Social Policy Framework Values Mapping Survey Results

January 2013

Background

As part of the engagement to create Alberta's Social Policy Framework, the Government of Alberta contracted Cambridge Strategies Inc. to develop and conduct an online survey. The survey was intended to identify which values and outcomes are most important to Albertans with respect to social policy and the design and delivery of social programs and services. This document is a summary of the responses.

Methodology

Cambridge Strategies Inc. designed and conducted the survey in conjunction with Clever Trout Consulting and research and policy experts from the Ministry of Human Services. Based on feedback from the first phase of engagement on the Social Policy Framework, statements and questions were developed on potential outcomes for the Social Policy Framework, as well as value statements and policy options based on the feedback themes.

The survey used a technique called Discrete Choice Modeling (DCM) that measured how Albertans value and prioritize the potential outcomes and themes. The method also measures the relative intensity with which those values are held, and the trade-off (or sensitivity) of commitment levels to those features. Using DCM, it is likely that no one is presented with a set of choices that completely satisfies their world view. Instead, participants are asked to make choices between the things that are most important to them against the things that are less important. Once the survey data was collected, citizen preferences were modeled for every parameter tested to determine the relative importance of features, the amount of intensity with which those preferences are held, and the level of commitment to those preferences.

Ideally, variables used in DCM must be comprehensively exhaustive and mutually exclusive. There is naturally some overlap and relationships between and among the themes and outcomes tested: in this survey, choices were kept as discrete as possible. Results should be interpreted within the context of the interrelated and complexity of social issues and policy.

Best-worst choice scenarios were used to determine preference among policy outcomes and choice-based conjoint questions were used to determine preference among themes. By asking respondents to choose among various scenarios, it was possible to discern both the priority ranking and relative importance of each outcome and theme.

Both a random and a non-random survey were conducted. In both cases, the same survey was used. Random sample data was collected between October 8 and October 12, 2012, and was obtained by engaging a market-research company to supply a pool of respondents. Respondents over the age of 18 were sent invitations to take part in a web survey, and this sample yielded 1,044 valid surveys. With a sample of this size, aggregate results are considered accurate to within +/-2.1 percentage points nineteen times out of twenty, to what they would have been had the entire adult population of Alberta been included in the survey.

The non-random group was made up of Albertans who chose to take the survey through a link on the www.socialpolicy.alberta.ca website. A total of 255 valid surveys were obtained from the non-random group. This non-random sample data was collected between October 8 and November 16, 2012.

Random Sample Results

Fifteen social policy outcomes that emerged from phase one engagement were tested with a random sample group to obtain a priority ranking. Four of the fifteen statements were randomly selected and presented to a survey respondent. The respondent was then asked to pick the most preferred and least preferred statement only. This question was asked several times with different sets of randomly selected statements.

The graph below shows which outcome statements (value priorities) were, on average, rated most highly by respondents compared to other statements.

Questions were designed to force a choice between imperfect alternatives. This gives a better understanding of *relative* priorities, but cannot be interpreted to mean any given outcome or theme is important or unimportant. For example, "Immigrants can access effective language training" cannot be understood as unimportant, rather, when forced to choose, the other statements were deemed *more* important. By asking respondents to judge the relative importance of each outcome, it was possible to determine which outcomes were considered the highest priorities.

Value Priorities for Albertans (Outcome Statements)

Outcome Statement	Relative Importance
There are fewer children living in poverty	13.3
Family violence is eliminated in the province	10.7
Homelessness is eliminated in Alberta	9.6
Promoting good health is as important as treating illness	8.9
There are fewer adults living in poverty	7.7
People with disabilities can find meaningful employment	7.1
All Albertans share in Alberta's wealth	7.1
Mental health and addiction treatment is more integrated	6.4
Alberta families have access to high quality and affordable child care	6.3
Discrimination is eliminated in Alberta	5.4
Albertans are self-reliant	4.2
Community needs should determine where in-person services are provided	4.0
Albertans are able to understand how decisions are made about the services they receive	3.9
Aboriginal communities receive the support they need	3.1
Immigrants can access effective language training	2.2

Four statements both received a high average ranking and were picked as top choice most often, as portrayed in the upper right quadrant of the figure below: "There are fewer children living in poverty"; "Promoting good health is as important as treating illness"; "All Albertans share in Alberta's wealth"; and "Homelessness is eliminated in Alberta". These four statements were most important for 70% of Albertans.

