



**albertapatient**s  
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# A Serious Post-COVID Care Deficit Looming

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## >> A Serious Post-COVID Care Deficit Looming in Alberta

(EDMONTON) According to a recent survey of albertapathients, there is a serious post-COVID **care deficit** growing in Alberta's health care system, brought about by pandemic related health impacts combined with major disruptions in care delivery over the past sixteen months. A majority of patients in Alberta are reporting their own mental and physical health has suffered over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, while at the same time, pandemic response has created notable disruptions in on-going care which are increasingly impacting patient health.

### Albertans' Health During COVID-19

#### *Mental Health*

COVID-19's impact on the mental health of Albertans is troubling. Almost two-thirds (64%) of patients report a decline in their own mental health since the start of the pandemic, with nearly one-quarter (23%) saying their mental health is "Much Worse" now. This trend is something patients have been struggling with for some months, as the proportion reporting a decline has remained consistent with November 2020 findings.

- Detrimental mental health impacts are slightly more common among women than men, those under the age of 55 and those with chronic medical conditions

In reporting the reasons for deteriorating mental health, patients cite both causes and symptoms:

- Almost one-half (47%) say they are having difficulties coping with social isolation, while others note concerns about finances, the security/workload of their jobs and concern for the health and safety of their loved ones
- In terms of how this manifests itself, many say they are experiencing depression (17%), anxiety (16%), stress and worry (11%), along with less common outcomes like anger/frustration/irritability and insomnia/fatigue

## >> A Serious Post-COVID Care Deficit Looming in Alberta (continued)

### Albertans' Health During COVID-19

#### *Physical Health*

Over one-half (52%) of patients report that their physical health has declined since the start of the pandemic (15% say “Much Worse” now). This represents an eight-percentage point increase in those feeling negative physical consequences from COVID response since November 2020.

- Perceived deterioration in physical health tends to be more prominent in those under the age of 54 years, and those with a chronic medical condition

Meanwhile, one-in-ten (11%) feel their physical health has improved during the pandemic.

## >> A Serious Post-COVID Care Deficit Looming in Alberta (continued)

### COVID Disruption in Patient Care: “The Care Deficit”

Fully 54% of patients report that the pandemic has created disruptions in their regular health care. In this, one-third (34%) say they have avoided or delayed visits to their family physician, another 20% have put off specialist visits, and 15% have been unable to access lab and diagnostic services in a timely fashion. Roughly one-in-ten patients note their specialist or family physician have been unable to provide the care they needed due to COVID, along with patients who have had their non-urgent surgical or outpatient medical procedures delayed or cancelled.

### “The Care Deficit” & Health Consequences

The impact of the COVID “Care Deficit” on patient health is both significant and growing in Alberta. Almost one-half (46%) of those whose care has been disrupted by COVID (~25% of the entire patient population) say their personal health has been impacted due to the lack of continuity of care (12% saying “A great deal”), a notable nine-percentage point increase since November 2020. Indeed, only 7% of patients who have experienced a disruption in their care over the past year report it has had no impact on their health.

- The Care Deficit tends to impact the health of patients under the age of 65 far more than their older cohorts
- Negative health consequences from the Care Deficit are more common among the least affluent, and patients dealing with chronic conditions (particularly those with the condition themselves, but also those with family members who have them)

## >> **A Serious Post-COVID Care Deficit Looming in Alberta** (continued) - **COMMENTARY**

Commenting on these results from the albertapatient survey, AMA President, Dr. Paul Boucher notes:

“COVID-19 is insidious, and its impacts will be enduring. It has not only directly impacted the lives and livelihoods of Albertans, it is creating the conditions for a serious health care system challenge in its wake. Albertans are dealing with the very real mental and physical consequences of battling the virus, dealing with the adverse effects of lockdowns, and experiencing the consequences of having their regular care seriously disrupted.

This growing Care Deficit will have severe consequences for patients if we don't start preparing for and tackling it now. This is particularly true for patients with chronic conditions. Diabetes and hypertension, as an example, are best managed with appropriate comprehensive care. Disruptions in the continuity of care can lead to complications and far more serious health concerns.

