



Respecting People. Impacting Business.™

The **GREAT DIVIDE**

The Chasm Standing Between
Job Seekers and Employers



An Express Employment Professionals White Paper
– **October 2022** –



“It is often assumed that people who aren’t working can’t find an open job, but the situation is far more complicated. There are barriers standing between jobs and those who want to work. All of us need to understand these barriers so that we can eliminate or overcome them as a society.”

– Bill Stoller, Chairman and CEO,
Express Employment International



Blocking the Career Path

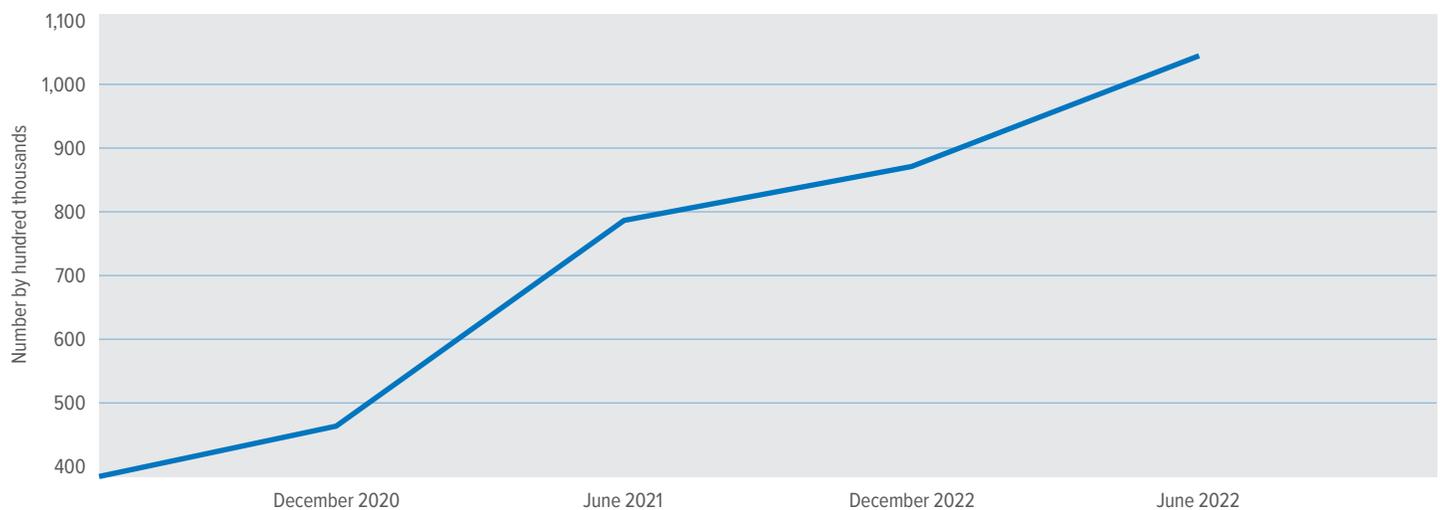
People Want to Work, But Something Is Standing in the Way

After spiking dramatically at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment rate in Canada has steadily declined, reaching 5.4% in August 2022. Nonetheless, there are currently more than 1.2 million Canadians who are unemployed.¹ This number does not include the 426,000 people who wanted a job but did not look for one, and therefore did not meet the definition of unemployed.²

At the same time, the number of job vacancies has skyrocketed. The job vacancy rate in the first quarter of 2022 was 5.9%, matching a record high from September 2021. There were more than 1 million job vacancies in June for the third consecutive month.³

So, with a record high number of job vacancies and over 1.5 million Canadians unemployed, what is keeping people from rejoining the workforce and filling these job openings?

Figure 1: Number of Job Vacancies 2012-2022



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0371-01 Job vacancies, payroll employees, and job vacancy rate by provinces and territories, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality



1.2 Million
Unemployed Canadians

426,000
Canadians Who Want a Job but Haven't Searched for One Recently

1.63 Million
Unemployed Canadians Who Want a Job

Figure 2: Job Vacancies in Selected Industries

| | July 2021 | July 2022 |
|---|-----------|-----------|
| Manufacturing | 66,025 | 82,785 |
| Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services | 52,720 | 72,225 |
| Transportation and Warehousing | 33,095 | 48,985 |
| Accommodation and Food Services | 123,700 | 171,715 |
| Construction | 67,320 | 89,225 |
| Health Care and Social Assistance | 106,285 | 149,665 |

Source: Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0372-01 Job vacancies, payroll employees, and job vacancy rate by industry sector, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality
<https://doi.org/10.25318/1410037201-eng>



The 10 BARRIERS

Drawing from the real-life experience of Express Employment Professionals franchise owners and the companies they serve, as well as exclusive survey data prepared by The Harris Poll for Express and recent economic data, Express has identified 10 common barriers to employment in the modern economy:

1 Inflation and Wages

2 Transportation and Geography

3 Workplace Culture Expectations

4 Skills Mismatch and Lack of Training

5 Child Care

6 Elder Care

7 Unpredictable Business Needs

8 Communication Issues

9 Work History and Criminal History

10 Health Issues and Concerns



1. Inflation and Wages

Wages have been rising in Canada, but the cost of living has been rising faster. And when prices rise faster than wages, a paycheque buys less and less.

