

# Public Attitudes to Paid Sick Leave in Ontario

A Survey of Ontario Residents

Commissioned by Unifor

*April 16, 2021*



EXOS

# Background

- » As of 2021, Ontario does not have any form of legislated paid sick leave
- » Under the previous government, Ontario workers were given 10 personal emergency sick days, two of which were paid
- » In 2019, however, the Ford government scrapped paid sick leave and replaced it with other forms of unpaid leave
- » Ontario residents have access to the federal Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CSRB), which provides \$500 per week for up to two weeks to workers who are sick or must self-isolate due to COVID-19
  - However, the CSRB is a time-limited measure

# Enter COVID-19

- » As Ontario struggles to contain the third wave of COVID-19, the issue of paid sick leave has become more topical than ever
- » Workplaces have been a major source of COVID-19 infections and the lack of paid sick days – particularly among essential workers – has direct implications for containing its spread
- » The purpose of this survey is to gauge public attitudes toward mandating paid sick leave benefits in Ontario

# Methodology

- » This survey was conducted by phone using Interactive Voice Response (IVR), where respondents are able to enter their preferences by punching the keypad on their phone, rather than telling them to a live operator
- » The field dates for this survey are April 7-12, 2021
- » In total, a random sample of n=1,240 Ontario residents aged 18+ responded to the survey
  - The margin of error associated with the total sample is  $\pm$  2.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20
- » All the data have been statistically weighted by age, gender, and region
- » This survey was commissioned by Unifor

# Support for mandated paid sick leave

- » By a margin of more than 4-to-1, Ontarians support the implementation of paid sick for Ontario workers
  - 70% support 5 days of paid sick leave and a slightly lower proportion – 64% – support 10 days of paid sick leave
  - Fewer than one in five Ontarians are opposed to paid sick leave
  - Support is stronger among women, those under 35, and private sector union members
  - There is a strong partisan divide with Progressive Conservative supporters more divided on the issue and all other party supporters overwhelmingly in favour

# Support for paid sick leave (Ontario)

**Q.** As you may know, Ontario does not have any form of legislated paid sick leave. Workers in Ontario are entitled to three days of job-protected sick leave every calendar year, but this leave is unpaid. To what extent would you support or oppose introducing **FIVE DAYS** / **TEN DAYS** of provincially legislated paid sick leave?

