

## BACKGROUND

Despite an increasing international consensus on the benefits of Advance Care Planning (ACP), low levels of public engagement remain a concern.

Our study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Did participation in ACP activities change over time in Alberta?
2. Did intra-provincial variation in ACP policy help to explain differences in engagement?

## METHODS

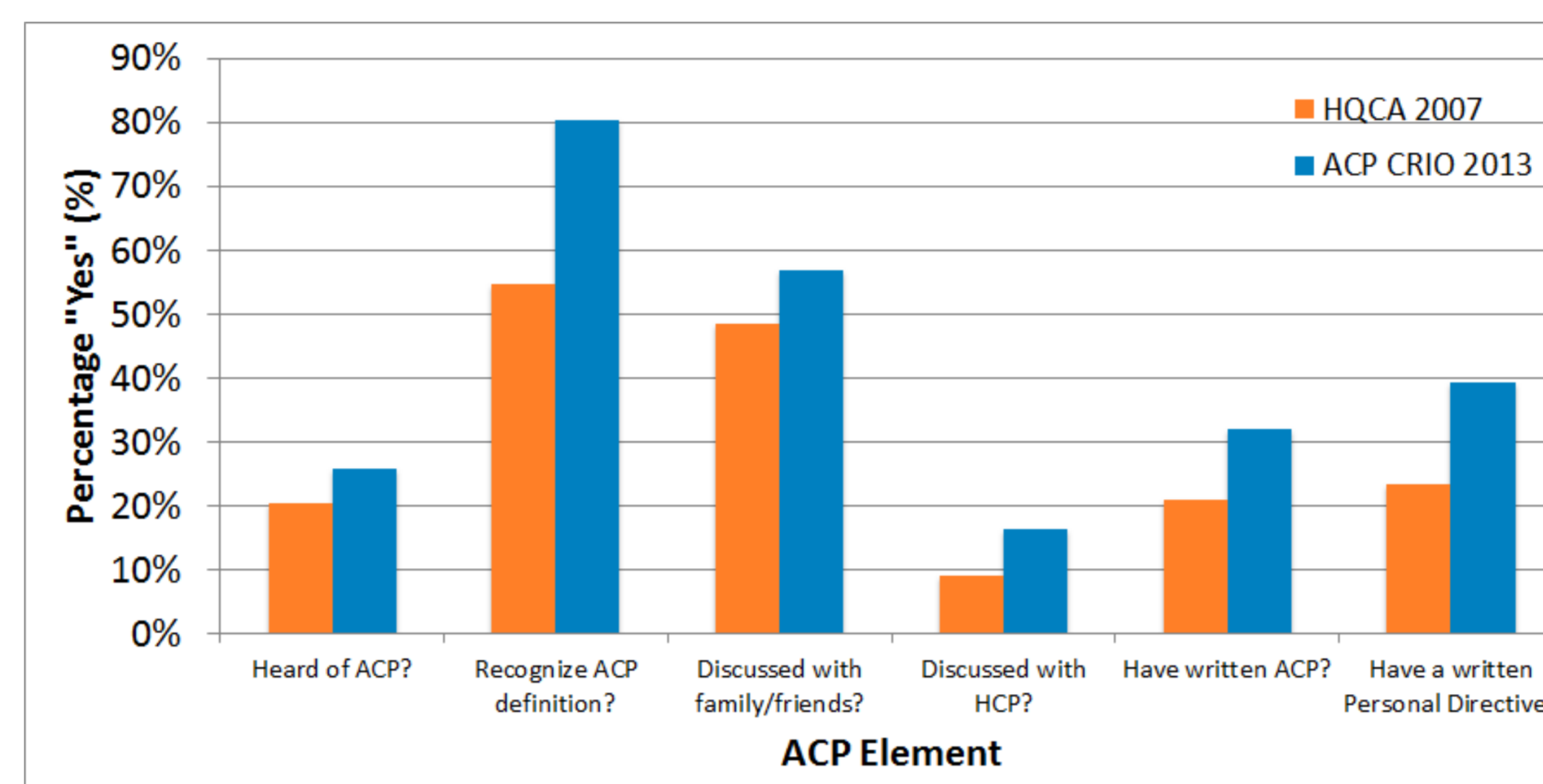
We compared the raw results from two telephone-based, public polls administered in Alberta by the Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) in 2007 and the Advance Care Planning Collaborative Research and Innovation Opportunities Program (ACP CRIO) in 2013.

**Table: Wording of the Survey Questions Asked for 2007 and 2013 Polls (Minor changes were made in 2013)**

Have you ever heard of advance care planning?
Advance care plans are verbal or written instructions that make your wishes known about the kind of health care you want, or do not want, if you become very ill or injured and are unable to speak for yourself. These are sometimes also called "living wills." Based on this definition have you heard of advance care planning?
Have you had a discussion with family or a close friend about what health care treatment you want, or do not want, if you become very ill or injured and you cannot speak for yourself?
Have you ever had a discussion with a health care professional (e.g. Doctor, nurse, social worker, or other healthcare team member) about what health care treatment you want or do not want if you become very ill or injured and you cannot speak for yourself?
Do you have an Advance Care Plan written down in any form or format?
Now we are going to ask you a question about Personal Directives. Personal Directives are the legal documents in Alberta which allow you to name a decision maker and provide written instructions to guide your medical care, if due to illness or injury, you no longer have the capacity to make such decisions. Do you have a written Personal Directive?

## RESULTS

**Figure: The Percentage of "yes" answers to each ACP element for the 2007 and 2013 polls (unadjusted data)**



We observed increased participation in ACP between 2007 and 2013 for each element, absolute rate difference (and 95% CI) :

- Heard of ACP? 5.5%, (95% CI 1.7-9.3%)
- Recognize ACP definition? 25.6% (95% CI 21.6-29.4%)
- Discussed with Family? 8.5% (95% CI 4.2-12.8)
- Discussed with HCP? 8.8% (95% CI 5.8-11.8)
- Have written ACP? 11.0% (95% CI 7.2-14.9)
- Have a written Personal Directive? 16.0% (95% CI 7.2-14.9)

Logistic regression analysis, unadjusted and adjusted for age, education and self-rated health status found significant increases in ACP engagement in each element (except for "Heard of ACP?" which was not significantly increased after adjustment)

No difference was seen in public engagement in 2013 between Calgary (which had a regional policy for Advance Care Planning and Goals of Care Designations since 2008) and the rest of Alberta

## INTERPRETATION

- ACP engagement is increasing over time, although the overall frequency remains low.
- Public polls can be used to examine socio-cultural changes in engaging in ACP over time.
- Our study does not allow for an exploration of *why* more people are engaging in ACP but we can hypothesize several reasons:
  - An ageing demographic, with increased exposure to making medical decisions for family
  - Media coverage of high profile legal cases
  - National awareness campaigns, e.g. Speak Up
  - Personal Directives Act (Alberta 2008)
- Health system policies on ACP may not be able to catalyze behavioural change in the absence of investment in a widespread, public awareness campaign about ACP.
- The results indicate to health care administrators, public policy makers and HCP where attention is needed (e.g. encouraging ACP discussions with health care providers) to develop and evaluate interventions that will further enhance engagement in lower frequency elements of ACP.

## CONTACT

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