Average hourly wages for employees rose 5.4% on a year-over-year basis in August after rising 5.2% in July and June, the fastest growth in almost 25 years.⁴ However, the growth in wages has paled in comparison to the rise in inflation. Inflation increased by 7.6% on a year-over-year basis in July, and 8.1% in June. Astonishingly, this increase in inflation was the largest yearly change in almost 40 years.⁵

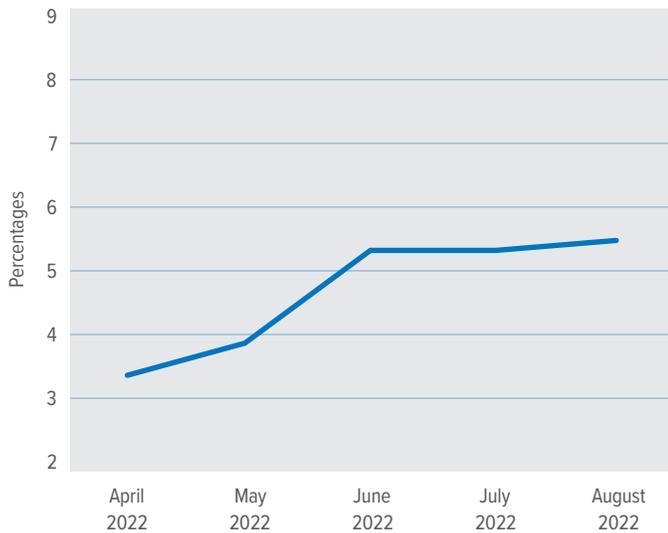
Those on the sidelines looking for reasons to go back to work may feel less motivated if the buying power of a potential paycheque is shrinking. Certainly, many people now need extra income just to pay the bills. But for others who work by choice rather than out of necessity, it may be a less attractive proposition. For those receiving government assistance, if earning a paycheque means losing those benefits, there are other tradeoffs to consider.

For someone who has been getting by without working, especially someone also facing one of the other nine barriers, the question they might be asking themselves is, "Why would I work now for less?"

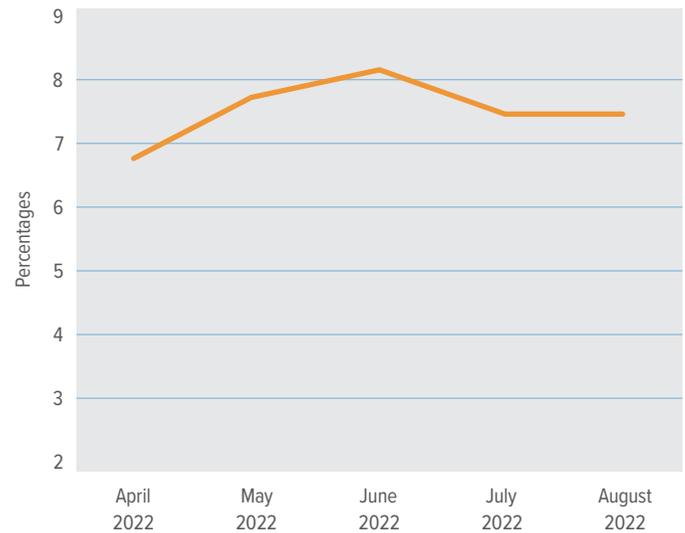


Figure 1: Wage Increase vs. Inflation Increase

Rate of Wage Increase



Rate of Inflation Increase



Source: Statistics Canada, Price trends: 1914 to today, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/2018016/cpilg-ipcgl-eng.htm>



“Employers need to really consider what a livable wage is for someone working for them. If your place of work is not accessible by a bus route, you must pay more. If someone cannot afford rent, food, their bills, a vehicle, and all the costs associated with it, while working full time for your organization, you will continue to see turnover and jobs will continue to go unfilled.”

– James Norris, Express franchise owner, London, Ontario



2. Transportation and Geography



By necessity, many job seekers have to be picky about job location. They may only be able to commute to jobs that are accessible via public transit. Or, due to fuel or other costs, they may only be able to commute a limited distance. Or, more challengingly, promising job openings may be in one region while they live in another—meaning the only way to get a desirable job would be to relocate to another city or province/territory.

Industrial jobs are often located outside of urban areas, and these suburban and rural areas can be in short supply of workers and often lack frequent public transportation, if there is any at all.