We've seen cancer diagnoses drop 20–30% this year. This is not because cancer rates are lower in the population, but because more cancers have gone undetected. COVID has affected our ability to screen patients and catch the disease at an early stage. Early diagnosis and treatment with cancer is vital, and disruptions in regular care will have consequences for patients and the health care system overall.

The message to government decision-makers, practitioners and patients alike is we need to start addressing this now, and not be swamped by it in the coming months and years. The issues here need to be addressed with broad thinking and action and will continue to challenge us.

Physicians and government decision-makers need to be mindful that this situation is now upon us – the Care Deficit is here now, and it's growing. The Alberta government has so far taken steps to reduce surgical backlogs and wait lists but there remains a serious deficit of care in many areas that needs to be appropriately resourced, prioritized, and addressed if we are going to truly recover from the pandemic.”

## >> A Serious Post-COVID Care Deficit Looming in Alberta (continued) – MEDIA CONTACTS

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Research findings should be directly attributed to [albertapatients.ca](http://albertapatients.ca). Detailed survey methodology, and additional information about the albertapatients initiative can be found on the final page of this presentation deck.



# >> COVID Impacts on Physical and Mental Health

"Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, how would you rate your physical/mental health today?"

## Physical Health

■ Much better ■ Somewhat better ■ About the same / unsure ■ Somewhat worse ■ Much worse



## Mental Health

■ Much better ■ Somewhat better ■ About the same / unsure ■ Somewhat worse ■ Much worse



Base: All respondents

	Base	May'21 (n=4,744)	Nov'20 (n=4,349)	Jun'20 (n=3,618)
Better		11%	12%	12%
Same/ unsure		<b>37%</b>	44%	55%
Worse		<b>52%</b>	44%	33%

	Base	May'21 (n=4,744)	Nov'20 (n=4,349)	Jun'20 (n=3,618)
Better		7%	6%	9%
Same/ unsure		29%	<b>30%</b>	38%
Worse		<b>64%</b>	<b>64%</b>	53%

□ Significantly higher than the previous wave  
○ Significantly lower than the previous wave

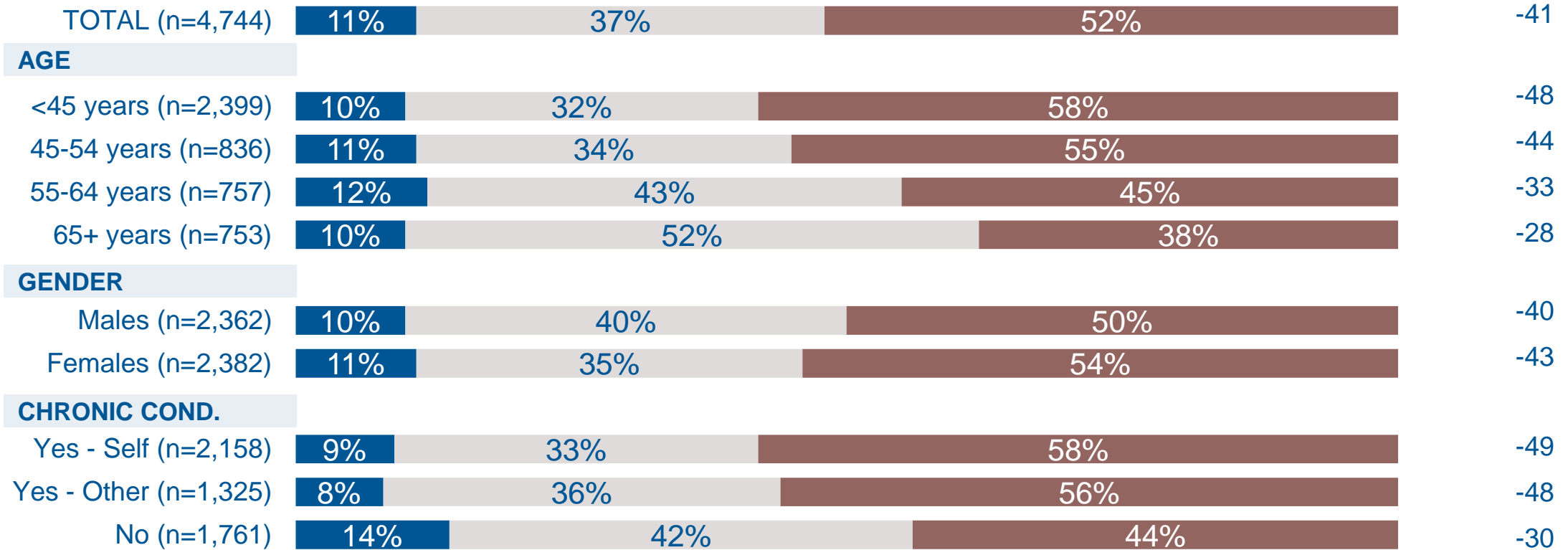
# >> COVID Impacts on Physical Health by key demographics

"Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, how would you rate your physical health today?"

## Physical Health

■ Better ■ Same/unsure ■ Worse

**NET BETTER**



Base: All respondents | NET Better = Better minus worse



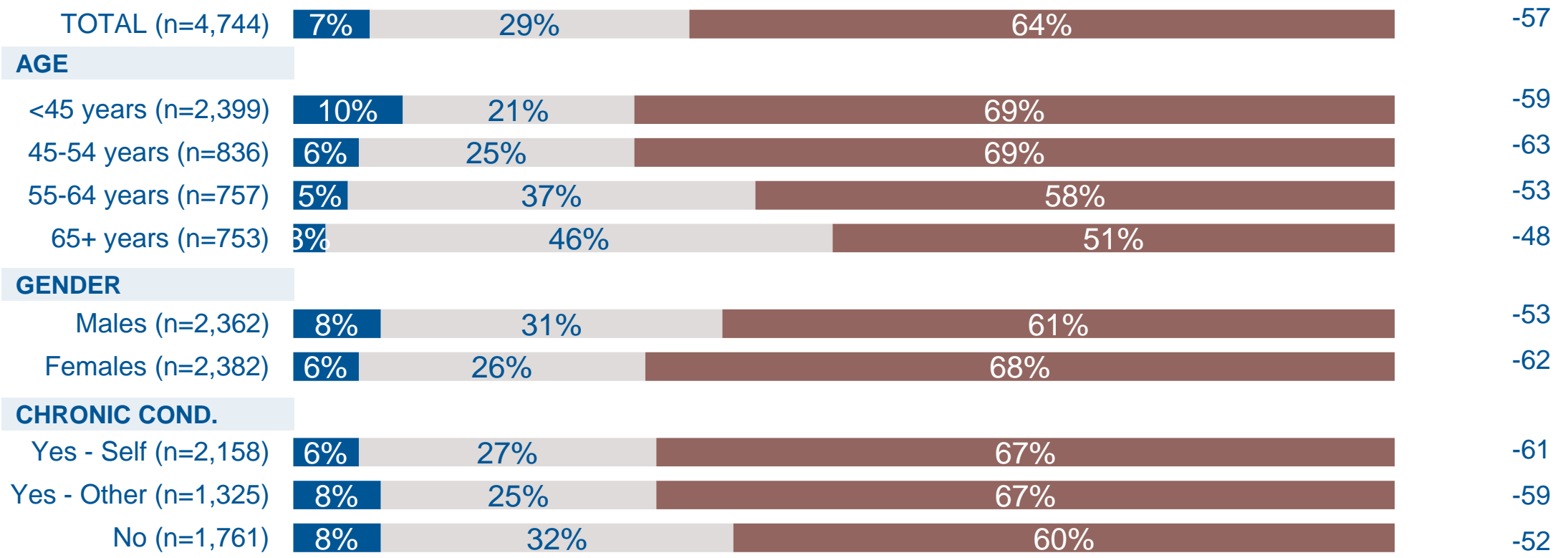
# >> COVID Impacts on Mental Health by key demographics

"Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, how would you rate your mental health today?"

