

# Canada Memo

Date: November 20, 2020  
To: Express Employment Professionals  
From: The Harris Poll  
Subject: State of the Unemployed 2020 Survey – Canada

*The survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between October 15 and October 29, 2020 among 1,008 Canadian unemployed adults (defined as adults ages 18+ in Canada who are not employed, but looking for work). Figures are weighted where necessary by age by gender, race, region, marital status, education, household size, and knowledge of official languages.*

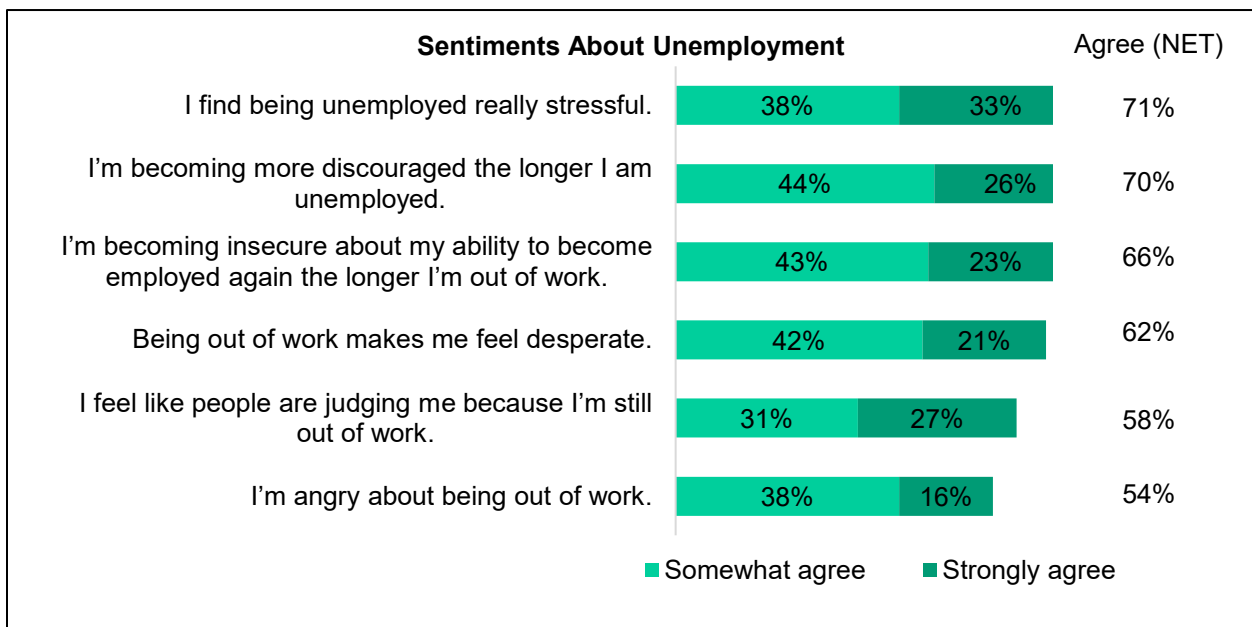
*All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, The Harris Poll avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.*

*Respondents for this survey were selected among panel members who have agreed to participate in surveys. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.*

**For unemployed Canadians, the COVID-19 pandemic is not only the most commonly reported reason for their unemployment, it is also a barrier to returning to work, and a key factor why many say they are still unemployed. As more time passes without work, negative emotions about unemployment intensify, particularly for younger adults.**

Nearly 2 in 5 unemployed adults (38%) have been out of work for 6 months or less, entering unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked why they are unemployed, the most commonly cited reason is they lost their job/their position was eliminated due to the COVID-19 pandemic (29%), followed by being laid off (14%). In fact, many (58%) say if it wasn't for the COVID-19 pandemic, they would still be employed and more than 3 in 5 (62%) believe the COVID-19 pandemic is the reason they are still unemployed (particularly those who have been unemployed for 4-6 months (77%) and Boomers/Seniors (74%)).