While lack of public transportation may not have previously been an issue for some employees and job seekers who had access to a vehicle, the rising costs of both gas and cars, as well as vehicle maintenance and repairs, means many people can no longer afford to drive to work. If public transit is not available, then employees cannot get to work.

For example, the national average cost of regular unleaded gasoline has increased 33% so far this year compared to last year and 75% compared to 2020. In addition, the cost of new and used cars has increased significantly. The cost of used cars has increased more than 35%, while the cost of new cars has increased 18% compared to last year.⁶

A recent survey found that, on average, Canadians saved more than \$10,000 working remotely during the pandemic. Not paying as much for fuel and commuting costs was a major contributor to what they saved while working from home in some capacity.⁷

If it is too difficult and/or expensive to get to work, then unemployed Canadians will not take available jobs, especially ones that do not allow for working remotely.





“Municipal and regional governments have not kept up with transportation infrastructure in areas that have grown. We have a couple of large business parks that have poor or no transit to the area. This has created large staffing issues and is forcing companies to pay higher wages just to attract workers. Some of our clients have helped arrange carpooling and adjusted shift start and finish times to accommodate workers on the limited transit that is available.”

– Terry Stewart, Express franchise owner, Surrey, British Columbia



“During a recent meeting with a large manufacturer, they shared their staffing challenges and the difficulty of finding workers to fill their shift times. It was determined that the solution was to change their start time by half an hour in order to accommodate employees commuting via the public bus route. Solutions can be simple and even inexpensive as long as the will to change is there.”

– Michael Elliott, Express franchise owner, Kitchener and London, Ontario



3. Workplace Culture Expectations



Some barriers are self-imposed. Perhaps the most notable is job seekers' workplace culture expectations. The labour shortage has given job seekers the sense that they can be choosier in their job search. In addition, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic made many Canadians re-evaluate what they want in a job and how they balance their time.

As a result, many job seekers may avoid or turn down opportunities with employers who do not clearly promise the type of culture they want. They may look for the following as evidence of the culture they are seeking:

- ***Flexible work schedules***
- ***Reasonable, predictable hours***
- ***Flexibility in work location/Ability to work remotely***
- ***Clear opportunities for career advancement and professional development***
- ***Clear communication about expectations and goals***
- ***Welcoming attitude to people of all backgrounds***
- ***Sufficient paid time off***
- ***Generous benefits, including wellness and mental health support***
- ***Employee appreciation events or perks***
- ***Reputation for high employee satisfaction***

Even before the pandemic, workplace flexibility and the ability to work from home ranked highest after wages and benefits when employees were asked what they want from their employers, and this has become even more in demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ In fact, a recent poll found that 40% of Canadians are willing to take a pay cut to be able to work from home.¹⁰

But workplace culture can be difficult to measure and is often in the eye of the beholder. A job seeker will use the application and interview process to assess the company. If it seems that the employer does not treat employees well or does not pay attention to an employee's individual needs, concerns, or values, the job seeker will move on to the next opening.





"Wages, while important, aren't the only way to make a company stand out—making employees feel heard, valued, and appreciated is always a good retention strategy. Not every employee wants the same perk or benefit, so it is very important to sit down and speak with each one of your employees individually. One employee may want to change their hours so they can make it to school drop-off or pick-up, one might want the ability to work from home, and another might want more vacation time."

– Bradley Jenkins, Express franchise owner, Cambridge, Ontario



"Company culture is often the number one reason given in welcome and exit interviews as to why people join and leave companies. Express' Engage to Retain training program addresses two key components of an effective employee retention strategy: effectively onboarding new employees and the importance of ongoing development."

– Dan Purdy, Express franchise owner, Abbotsford, British Columbia



4. Skills Mismatch and Lack of Training



Even though employers seem desperate to fill jobs, they will not accept just any job applicant. Businesses still want to hire employees who have the basic knowledge and skills to perform the job well. The trouble is, so many job seekers have not had the opportunities to gain these skills, which could range from technical certificates for advanced manufacturing to necessary vocational licenses for service industry jobs.

Why do they lack these skills? One reason is that job seekers do not have the resources to acquire them. Another is that the educational system is not equipping students with in-demand skills and credentials. Yet another issue is that, unlike in past recessions, those who lost jobs in the 2020 recession did not or could not use the opportunity to pursue retraining or upskilling for in-demand careers—a topic explored in greater detail in the October 2021 Express white paper, “The Lost Generation.”¹¹

A 2020 Express-Harris poll, which is explored in the Express white paper, “A Canadian Education Revolution,” found that 9 in 10 Canadians (89%) endorsed the idea of an “education revolution.” Four out of five (80%) said that schools are not preparing students with the skills they need to be successful in the workplace, and 82% also said that the education system has failed to evolve to meet the needs of the modern workforce.¹²

According to that same poll, the lack of training extends to “soft skills.” About half of employed Canadians wish their high schools would have taught networking skills (48%) or offered interviewing tips or practice sessions (55%). In addition, 59% wish their high schools would have taught them how to handle real-life workplace situations like disagreements with colleagues.



