orthopedic surgery patients are split on the value of private surgery clinics, with 49 per cent saying they are a good thing, overall, and the rest (51%) saying they're a bad thing

Index:

- **Part 1 - More than one-in-five had 'unreasonable' wait times**
- **Part 2 - Paying for faster service?**
- **Part 3 - Most are satisfied with hospitals, surgeons, and outcomes**

More than one-in-five had 'unreasonable' wait times

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, 73 per cent of knee replacements and 79 per cent of hip replacements were completed [within the benchmark time frame](#) of 182 days (six months) in 2016. Wait time statistics for other orthopedic surgery procedures are not reported on the CIHI website.

These two joints – knees and hips – are the [among most common](#) areas for orthopedic surgery, and the volume of such procedures has been increasing as Canada's population ages.

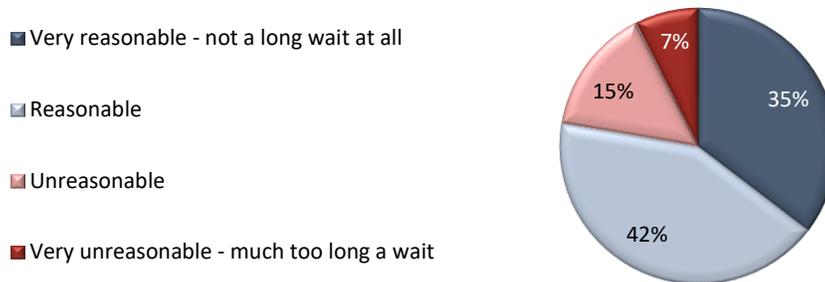
This Angus Reid Institute survey is one of the largest of its type undertaken in Canada. Among the 1,512 people surveyed – all of whom have undergone orthopedic surgery in the last decade or are currently waiting for a procedure – roughly half (49%) had a knee operation, and another one-in-five (21%) had a hip procedure. Fewer than one-in-ten respondents underwent each of the other types of orthopedic surgery canvassed in this survey ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

More than one-in-five patients who had orthopedic surgery of any type in the last ten years report finding the amount of time they waited "unreasonable." This includes 7 per cent who found the wait "very unreasonable," as seen in the graph that follows.

CONTACT:

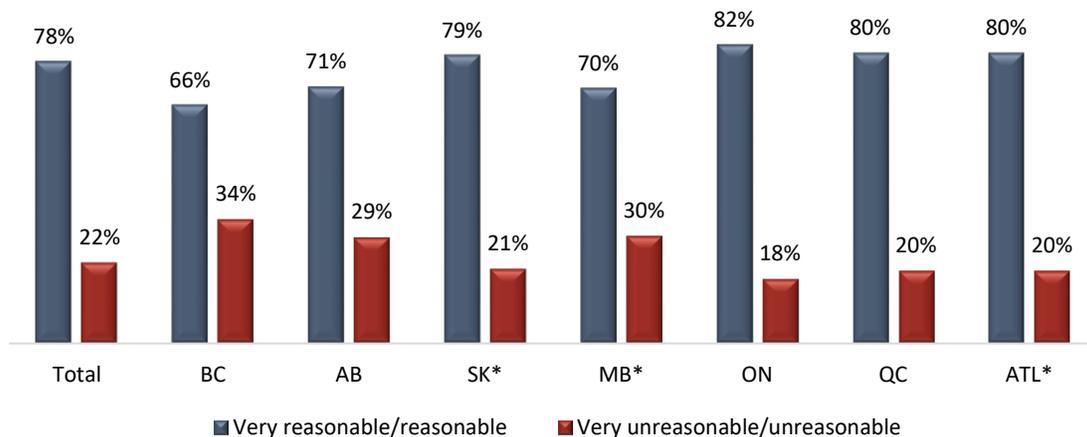
Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250-899-0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

How would you describe the amount of time you spent waiting for your most recent orthopedic surgery? Was it:



Among respondents in British Columbia, the percentage who report unreasonable wait times rises to one-in-three (34%), higher than in any other region:

How would you describe the amount of time you spent waiting for your most recent orthopedic surgery? Was it:



*small sample sizes

This finding correlates somewhat with CIHI data on knee and hip replacement wait times in British Columbia. While the national averages are 73 and 79 per cent of procedures, respectively, completed within the benchmark time, the percentage of procedures meeting the benchmark in British Columbia is 61 per cent for hip replacements, and just 47 per cent for knee replacements.

