

# COVID-19 IMPACT SURVEY

PHASE 2: FALL 2020



YOU YOUR FAMILY YOUR JOB

February 2021



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Four County Labour Market Planning Board would like to express our thanks to those who took time to share their experiences with us.

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The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Ontario.



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# INTRODUCTION

By early April 2020, Statistics Canada reported that 3,100,000 Canadians had experienced job loss or a reduction in hours due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> By June 2020, Statistics Canada was reporting that the employment of 5.5 million Canadians had been impacted by COVID-19.<sup>2</sup> Locally, the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Economic Region which covers the counties of Bruce, Grey, Huron and Perth saw unemployment move from 5.9% in March to a high of 9.6% in June 2020. In order to understand the initial impact COVID-19 had on the local workforce, the Four County Labour Market Planning Board conducted a survey<sup>3</sup> between April and June 2020. Results of this survey may be found on our website ([www.planningboard.ca](http://www.planningboard.ca)).

In October and November 2020, the Planning Board conducted a second survey in order to understand the ongoing impact of COVID-19. The results of that follow-up survey are summarized in this report. By October and November 2020, the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula region began to show signs of economic recovery, and by December 2020 (reflecting data from November 2020), the local unemployment rate had dropped to 5.4%.<sup>4</sup> The following report analyzes responses received from this second survey, capturing the experiences of individuals in Bruce, Grey, Huron and Perth counties eight to nine months after the pandemic began.

This survey asked several questions concerning employment status, precarious employment, financial security, and the physical and mental health impacts of COVID-19 on individuals and their families. While the initial survey explored the immediate impact of the pandemic on our local community, this subsequent survey asked people about how COVID-19 had impacted their lives several months into this new reality. This allowed us to frame questions in terms of the sustained impact of COVID-19 on personal finances, job security, and work-life balance. While this represents a small sample of individuals in the four county region, data collected is consistent with national survey data collected by Statistics Canada concerning the impact of COVID-19 on Canadians.



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1 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2020028-eng.htm> [Retrieved June 2020]

2 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2020038-eng.htm> [Retrieved June 2020]

3 The Planning Board collaborated with Workforce Planning West to conduct an initial survey, which was then extended in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula region until June 30, 2020.

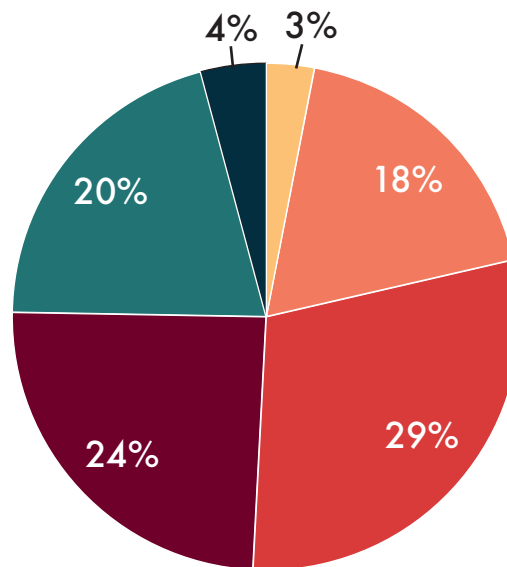
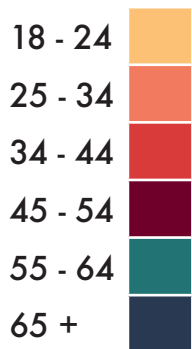
4 <https://www.planningboard.ca/news/> [Retrieved December 2020]

# KEY FINDINGS.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

384 individuals across Bruce, Grey, Huron, and Perth counties responded to this anonymous and confidential survey, with a completion rate of 90%. Survey respondents were asked to identify their age, gender, occupational category and industrial sector. The highest percentage of respondents were between 35-44 years old (29%), and survey respondents were more likely to be female (83%) than male (16%). Thirty-five percent of respondents are employed in occupations in education, law & social, community, and government services. Healthcare and social assistance was the most highly represented industrial sector (28%).

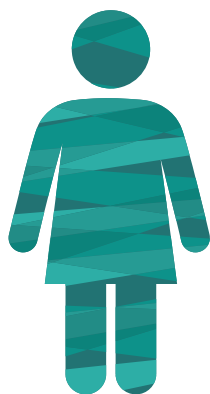
### AGE BREAKDOWN:



\* Does not total 100% because some respondents preferred not to disclose their age.

