

There is a Whole Lot of Searching Goin' On: Health Information Seeking Practices of Canadians

Presentation for the Canadian Communication Association

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ACTION for Health

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Applied Communication Technology: Information . Organizations . Networks

June 3, 2005 – Canadian Communication Association

There is a Whole Lot of Searching Goin' On: Health Information Seeking Practices of Canadians

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Web study results presented on behalf of the Quality Improvement of Literacy, Telecare and Self Help (*QUILTS*) Collaboration and the BC Ministry of Health



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Overview

- ❑ Review health information-seeking patterns of Canadians
- ❑ Review findings of BC Ministry of Health self-care web site survey
- ❑ Explore how might information providers communicate more effectively with health care consumers
- ❑ Policy implications to consider when designing web sites

Searchin' Statistics...

- ❑ BC has the highest level of Internet usage in the Country
 - ❑ 71% of BC households were regular users (2003)
 - Up 23% from 1999
- ❑ Rates similar in
 - Alberta (69%)
 - Ontario (68%)
- ❑ Lowest rates were found in
 - New Brunswick (53%)
 - Quebec (66%)

Still Broad “Digital Divide”

- ❑ Among households earning \$70+
 - Almost all (90%) used the Internet
- ❑ In households earning less than \$23,000
 - Only about a third (35% used the Internet)
- ❑ This rich/poor gap has increased from 1999 to 2003
- ❑ No difference in health-seeking patterns by income once a person has online access

“Cyberchondriacs” ...what are they looking for?

Top three medical conditions researched on-line are:

Depression

Arthritis

Diabetes

Next come...allergies, migraine headaches & heart conditions

Six in ten say that they feel comfortable using drugs prescribed by a physician

- ❑ 29% percent say they would stop taking the drug if they found negative information online

Canadians are divided on the question of whether drug advertising is a “good source of information”

- ❑ Quasi-sites add to this confusion...look like a health information site, but actually sponsored by drug company

NFOCF group, 2002

Reasons for Accessing Internet - All Households

Email = 52%

General browsing = 49%

Accessing medical/health info = 36%

Travel information/arrangement = 34%

Government information = 32%

View news = 30%

Electronic banking = 30%

Find sports-related info = 25%

Purchasing goods/services = 19%

(Stats Can, 2004
report)

The BC HealthGuide Program

BC HealthGuide Handbook

400 page handbook distributed free of charge to BC households (Spring 2001)

French language version (2004)

First Nation Handbook (2003)

BC HealthGuide HealthFiles

170 fact sheets with information on a wide range of health & safety issues

BC NurseLine (24/7 access to nurses)

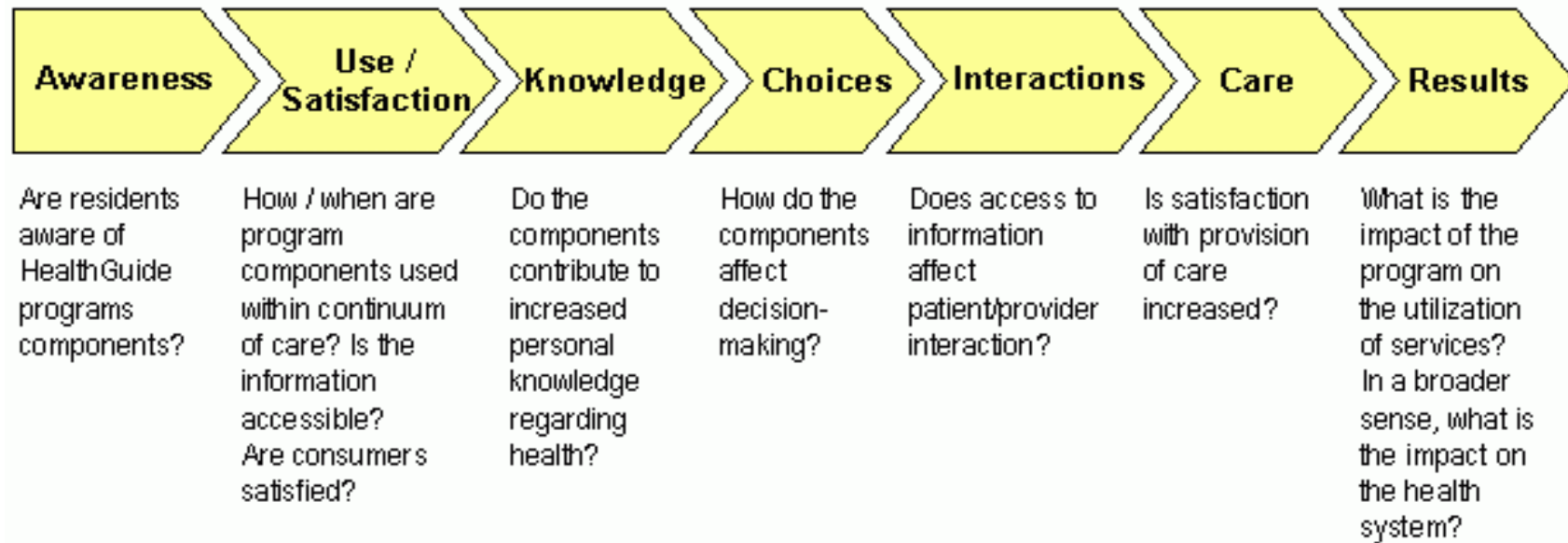
BC is one of 8 CDN jurisdictions providing services

BC HealthGuide Online (www.bchealthguide.org)

