



Athabasca University's "Flying the Pandemic Coop" Study Key Findings - Poll Facts Sheets

Athabasca University commissioned a national study entitled: "Flying the Pandemic Coop" on the Angus Reid Forum last month to examine Canadians' attitudes and expectations for work and life in a post-pandemic era. The study also had a special interest in capturing changing expectations for higher education. The following poll facts represent a summary of the study's key findings.

Canadians are ready to do whatever it takes to get the life they want

Overall, Canadians are setting their sights high on life and work improvements, rooted in the learnings they've gleaned from their experiences of this global pandemic. Many Canadians' mental health has been adversely affected; however, Quebecers notably appear happier generally across all dimensions measured in the study. In contrast, Albertans are significantly more likely than the general Canadian population to say they will look for a new job or pursue micro-credential courses once the pandemic subsides. More young Canadians and more women reported these same experiences compared to their national counterparts.

As Canadians emerge from some dark times, they definitely see brighter days ahead, and they are preparing themselves now to take life, their learning and their work, by the horns.

Mental health adversely affected by pandemic:

- **Mental health and the age factor:** Young Canadians (aged 18-34) reported feeling the greatest impact on their mental health from this pandemic, with 51 per cent saying they have been adversely affected. Those aged 35-54 were also more deeply impacted, compared to the overall national average (40 per cent vs 36 per cent)
- **Provincial analysis:** Geographically-speaking, Ontarians were hardest hit in their mental health with 43 per cent feeling a negative impact, followed by Albertans at 39 per cent. In contrast, Quebecers were least affected at 25 per cent
- **Mental health and gender:** Statistically, women struggled more with their mental health as well, compared to men (39 per cent versus 32 per cent)
- **Desire for emotional resilience training:** Close to half of all Canadians aged 18-34 (48 per cent) and almost half of women of all ages across the country (46 per cent) said if they could focus on one training area to improve skills for work, they'd want to build emotional resilience to support their mental health

A key coping mechanism? Occupying the mind with online learning and hobbies:

- **Keeping busy amid the pause:** 42 per cent of Canadians said they've been doing everything they can this past year to keep their minds occupied and away from pandemic woes – such as starting a new hobby or learning online, etc.
- **Provincial pandemic woes:** This figure jumps to 48 per cent in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and was 45 per cent in Ontario. Quebecers again were least likely to feel the need to push away pandemic woes at just 35 per cent
- **More women than men focused on new learning and hobbies:** 45 per cent versus 38 per cent
- **Young people have been impacted more:** Half of all young Canadians (aged 18-34) reported busying their minds to keep pandemic woes at bay

Canadians' current state of happiness:

- **Correlations of happiness and age:** Only 36 per cent of Canadians report being very happy with their life, generally-speaking. Those aged 55+ appear to be the happiest group at 43 per cent. Young Canadians (aged 18-34) in contrast came in below the national average at 30 per cent
- **Joy amid the provinces:** Quebecers are by far the happiest province, with 47 per cent reporting great contentment with their lives. For Albertans, this figure drops down to just 29 per cent
- **Lacking happiness at work:** Workwise, it appears there is more work to do to cultivate happiness. Only 23 per cent of Canadians feel very happy at work. Quebecers are only slightly happier in their workplaces too, at 27 per cent
- **Quebecers' *joie de vivre* – the proof is in the data:** It would appear this way of life is more pandemic-proof than anywhere else in Canada. Half of all Quebecers (49 per cent) report being very happy in their own self - *just being themselves*, compared to the national average of 37 per cent. Ontarians in this regard came in at 31 per cent

Pandemic-inspired changes to come:

- **Prioritizing self-improvement:** 74 per cent of Canadians say it's time for them to invest in themselves – levelling up their work and life. Women are more likely than men to make this declaration (76 per cent versus 70 per cent)
- **If something is not working, change it:** 68 per cent of Canadians are unafraid to make a move if something is not working in for them, saying work-life balance needs to be upheld without compromise
- **Self-advocacy:** 59 per cent of young Canadians (aged 18-34) admit the pandemic has made them realize they must advocate for themselves more at work (compared to the national average of 39 per cent). Albertans too, at 48 per cent, were more likely than the national average to feel this way
- **The pandemic has inspired goals for higher education:** Close to 40 per cent of young Canadians say the pandemic has made them realize that they want to go back to school, to get more education – e.g. a bachelor's, masters or PhD degree. Albertans are also more likely than the national average to have such plans (31 per cent versus 23 per cent)
- **Family time is going to look different post-pandemic:** 76 per cent of Canadians are planning to re-prioritize their lives based on lessons imparted from COVID-19 – e.g. family time, travel, work, passion projects, hobbies, etc.

- **Starting a new work chapter:** 22 per cent want to remain in their chosen field while changing employers, and 26 per cent want to start something completely anew
- **Pandemic-driven giving:** Half of the country (51 per cent) has realized since the pandemic that they want to volunteer more too, for charities and just giving back more to the community; Women are considerably more likely to say this than men (56 per cent versus 45 per cent). Ontarians and Albertans are also in a greater giving mood than the national average at: 58 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively
- **Diversity-awareness:** 54 per cent of respondents say they want to be better educated on diversity and social justice issues too, given this past year's spotlight on societal bias. This figure is significantly higher for women than men at: 63 per cent versus 45 per cent, respectively

Financial woes with a thirst for saving *and* for travel:

- **Financial hardships:** About one in five Canadians (22 per cent) say their financial situation has worsened overall this past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Albertans were hit particularly hard with 37% saying they've experienced such financial woes
- **Saving for another rainy day:** a full 80 per cent of all Canadians (including 87 per cent of those aged 18-34) say they want to keep saving their money now for when they may need it on a future *rainy day*
- **Travelling close to home and far away:** Canadians' built-up thirst for travel is quite clear with 61 per cent saying as soon as they can, the first thing they will do is go travelling – but not too far from home (somewhere in Canada or the US). Another perhaps more adventurous group of Canadians (44 per cent) have set their sights on travelling somewhere far away, sunny or exotic

Changing expectations about learning in the workplace:

- **Remote work or bust:** 41 per cent of Canadians say if they can't keep their current virtual working arrangement, they would be inclined to look for work elsewhere. This figure jumps to 51 per cent among Canadians (aged 18-54)
- **Building expertise in the digital economy:** 73 per cent of Canadians want employers to invest more in digital training for their workers. Among those aged 35 to 54, this desire jumps to 80 per cent
- **Higher ambitions with higher education:** 65 per cent of respondents also say people today expect their employers to provide cutting-edge learning including higher education (e.g. college/university). Canadians between the ages of 35 and 54 agree with this most at 74 per cent
- **Macro desires for micro-credentials:** three out of five Canadians aged 18 to 54 have their eyes set on "micro-credentials" from universities that they can use to upskill and up-level their careers. Albertans again are most ambitious in this regard, at 58 per cent, compared to the national average of 47 per cent
- **Upgrading with no compromise:** for 72 per cent of Canadians, there was clear consensus that the pandemic propelled them to recognize, it's time for them to upgrade their lives with no compromise – in work, in continuous learning, and in life

Changing expectations about learning in higher education:

- **Re-wired tech-savvy brains:** Seven in 10 Canadians aged 18-54 (71 per cent) believe the way we learn is changing due to the influences of technological advancements

- **“Gaming” in college or university:** Half of all Canadians want to see “Ed Tech” (Education Technology) and gamification incorporated into traditional higher learning degree programs today
- **Upping their game at work:** Three-fifths of Canadians aged 18-54 (59 per cent) want to enhance their skills with credible learning in order to stay at the forefront of their game at work

About the “Flying the Pandemic Coop” Study

From May 5-6, 2021, Athabasca University conducted a survey focused on Canadians’ attitudes and expectations for work and life in a post-pandemic era, especially as they pertain to changes in higher education. It was conducted, in English and French, among a nationally representative sample of 1,531 Canadian adults who are members of the online Angus Reid Forum, balanced and weighted on age, gender, region and education. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would yield a margin of error of +/- 2.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.