## Mental Health

■ Better ■ Same/unsure ■ Worse

**NET BETTER**



Base: All respondents | NET Better = Better minus worse

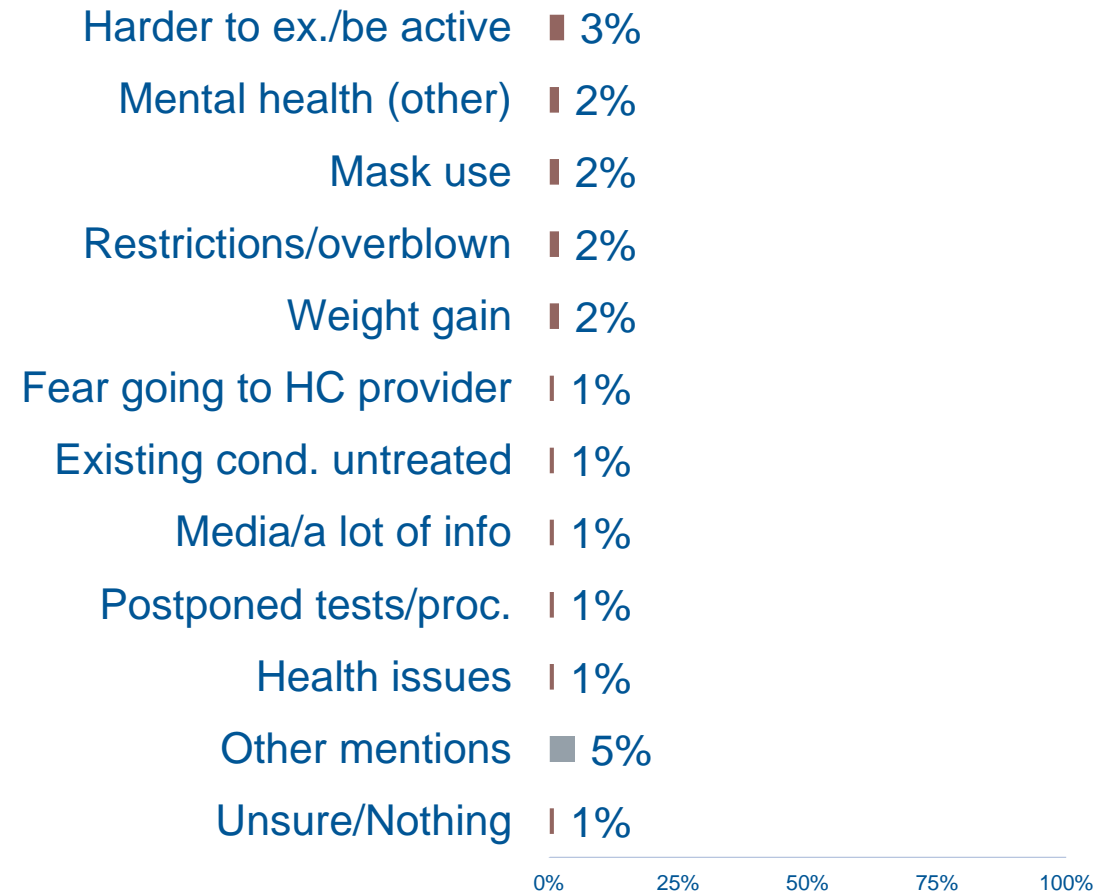
# >> Reasons for Worsened Mental Health

64% say their mental health is worse today

% of mentions



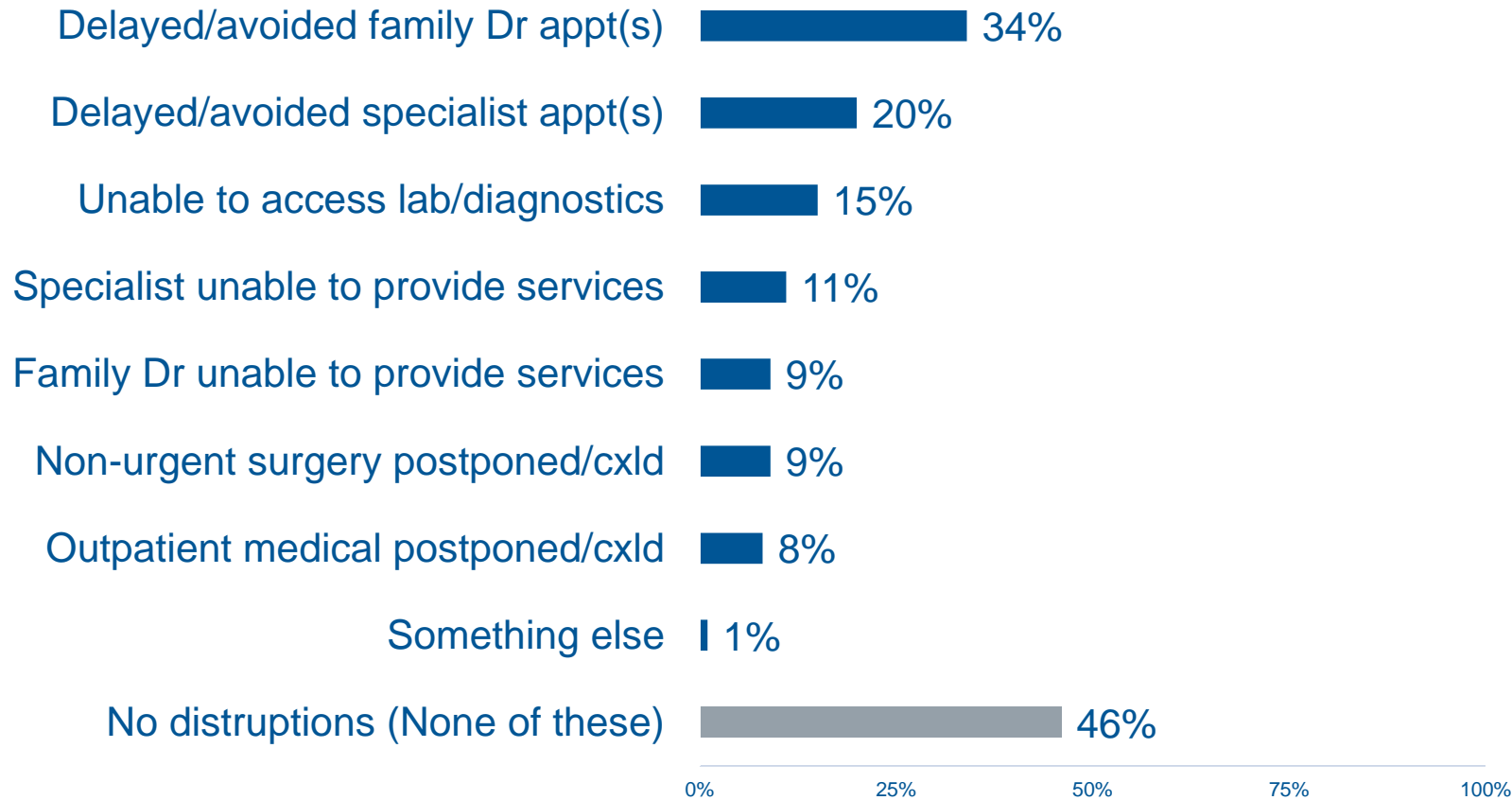
% of mentions, continued



Base: Those who voluntarily commented that their mental health if worse today. Open-ended verbatim comments were coded into common themes

# >> COVID-19 Disruptions on Regular Health Care Needs

"Have you personally had your regular health care needs disrupted in any way by COVID-19? Here are some examples, please select any that apply to you personally."