3,000 common health concerns, including tests, procedures and other resources



Health Information's Role in Primary Care Experience

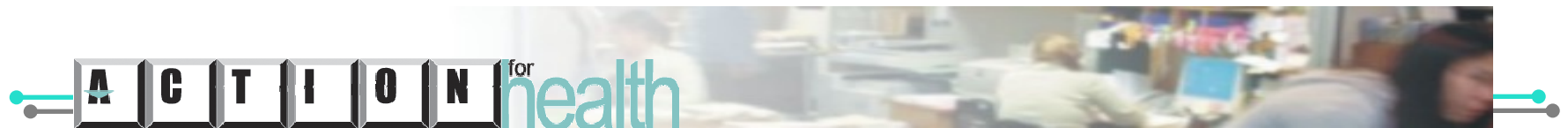


Source: QUILTS evaluation framework report

BC HealthGuide Program Goals

Program goals include:

- Improve consumer access to timely and accurate health information and advice
- Expand consumer knowledge in managing personal health risks and conditions
- Alleviate pressure on emergency and physician services due to inappropriate use
- Reduce costs due to inappropriate use of health care system



BC HealthGuide Research Strategy (Web Site)

□ 4-Prong Research Strategy

■ Focus groups

- Involved both English speakers/multi-lingual speakers
- Who is using/not using?
- Navigation patterns
- Included physicians (both FP and ER)

■ Population-based telephone survey

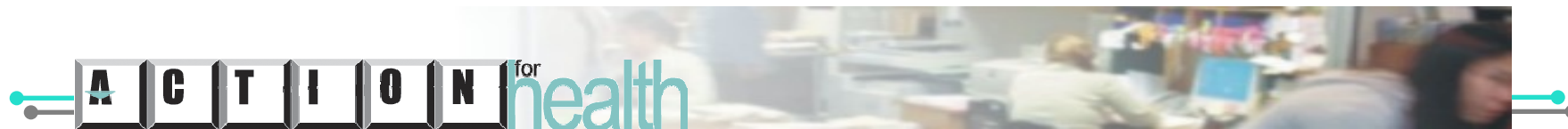
- Gauge awareness

■ Pop-up web survey

- Develop profile of users

■ Key informant interviews of health care professionals

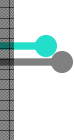
- Are they aware of web site?
- How do they use it, compared to their use of the printed materials?



BC HealthGuide OnLine (entry page)



