



Are Adults Making Use of Career Services in Canada?

An Insight Report from the Labour Market Information Council and the Future Skills Centre



Table of Contents

<u>Foreword</u>	3
<u>Key Findings</u>	5
<u>Introduction</u>	7
<u>Section 1: Use of Career Services Among Adults</u>	9
<u>Section 2: Information Received from Career Services</u>	12
<u>Section 3: Why Aren't Canadian Adults Accessing Career Services?</u>	16
<u>Section 4: Implications and Future Considerations</u>	18
<u>The Path Forward</u>	21
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	23



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Centre

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Compétences futures

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Ryerson University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills program.

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The Labour Market Information Council (LMIC) is a non-profit research institute dedicated to ensuring Canadians have the necessary information and insights to navigate the changing world of work. Our mission is to empower Canadians with timely and reliable labour market information in an engaging way that supports their decision-making process.

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Canada 

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.



Foreword

The partnership between FSC and LMIC is focused on developing new and innovative methods to provide career development professionals with the tools and information they need to help Canadians make career and skills-related career decisions. A significant part of our work together is developing a high-quality repository of labour market information, and finding the best ways to share that data.

We're pleased to share the latest report coming out of our collaboration. *Are Adults Making Use of Career Services in Canada?* sheds light on the perceptions and uptake of careers services in Canada, and helps us better understand the challenges and bottlenecks in career guidance information and services.

The insights from this research will support the people-centered approach that we have put at the forefront of our work and research. We look at labour market numbers and trends, but always with an eye to the impact and effect of that information and how it can best serve the needs of all Canadians.



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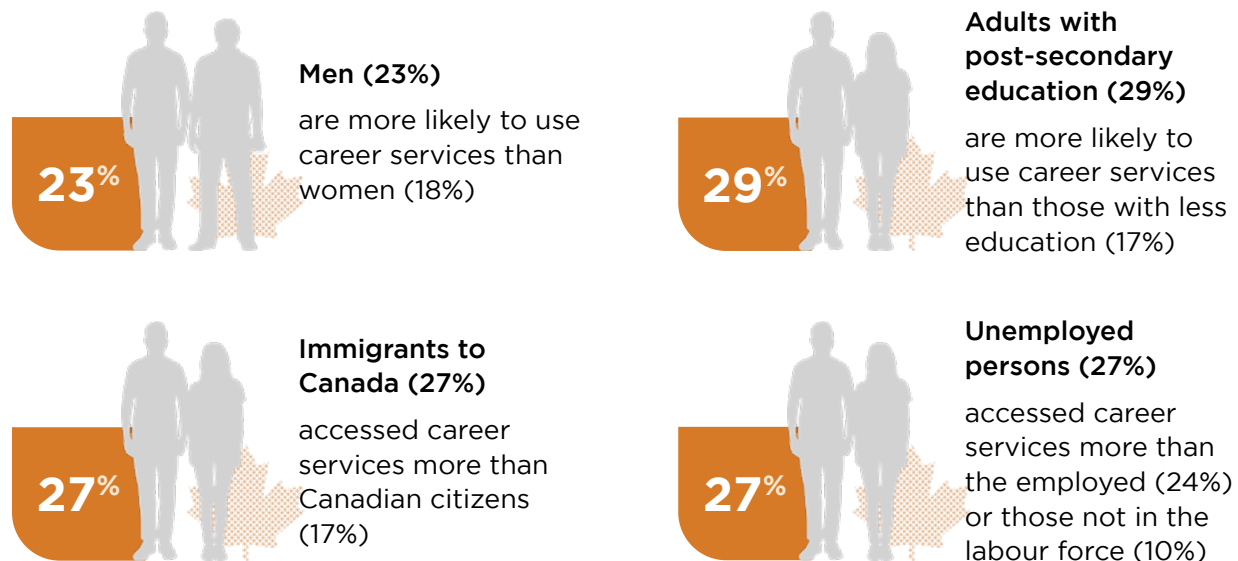


Key Findings

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a historic disruption in the job market, bringing renewed attention to the availability and access of services to support Canadians in their career choices.

Almost one in five adults aged 25–64 have received career services in the past five years, compared to half of youth aged 18–24.

Among adults, the likelihood of using career services differs significantly between groups. Men, those with post-secondary education, immigrants and unemployed people are more likely to use career services:



Career services are used about equally across regions

Nearly everyone who engaged with career services reported some positive impact, although many report key gaps in the provision of labour market information. Yet large numbers of Canadians are not accessing career services, either because they are not aware of them, don't feel the need for them or face access barriers. And compared to other OECD countries, the use of career services is much lower in Canada.

