



CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR YOUTH PROSPERITY

CONSEIL CANADIEN POUR LA REUSSITE DES JEUNES

# National Youth **EMPLOYMENT SECTOR** Town Halls

**Executive** Summary

## About the Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity

The Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity is a non-profit organization supporting youth workforce development in Canada. We are a cross-sector, collaborative table of highly-skilled community and corporate leaders improving the sector through engagement, coordinated activities, research and advocacy.

**We thank our partners and sponsors for making the National Town Halls possible.**

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## The Counselling Foundation of Canada

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Funded by the Government of  
Canada's Youth Employment  
Skills Strategy



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## npower canada



### Regional Hosts

## FIRST WORK



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The Canadian economy was in economic freefall as millions (3 million) were furloughed or laid off or rendered unemployed with youth unemployment hovering around 30% in June 2020 while the general unemployment rate was 12% at that time. – figures from Statistics Canada*

COVID-19 accelerated the need for the employment sector to change the way it delivered supports to youth, highlighting and exacerbating some of the gaps that have long existed. As system conveners and connectors within the workforce development sector, The Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity (CCYP) noticed that there had not been any discussion or notable investment in services to support the sector to respond to the increased needs of youth, especially vulnerable youth, during and following the pandemic. CCYP and our partners deemed it imperative to open a discussion with frontline practitioners to gain insights into what they would need to be able to support youth in finding employment as we moved towards an economic recovery.

## **This was the impetus for the National Youth Employment Sector Town Halls.**

The town halls were organized by the Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity (CCYP), in partnership with AXTRA, Opportunity for All Youth, NPower Canada, the Canadian Mentoring Partnership, YWCA Canada, OTEC, CERIC, The Counselling Foundation of Canada, The Government of Canada – Youth Employment Skills Strategy and RBC.

During the week of June 15-19, 2020, we brought employment service providers (ESP) from across Canada together to address these unprecedented times. The town halls created an opportunity for the youth employment sector to come together and talk about how they were adjusting to the impacts of COVID-19 and what they would need to support the reopening of the economy. Employment service practitioners who are on the frontline needed a forum to react, share and discuss issues (and find solutions) that they were encountering in real time.

## **In our convening of practitioners we sought to learn the following:**

- 1 How can service provision change to respond to the uncertain labour market? How can technology help?
- 2 What data should we (ESPs, government) be collecting to better understand stakeholder needs?
- 3 What do you need as a professional to support youth? What does the sector need?

In our discussions with employment service practitioners, a number of issues were raised around adjusting to the new distanced, normal brought on by Covid-19. The common themes being concerns around access and efficacy of technology; a lack of engagement from employers in mitigating current conditions; funding insecurities; pre-existing conditions, such as those around incorporating labour market data; and the inevitable impacts of all of these things on the mental health and motivation of youth clients and themselves.





# EMERGENT THEMES

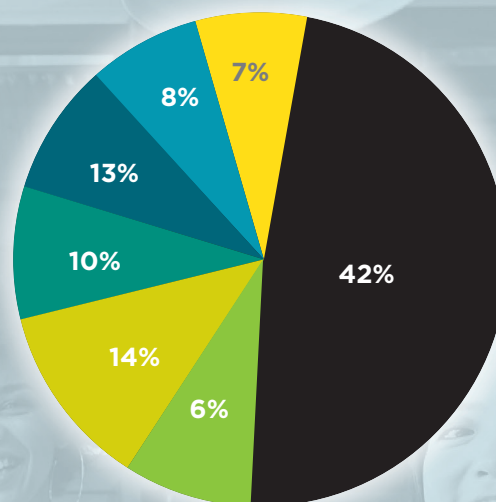
Based on what we learned, here's what we propose as the way forward:

- 1 **Investment in the sector's digital capacity and infrastructure to improve essential support and employability skills for youth, especially NEET youth.** Concerns surrounding technology, accessing it, using it and its effectiveness in addressing the problems youth were facing during the COVID shutdowns were consistently raised during the town halls and the survey. Employment service providers should not have to rely on personal devices or shooting professional videos using phone cameras to communicate delicate and difficult information to their youth clients, as was related to us. Providers who depend on public funding should have technology fund allocations where they can successfully connect with their youth clients during times of social distancing and where in-person services are reduced.