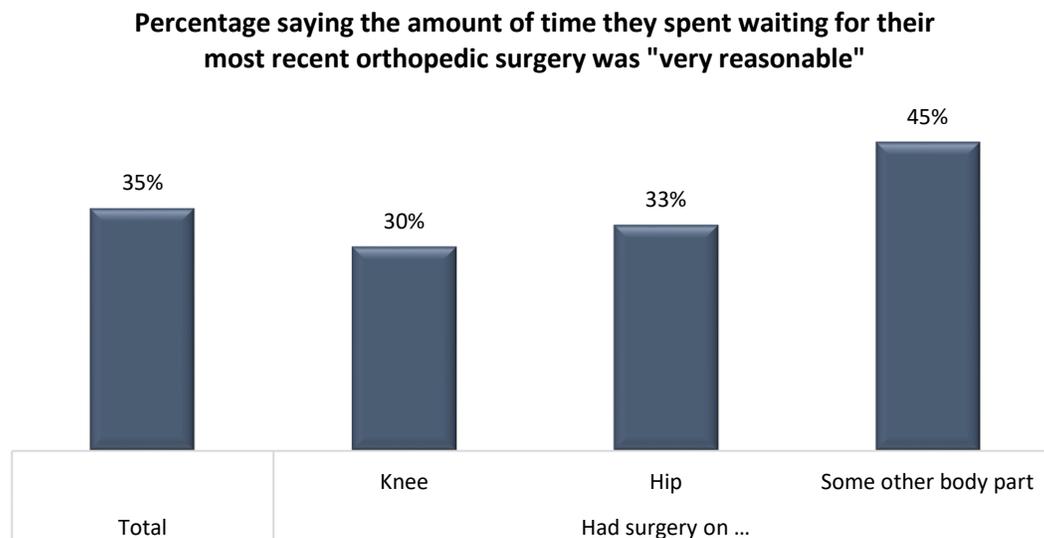
That said, data from other provinces doesn't correlate quite as well with the perceived reasonableness of wait times. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, for example, have similarly low proportions of knee and hip

replacements meeting the benchmark time, but patients in the Atlantic region are among the most likely to say their wait times were reasonable.

Likewise, Alberta beats the national average for meeting benchmark wait times on both knee and hip replacement procedures, but Alberta patients are almost as likely to find wait times unreasonable as British Columbians.

Whatever a patient's reason for believing their wait was unreasonable, this survey confirms that they are not alone. Extrapolating from publicly available data on the number of knee and hip procedures conducted in Canada in the last 10 years (a total of slightly less than 1 million), this study suggests that more than 300,000 people who had orthopedic surgery of any type (knee, hip, or other) in this country in the last decade waited an unreasonable amount of time to get it.

It should be noted that a variety of factors beyond region influence responses on this question. Generally speaking, patients who had operations on a part of their body other than a knee or hip are more likely to say their wait time was "very reasonable," as seen in the following graph:

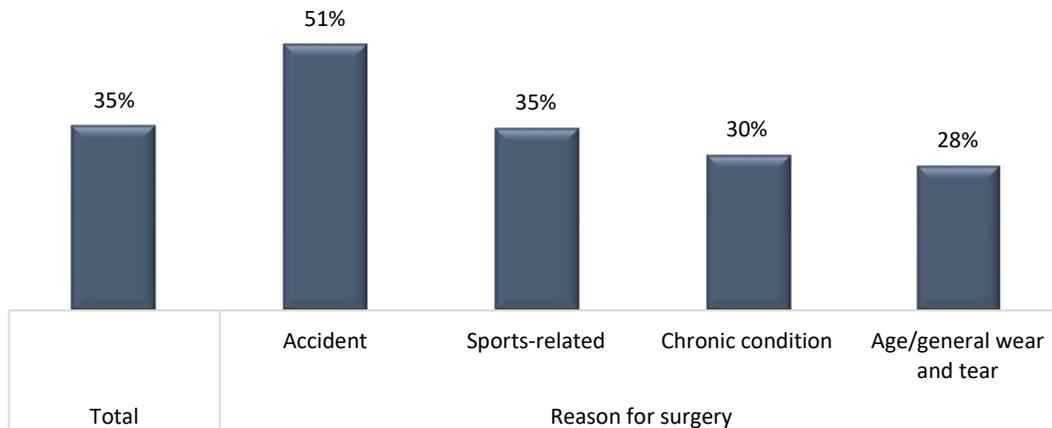


The reason for receiving orthopedic surgery also correlates with the perceived reasonableness of the wait time. Patients requiring treatment for traumatic injuries caused by accidents – whose surgery needs are often considered urgent – are more likely to say their wait time was "very reasonable."

CONTACT:

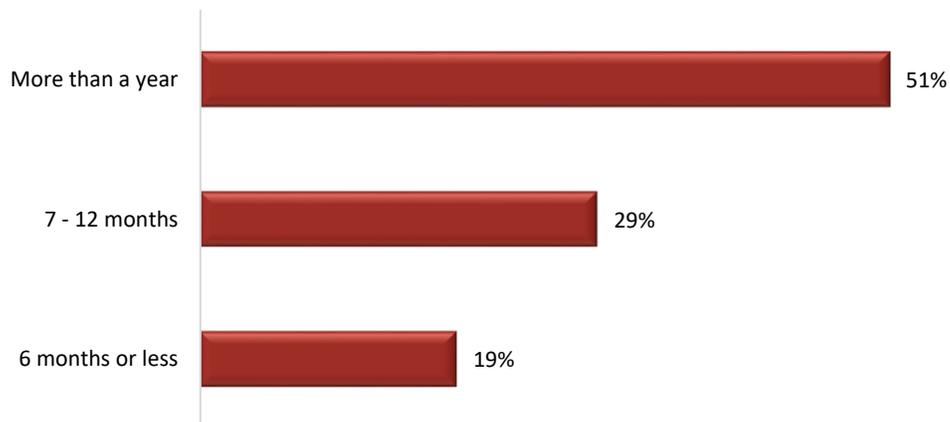
Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250-899-0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Percentage saying the amount of time they spent waiting for their most recent orthopedic surgery was "very reasonable"



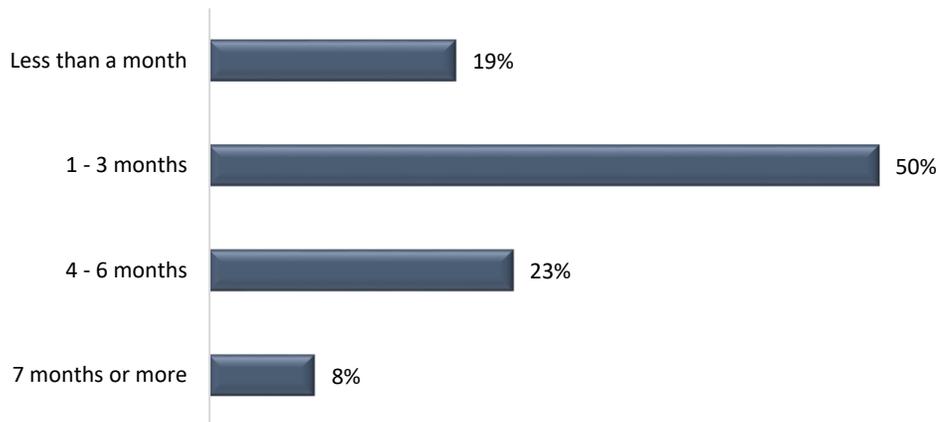
Those who waited an amount of time they felt was unreasonable were asked a follow-up question about how long they waited. Half (51%) say they waited at least a year, including one-in-six (17%) who waited two years or more for surgery. Another three-in-ten waited more than the benchmark six months, as seen in the following graph:

You indicated that the amount of time you waited for orthopedic surgery was "unreasonable." How long was the wait? (N=333)



Asked what length of time would have been reasonable, half (50%) of those who reported unreasonable waits for surgery said "1 – 3 months," and nearly all respondents picked a number below the benchmark six-month wait time, as seen in the following graph:

And, in your opinion, what would have been a reasonable amount of time to wait? (N=333)



Paying for faster service?

Given the proportion of orthopedic surgery patients who found their wait-times for surgery unreasonable, respondents were also asked whether they would be willing to spend their own money to speed up the process.

Private clinics that conduct orthopedic surgery can be found across the country, and are sometimes [tasked by provincial governments](#) to operate on those who have been waiting too long in the public system. Generally, these clinics also allow patients to pay for their surgery out of pocket, though hardly any of the patients surveyed in this study spent money on their procedure. Fully 96 per cent say they did not pay for their most recent orthopedic surgery, and only 1 per cent say they paid the full cost (the rest either paid part of the cost or could not recall).

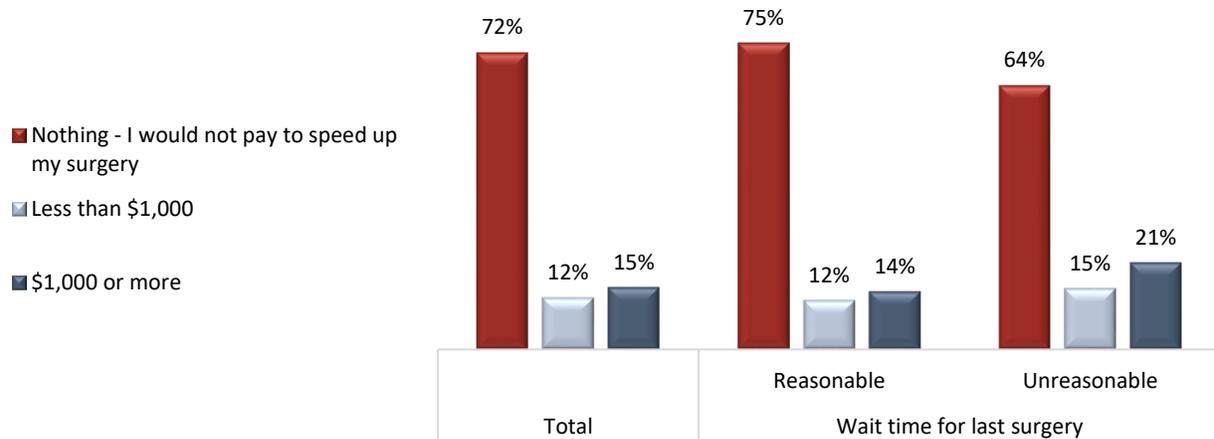
Asked to suppose they needed orthopedic surgery again, and had the option to speed up the process by paying for it out of pocket, more than seven-in-ten respondents (72%) say they would choose not to pay. This includes nearly two-thirds of those whose wait times for their most recent surgery were “unreasonable,” as seen in the graph that follows.