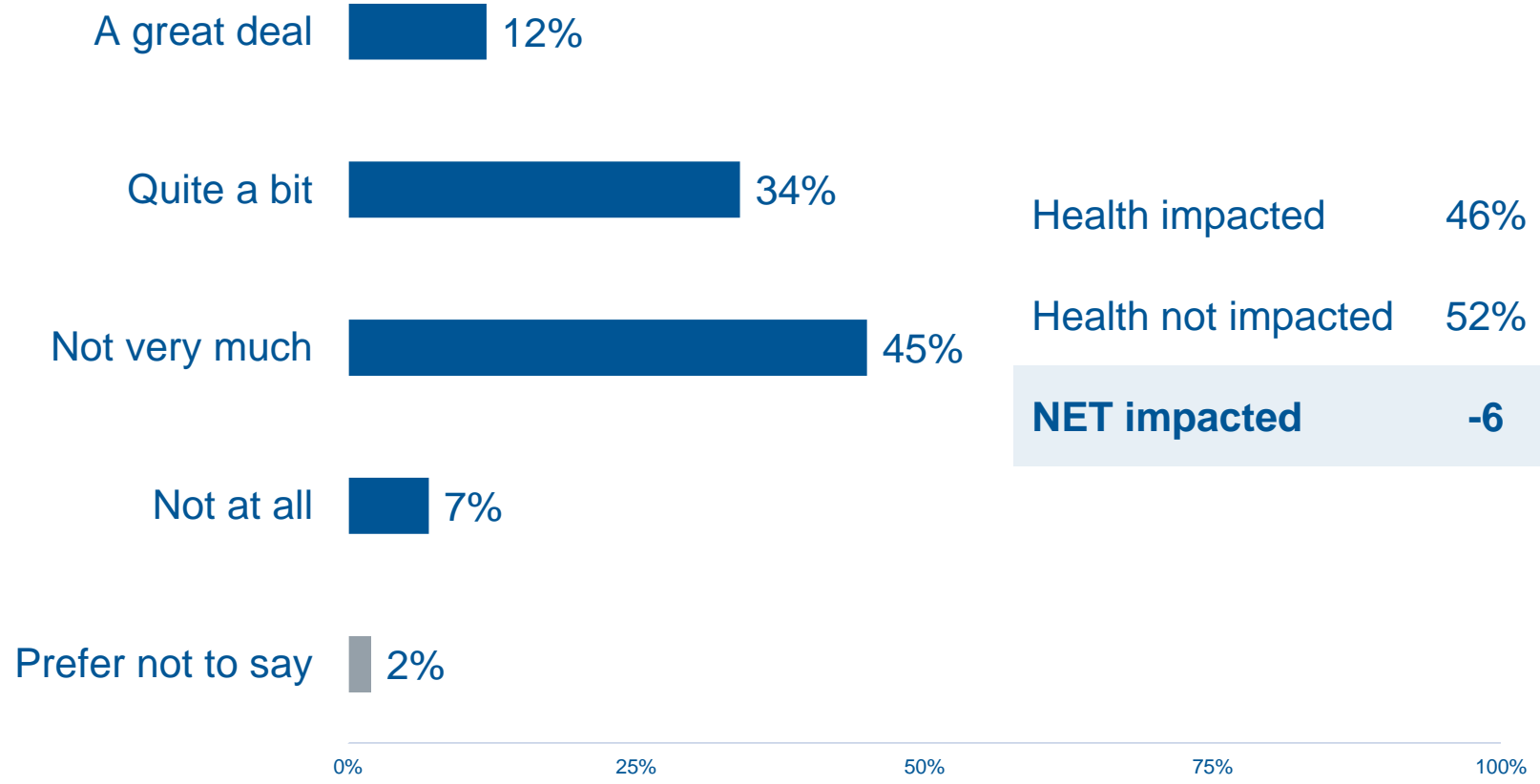
## Summary

NET disrupted	54%
1 disruption	25%
2 disruptions	13%
3+ disruptions	15%
No disruptions	46%

Base: All respondents | Multiple Mentions

# >> Impact of COVID Health Care Disruptions on Personal Health

"And how, if at all, has the disruption in your health care access during the COVID situation impacted your health?"