### GENDER BREAKDOWN:

**FEMALE: 83%**



**MALE: 16%**



**NON-BINARY: 1%**



## OCCUPATION:

Management	6%
Business, Finance & Administration	14%
Natural & Applied Sciences	1%
Healthcare	17%
Education, Law & Social, Community, and Government Services	35%
Art, Culture, Recreation & Sport	6%
Sales & Service	8%
Trades, Transport & Equipment Operators	3%
Natural Resources and Agriculture	1%
Manufacturing & Utilities	6%
Don't know	3%

## INDUSTRY:

Agriculture, forestry, & fishing	1%
Accommodation and food services	2%
Arts, entertainment, & recreation	5%
Information & cultural industries	3%
Construction & Utilities	8%
Education	9%
Finance and real-estate	1%
Healthcare and social assistance	28%
Manufacturing	2%
Mining, quarrying, and oil & gas extraction	0%
Professional, scientific, technical, and administrative services	7%
Public administration	15%
Retail and wholesale trade	4%
Transportation and warehousing	0%
Other services	13%
Unsure	1%



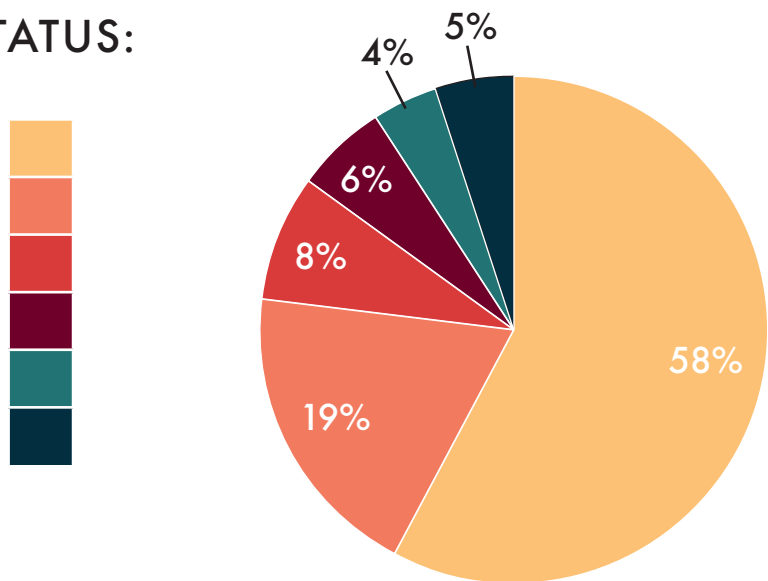
# EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

The majority of respondents (58%) were employed full-time at the time of the survey (October/ November 2020). For those who were working before COVID-19, the majority (67%) responded that they are currently working at their usual place of work, while 20% responded that they are working from home. Ten percent of respondents have either temporarily or permanently lost work due to COVID-19, and another 4% have lost work for reasons unrelated to the pandemic.

In the Planning Board's 2018 Employee Survey, 35% survey respondents who were unemployed reported that not having access to work in their geographical area was an obstacle to finding employment.<sup>5</sup> Lack of public transit has also been cited as a frequent obstacle to employment by both employers and job seekers in the region.<sup>6</sup> One immediate impact of COVID-19 which has the potential to impact businesses and workers long-term is the extent to which people are able to work from home. For those who have lost work due to COVID-19, searching for work may no longer have the same geographical obstacles it once did, as potential workers in certain occupations and industries may now have flexibility to apply for opportunities beyond the local geographical area. Correspondingly, employers may now be able to recruit employees for certain roles that can be performed remotely from beyond the immediate region. The extent to which remote work will persist beyond COVID-19 remains to be seen, but the flexibility of this option may assist job seekers with skillsets that may not match local needs as well as employers who are struggling to fill hard-to-fill positions.

## CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS:

Employed full-time  
Employed part-time  
Self-employed  
Unemployed (and looking for work)  
Unemployed (and not looking for work)  
Retired



<sup>5</sup> <https://www.planningboard.ca/reports/employee-survey-2018/>, p.22.