“The greatest shift employers are likely going to need to make is increasing the ability to train and onboard. If the market won't provide people with the skills you need, then you better start figuring out a way to provide the training.”

– Brent Pollington, Express franchise owner, Vancouver, British Columbia



48%
Wish Networking Skills Were Taught

55%
Wish Interview Tips Were Offered

59%
Wish Conflict Resolution Was Taught



Since schools aren't equipping students with the skills needed for the real-life workforce, many companies need to provide training if they can't find someone who already has the required skills for the job. But this can create a catch-22. Many employers are hesitant to invest the time and cost to train a new employee as, in this tight labour market, many will and have used their upgraded skills to get a higher-paying job elsewhere. However, not training new employees leaves employers unable to get workers with the skills needed to fill open jobs, resulting in continued labour shortages and work not getting done.



“My advice to clients is, whenever possible, hire for attitude and train for skill. Fortunately, more and more companies are building training plans into their hiring plans.”

– Hanif Hemani, Express franchise owner, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

For years, Express has sounded the alarm about the mismatch between the skills required for jobs that are in demand and the skills possessed by people who need jobs. There is no sign that the situation has noticeably improved and, in fact, may have become even worse during the pandemic.



5. Child Care

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadian parents in many parts of the country struggled to find a daycare placement. The COVID-19 pandemic upended child care in Canada and continues to disrupt child care facility operations, with many home-based child care facilities closing their doors altogether. This leaves working parents under greater strain than ever before.

There was already a shortage of daycare workers and long waitlists for daycare spots, which has become even more severe as many daycare workers left the industry during the pandemic, citing low pay, long hours, and burnout. Many of these workers will never return. This shortage has caused many daycares to reduce their hours or close temporarily.¹⁵ This situation will get worse as thousands more spaces are being created across the country with no one to fill them, causing more families to be waitlisted for a daycare opening.

The federal government has now signed agreements with every province and territory for \$10 a day daycare, which will provide much-needed financial relief to working parents. However, most of these spots won't be available in the near future, and businesses need workers now. In addition, not all daycares are signing up for the program, and there will not be enough spots for all parents. As a result, a significant number of Canadian families continue to pay the high cost of daycare. With the rise in inflation and increase in wage rates, families that cannot get subsidized daycare will be paying even more for a daycare space, if they can find one.

Furthermore, the problem of a lack of daycare for shift workers has not been addressed. The new daycare spaces being created across the country will almost all be for traditional 9-5 jobs, leaving parents who work shifts, especially overnight, with few to no options.

The child care issues exacerbated by the pandemic caused parents to change their working habits, according to a recent Express survey conducted by The Harris Poll. Since the start of the pandemic, adjusting work hours (39%), taking time off to care for children (36%), and working remotely (36%) were the most frequently cited by working parents. Additionally, 16% of parents shifted from full-time to part-time work.

Child Care Issues Exacerbated by the Pandemic

39%

Adjusting
Work Hours

36%

Taking Time Off
to Care for Children

36%

Working
Remotely

16%

Shifted from
Full-Time to Part-Time



"For the most part, we have seen support and encouragement for working parents. Flexibility offered by employers is at an all-time high and must be continued in order to retain working parents as part of the labour force."

*– Jessica Culo, Express franchise owner,
Edmonton, Alberta*

Some parents, mainly women, have temporarily left the workforce due to their inability to get a daycare space for their child(ren).¹⁴ More than 1 in 6 working parents quit (16%) during the pandemic.¹⁵

The problem extends beyond day care facilities. Schools are also facing staffing and operating challenges of their own. Widespread reports of bus driver shortages present parents with a similar problem—many parents had to make difficult choices about how to get their children to and from school while still showing up for work.¹⁶ At the start of the 2022–2023 school year, many school districts were reporting teacher shortages.¹⁷

An Express survey conducted by The Harris Poll found that the situation has become severe enough that many companies are trying to help working parents deal with child care issues with paid parental leave (43%), flexible work hours (41%), flexible work location (34%), ability to work part-time (30%), unpaid parental benefits (25%), and shortened work weeks (21%) among the most common.¹⁸

As long as parents have difficulty finding daycare spaces for their children, many parents will be kept out of the workforce—unless employers or others step in to fill the gap.

There’s a longer-term risk here, too. If parents continue to have a difficult time finding or affording child care, younger Canadians may be more likely to choose not to have children, slowing population growth and, over time, further exacerbating the worker shortage.