*We urge the government to fund a "Technology Endowment" for employment service providers, for these organizations to prepare young people and themselves for this new paradigm. This technology fund will allow employment service providers to provide youth with the hardware needed to thrive in this digital world, and the training to use it.*

- 2 **Prioritize the creation of 'rapid response' jobs for youth as part of short-term COVID recovery efforts.** Employment service practitioners recognized that the lack of employer interest towards youth job opportunities arose from uncertainty. In order to stimulate youth employment, 'rapid response' job programs or an expanded system of wage and employment subsidies for youth will address these concerns. There is evidence that such active labour policy

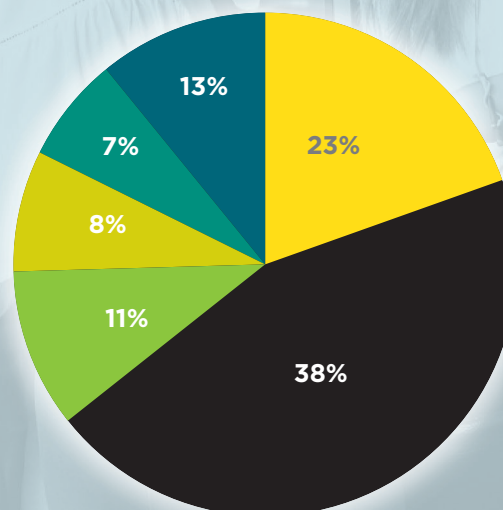
Panel A  
Regional participation



Source: Compiled from registration data.



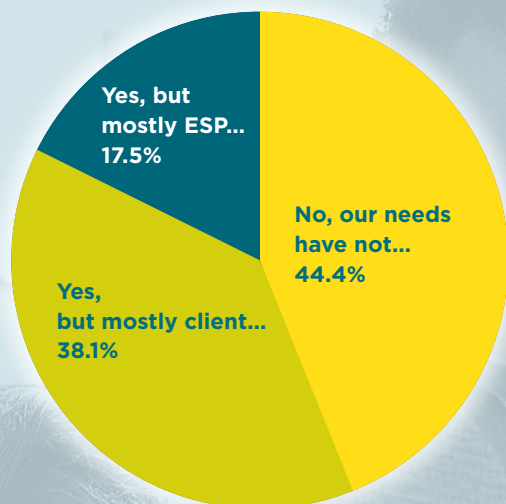
Panel B  
Canada population distribution



Source: Compiled from registration data.

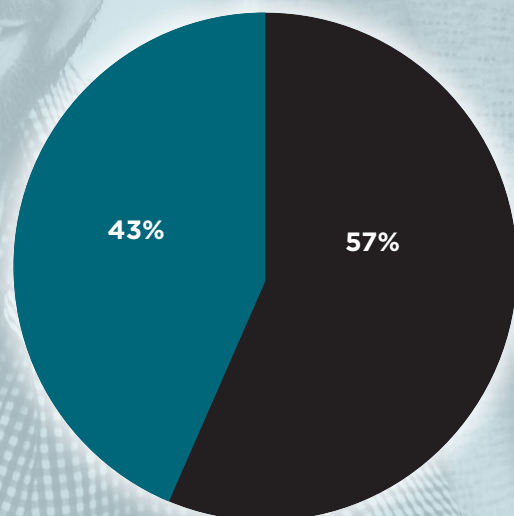


## Do you think your and your client's needs have informed government response?

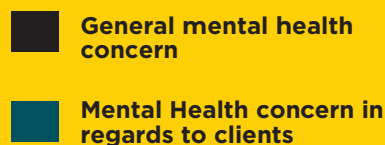


Source: Event participants in general sessions.

## Mental health & safety concerns



Source: Post-event survey data



tools raise short-term employment, thereby reducing economic uncertainty.

*The government has begun investing in rapid response employment programs such as Pivot 2020 - a program that will provide more than 1,200 young across Canada with paid, virtual research jobs this fall. This rapid response initiative is a partnership with CCYP, Tamarack Institute, SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, Canadian Urban Institute, and Institut du Nouveau Monde and is funded by the Government of Canada. We have a long recovery period ahead of us and encourage government to continue supporting these types of interventions.*

- 3 **Recognize the impact on mental health for job seekers and practitioners and provide a broader range of supports.** ESPs told us the incidence of mental health problems and anxiety have increased during the pandemic and that they find social isolation has worsened these states for their youth clients (and even themselves). The impacts are deep and varied. To counter these effects, employment services practitioners must be better supported in budgetary allocations to connect their clients (and themselves) with the appropriate and remote mental health support services to access the care both require that are often not covered in provincial health plans or the mental health programs already funded by governments.