Wider awareness about career services is needed in Canada, especially for groups most vulnerable to career disruptions. Equipping career service providers with labour market information tools, skills and capacity to better serve the needs of Canadians will be critical moving forward.



Introduction

Career services represent an important way for Canadians to attain reliable and accurate labour market information (LMI), such as job opportunities, potential earnings and skill requirements, as well as a wide range of supports to support success in learning and work.

Career services can range from helping people new to the job market understand different career pathways, to identifying education and training opportunities for mid-career workers, to providing job search strategies that best fit the needs of different clients.

Career development professionals are trained to [make the best use of human talent](#) in the labour market by connecting individuals with career pathways and opportunities that work for them, ultimately leading to improved performance at [work and in education](#).

In 2021, the Labour Market Information Council (LMIC) and the Future Skills Centre (FSC) set out to understand how Canadian adults aged 25–64 access career services and what information they receive when doing so.

We surveyed over 3,000 Canadians on the most common types of labour market information they received as well as any reported changes the services had on their life and work ([see Box 1](#)). This analysis helped us identify current gaps and challenges in accessing career services in Canada, an issue of acute importance considering the massive job disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This Insight Report is an extension of the OECD Survey of Career Guidance for Adults, with questions adapted for the Canadian context ([see Box 2](#)), and is organized as follows: Section 1 explores who uses adult career services in Canada; Section 2 discusses the most common information, delivery formats and effects of career services; Section 3 summarizes why career services are not accessed by more people; and Section 4 identifies the implications of this data as well as future considerations.

Box 1 – Survey Data and Defining Career Services

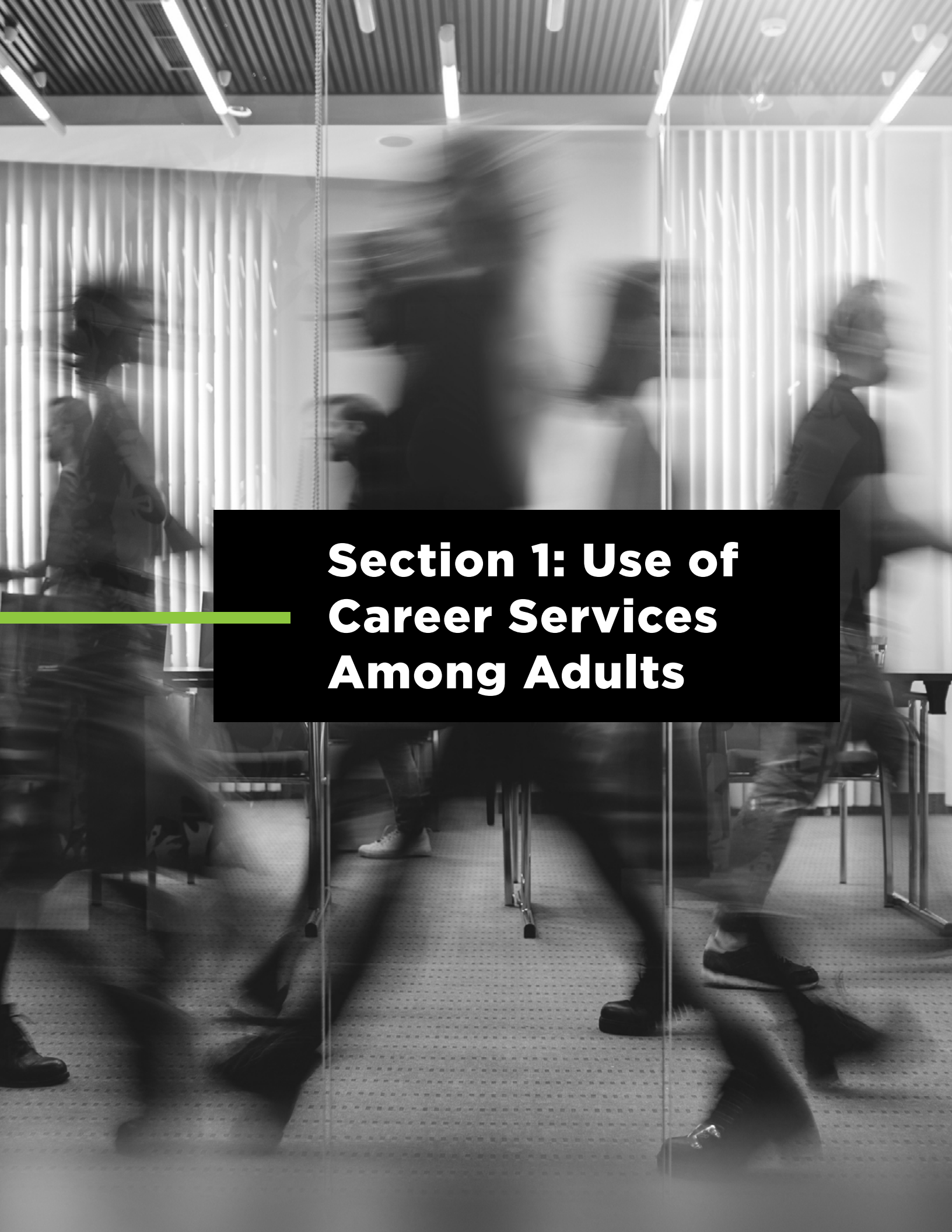
We commissioned two online surveys to understand career services use, the experiences and reasons for accessing career services.