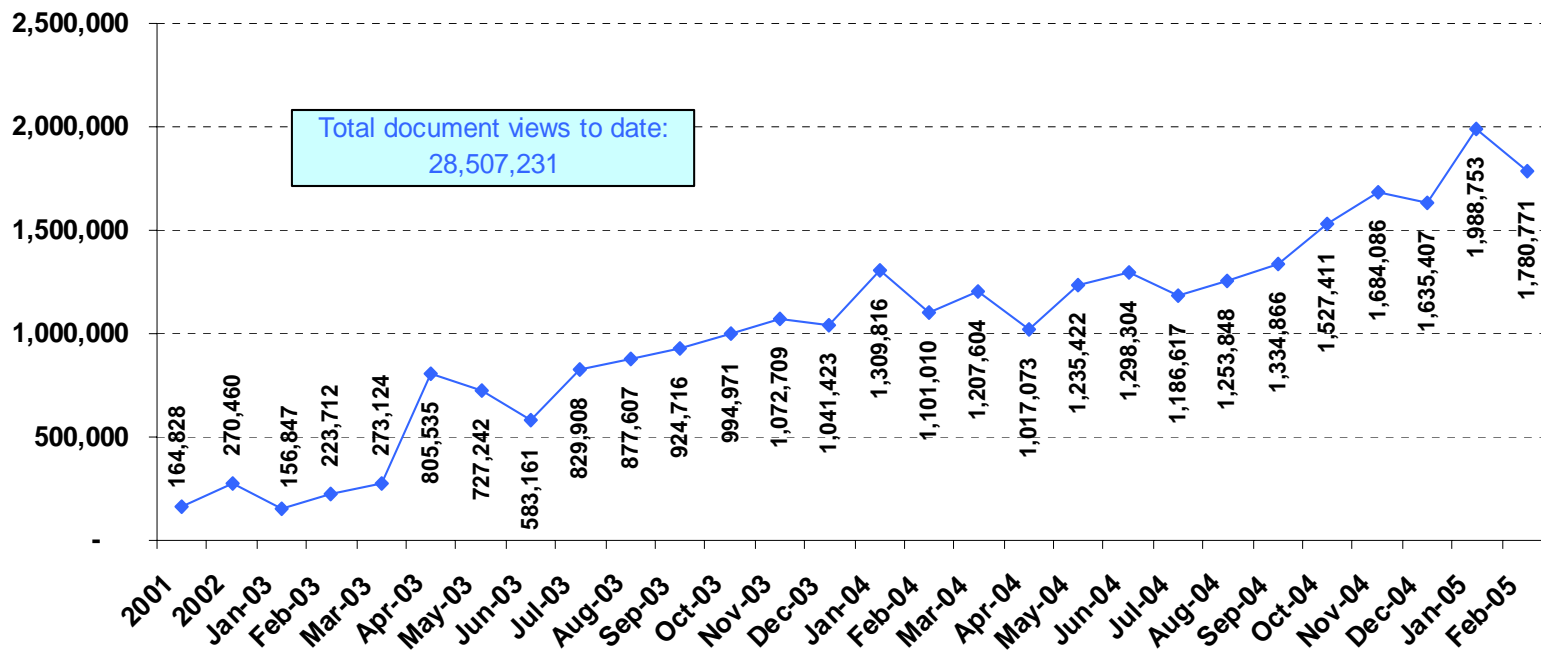
● Navigating BC HealthGuide OnLine



Navigation on BC HealthGuide Online



BC HealthGuide Online

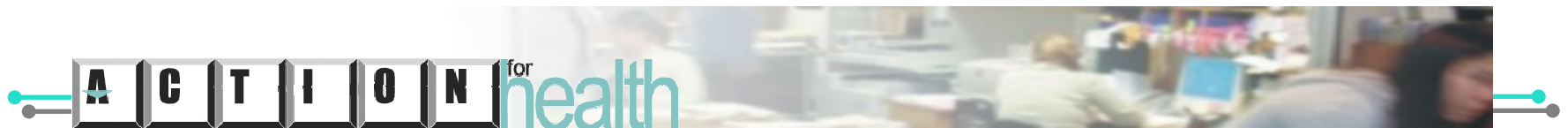


Source: BC Ministry of Health

Focus Group Results

10 consumer groups held throughout the province

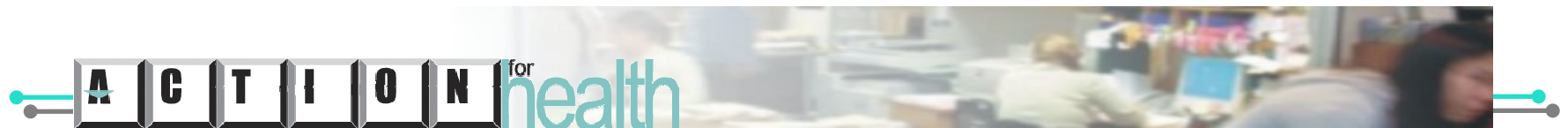
- Included both users of the program & non-users
- Navigation patterns
 - Majority use search engine (e.g., Google, MSN, Excite)
 - Web sites accessed included:
 - Ask Jeeves, Medline, Mayo Clinic, WebMD
 - Low awareness for BC HealthGuide, and government-sponsored web sites in general (about 1 in 10 were aware of the web site)
- Evaluation of information found
 - Using multiples sites
 - Using credible sites



Use of Information During Physician's Visit

Does information affect an office visit?

- ❑ Physicians are “not happy”
 - Esp. “older physicians”
- ❑ Questions competency
 - Expected that the physician already knows the info
- ❑ Disincentive for physicians to support programs like the BC HealthGuide
 - Less business
- ❑ Consumer strategy – “hide” the written information, but bring up what they know in the conversation

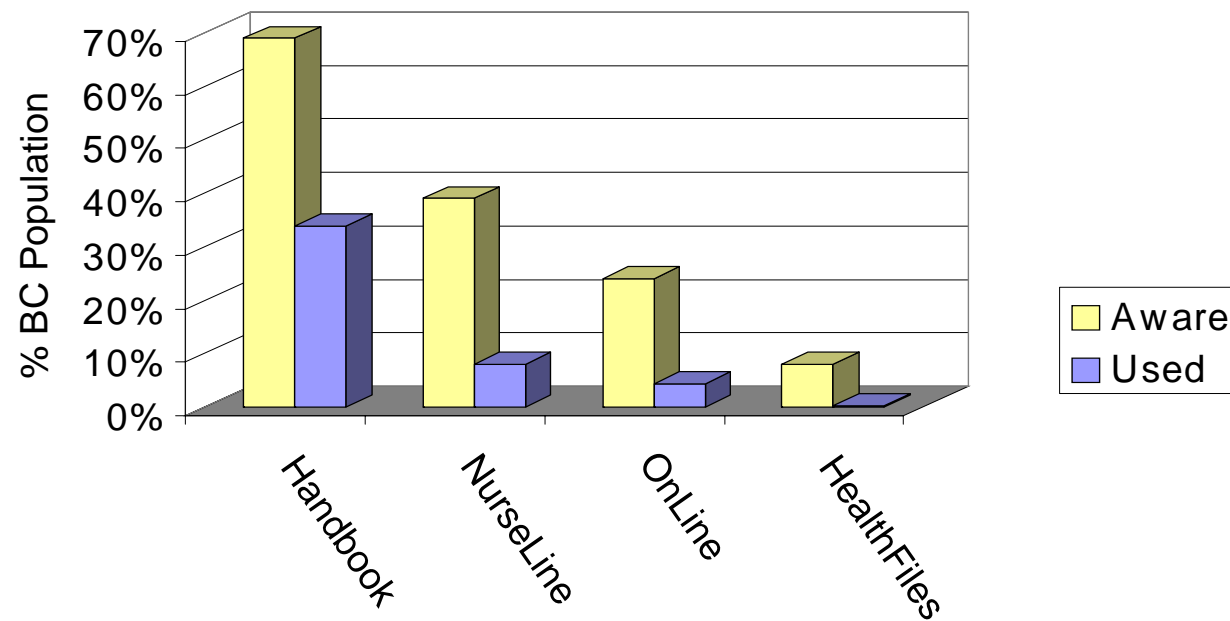


Population Based Telephone Survey Results

Findings related to the BC HealthGuide Online:

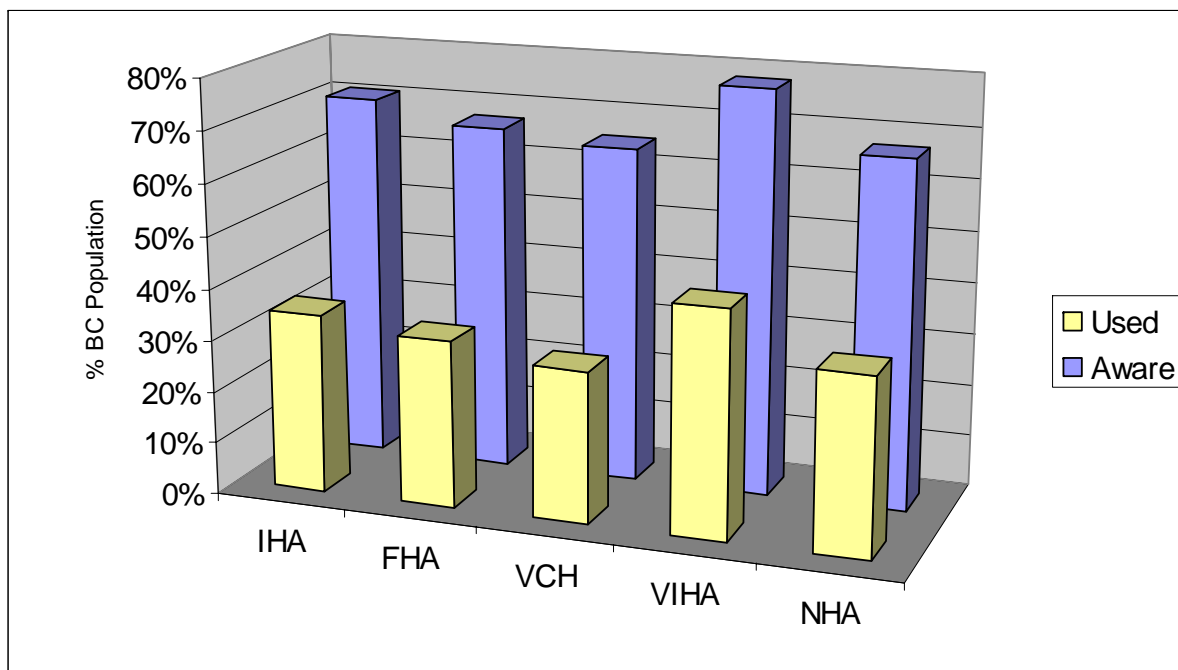
- ❑ Used by 4% of British Columbians in the last year
- ❑ Utilization highest among
 - Men
 - Younger persons (18-34)
 - Higher-income households (over \$30,000)