Importance Ranking Compared to the Frequency a Statement was Chosen as Most Important
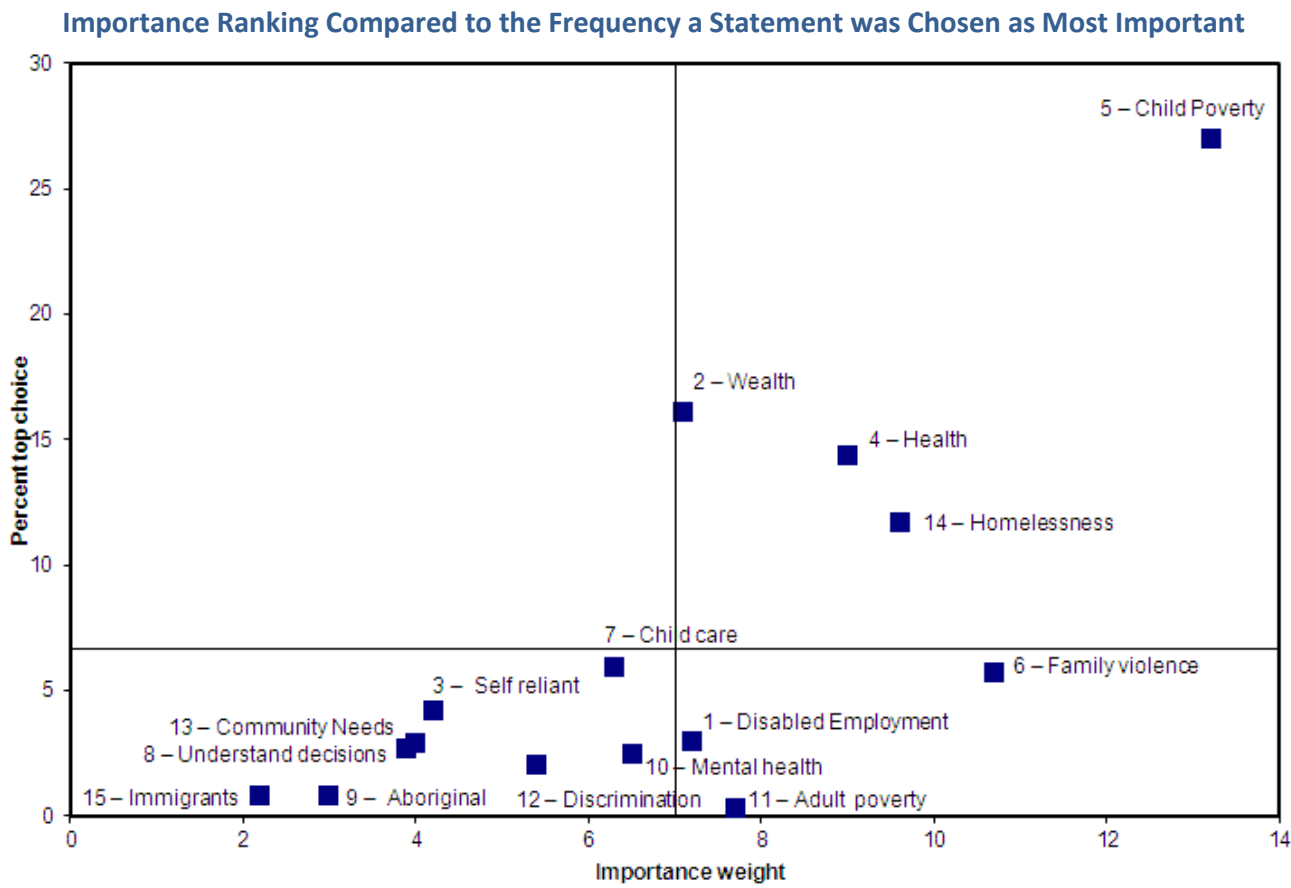
1. People with disabilities can find meaningful employment
2. All Albertans share in Alberta's wealth
3. Albertans are self-reliant
4. Promoting good health is as important as treating illness
5. There are fewer children living in poverty
6. Family violence is eliminated in the province
7. Alberta families have access to high quality and affordable child care
8. Albertans are able to understand how decisions are made about the services they receive
9. Aboriginal communities receive the support they need
10. Mental health and addiction treatment is more integrated
11. There are fewer adults living in poverty
12. Discrimination is eliminated in Alberta.
13. Community needs should determine where in-person services are provided
14. Homelessness is eliminated in Alberta
15. Immigrants can access effective language training