The majority of unemployed adults report negative feelings about being out of work:



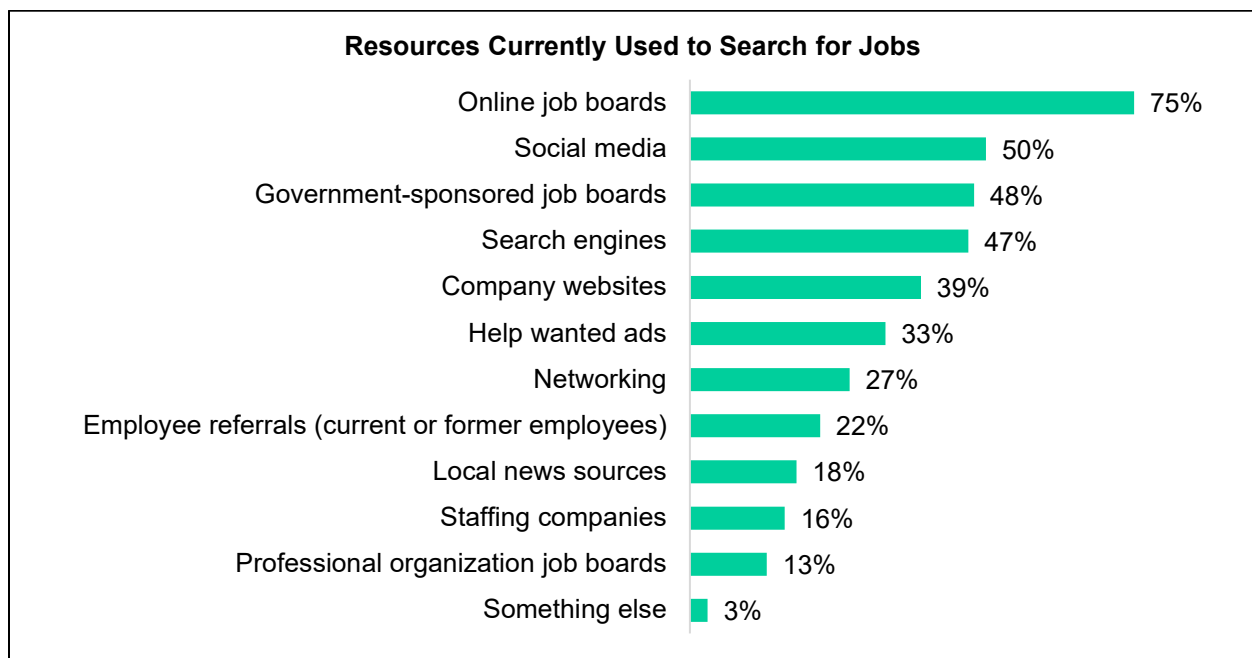
Nonetheless, there is an air of resiliency as most are confident everything will turn out fine (72%) and say they are able to handle the stress of unemployment (64%). Boomers/Seniors are more likely than Gen Z to agree they can handle the stress of unemployment (69% vs. 52%), while Gen Z is more apt to report negative feelings as they presumably have not experienced as many ups and downs of the job market during their working life: they find being unemployed really *stressful* (80% vs. 63% Boomers/Seniors); they are become more *discouraged* the longer they are unemployed (77% vs. 63%); being out of work makes them feel *desperate* (74% vs. 54%); they feel like people are judging them because they're still out of work (71% vs. 40%); and they're *angry* about being out of work (62% vs. 48%).

In addition to the reason many are unemployed, the COVID-19 pandemic is also a hindrance to returning to work for some. Among unemployed adults who would not or are not sure if they would return to work if offered a job right now (19%), half (50%) say it's because they're concerned about the COVID-19 infection rate, 38% say they are concerned about their safety, and 23% say it is because they have to take care of children or other family members.

***The job search is a priority for the majority of unemployed Canadians, with many spending hours each week using various resources to find open jobs. However, these efforts have led to few interviews and many desire more resources during the search process.***

Although nearly 4 in 5 unemployed adults (79%) say they have not completely given up on looking for a job, the majority (63%) say they expected to find a job more quickly. Around 7 in 10 say they're finding it hard to keep their effort level high in their job search (70%) or say the longer they're unemployed, the harder they're finding it to keep working hard at finding a job (67%). In fact, more than 1 in 5 unemployed adults (21%) say they have completely given up on looking for a job.