## Five days



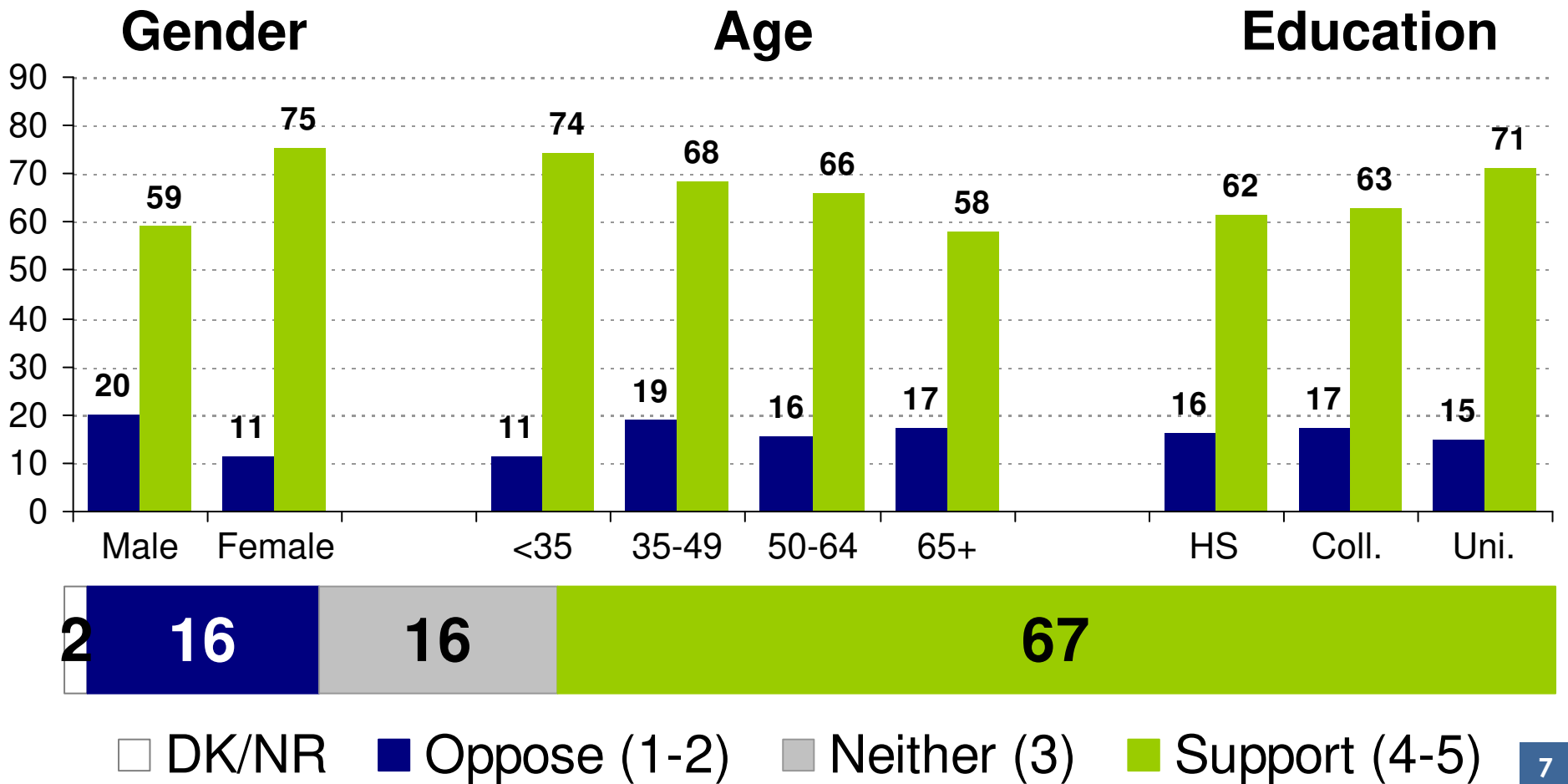
## Ten days



DK/NR     Oppose (1-2)     Neither (3)     Support (4-5)

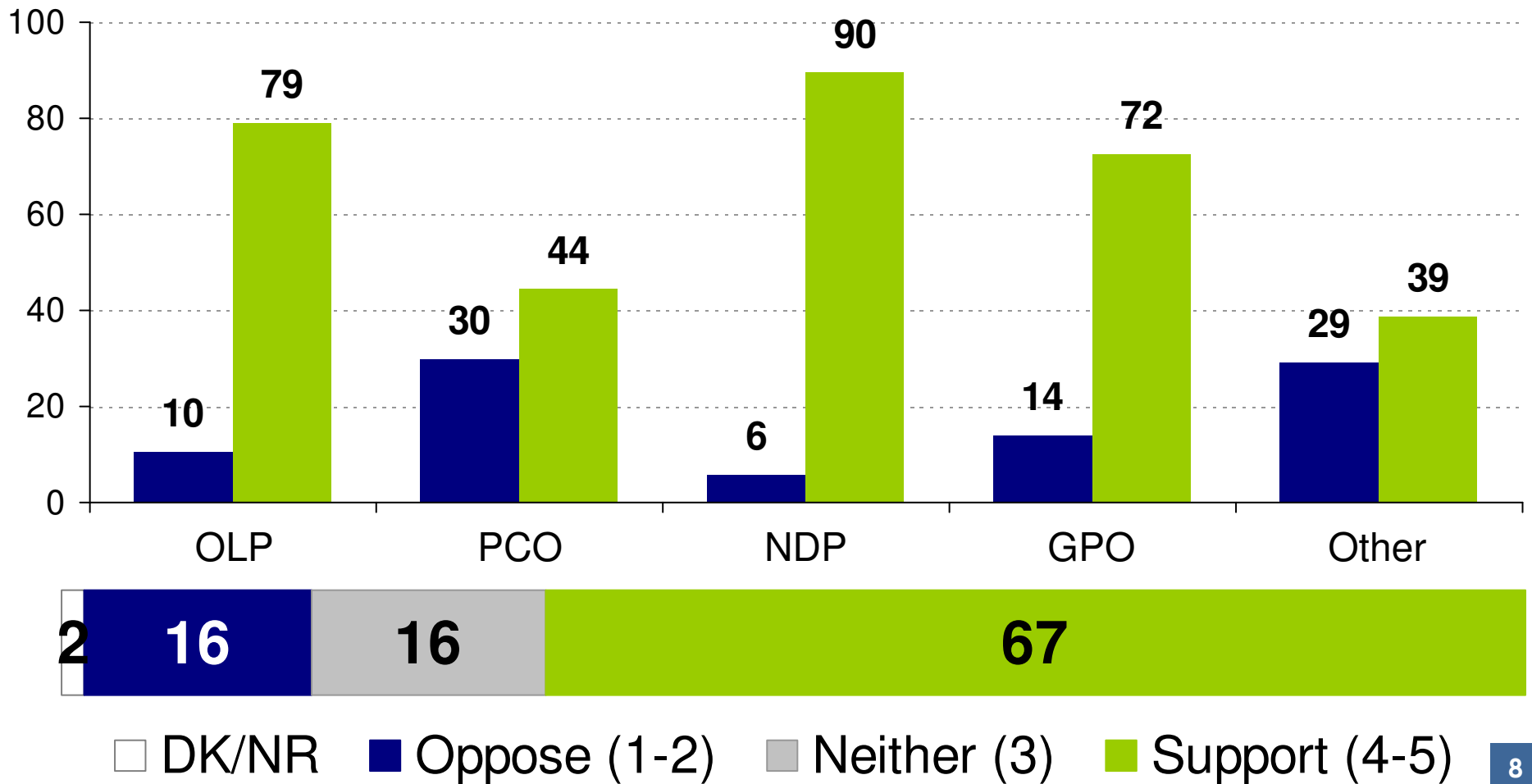
# Support for sick leave by demographics