Seven themes that emerged from phase one engagement were also presented in the survey: Access, Inclusion, Respect and Dignity, Equity and Fairness, Well-being, Roles and Relationships, Delivering Programs and Services. Within each theme, respondents were offered between two to four policy approaches or directions. The themes and accompanying policy statements follow, in no particular order. Bold indicates the highest scoring preference within each theme (see pages 7 and 8 for more details).

1. Access
   - Publicly-funded social services should be accessible to all Albertans
   - Publicly-funded social services should serve only the poorest Albertans
   - **Publicly-funded social services should be accessible by demonstrated need, regardless of income**

2. Inclusion
   - Albertans should be welcomed and accepted in their communities
   - Albertans are responsible for being accepted in their communities
   - **Albertans should be able to contribute and participate in the life of their community**

3. Respect and Dignity
   - Province of Alberta should provide minimum support and help; people are responsible for their own actions
   - Province of Alberta should provide support and help only to those who are vulnerable or cannot care for themselves
   - Province of Alberta should provide social supports to everyone because all human beings have inherent worth and dignity
   - **Province of Alberta should provide support and help that many citizens may need from time to time**

4. Equity and Fairness
   - **Social policy should ensure basic needs, like shelter, for every citizen**
   - Social policy should ensure everyone has equitable or fair opportunities
   - Social policy should protect the most vulnerable

5. Well-Being
   - Alberta's economic wealth is more important than an inclusive and welcoming society
   - **An inclusive and welcoming Albertan society is more important than economic wealth**

6. Roles and Relationships
   - Government primarily leads response to social issues
   - Individuals know best how to deal with their own challenges
   - Local communities are in the best position to address social needs
   - **Citizens, community agencies and government work interdependently/in close collaboration to address social issues**

7. Delivering Programs and Services
   - Social programs and services focus on prevention
   - Social programs and services focus on complex and interlinked challenges
   - Social programs and services are aligned with government priorities
   - **Social programs and services tailored to citizen needs**

For each question, survey participants were presented two scenarios. Each scenario included one statement from each theme. Computer software randomly selected and combined statements selected for each scenario. The respondent was then asked to choose the preferred scenario. Neither scenario would necessarily be ideal, therefore forcing the respondent to make choices about preferred priorities. A randomly generated set of scenarios was presented to each respondent several times. Below is a sample of a randomly generated question as it would have appeared to a respondent on the screen.

Sample Question

If these were the only two options available for Alberta's social policy, which do you prefer? *(Choose only one below. Please assume these two options differ only on the features shown)*

Access	Publicly-funded social services should serve only the poorest Albertans	Publicly-funded social services should be accessible by demonstrated need, regardless of income
Respect and dignity	Province of Alberta should provide support and help that many citizens may need from time to time	Province of Alberta should provide minimum support and help – people are responsible for their own actions
Roles and relationships	Citizens, community agencies and government work interdependently/in close collaboration to address social issues	Individuals know best how to deal with their own challenges
Inclusion	Albertans are responsible for being accepted in their communities	Albertans should be welcomed and accepted in their communities
Delivering programs and services	Social programs and services focus on prevention	Social programs and services focus on complex and interlinked challenges
	○	○

Next

Survey of Albertan priorities and preferences.