Still, nearly 2 in 3 (64%) feel that right now, there is no activity that is more important than finding a job, and unemployed Canadians spent 11 hours last week (on average) looking for work. The majority (75%) currently use online job boards to search for jobs, with around half using social media (50%), government-sponsored job boards (48%), or search engines (47%).



While most (72%) say they feel like they know how to go about finding a job, more than 1 in 3 (37%) say using more resources to find open jobs would make it easier to find a job during the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, Gen Z stands apart from their older counterparts when it comes to looking for jobs, as they are:

- least likely to feel like they know how to go about finding a job (58% vs. 70% Millennials, 75% Gen X, and 82% Boomers/Seniors), and
- more likely to believe that using more resources to find open jobs would be helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic (51% vs. 37% Millennials, 34% Gen X, and 31% Boomers/Seniors).

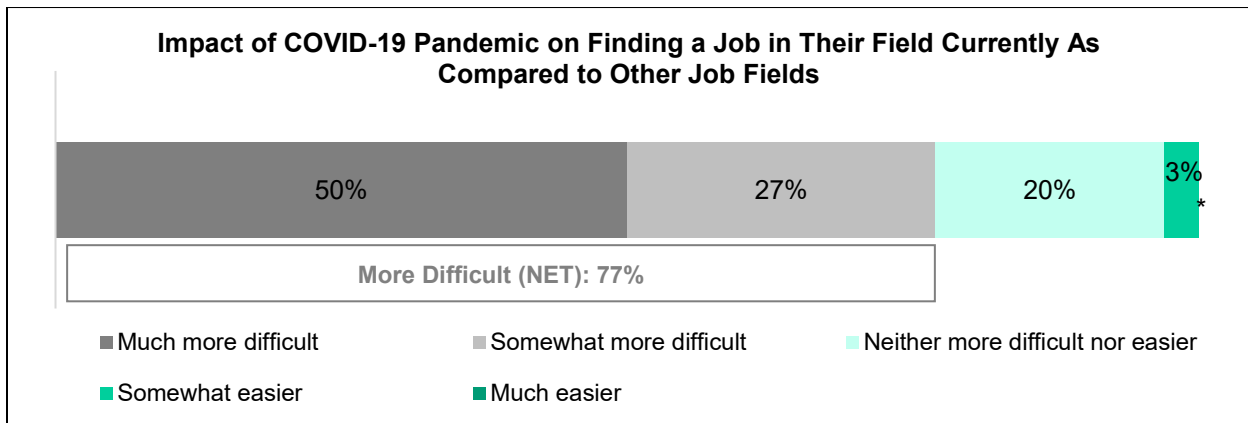
Along these lines, compared to older adults, Gen Z more commonly uses social media or search engines to search for jobs, but is less likely to use government-sponsored job boards or staffing companies.

From this job hunting, unemployed adults applied to 13 jobs (on average) in the last month, though only had 1 interview (on average). Of those who have not had an interview in the last month, some last had an interview in Q3 (14%) or at the beginning of this year in Q1 (14%), but only 9% say they had an interview in Q2, presumably due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, the longer adults are unemployed, the less time they say they've spent looking for work, the fewer jobs they've applied for, and the fewer jobs they've interviewed for.

***A sense of hope among unemployed adults about finding a job they really want persists, but few are highly hopeful they will find a job that rivals their previous one or has key aspects they want. As the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light new and existing challenges in the job search process, many feel switching job fields or upgrading their training could aid in finding a job.***

In their current job search, 4 in 5 unemployed adults (80%) say they are hopeful that they will find a job they really want in the next 6 months. Fewer are at least somewhat hopeful that they will soon find a job that has good benefits (59%), is as good or better than the last job they had (59%), or is for the pay they want (56%).