The first survey asked 2,000 individuals, representative of the Canadian population aged 18–64 years old, whether they had used career services in the past five years. The subsequent survey focused on a representative sample (n=3,530) of working-age adults aged 25–64 and asked about the information they received, information sought but not received, delivery format and positive effects of career services. It also asked about the reasons career services had not been used. The data in this study are taken from the adult survey unless otherwise noted.

For the purpose of this study, we used the following definition of career services:

Career services are offered across Canada through public employment services, community-based agencies, educational institutions, workplaces and private providers. Career services offer a range of supports including:

- Helping people to access information to help make career-related decisions (e.g., wage information, job prospects, cost of living, etc.)
- Helping people to understand career options and choose a career direction
- Helping people to get the skills/credentials/training they need to pursue career goals
- Helping people to get a job or start a business
- Helping people to keep their job or grow within their position/organization
- Addressing personal/life issues that may be preventing individuals from moving forward with their goals

A black and white photograph of a busy office interior. The image is heavily blurred, showing the lower halves and legs of several people walking through a modern office space with glass partitions and vertical blinds. A black rectangular text box is centered over the image, containing the title in white text. A thin green horizontal line is positioned to the left of the text box.

Section 1: Use of Career Services Among Adults

Minimal use of career services among Canadian working-age adults

The survey found that approximately one in five (19%) Canadian adults aged 25–64 and (50%) of young Canadians (aged 18–24) report having used career services in the past five years.

Since career services are often provided alongside training and education programs in which youth are more likely to be enrolled, this higher rate among younger Canadians was to some degree to be expected.

While there is no “optimal” level of career services usage, the rate of career services usage in Canada is far lower than in other OECD countries. In the United States, for example, 38% of adults report using career services in the past five years. International comparisons will be the focus of a forthcoming OECD study on career services, undertaken in partnership with LMIC and the Future Skills Centre ([see Box 2](#)).

Box 2 – International Comparisons: Forthcoming OECD Study

[OECD's 2020 Survey of Career Guidance for Adults](#) finds that in Chile, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand and the United States an average of 43% of adults aged 25–64 spoke with a career guidance advisor during the previous five years. Men, people with higher levels of education, and urban residents were more likely to use career services.

Adults who seek career services generally look for job search assistance and education/training programs. Most access job and training information while seeking assistance from an advisor, online and from family/friends.

In partnership with LMIC and the Future Skills Centre, OECD is undertaking a review of career services in Canada.

In addition to the survey described here, the study is informed by data collected through a policy questionnaire distributed to ministries of education and labour regarding career services available across Canada. The report will highlight interesting and innovative practices and key success factors, both in Canada and across OECD countries, to inform policy. It will shed light on the nature and use of career services and any barriers adults face in accessing them.

The remainder of this report draws on the detailed data available from our survey on the use of career services among Canadian adults. While the rate of adults receiving career services is 19%, it varies across several sociodemographic categories and, to some extent, geography.

As seen in [Table 1](#), several groups — notably men, those with higher education and immigrants — are more likely to have used career services in the past five years. Even among the highest user groups, however, the average usage rate in Canada is still below other comparable countries.

Overall, men use career services more than women do. Even among people currently employed, men are more likely to use career services (26% of men versus 22% of women). Why this is the case — and how this difference impacts men's and women's respective career pathways — warrants further investigation.

People with post-secondary education are also more than twice as likely to use career services than people with high school education or less (29% versus 13%). Since people with less education are more vulnerable to insecure [employment](#), they could benefit even more from career services planning and support.

As expected, people who are unemployed use career services more than people who are employed, but only slightly more (27% versus 24%). Whereas only 10% of adults who are not active in the labour force have accessed career services, perhaps because such services are most often provided in tandem with support for jobseekers (see Section 4).