Companies' Efforts to Help



Source: The Harris Poll

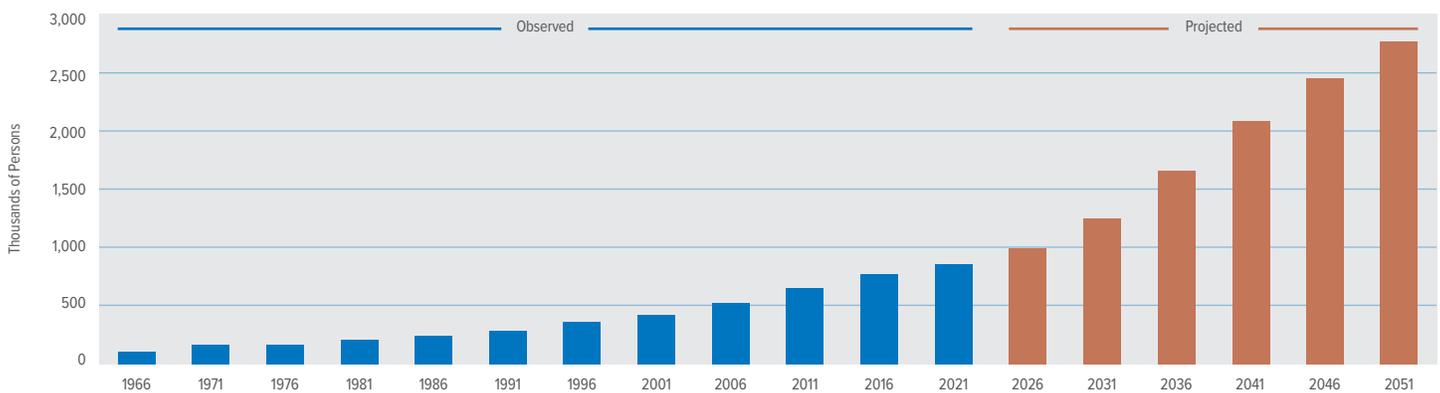


6. Elder Care

Canada's population is aging rapidly. From 2016 to 2021, the number of Canadians aged 65 and older rose almost 20% to 7 million—the second-largest increase in 75 years. The number of Canadians aged 85 and older is approaching 1 million and is more than twice the number from 20 years ago. This cohort does not include the large baby boomer population that is just beginning to reach 85 years old. Statistics Canada population projections indicate that by 2051, almost one-quarter of the population could be aged 65 and older, with the number of Canadians aged 85 and older tripling during that time.

As elderly Canadians age, their health needs become more complex. As a result, many require home care or live in a nursing or seniors' home. Roughly 1-in-20 Canadians aged 65 and older and 1-in-4 aged 85 and older, live in a nursing or seniors' home.¹⁹

The Number of People Aged 85 and Older Continues to Grow



Note: Data for 2026 to 2051 are population projections from the M1 medium-growth scenario and are based on the 2016 Census. For reasons of comparability, the Census net undercoverage has been removed from the projected populations presented in this graph.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1966 to 2021. The custom population projections are based on the Population Projections for Canada (2018 to 2068), Provinces and Territories (2018-2043). Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 91-520-X.

Over half of nursing homes and roughly half of senior homes have reported an increase in critical staffing shortages.²⁰ The labour shortage puts an incredible strain on the facilities' ability to provide reliable and quality care, as well as their ability to take in new patients and residents amid rising demand due to the aging population. But with staff experiencing pandemic exhaustion and expressing concerns about pay and advancement opportunities, it is difficult to retain employees and recruit new ones.

The shortage of elder care professionals is especially stark within home health care, as that industry is considered one of the fastest growing.²¹



Canada's health system is already struggling to meet current needs for home and long-term care, but as baby boomers move into the ages associated with higher care needs, demand for home and long-term care will skyrocket.

The Canadian Medical Association estimates that demand for long-term care is expected to reach 606,000 patients in 2031, up from 380,000 in 2019. Similarly, demand for home care will increase to roughly 1.8 million patients in 2031, up from close to 1.2 million in 2019.²³ In other words, more Canadians will require home care or a nursing home spot, at the same time that fewer and fewer are available.

This forces many working-age adults to choose between caring for a parent or loved one or going to work. If their elderly loved one cannot get a spot in a nursing home, and home care is unavailable, then they have few options but to provide that care themselves.

More than 1 in 4 Canadians aged 30 or older say they're caregivers for aging parents or in-laws, and that number is expected to grow as the proportion of elderly people grows.²³

To be sure, the pandemic exacerbated this issue, but it didn't create it. Elder care was already a challenge—a barrier—years ago, as Express explained in a 2018 white paper.²⁴

For the growing number of Canadians who are part of the "sandwich generation" and have to care for both young children and elderly parents, paid work on top of caregiving responsibilities can be overwhelming and unfeasible.



7. Unpredictable Business Needs

SOLD OUT

Statistics show that jobs have been abundant in 2021 and 2022. But that doesn't capture the full economic picture—or the unique situation of individual companies. Businesses have been grappling with a host of issues that have created more unpredictability than at any other period in recent memory.