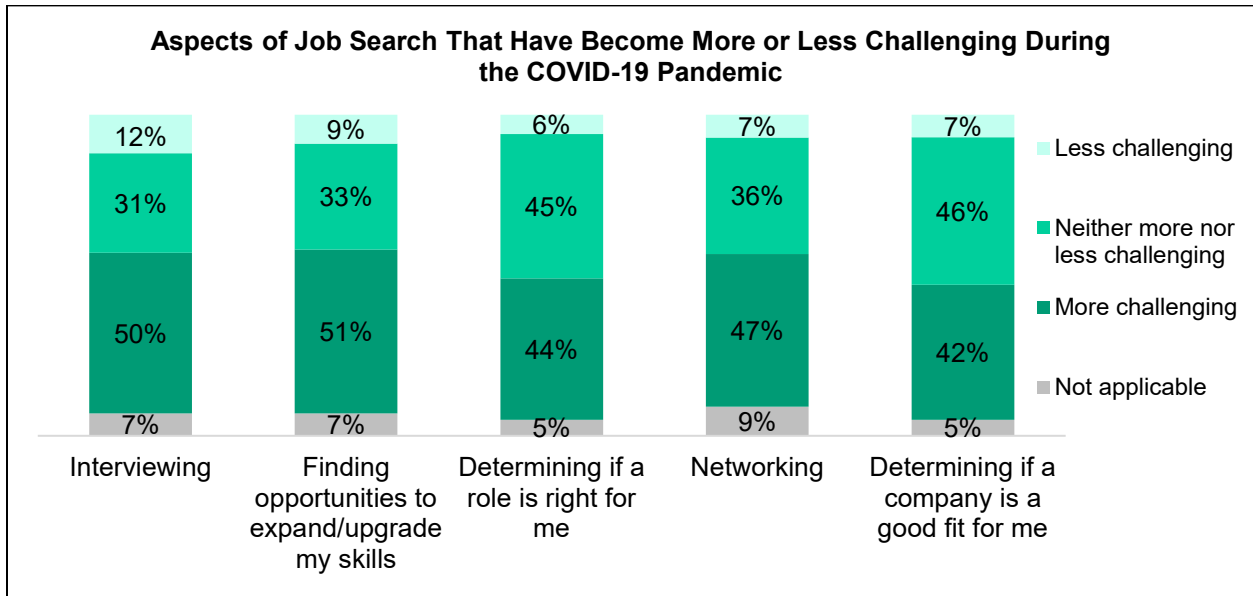
Many (59%) are at least somewhat hopeful that they will soon find a job in their field, but only 19% say they are extremely or very hopeful. In fact, for more than half of unemployed adults (59%), the COVID-19 pandemic has made them less hopeful that they will find a new job in their field. Further, more than 3 in 4 (77%) believe the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more difficult to find a job in their field currently as compared to other job fields, with half (50%) saying it has become much more difficult.



This sentiment of increased difficulty is shared among the vast majority of Boomers/Seniors who have been diagnosed with a chronic health condition (86%), with more than 7 in 10 (72%) saying they are less hopeful they'll find a new job in their field.

More than 1 in 3 unemployed adults (37%) believe changing job fields would make it easier for them to find a job during the pandemic. Nearly 2 in 3 (65%) are looking for a job in a different field because they haven't been able to find one in theirs, and more than half (52%) even believe that starting over in a new field is the only way they can find a job right now during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only put a damper on finding a job in one's field, it has created new or exaggerated existing challenges to the search process. The vast majority of unemployed adults (87%) say they are currently facing challenges while trying to find a job during the COVID-19 pandemic; most commonly, they must compete against more people looking for jobs (65%), followed by limited to no opportunities to attend in-person networking events (37%). In addition, many report certain aspects of the job search during the COVID-19 pandemic have become more challenging, notably finding opportunities to expand/upgrade their skills (51%), interviewing (50%), or networking (47%).



Although 3 in 5 unemployed adults (60%) agree their education provided them with many of the skills necessary to be successful in the workplace, more than half of unemployed adults (52%) say they are not surprised they don't have the skills employers want. Further, many say expanding their hard skills (43%) or improving their soft skills (31%) would make it easier to find a job during the COVID-19 pandemic.