BC HealthGuide Program Component Awareness & Utilization



Source: QUILTS Evaluation Team, telephone survey, Jan 04

Geographic Distribution of Awareness/Usage of Web Site

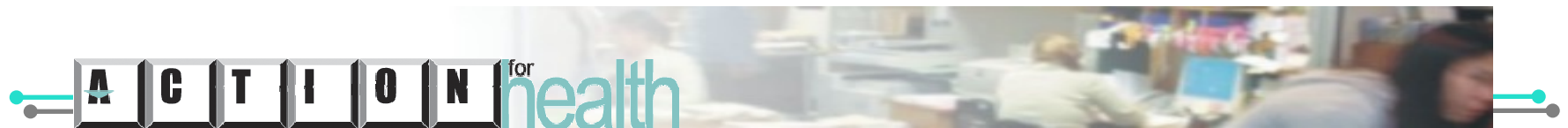


Source: QUILTS Evaluation Team, telephone survey

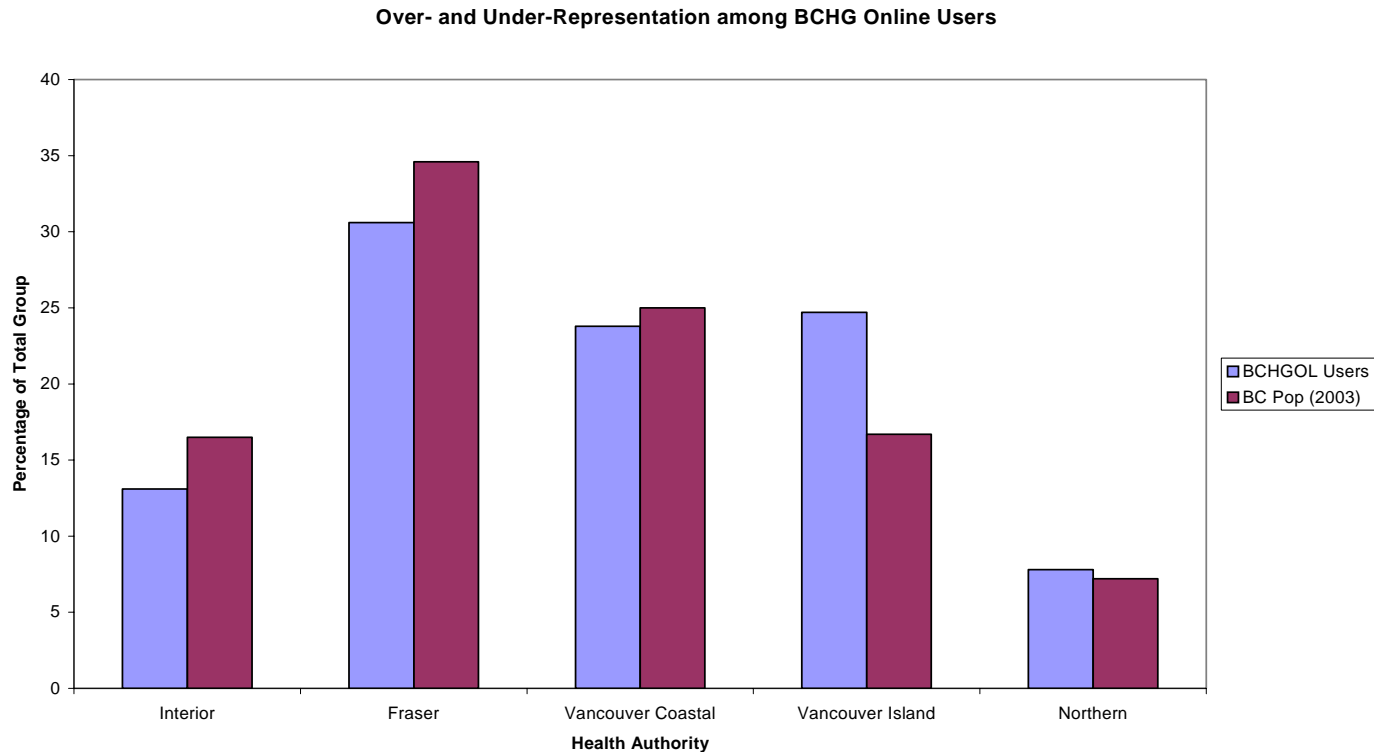
BC HealthGuide Web Survey

- Pop-up survey ran on web site from mid September 2004 through February 1, 2005
 - 5,800 individuals were presented with survey
 - Completed surveys = 2,927 (50% response rate)
 - Convenience-based sampling as users of the site self-selected into our survey

- User Profile
 - 76% of respondents were female
 - Most users (93.5%) were between 20 to 65 years old
 - Over 65+, more evenly divided by sex



With Respect to BC Population



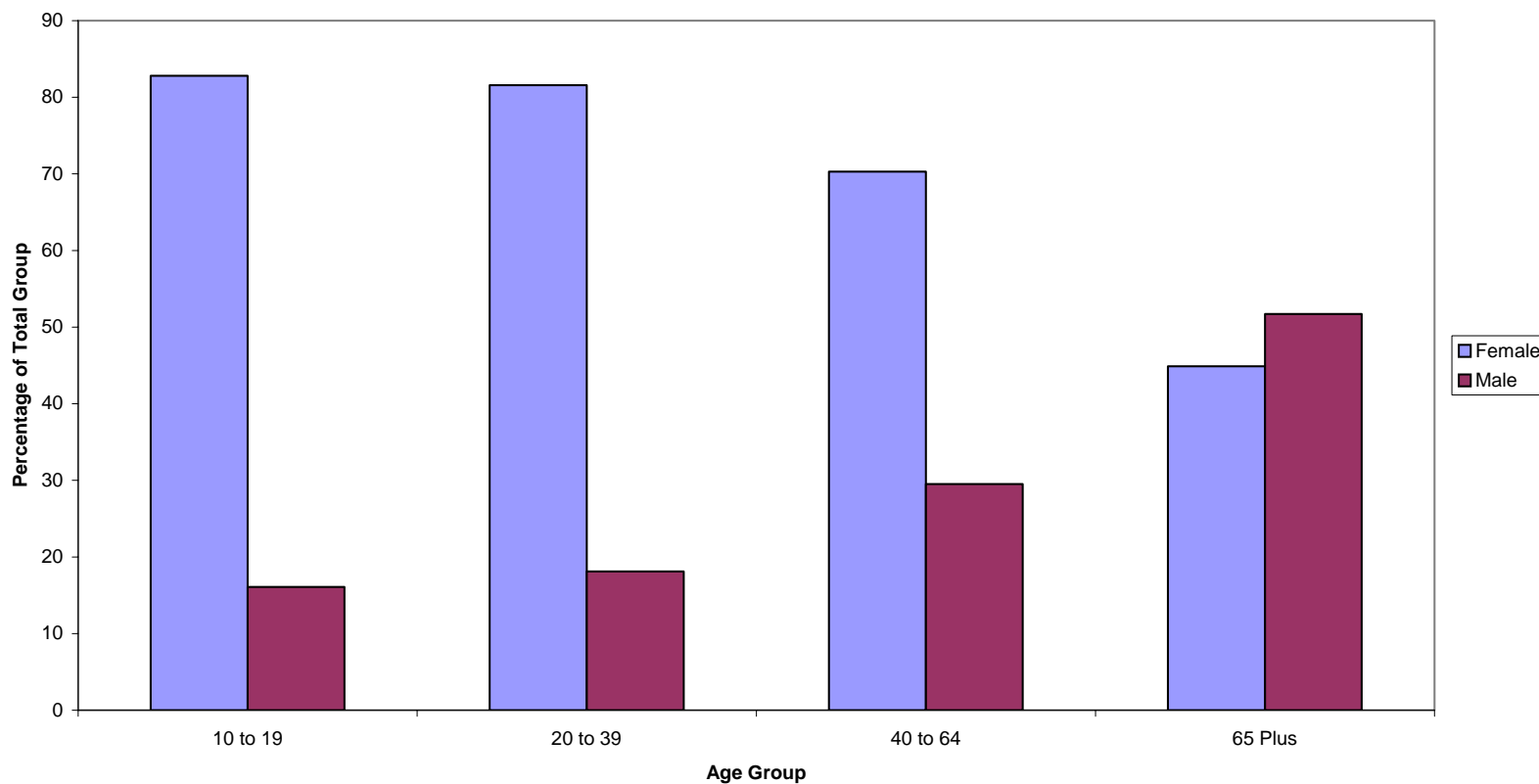
Users over-represented on Vancouver Island and the North

Question is...what makes this so?