**Q.** To what extent would you support or oppose introducing **FIVE DAYS / TEN DAYS** of provincially legislated paid sick leave?



# Support for sick leave by vote intention

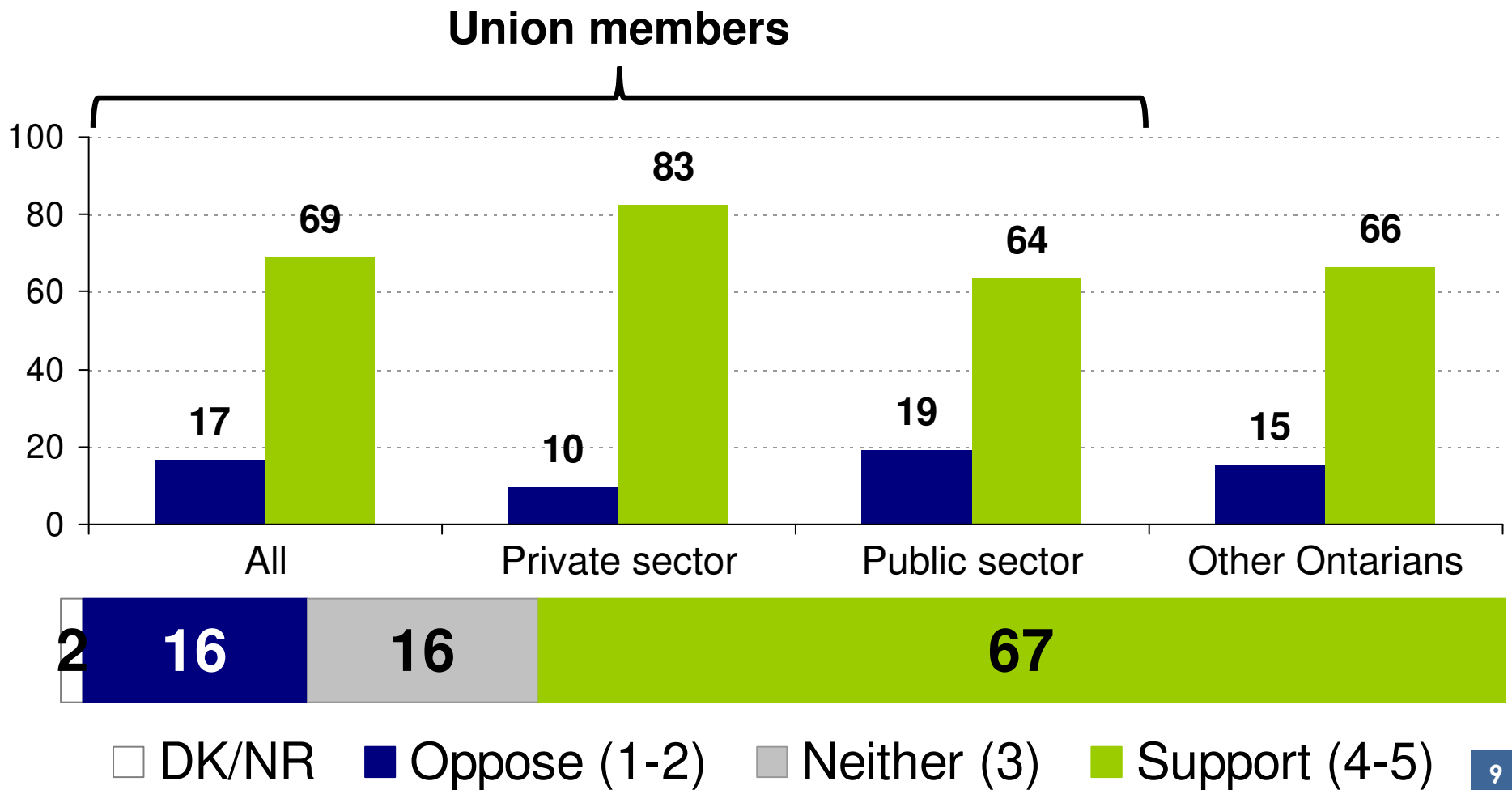
**Q.** To what extent would you support or oppose introducing **FIVE DAYS / TEN DAYS** of provincially legislated paid sick leave?