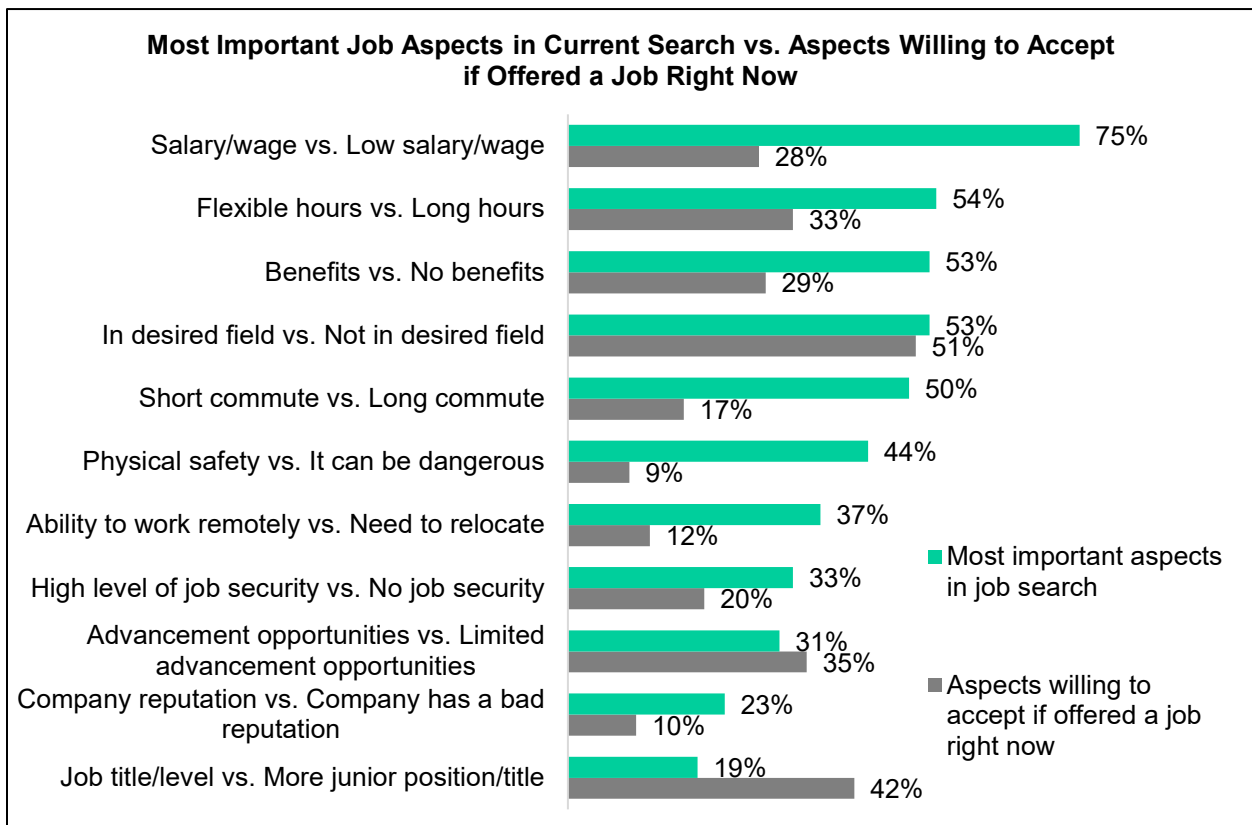
**Spotlight on College Graduates:**

*More than half of unemployed adults with at least a bachelor's degree (55%) say they are surprised they don't have the skills employers want, compared to 43% of those with a high school degree or less who say the same. To this point, one-third of those with higher education (33%) wish they focused on a vocational career rather than getting their college degree, and more than half (54%) would be willing to accept a more junior position/title if they were offered a job right now.*

*Though, there is still perceived value in having higher degrees as those with education below a bachelor's degree are at least twice as likely as those with at least a bachelor's degree to say that completing higher educational degrees would make it easier to find a job during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, more than 7 in 10 of those with higher education (71%) feel their education provided them with many of the skills necessary to be successful in the workplace, compared to 46% of those with a high school degree or less.*

**Given the exaggerated challenges in the job search as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many unemployed adults are weighing their losses and would be willing to forgo aspects of a job that are important to them in order to pay the bills.**

Resulting from the challenges to finding a job that is a good fit, let alone any job, unemployed adults commonly say they would be willing to accept some aspects of a job, that may be less than ideal, if they were offered a job right now. Salary/wage (75%), flexible hours (54%), benefits (e.g., paid time off, health insurance, RRSP) (53%), and finding a job in their desired field (53%) are reported as the most important aspects of a job in unemployed adults' current job search, whereas the aspects they would most commonly be willing to accept if offered a job right now are not in their desired field (51%), a more junior position/title (42%), limited advancement opportunities (35%), and long hours (33%). The aspect that appears to be the most non-negotiable is salary/wage, with only around 1 in 4 (28%) saying they'd accept a low salary/wage.