As expected, people who have immigrated to Canada are more likely to engage with career services than people born in Canada (27% versus 17%). Many newcomers arrive with economic visas and seek support navigating a new work environment and culture, and many career services are specifically geared to newcomers.

Regionally, the usage patterns of career services vary between 17% in Quebec and the Atlantic region, 20% in the Prairies and British Columbia, and 23% in Ontario, but does not differ to a level of statistical significance.

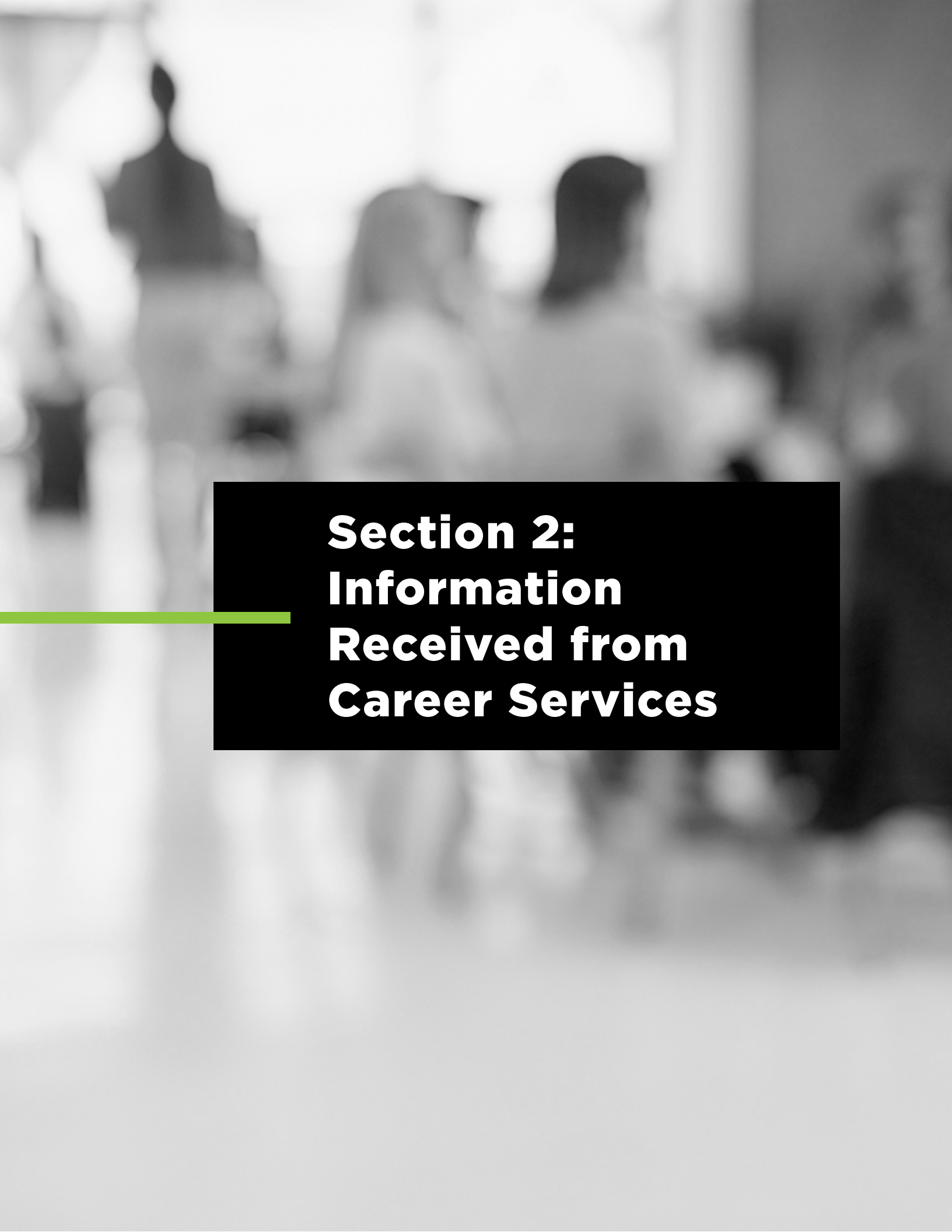
Table 1 – Have you used a career service in the 5 years?¹

Main category	Subset	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents who report having used career services within past 5 years
	Total	3,530	19%
Gender	Women	1,791	18%
	Men	1,716	23% [†]
Region	Ontario	1,350	23%
	British Columbia	464	20%
	Prairies	654	20%
	Quebec	830	17% [†]
	Atlantic	230	17% [‡]
Education level	High school or less	1,266	13%
	Some post-secondary	1,316	21% [†]
	Post-secondary	1,035	29% [†]
Labour force status	Employed	2,200	24%
	Unemployed	394	27% [†]
	Not in the labour force	937	10% [†]
Immigration status	Canadian citizen and permanent residents	2,576	17%
	Immigrant	1,045	27% [†]

[†] 99% significance level from base-case; [‡] 95% significance level from base-case; base-case is first in each category. Data are based on weighted results from LMIC's survey Career Services Use among Canadian Adults. Counts and rates do not necessarily sum up to 100% due to rounding and the exclusion of answers such as "prefer not to say."