Source: QUILTS evaluation team, Web Survey

BC HealthGuide Online By Sex and Age

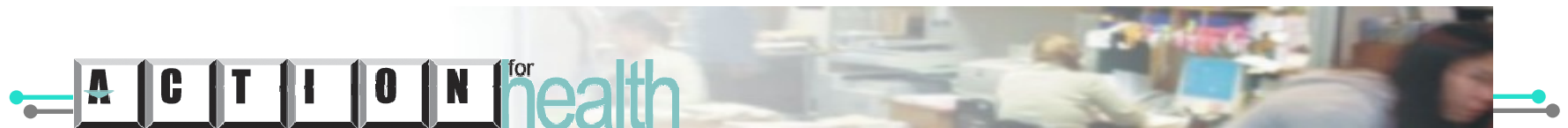
Percentages of Female and Male Respondents - by Age Group



Source: QUILTS evaluation team, Web Survey

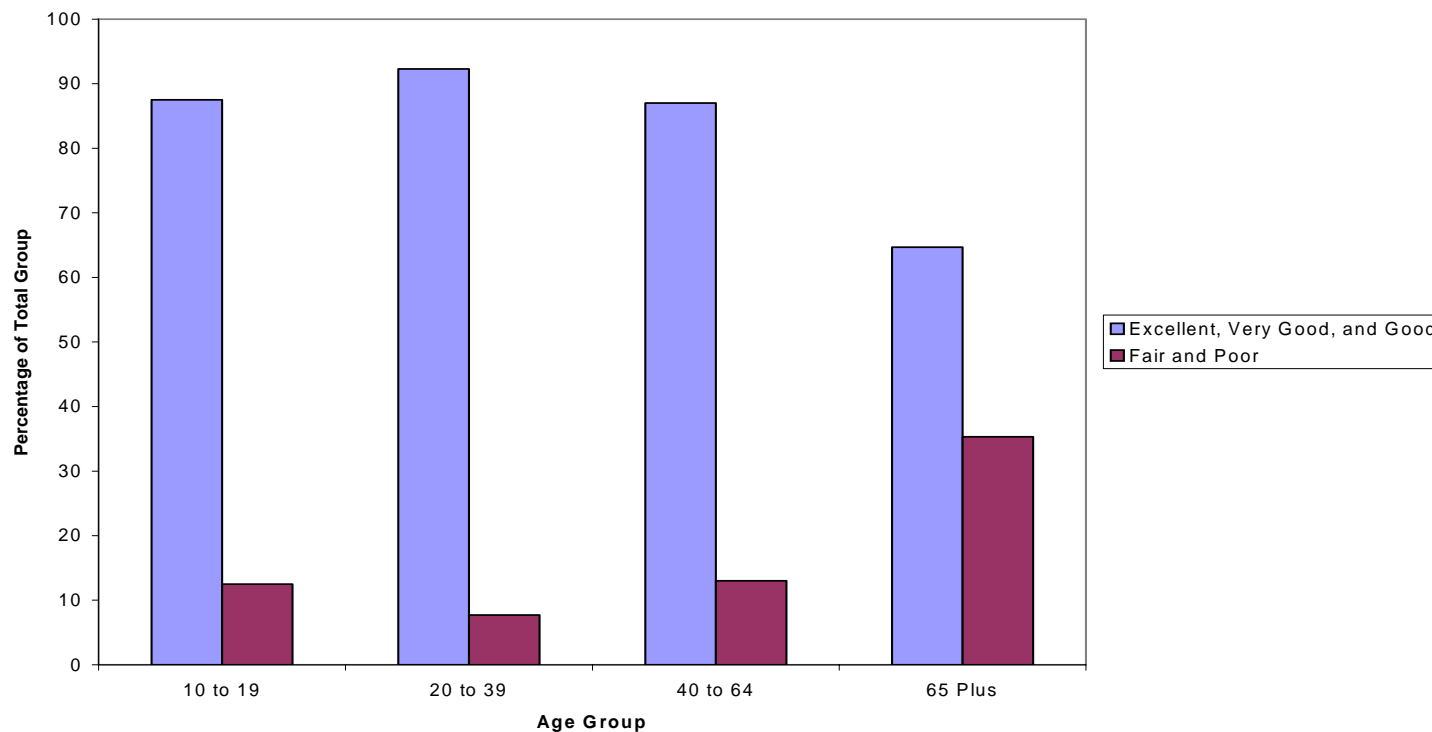
BC HealthGuide Online User Profile

- ❑ About half of users (46%) had children under 19
- ❑ 14% of users were practicing health care professionals
- ❑ 87% had some college education or better
 - 39% had finished university
- ❑ 80% reported earnings of \$30K or more
- ❑ About 50% never visited site previously in the last 6 months
 - So...lots of new users. Question is will they return?
 - About 30% had visited between 1 to 3 times
 - 9% had visited 8 times +



