

# Impacts of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities

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This release is available in [audio](#). The video "[Impact of COVID-19 on Canadians living with long-term conditions and disabilities, American Sign Language](#)" is also available.

Just over one-fifth of the Canadian population has one or more disabilities. However, relatively little is known about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. As highlighted by a [recent publication](#) using data from the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD), persons with disabilities may be particularly vulnerable during the pandemic.

From June 23 to July 6, 2020, approximately 13,000 Canadians with long-term conditions or disabilities participated in an online questionnaire, "Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Living with Long-term Conditions and Disabilities." Today, Statistics Canada is releasing these findings as part of a series of results based on this crowdsourcing initiative. Readers should note that, unlike other surveys conducted by Statistics Canada, crowdsourcing data are not collected under a sampling design using probability-based sampling. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings, and no inferences about the overall Canadian population with long-term conditions and disabilities should be made based on these results. The results are not inclusive of all persons with long-term conditions and disabilities, and reflect only the experiences of those who participated in the crowdsourcing survey.

As a first release, this article provides a general snapshot of the employment and income impacts of COVID-19 on survey participants aged 15 to 64 living with long-term conditions and disabilities.

Today we also released an article titled, "[The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadian families of children with disabilities](#)," which provides a snapshot of the experiences of parents who had children with and without disabilities in their household during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected as part of a recent crowdsourcing initiative, "Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Parenting during the Pandemic: Data Collection Series." Although the results are not representative of all parents in Canada, they provide insights into the experiences of participants in the crowdsourcing initiative. Overall, the results indicated that parents of children with disabilities and parents of children without disabilities had similar levels of concern for their families. However, a higher proportion of parents who had a child or children with disabilities were very or extremely concerned about their children's amount of screen time, loneliness or isolation, general mental health, and school year and academic success.

## Over one-third of participants with long-term conditions or disabilities report experiencing a temporary or permanent job loss or reduced hours during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the Canadian labour market, with over 5.5 million workers experiencing either job loss or reduced hours from February to April according to the [April Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#). The most [recent LFS release](#) shows that the gradual reopening of the economy led to a rebound in employment in May and June. The evolution of the COVID-19 shutdown has resulted in a wide range of employment changes and challenges. This impact has also been felt by persons with long-term conditions or disabilities who, under normal economic conditions, have lower rates of employment than those without disabilities.

Among participants aged 15 to 64 with a long-term condition or disability, two-thirds (66%) reported being employed prior to the start of the pandemic, while 55% reported being currently employed. Among participants who were employed before the start of the pandemic, over one-third (36%) reported experiencing a temporary or permanent job loss or reduced hours since March. Those who reported multiple long-term conditions were more likely (41%) to report a temporary or permanent job loss or a reduction in hours since March compared with those who reported one long-term condition (31%).



**Table 1**  
**Labour force status, crowdsourcing participants with long-term conditions or disabilities, aged 15 to 64**

	Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic			Current work situation		
	Employed	Unemployed	Not in the labour force	Employed	Unemployed	Not in the labour force
	%					
<b>Total, 15 to 64 years</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>29</b>
15 to 24 years	55	18	27	39	33	28
25 to 34 years	76	8	16	63	20	17
35 to 44 years	76	5	18	66	14	20
45 to 54 years	70	5	24	62	13	25
55 to 64 years	52	4	43	43	12	44

**Note(s):** The percentages may not add up to 100% due to non-response. The pattern of results was similar when these responses were included. Current work status reflects the reference period of June 23 to July 6, 2020.

**Source(s):** Source: Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians – Living with Long-term Conditions and Disabilities.

### Employment changes are more likely among young participants and those with lower levels of education

Compared with other age groups, young participants with a long-term condition or disability were more likely to report that their work situation changed from being employed prior to the shutdown to being currently unemployed or not in the labour force. Over half (55%) of participants aged 15 to 24 reported being employed prior to the start of the pandemic, compared with 39% who reported being currently employed. This aligns with findings from the LFS, which indicate that youth and students have been disproportionately affected in terms of employment during COVID-19.

Employment changes also differed by level of education. Among participants aged 25 to 64 with long-term conditions and disabilities, those with a high school education or less were more likely than those with at least some university credentials to report a change in employment status. Almost half (49%) of participants with lower levels of education reported being employed prior to the pandemic, compared with 36% who reported being currently employed. In contrast, employment among those with higher levels of education fell from 77% to 68%.