In Section 2, we explore what kind of information people seek from career services, how they access that information, and what impact career services have.

¹ We looked at the same demographic subsets in Table 1 for questions in Sections 2 and 3 and did not find any significant differences. We can provide these tables if interested readers would like to view them.



Section 2: Information Received from Career Services

Skill requirements, job vacancies and work search strategies

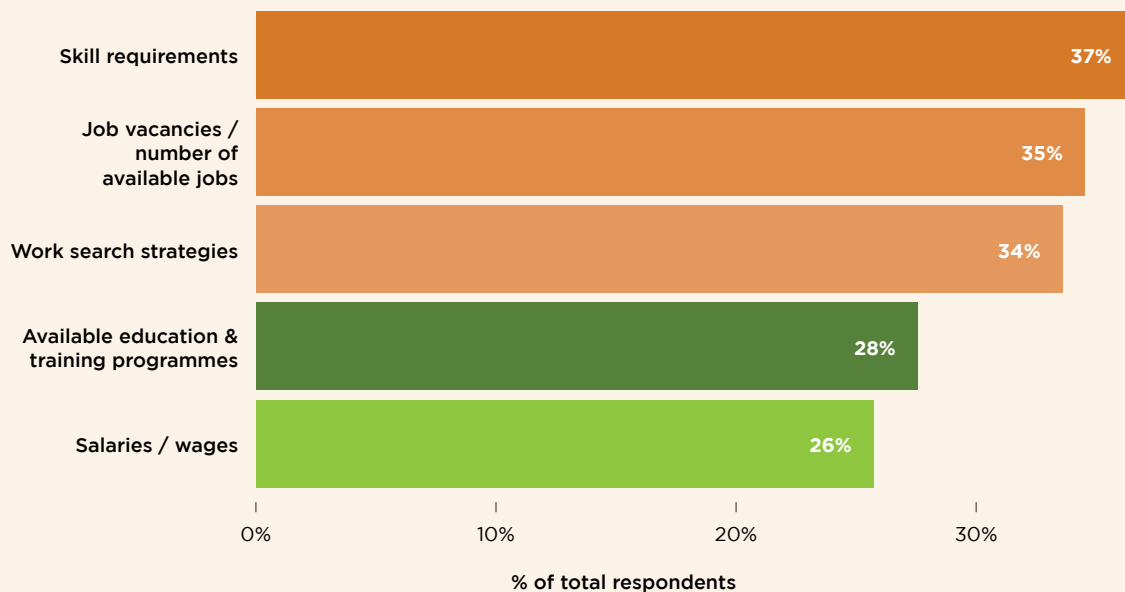
Among Canadian adults who used career services in the past five years, 95% report having received at least one type of useful labour market information (LMI).

The most common type of LMI accessed was the skill requirements of jobs (37%); a surprising finding given that skills information is arguably the most challenging type of data to [access and make use of](#) in career planning. Based on these findings, it appears that career service providers are helping to bridge this gap.

As shown in **Figure 1**, other types of LMI commonly received through career services include job vacancies (35%), work search strategies (34%) and education and training programs (28%). Interestingly, only a quarter (25%) of respondents indicated that salaries/wages was information they sought and received. This is surprising given that wage data are readily available, and previous research indicates that salaries/wages are among the [most sought after type of information](#) (see **Box 3**).

Figure 1 – Over 1/3 of adults received information on skill requirements, job vacancies & work search strategies

Information received by adults from career services (% of those who receive career services)



Information on financial support, future and current job vacancies were desired but not received

In some instances, certain types of information sought by adults were not available. Among adults who accessed career services, 70% report that at least one type of desired information was not received.

Several information gaps were identified: information on financial support for training, future openings and current job vacancies, salaries/wages and quality of training providers (see Figure 2).

Box 3 – LMIC Research on LMI Needs and Challenges

In LMIC's [2019 Public Opinion Research](#), we identified the [most common LMI needs, sources and challenges](#).