Portion of survey completed

0% ▓▓▓ 100%

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The graph below shows the relative importance of each theme on respondents' scenario choices. In other words, regardless of which statement they chose within a theme, certain thematic areas had a greater influence on which scenario was preferred. Access statements impacted 22.2% of responses, followed by Respect and Dignity (17.6%) and Delivering Programs and Services (14.2%)

Themes driving Albertans' responses to survey scenarios
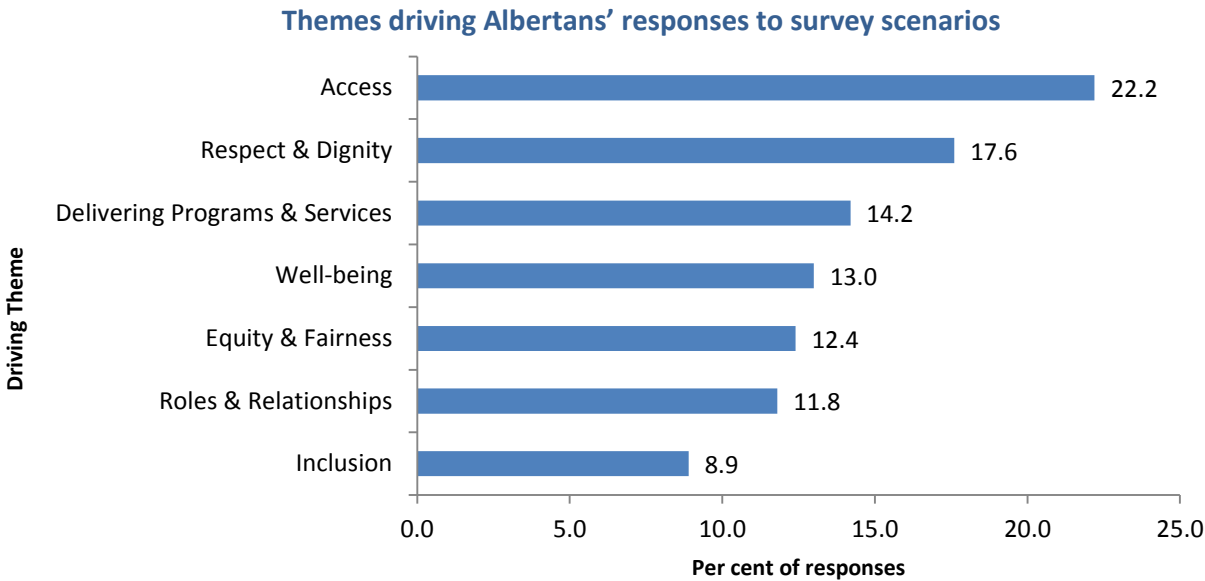
There was variable support for the specific statements within each theme. This is captured in the next graph, which shows the relative preference for the various policy statements. In interpreting this data, each preferred policy option is shown in relative importance to all the others. While everything has a degree of importance, the importance scale here is proportionate; hence under the theme of Access to publicly funded social services, the most preferred option (score of 73) is preferred more than nine times as much as the least preferred option (score of 8). Two policy statements ("access by demonstrated need regardless of income" and "access for all") were almost equally strongly preferred compared to the least preferred statement ("services should serve only the poorest Albertans").

Within the Respect and Dignity theme, two strong policy preferences emerged: "the province should provide support and help… (1) that many citizens may need from time to time" and … (2) "to everyone because all human beings have inherent worth and dignity". Compared to the top choice, support to "only to those who are vulnerable and cannot care for themselves" was preferred half as often, and "provide minimum support and help; people are responsible for their own actions" was preferred ten times less.

For Delivering Programs and Services, the most preferred policy statement was "social programs and tailored to citizen's needs services". This was only 30% to 45% more preferred than the next two options that state social programs and services should: "focus on prevention" and "focus on complex and interlinked challenges". "Social programs and services are aligned with government priorities" was favoured more than four times less than the most preferred statement.

There were two policy statements under the well-being theme. "An inclusive and welcoming Albertan society is more important than economic wealth" was almost three times more preferred than "Alberta's economic wealth is more important than an inclusive and welcoming society". However, this theme ranked fourth in driving intensity for participants' scenario selection.

Under the Equity and Fairness theme, preferences were split between social policy should "ensure basic needs, like shelter, for every citizen" and "ensure everyone has equitable or fair opportunities". This may indicate that participants believe social policy should do both and had difficulty prioritizing one above the other. The top choice was five times more preferred than the lowest ranking choice, "social policy should protect the most vulnerable."

