

POLICY BRIEF

Understanding the Need for Pre-employability Programming within the Canadian Employment Services Sector

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This policy brief is based on their 2024 research paper: Addressing the “Spin Cycle” in Employment Services Across Canada: Understanding the Need for Pre-Employability Programming (Ottawa: Canadian Career Development Foundation).

Key Messages

- **The spin cycle exists.** On average, practitioners reported that over a third of their caseload consisted of clients repeatedly returning for services.
- **There is a significant gap in service for those with pre-employment needs.** Nearly half the practitioners (46%) reported that their clients' pre-employability needs were not being met by any services available in their community.
- **The study found four specific pre-employability needs:** (a) employment and personal development skills; (b) establishing a vision, goals and hope for the future; (c) daily living concerns impacting the ability to maintain employment (e.g., housing, transportation, childcare); and (d) concerns related to health and wellbeing, including mental health.

Our current provincial structure for people receiving social assistance support does not acknowledge the barriers that people receiving assistance are facing, and rather, we are finding these participants are being pushed into employment when they are not ready ... and when they are not able to complete programming, they are cut off of assistance, rather than having supports around them coming from all levels.

- Career development practitioner
Manitoba

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the long-term unemployment rate in Canada was 10.8% in 2022 and the average rate over the past decade is 10.9%.¹ Many employment programs and services in Canada are less effective for assisting the long-term unemployed because they tend to assume a certain level of functioning and readiness to enter either the workforce or further education that this population may not possess.

However, some Canadians who experience long-term unemployment face various kinds

of barriers that must be addressed before they are able to make effective use of typical employment services and programs. Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) has identified barriers that are particularly prevalent for equity groups as including (a) lower earnings, (b) domestic and home care obligations, (c) hiring and retention challenges, (d) limited career advancement, and (e) social stigma.²

Similarly, the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) has identified three categories of barriers that can prevent people from successfully entering the workforce or even making effective use of employment services: (a) personal development skills (e.g., establishing goals, maintaining motivation, “bouncing back” from failure), (b) daily living concerns (e.g., access to transportation, childcare/dependent care responsibilities), and (c) support for physical and mental health concerns.³ CCDF has also proposed that programming designed to address these personal and environmental conditions (i.e., pre-employability needs) is an important part of the solution to facilitate long-term unemployed individuals’ successful workforce (re)integration.

“Pre-employability” is defined as the systemic barriers and personal development factors that impede readiness to engage effectively in career planning, skill development, and sustainable labour market attachment.

- Canadian Career Development Foundation

To understand the pre-employability needs of Canadians and the potential benefits of providing pre-employability programming to them, in 2022-23, the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) conducted (a) a national survey of over 400 career development practitioners, (b) an analysis of employment services client data from two provinces, and (c) interviews with clients and facilitators of the pre-employment program, In Motion & Momentum+ (IM&M+). This research reveals:

- According to career development practitioners, approximately 4 in 10 (37%) of their clients were “return customers” (i.e., clients who had cycled back for more services after previously completing their involvement with the agency), suggesting that existing services do not meet their needs. Considering the funds spent on employment services, reducing this repetition could save millions annually.
- Almost half (46%) of surveyed practitioners reported that their clients’ pre-employability needs were not being met by any services available in their community, indicating that there is a pressing need to expand programming to more fully address personal development skills, daily living concerns and connecting clients to supports for physical and mental health.
- Employment services clients also identified the existence of gaps in services across 16 specific categories of pre-employability needs, including daily living problems, mental health concerns, and support for their personal and psychological development. Being aware of one’s needs and yet experiencing difficulties getting

Before IM&M+, I felt like I was in a revolving door, you know? And “oh, I gotta look for a job,” “I gotta do this in order to get a check.” Now, it’s “how do I get off of welfare?” And now I just wanna keep working and feel so good to wake up and just be gone all day and come home, and you’re tired and you got a little bit of cash, you know?

- Public Employment Services client
Saskatchewan



the kinds of help needed becomes another setback to the morale of people who are unemployed.

- Clients of IM&M+ reported that it provided them with the sense of agency and life skills needed to pursue later (re)entry into education or employment, revealing the importance of providing this kind of programming.
- Facilitators of IM&M+ found it to be distinct from other unemployment services they were familiar with and effective precisely because of the focus on pre-employability rather than job placement.

In the beginning, I didn't see a point to IM&M+ ... being on Ontario Works you have to hit certain requirements and I said, "okay, well, this would qualify for that" ... The biggest changes I see in myself is the amount of confidence that I have when I'm carrying a conversation when I'm advocating for my son or myself. Kind of the ability to recognize who I am as a person and what I have to offer.

- Public Employment Services client
Ontario

The evidence from this research strongly supports the conclusion that some clients, such as those who have experienced long-term unemployment or are “return customers,” will benefit from services focused on meeting their pre-employability needs. Furthermore, program evaluation research has revealed that programs designed to address clients’ pre-employability needs, such as the In Motion and Momentum + (IM&M+) program, can be effective for improving clients’ readiness to complete typical employment/education programs.⁴ Therefore providing these kinds of pre-employment services will be an important contributor to reducing unemployment and solving the problem of people repeatedly cycling in and out of the workforce across Canada.

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Sources

1. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2023). OECD data: Long-term unemployment rate. <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/long-term-unemployment-rate.htm>
2. Employment and Social Development Canada (2022). Policy brief 2: Barriers to employment equity for equity groups under the federal jurisdiction. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development.html>
3. Canadian Career Development Foundation (2023). Addressing the “spin cycle” in employment services across Canada: Understanding the need for pre-employability programming.
4. Future Skills Centre & Blueprint (2023). Evaluation of the In Motion and Momentum + Program.