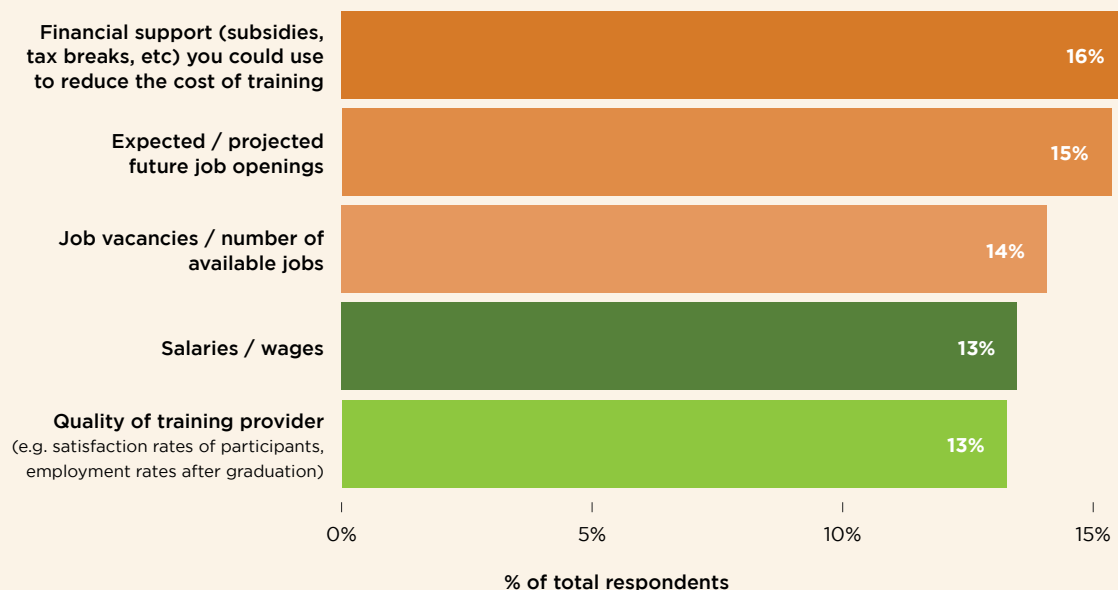
We found that salaries/wages, skill requirements and job benefit information are the most sought after LMI. The most frequent challenges include that LMI are often outdated, irrelevant, or do not offer insights about the future. Additionally, informal sources of LMI access are more likely to be used (e.g., friends and family, job ads and social media).

These findings suggest that the distribution and accessibility of LMI needs to be vastly improved. LMIC believes that use of career services can help in accessing accurate and timely LMI and in applying it effectively in the career planning process.

In addition, we [surveyed career practitioners](#) on their key challenges in accessing and using LMI. We found that only three out of five (60%) career practitioners found LMI easy to understand; fewer than half (43%) said they had received training to help them access or make sense of LMI. Career practitioners also reported that skill requirements, certification/education and salaries/wages were the top three types of LMI needed.

Figure 2 – Information needed on financial support, future and current job opportunities, salaries/wages and quality of training providers

Information sought but not received from career services for adults (% of those who receive career services)



Box 4 – Career Service Delivery Formats

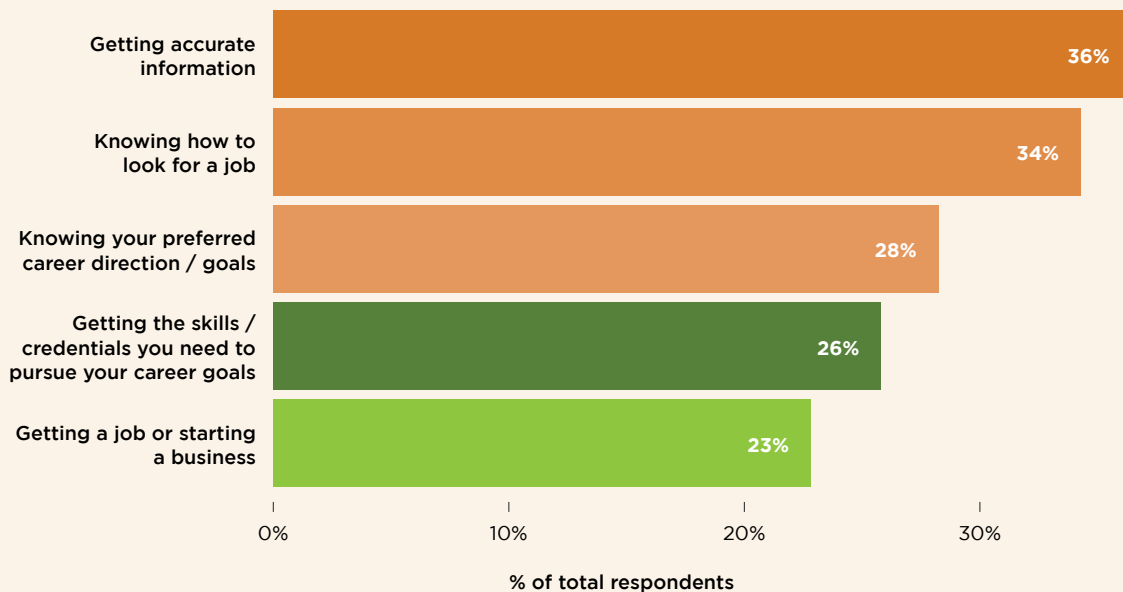
The delivery format of career services also plays an important role in the accessibility of LMI. Almost half of adults received services via email (47%). About a third also report services were delivered verbally, and a quarter via online video or webinar. Email, online video and webinar services have likely risen over the course of the pandemic while verbal services delivered face to face likely declined. Social media (14%) and physical mail (13%) were less common delivery formats.