*We urge the government to make resources more flexible and less tied to specific mental health support programs to respond to this need. We call for integration mental health care services with employment services for those people requiring both, as such a practice has been shown to be effective.*

- 4 **Expand education and skills training options and specific programs for youth as they retrain and adapt for an altered workplace.** ESPs were concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on youth motivation and recruitment for services. Both are the result of reduced employment opportunities because of the economic contraction. Expanding education and skills training opportunities



through institutions and programming is a way to induce youth to re-enter the labour force in the future as the economy recovers.

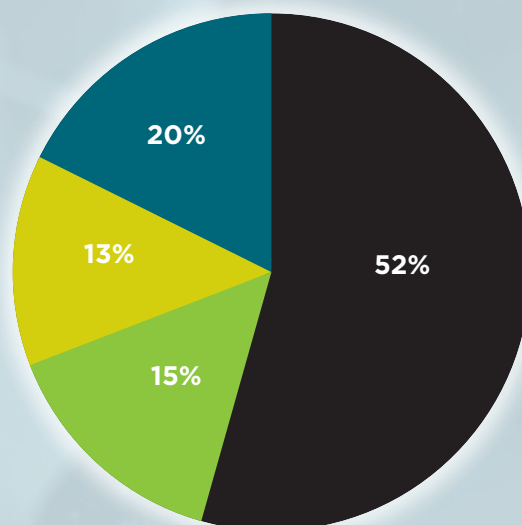
*We urge the government to modify emergency income supports like employment insurance by tying them to retraining and up-skilling opportunities. This can be achieved by comprehensively amending Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) and Workforce Development Agreements (WDAs) with each province and territory to include skills training program expansion for youth.*

- 5 Data dissemination for employment services providers must be improved.** ESPs perceive a lack of availability of relevant labour market intelligence to inform their counsel and intervention for youth making their own career choices. They indicated that to facilitate recovery for youth employment, access to labour market data was an important factor. While availability of data is not at issue in reality, it is the dissemination method that makes it inaccessible for people outside the purview of researchers.

*We urge the government to improve data dissemination methods of existing statistical data by providing it for diverse audiences. A few provinces have found ways to make existing statistical data accessible and these practices can be more widely adopted by provinces and the federal government. We urge the government to provide analyzed metadata (with the appropriate citizen safeguards) for satisfying short-term changes in the labour market using open data and API protocols to improve its accessibility.*

These town halls have provided the much-needed insights into what practitioners need to be able to support youth to find employment now and in the coming months. The pandemic has further exposed systemic and structural barriers for equity-seeking groups. Any and all responses have a responsibility to acknowledge and address these barriers, if the youth employment sector is to be successful in supporting the reopening of Canada's economy.

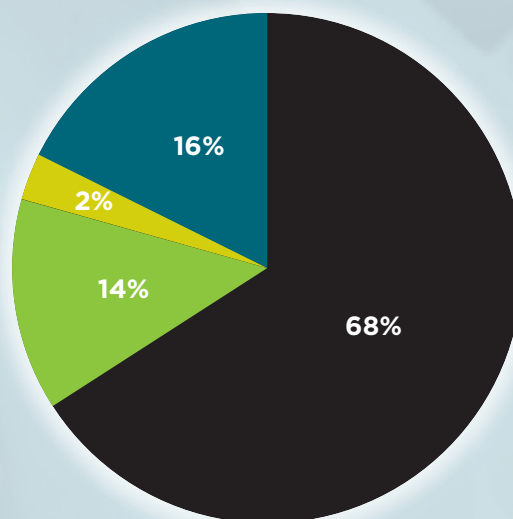
**Panel A**  
**Technology access, use and impact on employment services providers**



Source: Post-event survey data

- ESP having troubles with access to technology. This involves resources allocation towards technology
- ESP having trouble "using" technology
- ESP having doubts about the efficiency of technology
- Some combination of the above issues

**Panel B**  
**Technology access, use and impact on clients**



Source: Post-event survey data

- Client having troubles with acces to technology. This involves income, capability, geographic access to technology
- Client having trouble "using" technology
- Clients having doubts about the efficiency of technology
- Some combination of the above issues