### The majority of employed participants with long-term conditions or disabilities report working from home

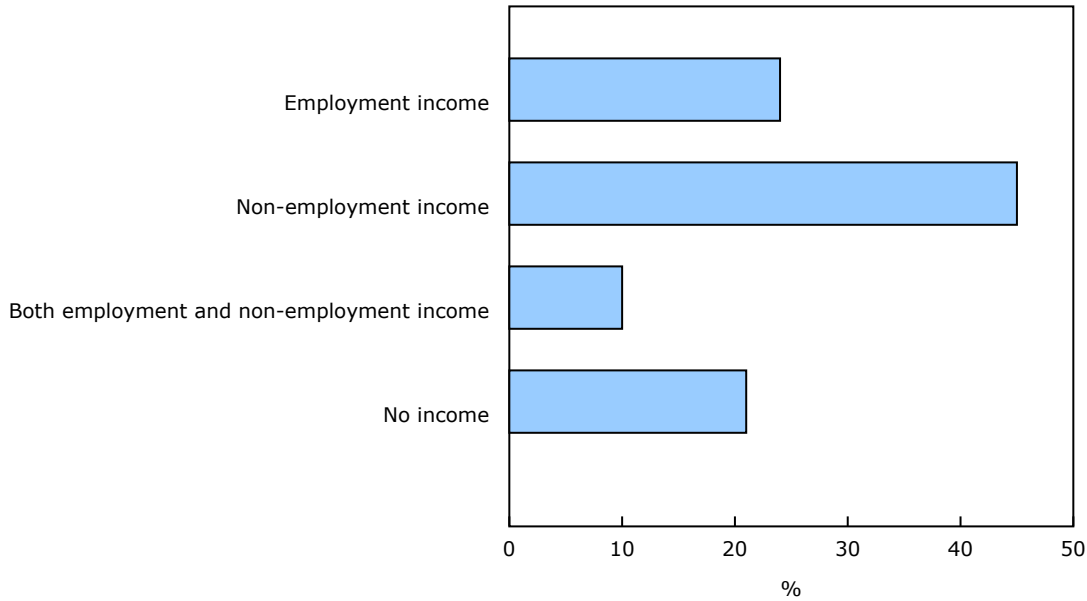
COVID-19 measures have resulted in more people working from home. [Previous research](#) estimates that about 39% of jobs in Canada can be done remotely. The majority (58%) of participants aged 15 to 64 with long-term conditions or disabilities who are currently employed reported that they are working from home instead of at their usual workplace. About 29% of respondents indicated they were working at their usual workplace outside the home.

### Almost half of participants have relied exclusively on non-employment income since March

For many Canadians, the widespread job losses and reduced hours caused by COVID-19 have resulted in a decrease in employment income, which could lead to the need for government assistance. A recent [Statistics Canada study](#) found that about one-quarter of Canadians could be financially vulnerable during the pandemic in the absence of government transfers. Data from the 2017 CSD show that persons with disabilities are more likely to live below the poverty line, and that employed persons with disabilities have lower incomes compared with those without disabilities. Income disruptions as a result of the pandemic could place persons with disabilities in an even more vulnerable position.

Just under one-quarter (24%) of participants aged 15 to 64 with long-term conditions or disabilities reported only receiving employment income since the start of the pandemic. Almost half (45%) said they only received income from non-employment sources during this period. Although not directly comparable, data from the 2017 CSD show that, under regular economic conditions, 37% of persons with disabilities aged 15 to 64 relied solely on employment income, and 30% relied exclusively on non-employment income.

**Chart 1**  
**Personal income source, crowdsourcing participants with long-term conditions or disabilities, aged 15 to 64**



**Note(s):** Employment income includes income from self-employment. Non-employment sources include employment insurance, worker's compensation, disability benefits, pension plan benefits, social assistance or welfare, and the Canada Emergency Response Benefit or Canada Emergency Student Benefit.  
**Source(s):** Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians – Living with Long-term Conditions and Disabilities.

Among the different sources of non-employment income received since the start of the pandemic, the most commonly reported sources were disability benefits (23%) and COVID-19-related income support (17%), such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit or the Canada Emergency Student Benefit.