Positive changes from career services

Among people who received career services, over 95% reported positive changes as a result. Over a third benefitted from accurate information (36%) and improved their ability to search for jobs (34%). Over a quarter better understood the skills/credentials needed to pursue career goals (26%) or achieve their preferred career direction (28%). Over one in five reported finding a job or starting a business after receiving career services (23%).

Figure 3 – Benefits from career services include relevant LMI, job search success and understanding skills/credentials requirements

Positive changes from career services use (% of those who receive career services)



The data show that most adult users of career services report at least some kind of positive impact — often landing a job. This raises the question of why Canada lags behind its international peers in adult use of career services. The next section explores this further.

An aerial, black and white photograph of a busy pedestrian crosswalk. Numerous people of various ages and styles of dress are captured in motion, crossing the street. The crosswalk is marked with thick, white vertical stripes on a dark asphalt surface. The perspective is from directly above, looking down on the scene.

Section 3: Why Aren't Canadian Adults Accessing Career Services?

Lack of awareness on the importance and existence of career services

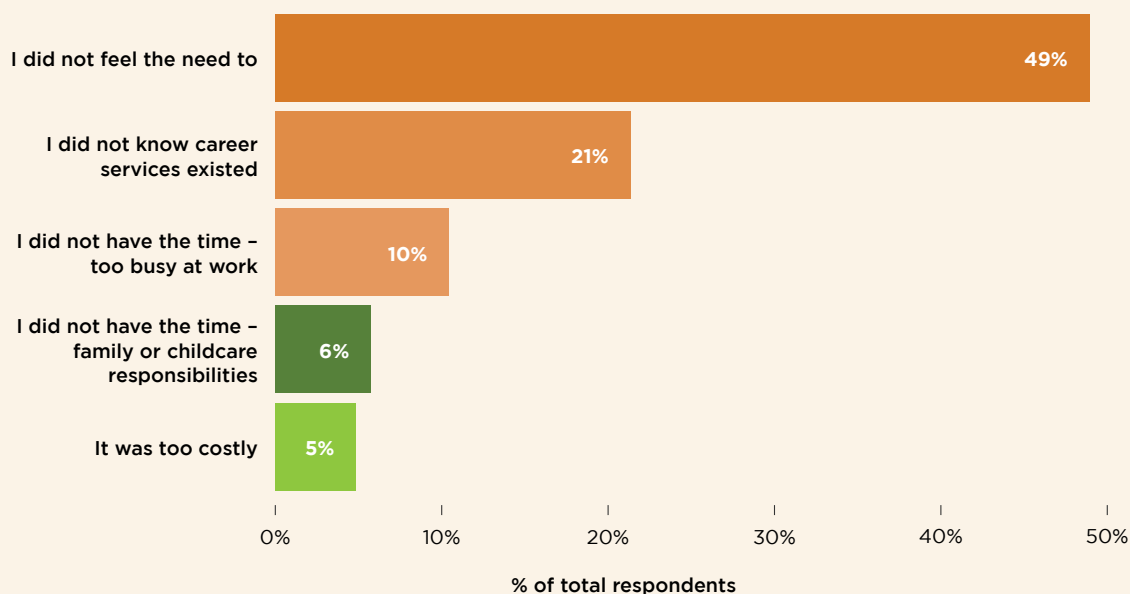
Overall, 81% of adult respondents had not used career services in the past five years (see **Figure 4**). Almost half (49%) of adults who had not used career services said that was because they did not feel the need. This implies that the other half (51%) of adults who had not used career services experience awareness or other barriers to access.

In fact, among those who did not access career services, one in five (21%) did not know they existed. A further 21% cite time- or cost-related issues. The remaining respondents could not find services (3%), believed them to be of poor quality (3%), or could not find a convenient time or location (2%).