# Support for sick leave by union membership

**Q.** To what extent would you support or oppose introducing **FIVE DAYS / TEN DAYS** of provincially legislated paid sick leave?



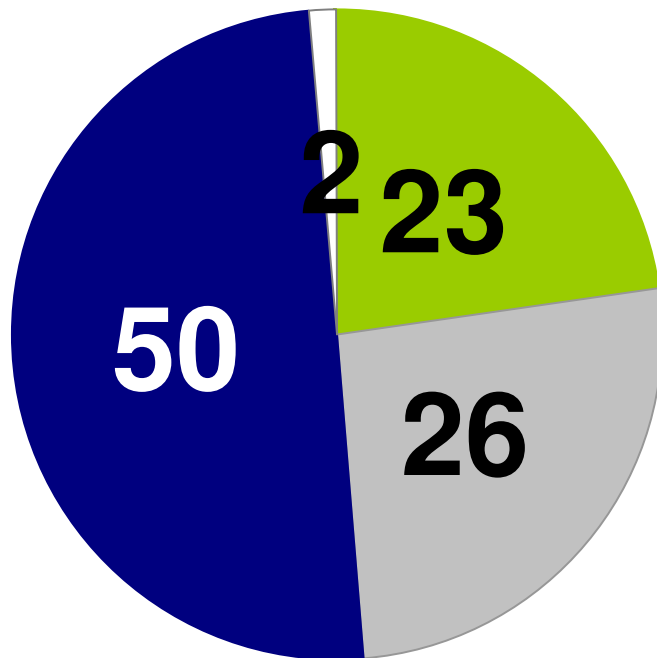
# Anticipated economic consequences

- » The public widely dismiss the notion that legislated paid sick leave will harm the economy and cost jobs
  - Just 23% of Ontarians believe legislated paid sick leave will hurt businesses, compared to 50% who disagree
  - Fears of negative economic impacts are largely limited to Progressive Conservative voters; however, just 35% of these respondents agree that paid sick leave will cost jobs