<sup>6</sup> EmployerOne Survey Archives - Four County Labour Market Planning Board

## CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT SINCE MARCH:

By October/November, approximately 30% of respondents indicated that their employment was being impacted by COVID-19 to some degree.

I am still working in my usual place of work	67%
<b>I am working from home temporarily</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>I am temporarily not working due to the COVID-19 crisis</b>	<b>4%</b>
I am temporarily not working for a reason not related to COVID-19	2%
<b>I have permanently lost work due to the COVID-19 crisis</b>	<b>6%</b>
I have permanently lost work for a reason not related to COVID-19	2%

## ABILITY TO WORK OR TO FIND WORK AFTER THE CRISIS:

Respondents were asked about the extent to which they agree that they feel confident in their ability to work after COVID-19. Twenty-five percent of respondents indicated that they are concerned about their ability to continue working or to find work after the pandemic is over. Sixty-eight percent did not express concern about their ability to work after COVID-19.



## ABILITY TO MEET FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS:

When asked about the extent to which COVID-19 has impacted their ability to meet financial obligations or pay for essential needs (including rent or mortgage payments, utilities and groceries), 33% of respondents indicated a significant or moderate impact, while 21% indicated that the current pandemic has had a minor impact, and 40% indicated no impact at all. The remaining 6% responded that it is too soon to assess the impact COVID-19 has had on their finances.

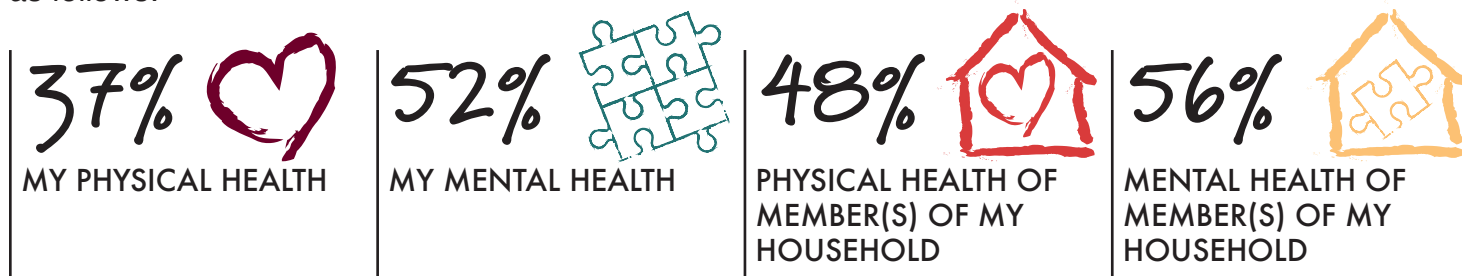
Impact COVID-19 has had on ability to meet financial obligations:



# HEALTH CONCERNS AND WELLBEING

When asked about the level of concern respondents have about their own health as well as that of members of their household, there was more concern overall about mental health and the highest concern was not for respondents themselves but for the emotional wellbeing of their families and household members. Over half of respondents were very or extremely concerned about the emotional health of members of their household.

The percentage of respondents who reported that they are very concerned or extremely concerned is as follows:



# KEY COMMENTS

Unsurprisingly, mental health concerns and the impact of long-term stress resulting from the pandemic were the most frequently raised additional comments in this survey. Respondents identified loneliness, social isolation, and worry about the sustained impact of COVID-19 restrictions and additional stress associated with the pandemic. Concern about the overall well-being of respondents, their families, and their communities was the most common theme among these responses.

Additional workplace stress created by COVID-19 was another key concern raised by survey respondents. The additional occupational stress created by establishing safe COVID-19 work protocols, ensuring compliance, and addressing work absences due to possible COVID-19 symptoms and/or isolation requirements was mentioned. Many respondents were concerned about maintaining their jobs with limited sick leave offered by their employers and/or the inability to care for children who were unable to attend school or daycare because of possible COVID-19 symptoms.

Ongoing financial stress was raised by those who have lost their jobs or employment opportunities due to COVID-19, but was also discussed by respondents who have maintained employment throughout this time period. Respondents identified financial pressures resulting from increased expenses associated with the pandemic, increases in prices for basic goods such as groceries, and increased household costs associated with spending more time at home. Many discussed how these financial pressures have created additional emotional stress for their families.