While the survey data shows that access and awareness are substantial barriers to using career services, the findings indicate a need to better understand about these barriers – and any others that may exist – for the 49% of non-using adults who didn't feel a need to use the career services. In-depth qualitative investigation may help shed light on the specific barriers facing potential users of career services and serve as an aid to designing interventions that address those barriers.

Figure 4 – Lingering lack of awareness regarding career services use

Why career services were not accessed (% of those who did not receive career services)





Section 4: Implications and Future Considerations

Governments and international organizations around the world recognize the transformational benefits of career services. The advantages are clear and compelling, including stronger academic performance, engagement in school or work, higher income and improved health and wellbeing. Evidence for the broader economic benefits of career development show its positive impact on the labour market, the educational system and social equity.²

Awareness of and access to career services

The data from this study reveal that 19% of adults in Canada used career services, with most users (65%) having at least completed some post-secondary education. This suggests that those likely to face a higher risk of labour market disruption because of lower education levels are less likely to be accessing services.

Lower usage rates among women raises concerns about equity and gendered career patterns. These Canadian trends are consistent with international trends in which adults at greater risk of disruption are less likely to access career services.³ Several factors could explain this pattern:

- **Lack of awareness of career development and its value:** adults in Canada are only minimally exposed to the idea of career development and its importance.⁴ Our study finds that nearly half of adults do not see a need for career services (see Figure 4).
- **Lack of visibility of career services:** almost a quarter (21%) of respondents who did not access career services did not know these services existed. The lack of a common branding and visible access points may explain this gap in awareness.
- **Fail first service delivery model:** publicly-funded career services in Canada have inconsistent eligibility criteria across communities. Many limit access to unemployed persons, which may – at least partially – explain their higher use of career services.

² T. Hooley and V. Dodd (2015). *The Economic Benefits of Career Guidance*. Careers England (<https://derby.openrepository.com/handle/10545/559030>).

³ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), International Labour Organization (ILO), UNESCO, European Commission, European Training Foundation, and European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (2021). *Investing in Career Guidance, Revised Edition* (<https://www.iccdpp.org/investing-in-career-guidance-2021/>).

⁴ Canadian Career Development Foundation and Challenge Factory (2021). *Access to Career Development in Canada. Career Development Maturity Matrix Research Briefing No. 4.*

Quality of services and information received

While factors limiting awareness and access to career services are key, it is also important to consider the quality of service provided. OECD research underscores the critical importance of quality career services, particularly for those in under-represented groups.⁵ Quality career services not only enhance individuals' employability, educational and labour market outcomes, but also improve mental health and wellbeing.⁶

While most adults in Canada reported positive impacts of using career services, some gaps in accessing LMI (for example, an absence of information on financial support, future openings and current job vacancies) were also noted.

Part of this problem may lie in the limitations service providers themselves face in accessing and using LMI. For instance, LMIC's own [research](#) finds that only three out of five career practitioners (60%) find labour market information easy to understand; fewer than half (43%) say they have received training to help them access or make sense of the data.

⁵ C. Civacevich, A. Mann, F. Besa, J. Díaz, and C. Santos (2021). *Thinking About the Future: Career Readiness Insights from National Longitudinal Surveys and from Practice*. OECD Education Working Paper No. 248 (https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/thinking-about-the-future_02a419de-en).

⁶ Canadian Career Development Foundation (2021). *Evidence for Community Employment Services: A Collaborative Regional Approach. Final Report: A Tale of Transformation*.



The Path Forward

The findings of this study raise several issues. Many adults in Canada are not accessing career services — whether because they are not aware of them, don't feel the need for them, or face access barriers.

This surfaces a need for wider awareness building around career services in Canada, a more cohesive approach to the branding and visibility of services, and a more inclusive, preventative, proactive service delivery model. Issues of awareness and access are particularly important for groups most vulnerable to career disruptions and systemic barriers due to low-income, gender and other forms of marginalization.

A second significant challenge is the need to improve access to LMI for career development professionals and ensure its effective integration into service delivery. Moving forward it will be important to explore the various options available to achieve these goals, including training that is aligned to the new [competency framework](#) for the career development profession.

The forthcoming OECD study on adult career services will shed light on international best practices and highlight key success factors to guide policy. Taken together, all of this will help inform the joint efforts of LMIC and FSC to equip career services with labour market information tools and data, thus helping to improve the quality of career services in Canada.

This will enable Canadians to build the career skills and strategies they need to navigate learning and work effectively while providing career development professionals with the skills, tools and capacity they need to better serve Canadians.

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