That said, it’s notable that more than one-third who had unreasonable wait times *would* pay, and one-in-five say they would spend \$1,000 or more in order to speed up a future surgery:

CONTACT:

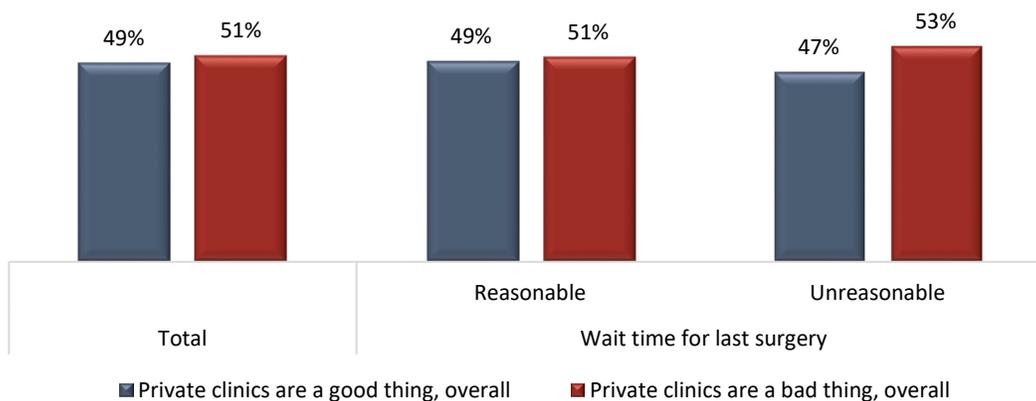
Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250-899-0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Suppose you needed orthopedic surgery again, and had the option to speed up the process considerably by paying for it out of pocket. What amount would you be willing to pay in order to get your surgery done more quickly? Would you pay:



Perhaps surprisingly, given their greater willingness to pay out of pocket for a future orthopedic surgery, those who had an unreasonable wait time are not significantly more likely than those who had reasonable waits to say private surgery clinics are a good thing, overall:

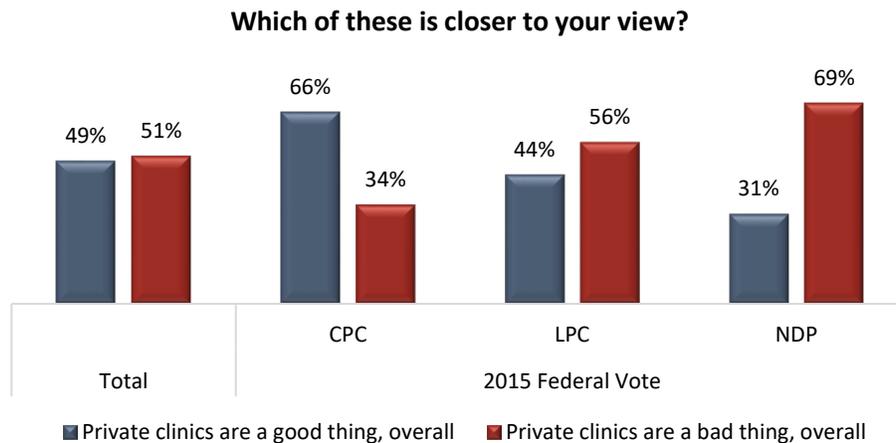
Some say private surgery clinics are good because they relieve stress on the public system. Others say they're bad because they contribute to a two-tiered system and give rich people an unfair advantage. Which of these is closer to your view?



One factor that *does* appear to influence both views on private clinics and willingness to pay for surgery is political orientation. Those respondents who voted for the Conservative Party of Canada in the 2015

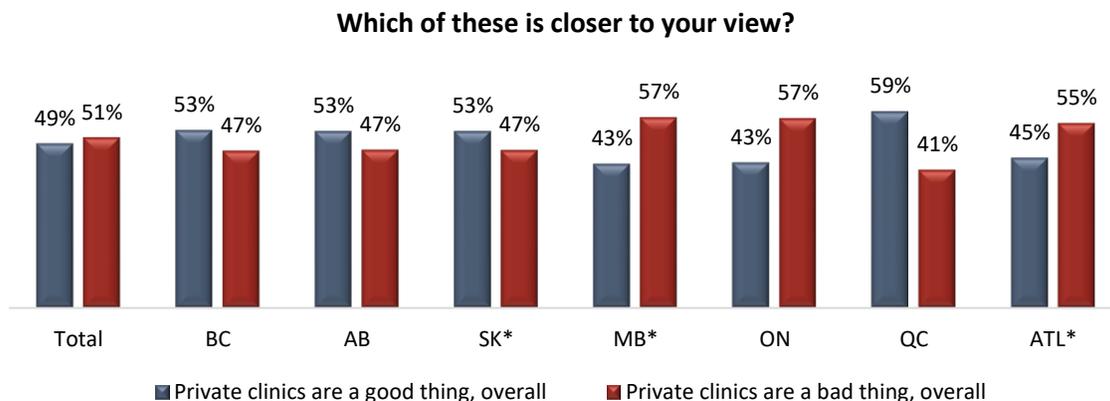
federal election are more likely to say they would be willing to pay their own money for a future surgical procedure (36% would, compared to 26% of Liberal Party supporters and 20% of New Democratic Party voters surveyed).