Health impacted 46%

Health not impacted 52%

**NET impacted -6**

	May'21 Base (n=4,744)	Nov'20 (n=4,349)	Jun'20 (n=3,618)
Impacted	<b>46%</b>	37%	31%
Not impacted	<b>52%</b>	60%	68%
Prefer not to say	2%	3%	1%

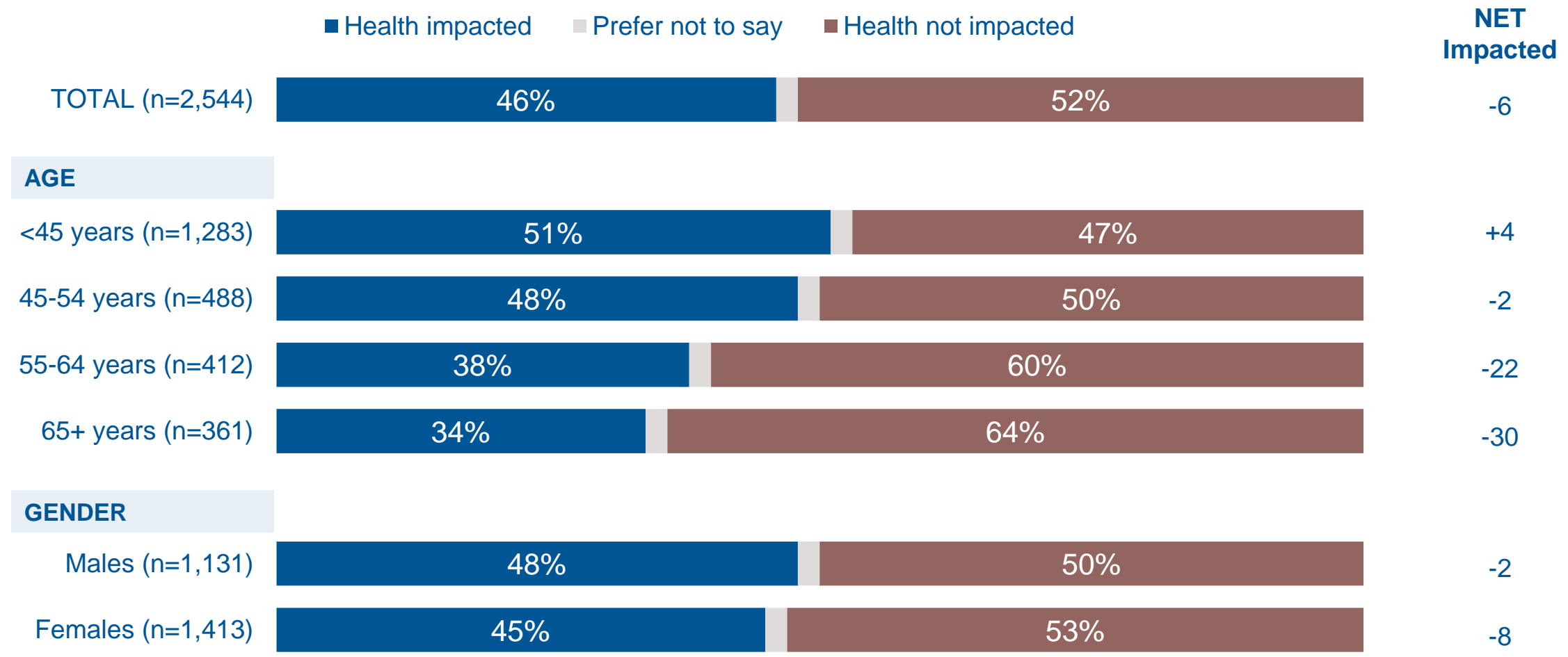
□ Significantly higher than the previous wave

○ Significantly lower than the previous wave

# >> Impact of COVID Health Care Disruptions on Personal Health

“And how, if at all, has the disruption in your health care access during the COVID situation impacted your health?”