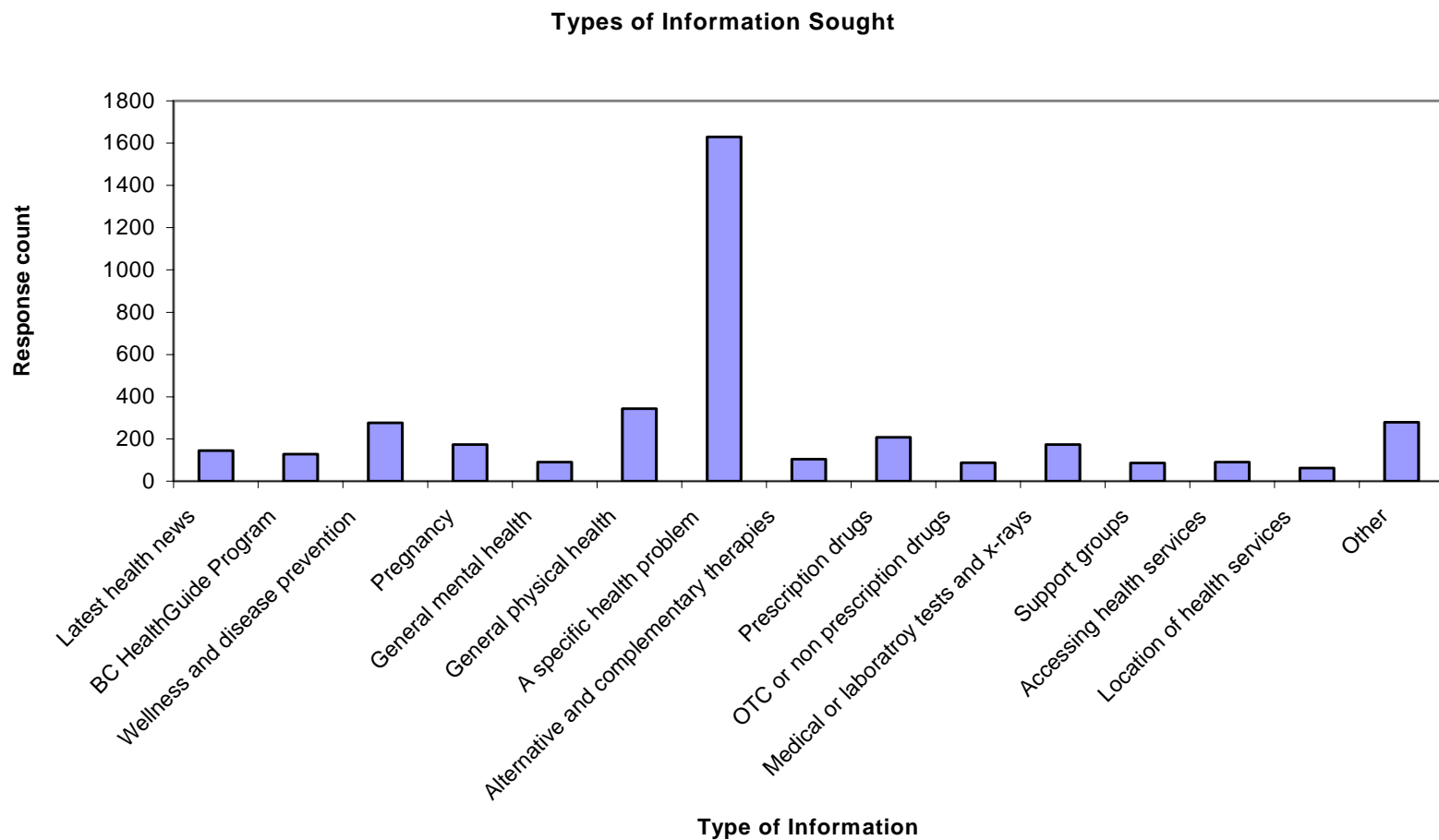
Self-Report Quality of Health of Users

Percentages of Self Rating of Health



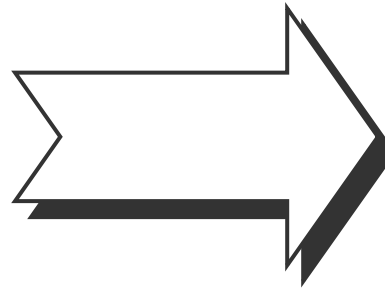
Source: QUILTS evaluation team, Web Survey

Types of Health Information Sought...



List of Health Problems Searched ...

- Abdominal pain
- Back pain
- Cancer
- Chest pain
- Chicken pox
- Flu
- Headache
- Heart problems
- Diabetes , etc.