# Anticipated economic consequences

**Q.** Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement:

**Requiring employers to provide paid sick leave will hurt the economy and cost jobs**

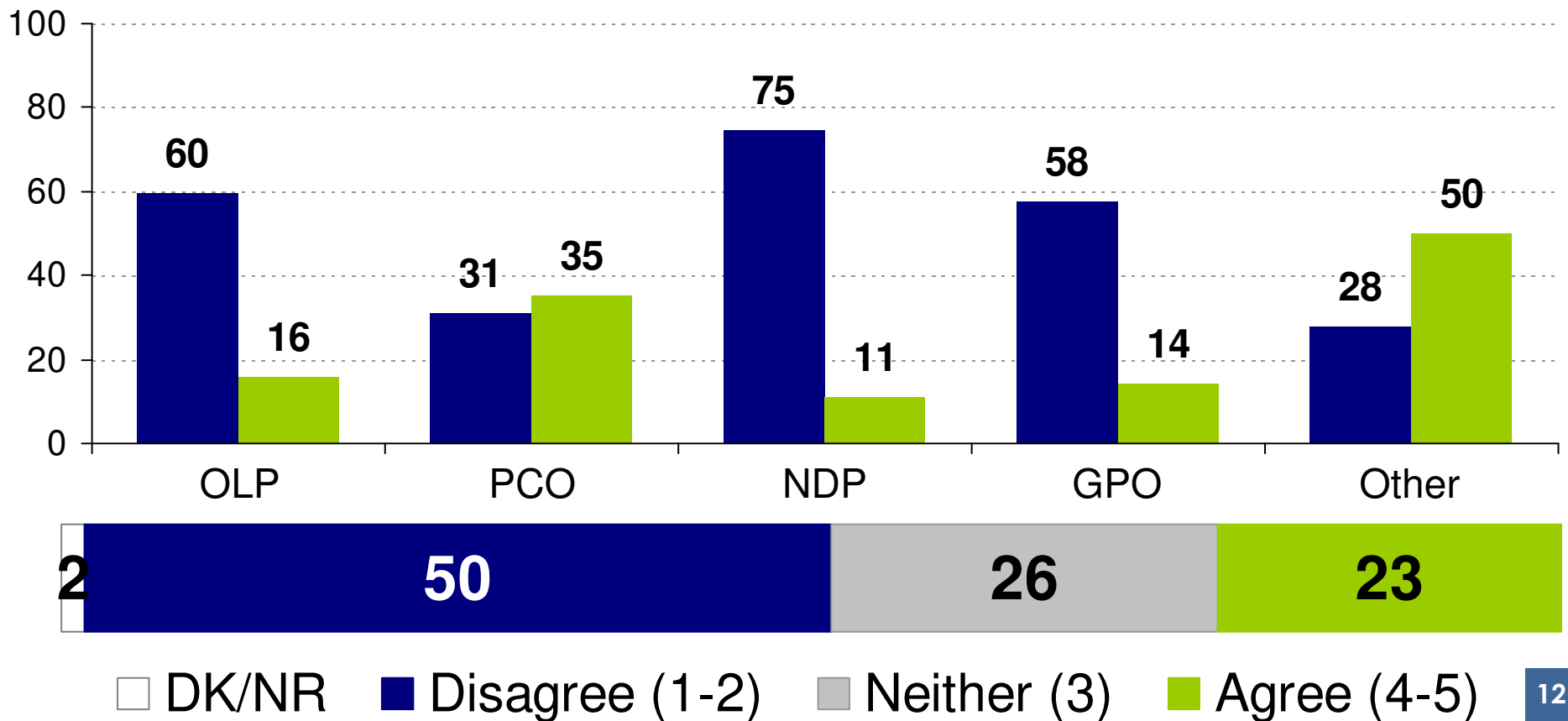


- Agree (4-5)
- Neither (3)
- Disagree (1-2)
- Don't know/No response

# Consequences by vote intention (Ontario only)

**Q.** Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement:

**Requiring employers to provide paid sick leave will hurt the economy and cost jobs**



**BASE:** Ontario residents; April 7-12, 2021, n=1,240, MOE +/- 2.8%, 19 times out of 20

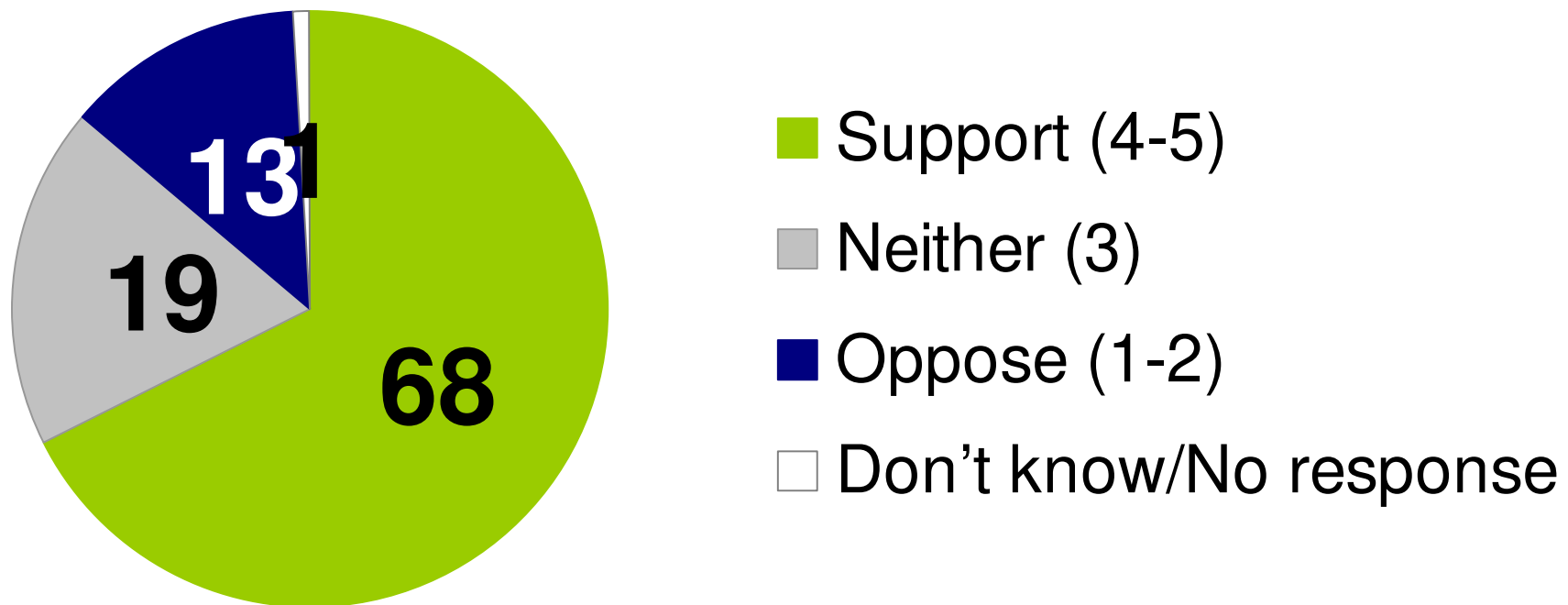
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# Support for subsidized sick leave