■ Health impacted    ■ Prefer not to say    ■ Health not impacted

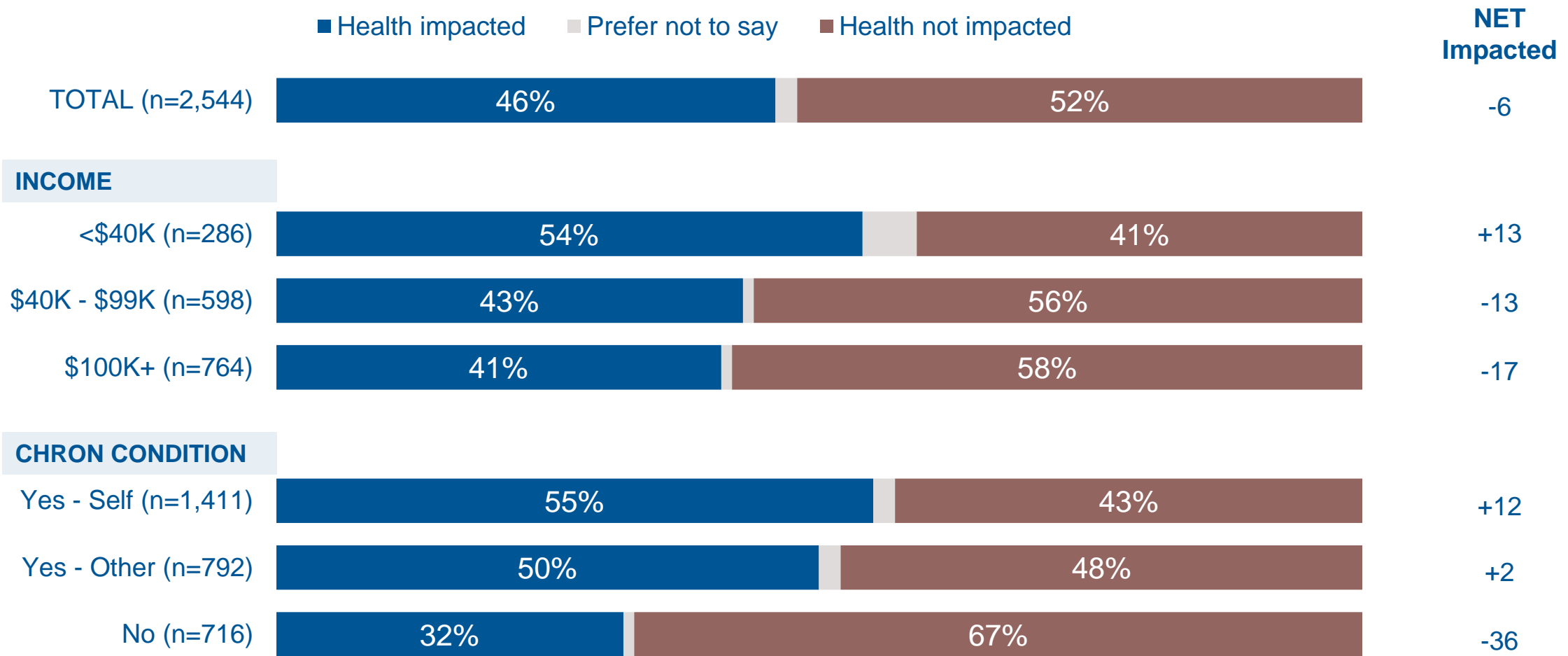


Base: Healthcare needs disrupted | NET Impacted = Impacted minus not impacted

# >> Impact of COVID Health Care Disruptions on Personal Health

“And how, if at all, has the disruption in your health care access during the COVID situation impacted your health?”

■ Health impacted   ■ Prefer not to say   ■ Health not impacted



Base: Healthcare needs disrupted | NET Impacted = Impacted minus not impacted

## >> Study information

### Research methodology

- Online survey fielded via the albertapatient online research panel
  - Field dates: May 19 - 27, 2021
  - Sample size: n=4,744
- Results reflect a representative sample of patients in Alberta
- Data was weighted to reflect gender, age and region of Albertans who have used the health care system within the past year
- A random stratified sample of albertapatient.ca panelists were invited to complete the survey. For interpretation purposes, a probability sample of this size would yield a margin of error of +/- 1.4 percentage points 19 times out of 20 at a 95% confidence interval
  - Accuracy of sub-samples of the data decline based on sample size

This research was conducted with and for the albertapatient.ca online community, operated by the Alberta Medical Association and research partner ThinkHQ Public Affairs Inc.

To learn more about albertapatient or to register as a member, please visit our website at [www.albertapatient.ca](http://www.albertapatient.ca).

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