Think about some of the questions that businesses are facing:

- *Will we have to cancel orders if supplies don't arrive due to global shipping delays?*
- *How will volatile energy prices affect our bottom line?*
- *How will port backlogs affect us?*
- *What does the local housing market mean for our ability to attract employees?*
- *Is the government going to raise taxes on my business?*
- *Will we be able to invest in the equipment needed to expand our business? Will that equipment even be available due to the electronic chip shortage?*
- *Will inflation continue rising and eating into our profit margins?*
- *What does the threat of war overseas mean for our supply chains?*

With questions like these looming, a business's outlook can change by the day. A business that is eager to hire many new employees one day may rethink that the next when they find out the machinery those employees were going to operate is backordered—or when they find out that energy costs have gone up so much that they cannot afford to offer the salaries they were planning to pay.

As a result, some job seekers may apply for jobs and never hear back or the position may be eliminated before they get through the application process. This confusion and uncertainty are frustrating for employers and employees alike. It can make job seekers feel like they are going after a rapidly moving target, with some unemployed Canadians taking a break from searching for a job altogether.



"Demand for goods has remained strong and there are still supply chain backlogs. The backlog creates uncertainty and delays for companies when it comes to hiring, which can cause workers to move on to other jobs and further create an even greater labour shortage at that company."

– Niven Lee, Express franchise owner, Delta, British Columbia



8. Work History and Criminal History

Another barrier is work history. The hot job market has led some workers to change jobs frequently, but that practice can backfire. Potential employers may see these “job hoppers” as unreliable. Why would they hire someone who has a history of leaving jobs after only a few months or weeks? That is often not even enough time for a new employee to get fully trained for their new position.

A criminal history can also pose a significant barrier for a job applicant—not because it makes the applicant unqualified for a job but because the application may not receive due consideration. Many businesses are still in the practice of automatically disqualifying or disregarding any applicant who possesses a criminal record—without looking into the nature and severity of the offense.

This practice can keep many otherwise capable individuals on the sidelines. Almost 4 million Canadians have a criminal record of some sort.²⁵

A study by Public Safety Canada and the Correctional Service of Canada found that only about half of released offenders who filed tax forms were in the labour market, compared with 69% of the general Canadian population. In addition, many released offenders were earning below the poverty line, earning less than half of what the general Canadian population earns on average. Women and Indigenous people released from federal prison have an even harder time gaining employment and earn even less than their non-Indigenous male counterparts.²⁶

Those with criminal records often apply for pardons for this reason, as a pardon seals the record of conviction so that no third party can obtain access to it. However, the pardon process cannot be initiated until several years after the completion of a sentence, and the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have slowed this process down even more.²⁷

Reviewing and modernizing criminal background check policies would create an opportunity for businesses and individuals to tap into a pool of talent while still balancing safety concerns.



“Employees are looking to go where they can get the most pay, benefits, and flexibility. With inflation rising, high employee turnover will continue for the foreseeable future.”

– KV Aulakh, Express franchise owner, Barrie, Ontario





“There are many employers who are requesting background checks as part of their hiring process. For some positions, it is a safety requirement, but for the many businesses that do not have a safety risk to the public or vulnerable populations, they should reconsider why a background check policy is in place. Some people have made a mistake in their past, have learned from it, and should not be penalized years after.”

– James Norris, Express franchise owner, London, Ontario



9. Health Issues and Concerns



FINANCIAL POST

March 10, 2022

Mental Health Emerges as Top Concern for Canadian Employers Worried about Workers' Low Grade Trauma from the Pandemic

“Report finds business leaders fretting about toll of mental health issues, from absenteeism to added costs for treatment.”

Many Canadians grapple with complex health and disability issues that can keep them from working. But in recent years, health issues have been front and centre due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

People who are immunocompromised or otherwise vulnerable may hesitate to work in positions that require frequent and close interactions with other people. Although looser quarantine restrictions are in place, it does not mean the virus will stop circulating and disrupting work and job searches. Nor does it mean people's fear will fully subside, especially as scientists report variants are becoming even more contagious.²⁸

Perhaps most alarming, though, is the number of Canadians who contracted COVID-19 months ago and are still experiencing debilitating symptoms.

A study of more than 1,000 Canadians who contracted long-COVID found that nearly 70% of respondents had to take leave from work. More than half had to reduce working hours, with 74% reducing their working hours by half or more. A significant number of respondents had to stop working altogether.²⁹

Because these conditions are still relatively new—and can vary significantly from person to person—businesses are not yet accustomed to making accommodations for employees in the same way they would for someone with other conditions or limitations.



“We still hear from people who are worried about catching COVID-19 if they were to take a job, especially as masks are no longer mandatory.”

– Terry Stewart, Express franchise owner, Surrey, British Columbia



But it's not just physical health issues that have come to the forefront during the pandemic, mental health issues have been exacerbated by the pandemic, particularly for those who have experienced social isolation, job loss, or changes in relationships. Several surveys have found that the mental health of Canadians has deteriorated significantly since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁰ As a result, workers are taking more sick days and some are taking temporary breaks from the workforce.