Roles and Relationships statements had a lower driving influence on scenario selection. Still, we can see that two of the four statements emerged as more preferred: "citizens, community agencies and government work interdependently/in close collaboration to address social issues" and "local communities are in the best position to address local needs".

The final theme, Inclusion, had the lowest influence on scenario selection, but we can see a split in respondents' preferences. "Albertans should be able to contribute and participate in the life of their community" and "Albertans should be welcomed and accepted in their communities" were almost equally preferred within this theme. "Albertans are responsible for being accepted in their communities" was preferred approximately three times less.

Policy Option Preferences

Access

Publicly-funded social services should be accessible by demonstrated need, regardless of income	~73
Publicly-funded social services should serve only the poorest Albertans	~8
Publicly-funded social services should be accessible to all Albertans	~66

Respect & Dignity

Province of Alberta should provide support and help that many citizens may need from time to time	~62
Province of Alberta should provide social supports to everyone because all human beings have inherent worth and dignity	~55
Province of Alberta should provide support and help only to those who are vulnerable or cannot care for themselves	~31
Province of Alberta should provide minimum support and help; people are responsible for their own actions	~6

Delivering Programs & Services

Social programs and services tailored to citizen needs	~45
Social programs and services are aligned with government priorities	~10
Social programs and services focus on complex and interlinked challenges	~31
Social programs and services focus on prevention	~34

Well-being

An inclusive and welcoming Albertan society is more important than economic wealth	~39
Alberta's economic wealth is more important than an inclusive and welcoming society	~15

Equity & Fairness

Social policy should protect the most vulnerable	~7
Social policy should ensure everyone has equitable or fair opportunities	~32
Social policy should ensure basic needs, like shelter, for every citizen	~35

Roles & Relationships

Citizens, community agencies and government work interdependently/in close collaboration to address social issues	~36
Local communities are in the best position to address social needs	~26
Individuals know best how to deal with their own challenges	~18
Government primarily leads response to social issues	~14

Inclusion

Albertans should be able to contribute and participate in the life of their community	~24
Albertans are responsible for being accepted in their communities	~9
Albertans should be welcomed and accepted in their communities	~23

Importance (weight)

Comparison to Non-Random Sample Results

The same survey was also available on the social policy framework engagement website, socialpolicy.alberta.ca. Survey respondents that participated through a link on the site are called the non-random or self-selecting sample. The graph below shows the relative importance of each outcome statement (value priority) as ranked by respondents.