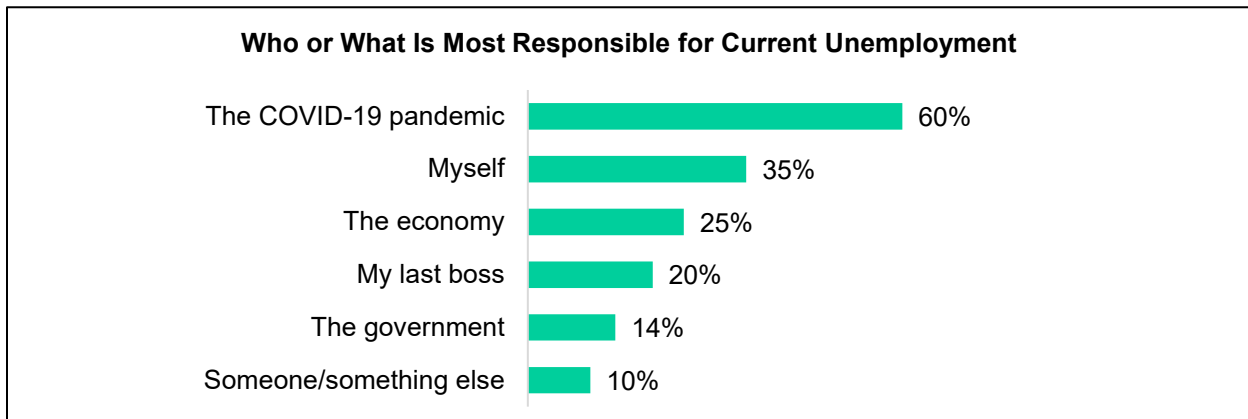


Around half of unemployed adults (51%) are willing to accept almost any job that will help them pay the bills. Although more than half (53%) say they don't apply for jobs that offer minimum wage because it's just not enough to pay the bills, a similar proportion (55%) agree the COVID-19 pandemic has driven them to start looking for a job that pays lower wages than they would like. Beyond salary, a substantial proportion are at least somewhat willing to relocate to another city/town (35%) or province (21%) to find a job. Notably, some unemployed adults are even willing to relocate to another city/town (21%) or province (16%) where the number of new COVID-19 infections is rising.

***The willingness to accept a less-than-ideal job currently may be due to concern about the direction of the economy and feelings of financial insecurity, in conjunction with a lack of financial support and savings that will run out in the near future.***

The most common source of income unemployed adults rely on is their savings (40%). In addition to this, more than 2 in 5 (42%) are relying on gig work (i.e., short-term, temporary and/or independent work) to keep them afloat. More than 3 in 4 (76%) say their household currently has some money in savings, but of those that have savings, more than half (52%) say they have less than \$5,000 saved. Not surprisingly, most (67%) believe they do not have enough savings to survive unemployment much longer. Despite a slight majority (54%) feeling confident that they will find a job before their savings run out, right now 7 in 10 unemployed adults (70%) do not feel financially secure, with 37% saying they do not feel financially secure at all.

This outlook may be dampened by the fact that the majority (62%) say in regard to the economy, things in the country are headed in the wrong direction. Although 60% of unemployed adults say the COVID-19 pandemic is most responsible for their current unemployment, 1 in 4 (25%) hold the economy most responsible and 14% say the government is most responsible.



Although employment insurance is provided to support unemployed Canadians, more than 3 in 5 (63%) agree there is not enough financial support provided to people who are unemployed, especially given the fact that more than half (52%) used to be the breadwinner for their household. One in 4 (25%) report they are currently relying on employment insurance during their unemployment, and the majority of unemployed adults (59%) say they would not be able to make ends meet right now without the assistance of employment insurance. Among those receiving employment insurance, on average, they receive \$1,352 each month, barely enough to live on. And, when it comes to the Canada emergency response benefits (CERB), more than 1 in 4 (26%) are receiving this support.