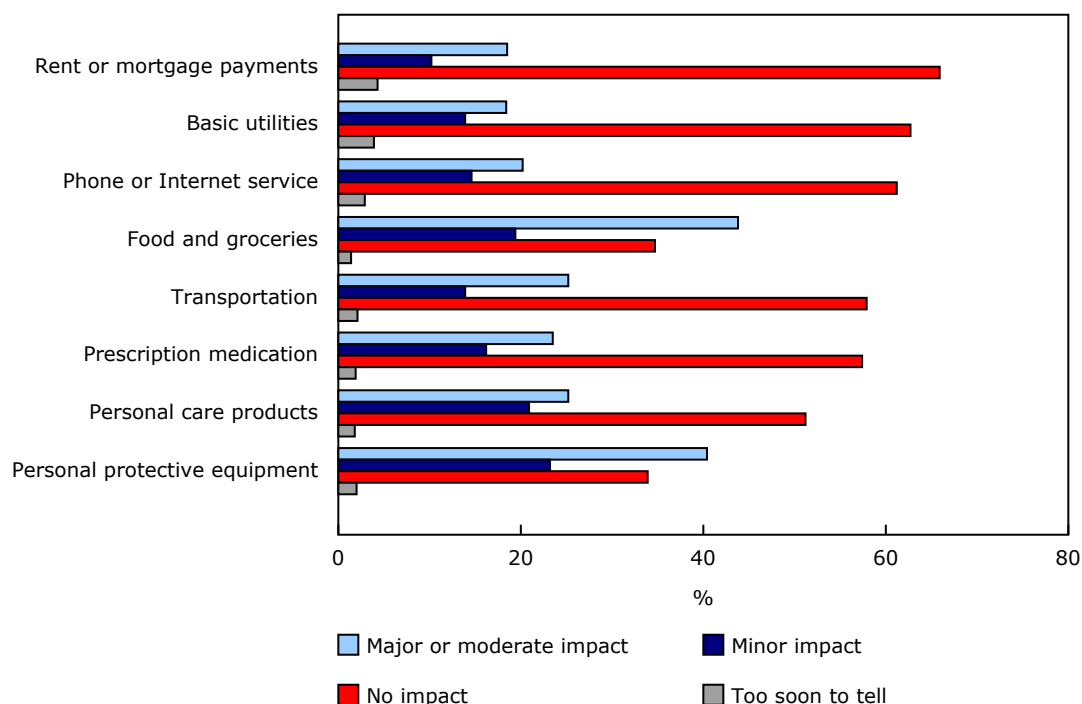
### **Almost one-third of participants report that their household income decreased since the start of the pandemic**

Over half (54%) of participants aged 15 to 64 with long-term conditions or disabilities reported that their overall household income stayed the same during the COVID-19 pandemic and 8% indicated that it had increased. However, 31% of participants said that their overall household income had decreased since the start of the shutdown. Among those who said that their household income had declined, over half (56%) reported that it had decreased by more than \$1,000 per month. Households with children were more likely to report that their household income had decreased (37%), compared with households without children (33%) and those living alone (20%).

## The ability to meet food and grocery needs and needs for personal protective equipment are the most commonly reported impacts of the pandemic

Crowdsourcing participants were asked about their ability to meet specific types of financial obligations and essential needs in the context of the pandemic. Participants with long-term conditions or disabilities most commonly reported a major or moderate impact on meeting their food and grocery needs (44%) and personal protective equipment needs (40%). The proportion who reported a major or moderate impact among the remaining categories was similar (around 20% to 25%).

**Chart 2**  
Impact of COVID-19 on financial obligations or essential needs, crowdsourcing participants with long-term conditions or disabilities, aged 15 to 64



Source(s): Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians – Living with Long-term Conditions and Disabilities.

## Over half of participants have difficulty meeting at least one financial obligation or essential need

Overall, 61% of participants aged 15 to 64 with long-term conditions or disabilities reported a major or moderate impact from COVID-19 on at least one type of financial obligation or essential need. Participants with multiple long-term conditions were more likely (71%) than those with one long-term condition (50%) to report impacts on financial obligations or essential needs. Participants who were living alone (65%) and households with children (64%) were also more likely than households without children (58%) to report impacts on financial obligations or essential needs.

### Note to readers

Data in this release are from Statistics Canada's crowdsourcing initiative, "Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Data Collection Series." The crowdsourcing questionnaires collect data on the current economic and social situation, and on people's physical and mental health, to assess the needs of communities and to implement suitable support measures during and after the pandemic. This alternative method of collecting information can be used to supplement data obtained from more traditional sources, particularly because of its relatively low implementation cost and ability to increase the granularity of data in a timely manner. Unlike other surveys conducted by Statistics Canada, crowdsourcing data are not collected under a design using probability-based sampling. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings, and no inferences about the overall Canadian population should be made based on these results.

Further caution should be used when interpreting the results because of the collection mode and the population of interest. The survey was only available as an electronic questionnaire. The overall accessibility of the survey was reduced since it was not available in other formats—such as ASL or LSQ, Braille or audio versions—and it was not available to those without access to a computer or Internet. Proxy interviews were encouraged, to allow family members or caregivers to respond on behalf of a person with a long-term condition or disability.

To identify participants with a long-term condition or disability, participants were asked if they had any of the issues in a list of six different issues. They were then asked if they identified as a person with a disability. Included in this analysis were respondents that reported a difficulty and self-identified as a person with a disability, respondents who reported no specific difficulty but identified as a person with a disability, and respondents who reported a difficulty but did not identify as a person with a disability. This differs from the method used by Statistics Canada on the Canadian Survey on Disability, which administers the Disability Screening Questionnaire to identify persons with a disability and calculate the official rates of disability across Canada.

Among the participants, 21% indicated they had a sensory difficulty, 38% reported a physical difficulty, 25% indicated a cognitive difficulty, 48% reported a mental-health-related difficulty and 57% indicated they had some other health problem or condition. Respondents could select more than one difficulty type.

### Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5323](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).