Value Priorities (Outcome Statements) – Non-Random Sample
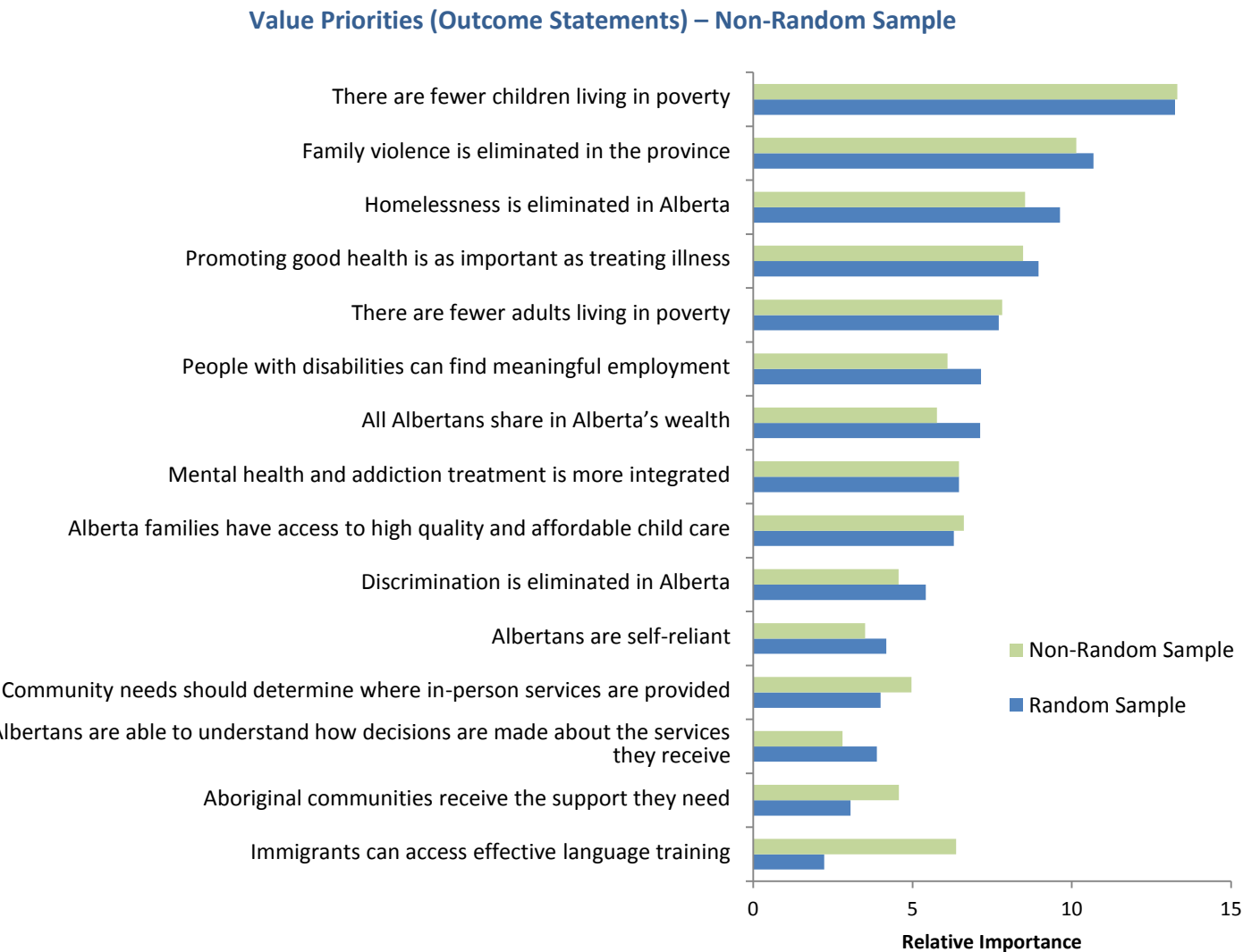
There was strong agreement between the random and non-random sample groups on the relative importance of potential outcomes. Respondents in both samples ranked the same four outcomes, in the same order, as the highest priorities for the Social Policy Framework. These outcomes are, in order:
1. There are fewer children living in poverty
2. Family violence is eliminated in the province
3. Homelessness is eliminated in Alberta
4. Promoting good health is as important as treating illness

The following graph compares the relative importance of each theme on respondent preferences between the random and non-random sample groups. The random sample group rated Access as most important, followed by Respect and Dignity, then Delivering Programs and Services. The non-random sample group selected Respect and Dignity as the most important driving themes, closely followed by Access, then Roles and Relationships.