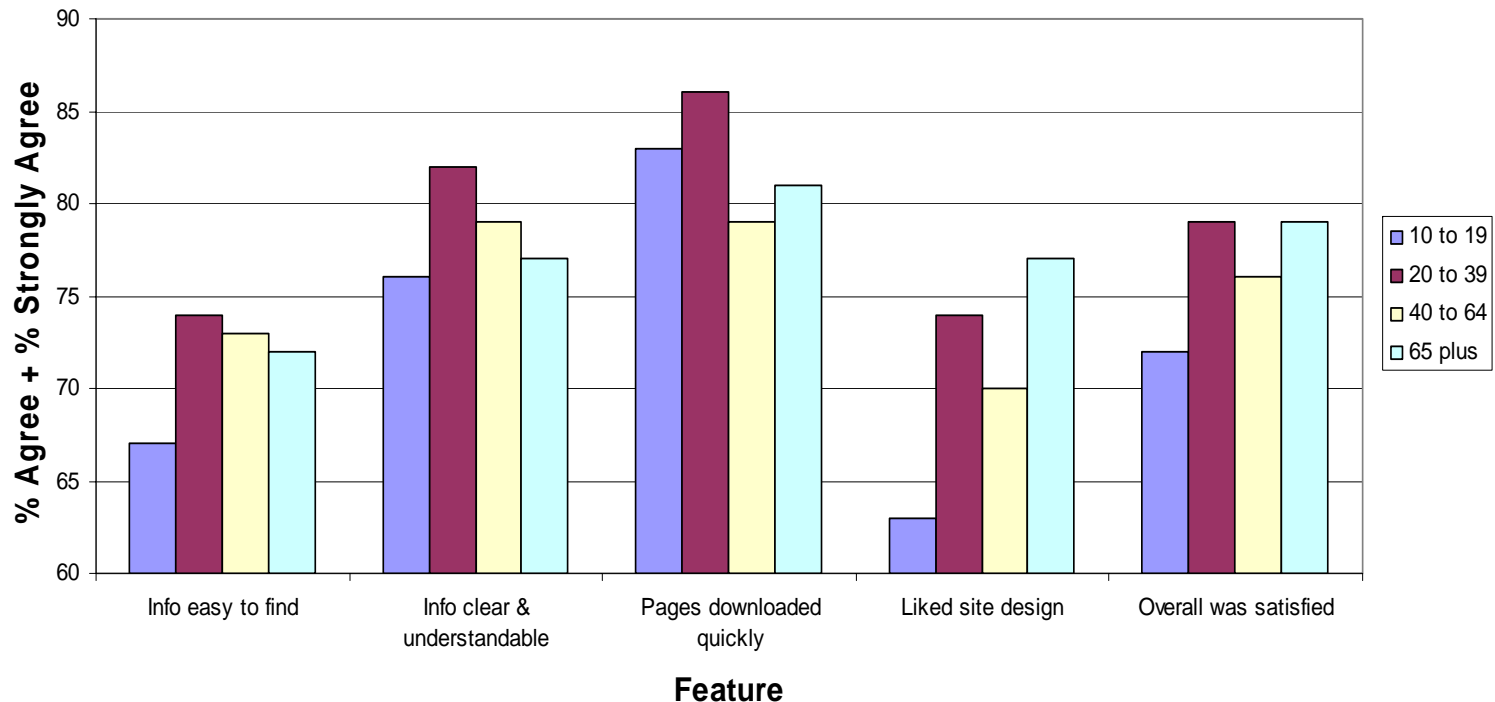


42% of all responses



Satisfaction

Satisfaction with Aspects of the Site - by Age Group

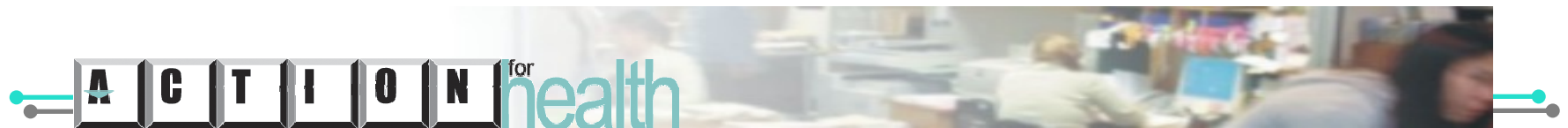


- Younger users (10 – 19y) least satisfied
- Only 63% of this age group liked the site design

● Pick the Low Hanging Fruit...

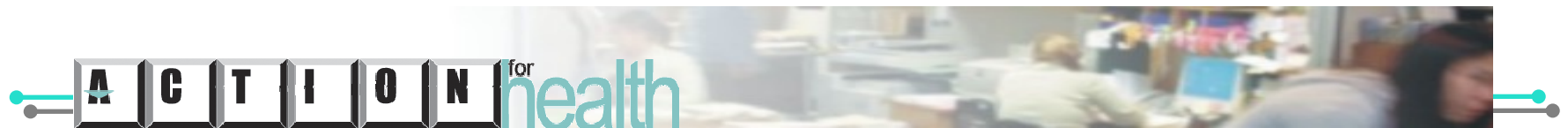
Determine who is currently using your site, and design your information to target their needs in the short run

- Young people/families
 - High expectations for web sites
 - Work with existing health care agencies
- Health care professionals
 - Assist those who might encounter computer access issues
- Choose general “key words” to enable more users to find your web site



● Pick the Low Hanging Fruit...

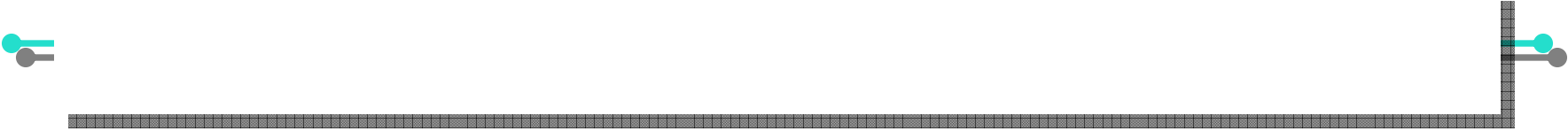
- Untapped audiences that are using the web...
 - College students/young adults
 - How best to reach this group as they approach entry into the “real world”?
 - In the case of BC HealthGuide, once they move out of the parents’ house, lose access to their copy of print guide
 - Workers
 - Hard to target
 - Healthy workforce = happy employers (?)
 - Is there interest by employers?
 - One day, access to health information in pharmacies (similar to blood pressure machines)



Policy Implications

Recognize that the Internet is not a substitute for other forms of information for all populations

- ❑ Investment in other forms of information delivery aimed at less educated, less affluent Canadians, and those with literacy barriers, is essential to universal, equitable health care.
- ❑ Targeting seniors via the Web continues to be a challenge
- ❑ Rural/remote access, while there in theory, still is a challenge
 - Computer sites in libraries are often very busy
 - Little privacy



“The hardest thing is to pick it [Handbook] up and read it,
rather than asking the person next to you”

Quote from Focus group participant

Acknowledgements

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- Kevin Brown, Director of BC HealthGuide program
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- Jeanne Legare, Project Director, QUILTS collaboration