- » Ontarians are broadly supportive of providing a subsidy to small businesses to help them cover the costs of paid sick leave
  - Two-thirds (68%) support the measure, compared to just 13% who are opposed
  - Support is comparatively higher among women and it declines with age
  - Support appears to transcend partisanship and majorities from Ontario's four major parties are in favour of these subsidies

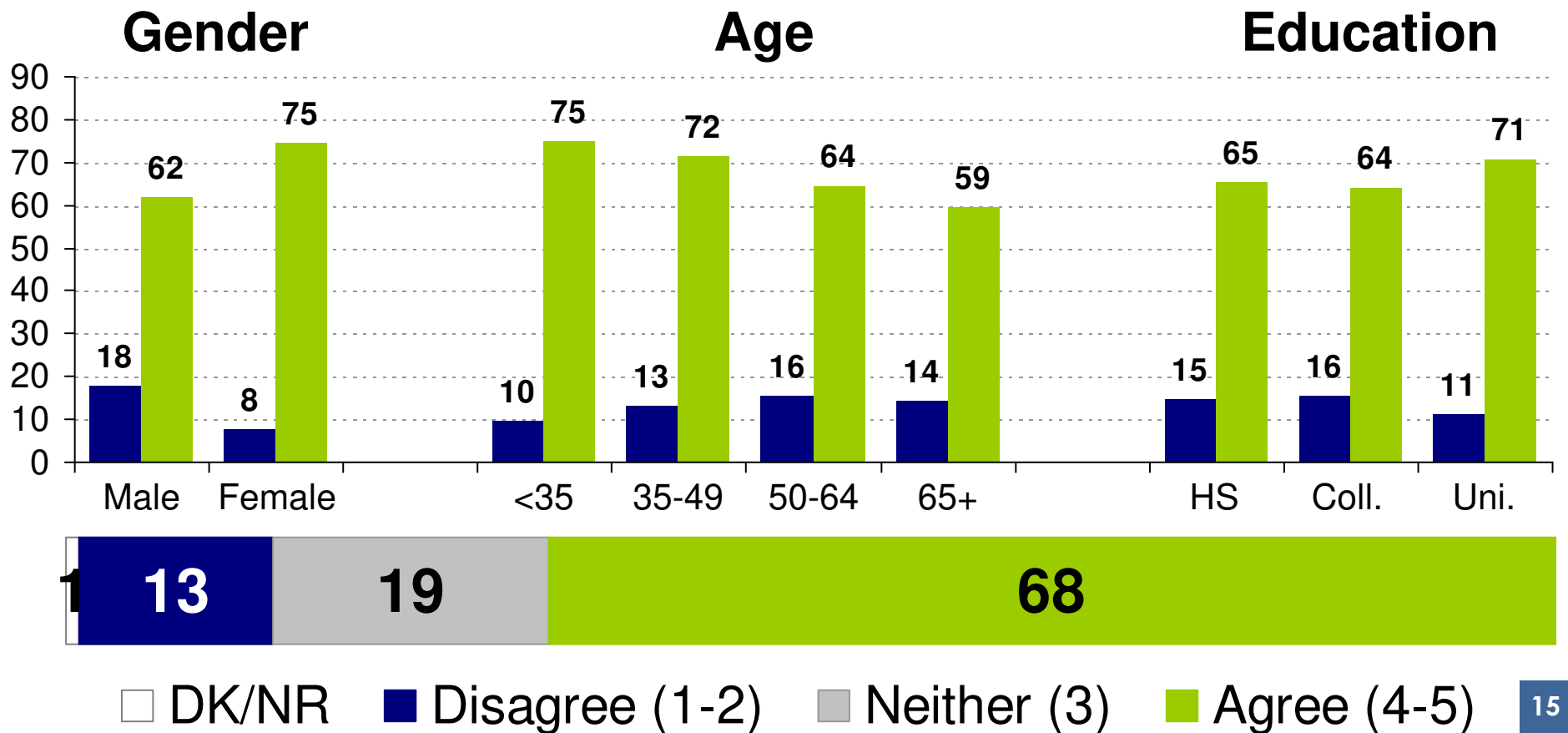
# Support for subsidized sick leave

**Q.** *If Ontario were to mandate employer-paid sick leave, to what extent would you support or oppose the Ontario government providing a subsidy to small businesses to help them cover the costs?*