“Mental health struggles have been dramatically on the rise, causing people to miss more shifts or be less productive at work. Some have even left the workforce temporarily.”



– James Norris, Express franchise owner, London, Ontario



10. Communication Issues



The way we communicate has changed significantly in recent years, as the reliance on electronic communications continues to increase—and in-person, face-to-face communication is no longer prioritized. Communication preferences vary widely among people of different generations, which can create barriers for job seekers. As a result, job candidates often complain that they do not hear back from prospective employers about their applications. Likewise, employers often complain of job applicants “ghosting” them.

The disconnect in communication styles and preferences leads to various problems:

- **An employer will assume an applicant lacks “soft skills.”** If an employer perceives that an applicant is not communicating directly or is responding too informally, they may assume this is indicative of poor communication skills and a lack of “soft skills” more generally. The issue might arise, for example, when an applicant relies only on texting or a brief email, rather than returning phone calls.
- **The applicant will feel uncertain about where they stand in the process.** When an employer doesn’t clearly communicate a job applicant’s status in the hiring process or relies on impersonal automated updates, many applicants will assume they are no longer “in the running” and move on to other opportunities. This issue might arise, for example, when a company relies only on communications generated through its online job board.
- **The employer will assume that the applicant is not truly interested.** When an applicant fails to respond promptly or does not respond clearly to questions or interview requests, the employer may move on to other candidates or assume the applicant does not want the job. In reality though, the applicant may be inexperienced at job hunting but still qualified and interested in the position.



“Both the employer and the job seeker must follow up quickly and consistently. In our office, we have a standard and process to contact 100% of our applicants in one day and will continue to follow up for several days.”

– Niven Lee, Express franchise owner, Delta, British Columbia





"Businesses need to re-evaluate how they accept applications. With the rise of online job boards and the ability for people to mass apply to positions, companies are having to spend more time going through resumes to find the right type of candidates. This can cause delays, or worse, possibly cause the company to be too selective and discount many applicants they should be considering. Many employers will also not even take a resume in person anymore. I believe this is a mistake as it shows the eagerness of the person applying and allows an opportunity to meet that applicant in person."

– James Norris, Express franchise owner, London, Ontario



Breaking Barriers, Clearing Career Paths

Where does this leave us? Everyone—employers, employees, policymakers, nonprofit leaders, and educators—has a role to play in addressing these issues. It's not just individuals' livelihoods that are at stake, it's the strength of our overall economy and the country's future.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused many changes to Canada's workforce, some temporary and some permanent. But many of these shifts had already started, the pandemic just propelled them into warp speed. Employers need to accept that the post-COVID workplace and workforce are different and, as many have already done, they need to adapt and innovate.

Labour shortages causing competition for talent are happening while the cost of living has risen sharply. As a result, companies that do not offer attractive wage and benefits packages will have a difficult time finding workers.

But compensation isn't all that matters to employees, company culture is more important than ever. The pandemic caused many Canadians to rethink their work-life balance, but younger generations were already making this shift. Employees want to work for a company that makes them feel valued, appreciated, and heard.

In the post-COVID workplace, it's become clear that one size does not fit all anymore. What attracts one job seeker may not attract another. Rather than trying to impose the same benefits and solutions for everyone, employers would be well served to speak to their employees and see what they value and accommodate those requests as much as possible. It's important to note, not all adjustments cost a lot of money or time, sometimes simple inexpensive changes can make a big difference.

One of the things most valued by job seekers is flexibility. Whether it is the ability to work remotely full-time or on a hybrid schedule, a four-day work week, the willingness of employers to change hours to accommodate family schedules and responsibilities, more vacation, or flex time, employees want to work for companies that provide them with work-life balance. This is especially the case for job seekers who have family caregiving responsibilities and/or physical or mental health issues.

Most employers are adapting to the new world of work and have taken steps to attract workers. Two-thirds of Canadian companies say they are increasing wages this year (66%). Close to half also say they have enhanced benefits (48%), with more sick leave (17%), better health care benefits (16%), and more paid time off (16%) among the most common improvements.³¹