Comparison of Driving Themes between Random and Non-Random Samples
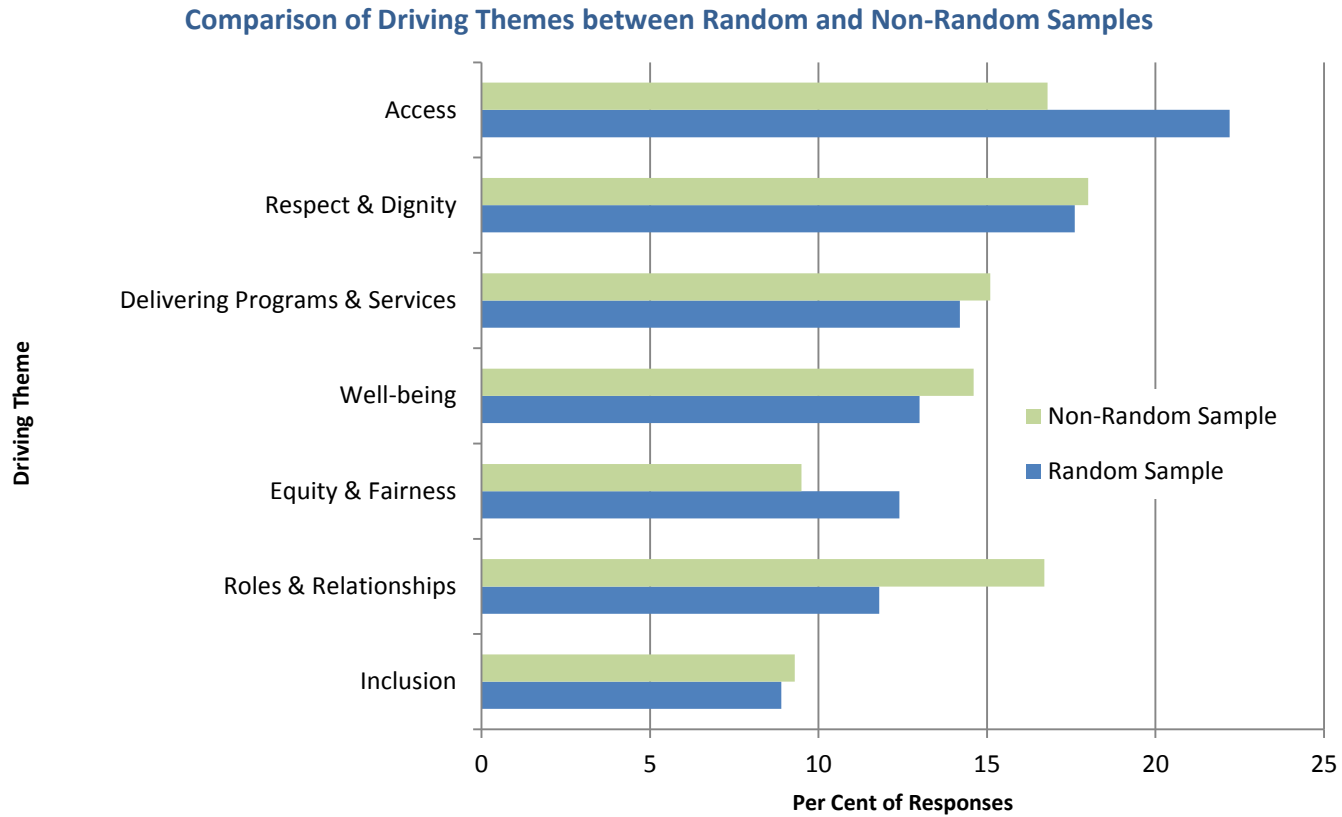
The next graph shows the relative preference for the various policy statements within each theme. For some themes, the top priority or degree of relative importance varies between the random and non-random groups. However, the overall pattern of preferences is similar between both groups.

Policy Option Preferences – Non-Random Sample

Access

Publicly-funded social services should be accessible by demonstrated need, regardless of income

Publicly-funded social services should serve only the poorest Albertans

Publicly-funded social services should be accessible to all Albertans

Respect & Dignity

Province of Alberta should provide support and help that many citizens may need from time to time

Province of Alberta should provide social supports to everyone because all human beings have inherent worth and dignity

Province of Alberta should provide support and help only to those who are vulnerable or cannot care for themselves

Province of Alberta should provide minimum support and help; people are responsible for their own actions

Delivering Programs & Services

Social programs and services tailored to citizen needs

Social programs and services are aligned with government priorities

Social programs and services focus on complex and interlinked challenges

Social programs and services focus on prevention

Well-being

An inclusive and welcoming Albertan society is more important than economic wealth

Alberta's economic wealth is more important than an inclusive and welcoming society

Equity & Fairness

Social policy should protect the most vulnerable

Social policy should ensure everyone has equitable or fair opportunities

Social policy should ensure basic needs, like shelter, for every citizen

Roles & Relationships

Citizens, community agencies and government work interdependently/in close collaboration to address social issues

Local communities are in the best position to address social needs

Individuals know best how to deal with their own challenges

Government primarily leads response to social issues

Inclusion

Albertans should be able to contribute and participate in the life of their community

Albertans are responsible for being accepted in their communities

Albertans should be welcomed and accepted in their communities

Legend:
- Non-Random Sample
- Random Sample

X-axis: Importance (weight) — 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100