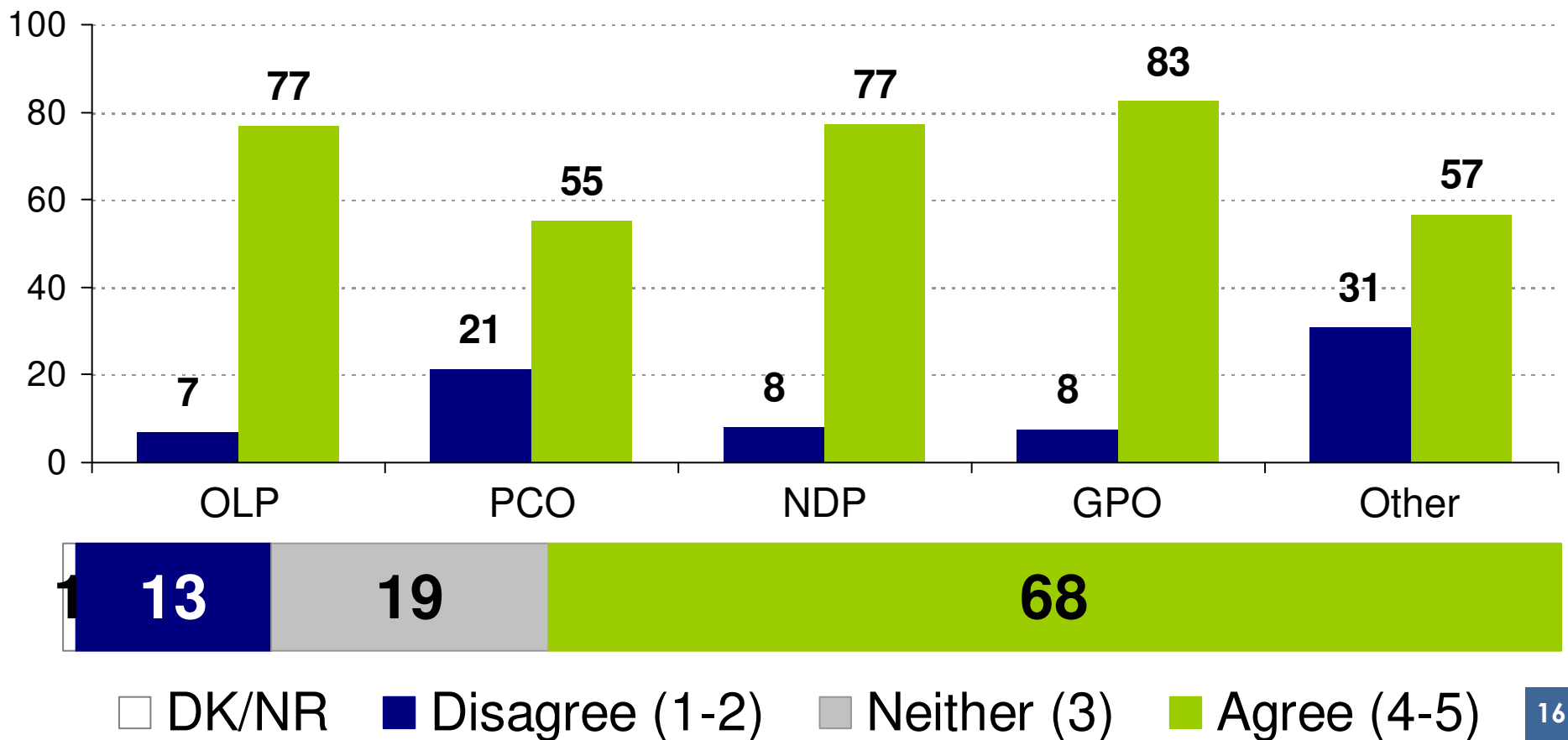
# Support for subsidies by demographics

**Q.** *If Ontario were to mandate employer-paid sick leave, to what extent would you support or oppose the Ontario government providing a subsidy to small businesses to help them cover the costs?*