Fully two-thirds (66%) of surveyed patients who voted for the Conservatives say private clinics are a good thing, while majorities who supported the other two major parties choose the opposite response:



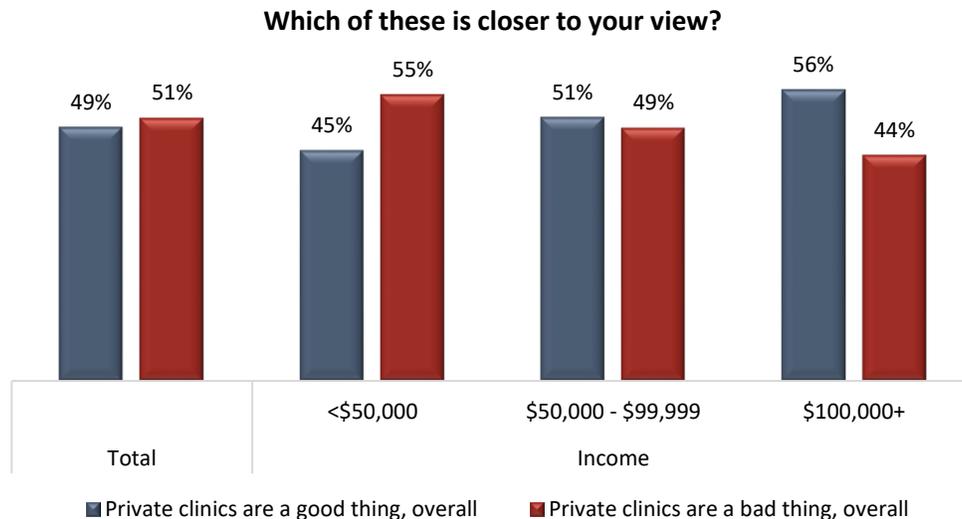
Regionally, respondents in Quebec are more likely than those in other regions to view private clinics positively, a finding possibly attributable to the province's status as the home of [the first private diagnostic machines](#) in the country, or to the key role Quebec played in a landmark Supreme Court of Canada ruling [ending government bans](#) on private health insurance.

Whatever the reason, Quebec is something of an outlier on this question. Neighbouring Ontario is one of regions most likely to view private surgery clinics negatively:



*small sample size

Also especially inclined to favour private clinics? Respondents with higher incomes, who are more likely to have the means to pay for surgery with their own money.