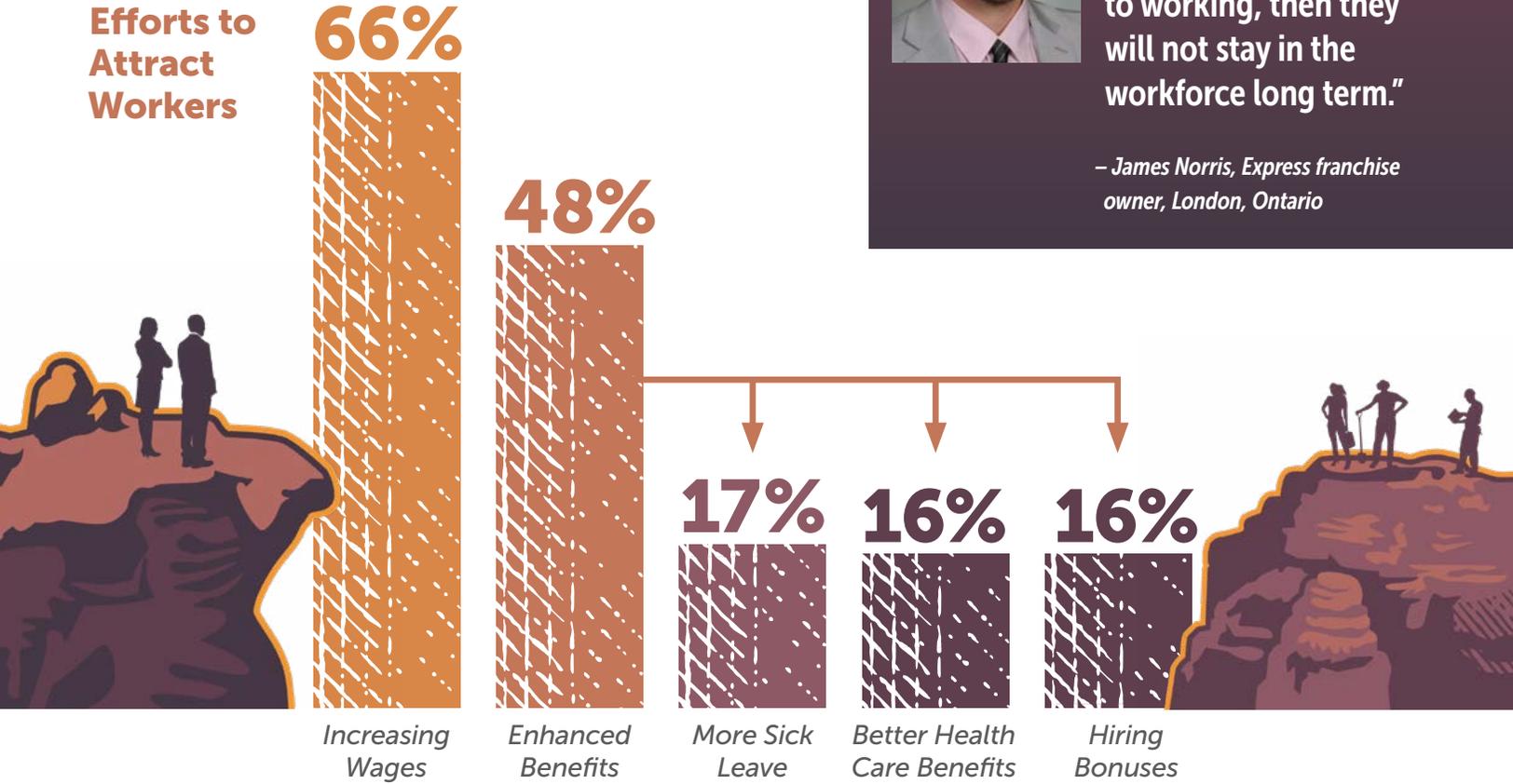


“Creating a quality company culture is a good investment. If you nurture an environment where people feel valued and motivated, the rest will follow.”

– Bill Stoller, Chairman and CEO, Express Employment International

In addition, almost two-thirds of Canadian hiring decision-makers (63%) say their company is taking steps to make hiring new workers easier—including offering remote work (24%), offering higher starting salaries (20%), and hiring bonuses (17%).

Efforts to Attract Workers



"If the difference or impact in someone's life is minimal when they go from not working to working, then they will not stay in the workforce long term."

— James Norris, Express franchise owner, London, Ontario

63% of companies are taking steps to make hiring new workers easier

Despite these efforts, many companies cannot find the workers they need to fill open positions. Companies need to examine the specific barriers in their job markets—and then work to help alleviate them the best they can. Are qualifications a dominant issue? Provide on-the-job training or partner with a local school to create earn-and-learn opportunities. Is transportation the problem? Perhaps a shuttle service could be an answer. Or maybe a rideshare benefit until an employee has some additional money saved to secure transportation of their own. Or maybe shift times need to change to align with public transportation.

Additional Benefits



As always, overcoming barriers will require the right level of drive, determination, and personal responsibility from the job seeker. But for everyone involved, the key will be understanding that new and growing problems will not be solved by old solutions.



"Company culture is extremely important because you can get someone in the door with a high wage, but to keep them, you absolutely need a positive, fun, and inclusive company culture. Employees should not dread coming to work every day and, especially in this tight labour market, companies have to go the extra mile to keep their valuable employees."

– KV Aulakh, Express franchise owner, Barrie, Ontario

Express Employment Professionals was founded on giving hope through jobs that help people provide for their families and giving peace of mind to employers in need of talented workers. Millions of Canadians need that hope more than ever.



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