# Support for subsidies by vote intention

**Q.** *If Ontario were to mandate employer-paid sick leave, to what extent would you support or oppose the Ontario government providing a subsidy to small businesses to help them cover the costs?*





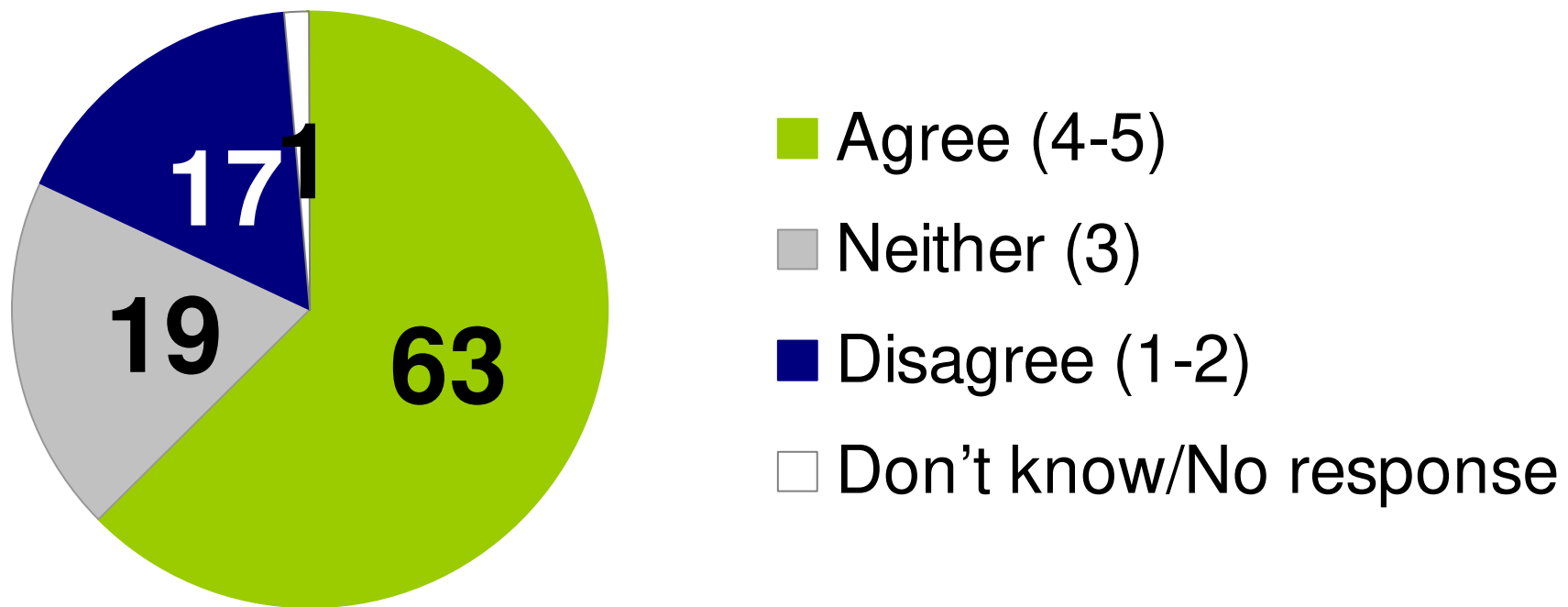
# Role of sick leave in combatting COVID-19

- » The link between paid sick leave and the spread of COVID-19 is well-understood by the public
  - 63% of Ontarians say paid sick leave is a vital part of containing the spread of COVID-19
  - Progressive Conservative voters are more divided on the matter, though a clear plurality (45%) agree that paid sick leave is essential to stopping the pandemic

# Role of sick leave in combatting COVID-19

**Q.** Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement:

**Recognizing that workplaces may be the largest contributor to the spread of COVID-19, paid sick leave is essential to stopping the pandemic**



# Conclusions (i)

- » Survey results reveal broad support for mandated paid sick leave in Ontario
  - Decisive majorities of Ontarians support for five or, to a somewhat lesser extent, ten days of legislated paid sick leave
  - Ontarians widely see paid sick leave as an important labour market reform
- » There is a strong partisan divide with Progressive Conservative supporters more divided on the issue and all other party supporters overwhelmingly in favour
- » Arguments that paid sick leave will pose an undue burden to businesses and cost jobs do not hold water with the majority of Ontarians (but produce divided views among Progressive Conservative supporters)

# Conclusions (ii)

- » There is considerable support for having the Province of Ontario fund small businesses to offset the costs of paid sick leave
- » The issue of paid sick leave has taken on greater urgency in the minds of the public as the absence of paid sick leave is seen as having contributed to the worsening spread of COVID-19



## For more information:

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