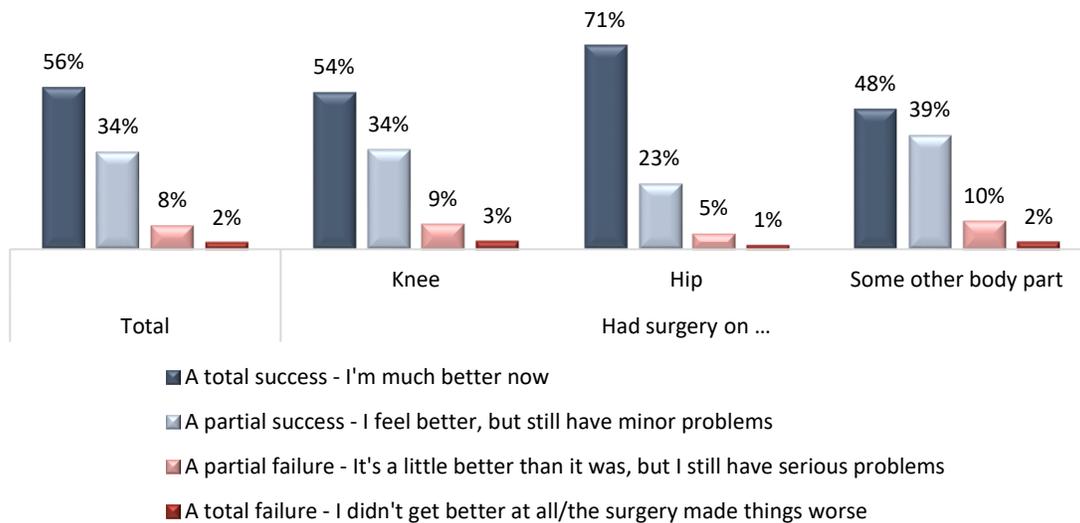
Most are satisfied with surgeons, facilities, and outcomes

While this survey suggests there is considerable room for improvement when it comes to wait times for orthopedic surgery in Canada, it also finds broad satisfaction on the part of patients when it comes to other aspects of the process.

Asked to rate the success or failure of their orthopedic surgery procedure, the vast majority of patients deem it to be either a partial (34%) or a total success (56%). Fewer than one-in-ten say their most recent orthopedic surgery was a partial failure (8%), and only 2 per cent say the surgery was a total failure.

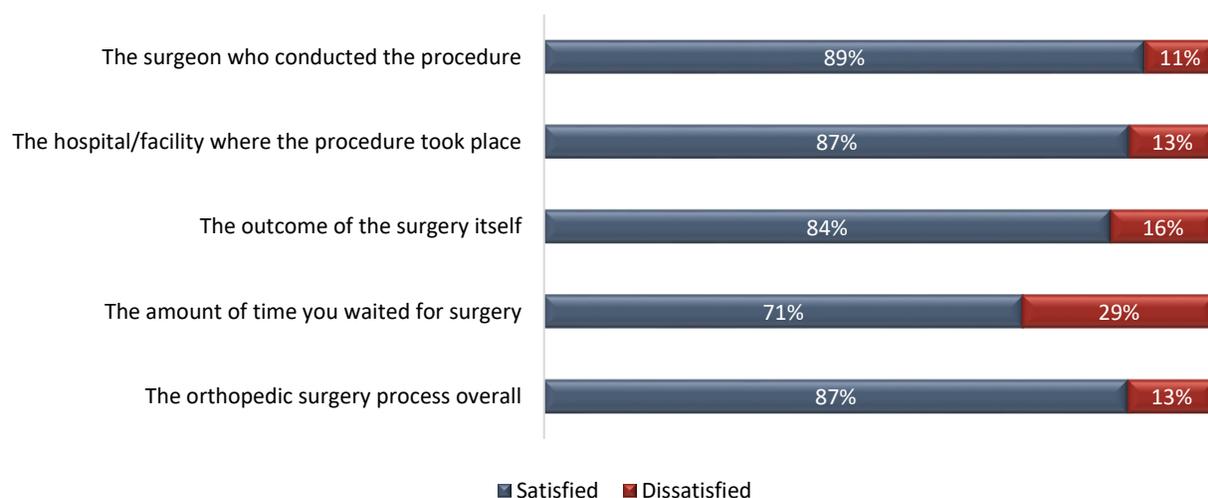
Those who had hip surgeries are especially likely to rate the experience as a total success, but the percentage of respondents reporting that their last surgery was a partial or total failure remains consistently low regardless of what part of their body was the subject of the operation:

Thinking about this most recent orthopedic surgery you experienced, how would you describe the result of the procedure? Was it:



In a similar vein, when asked whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with various aspects of the orthopedic surgery process, more than eight-in-ten respondents express satisfaction with each one, except for wait times:

Thinking about your most recent orthopedic surgery, would you say you were satisfied or dissatisfied with each of the following aspects of the process?



As might be expected, those who found their wait times unreasonable also overwhelmingly say they are dissatisfied with wait times. Notably, however, this dissatisfaction does not turn into a pattern. Those who had unreasonable wait times are not significantly less satisfied with the outcome of the surgery, the doctor, or the hospital. Indeed, more than eight-in-ten of them (83%) say they were satisfied with the orthopedic surgery process overall, despite their unreasonable wait (see summary tables at the end of this release for greater detail).

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

How would you describe the amount of time you spent waiting for your most recent orthopedic surgery? Was it:				
(weighted sample sizes)	Total who had surgery or have a firm date scheduled (1492)	Part of body operated on		
		Knee (724)	Hip (309)	Other (473)
Very reasonable - not a long wait at all	35%	30%	33%	45%
Reasonable	42%	48%	39%	36%
Unreasonable	15%	15%	18%	13%
Very unreasonable - much too long a wait	7%	8%	10%	6%

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250-899-0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

How would you describe the amount of time you spent waiting for your most recent orthopedic surgery? Was it:					
(weighted sample sizes)	Total who had surgery or have a firm date scheduled (1492)	Reason for surgery			
		Accident (399)	Sports-related (167)	Chronic condition (518)	Age/General wear and tear (409)
Very reasonable - not a long wait at all	35%	51%	35%	30%	28%
Reasonable	42%	31%	39%	48%	47%
Unreasonable	15%	12%	14%	15%	17%
Very unreasonable - much too long a wait	7%	6%	11%	7%	7%

Thinking about this most recent orthopedic surgery you experienced, how would you describe the result of the procedure? Was it:				
(weighted sample sizes)	Total who had surgery (1479)	Part of body operated on		
		Knee (719)	Hip (306)	Other (469)
A total success - I'm much better now	56%	54%	71%	48%
A partial success - I feel better, but still have minor problems	34%	34%	23%	39%
A partial failure - It's a little better than it was, but I still have serious problems	8%	9%	5%	10%
A total failure - I didn't get better at all/the surgery made things worse	2%	3%	1%	2%

Thinking about your most recent orthopedic surgery, would you say you were satisfied or dissatisfied with each of the following aspects of the process?

(Those saying “satisfied” shown)

(weighted sample sizes)	Total who had surgery (1479)	Wait time	
		Reasonable (1152)	Unreasonable (327)
The outcome of the surgery itself	84%	85%	83%
The amount of time you waited for surgery	71%	90%	5%
The surgeon who conducted the procedure	89%	89%	91%
The hospital/facility where the procedure took place	87%	87%	89%
The orthopedic surgery process overall	87%	88%	83%

Suppose you needed orthopedic surgery again, and had the option to speed up the process considerably by paying for it out of pocket. What amount would you be willing to pay in order to get your surgery done more quickly? Would you pay:

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1512)	Wait time	
		Reasonable (1159)	Unreasonable (333)
Nothing - I would not pay to speed up my surgery	72%	75%	64%
Less than \$1,000	12%	12%	15%
\$1,000 - \$1,999	6%	6%	8%
\$2,000 - \$2,999	3%	3%	5%
\$3,000 - \$4,999	2%	2%	4%
\$5,000 - \$9,999	2%	1%	3%
More than \$10,000	2%	2%	1%

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250-899-0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Some people say private surgery clinics are a good thing because they relieve stress on the public system. Others say they're a bad thing because they contribute to a two-tiered health care system and give rich people an unfair advantage. Which of these perspectives is closer to your own (even if neither is exactly how you feel)?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1512)	Wait time	
		Reasonable (1159)	Unreasonable (333)
Private clinics are a good thing, overall	49%	49%	47%
Private clinics are a bad thing, overall	51%	51%	53%

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250-899-0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org