Many respondents were concerned about a decrease or loss of work. This was noted particularly by those in contract positions, working part-time, or those who are self-employed. Individuals in post-secondary programs also identified a loss of summer work or internship/co-op opportunities. In contrast, a significant workload increase was mentioned by many respondents, particularly by those in healthcare, social assistance and management roles. Many described a significant increase in workload, and the unsustainable nature of this level of work, and associated stress, for long periods of time.

The ongoing stress of managing family and work commitments was mentioned by respondents who commented about their experiences with COVID-19. Balancing childcare while working from home, and/or working while adhering to public health requirements that impact children's attendance at school or daycare, were mentioned by many respondents. Working parents also spoke about how this additional stress was impacting both their personal and family's mental health.

Finally, accessing healthcare services, for both physical and mental health concerns, was expressed as challenging by some survey respondents. Cancellations and delays in accessing medical services unrelated to COVID-19 were reported.



# SNAPSHOT ON PRECARIOUS WORK

In addition to the overall survey results presented earlier in this document, we were able to filter responses to certain questions in order to create a snapshot focusing on precarious work. Precarious employment is defined by Statistics Canada as: Non-standard work that includes part-time work, temporary employment, multiple jobholders and self-employment. It is characterized by unpredictable income or work schedules, dependent on seasonality or contract-based work.

Precarious employment is one important variable influencing the extent to which individuals are able to withstand the economic fluctuations caused by COVID-19. Tracking changes in the number of workers whose work meets the definition of precarious employment can be an important tool for assessing labour market recovery in our region.

National and provincial research both show that those who were more vulnerable to economic changes and labour market instability before COVID-19 have experienced greater hardships due to the pandemic. They are more likely to be currently unemployed or working in jobs with less stability. They are also more likely to be working in sectors where work cannot be performed remotely, thereby creating stress due to the often additional risk of exposure, as well as needed access to childcare for parents required to work outside the home during this pandemic. The local survey data presented below aligns with these overall findings. While this snapshot highlights factors that correlate with precarious working conditions in our local communities, the Planning Board is undertaking additional in-depth research on this topic. The Precarious Employment Report will be available on our website ([www.planningboard.ca](http://www.planningboard.ca)) in March 2021.

Of survey respondents who were employed on March 2, 2020, and those who were employed when they completed the survey in October or November 2020, the following percentage reported that their work meets the definition of precarious employment:

ON MARCH 2, 2020 (PRE-COVID-19)

29%

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2020

27%






# KEY FINDINGS

Based on those who reported that they are currently (as of October/November 2020) precariously employed, key findings are as follows:






## DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS:

Compared to those who are not precariously employed, individuals who are currently precariously employed are more likely to be:

-  Younger
-  Have lower educational attainment
-  Approximately one in four respondents has at least one dependent child living at home



## EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS:

Compared to those who are not precariously employed, individuals who are currently precariously employed are:

-  More likely to have had part-time work or self-employment income before COVID-19
-  More likely to report a loss of work due to COVID-19
-  More likely to report that COVID-19 has impacted their ability to meet financial obligations
-  Less likely to report being able to work from home
-  Less likely to have confidence in their ability to continue to work or find work after the COVID-19 crisis

## HEALTH CONCERNS:

Compared to those who are not precariously employed, individuals who are currently precariously employed are:

-  More likely to report significant concerns about their own physical and mental health
-  More likely to report significant concerns about the physical and mental health of household members

# CONCLUSION

The information presented in this report comes from a survey that was conducted by the Planning Board in October and November 2020, at a time during which there was cautious optimism about the economic recovery of the four county region. However, at the time of this writing, Ontario's COVID-19 numbers and hospitalization rates had reached an all-time high and promising vaccines were still months away from distribution to all Canadians. Uncertainty about how the labour market will continue to change, and which changes may become permanent once we are able to contain the effects of the pandemic, remain.

In December 2020, the widespread and long-term impact COVID-19 has had on the local labour market is not yet known. However, this report provides a snapshot of the employment experiences, and related concerns, held by 384 individuals in our region at this moment in time. These results align with national data, suggesting that ways in which the local economy is being disrupted – and starting to recover – do not differ significantly from broader trends that are being observed across the country. It will be important to review and track upcoming changes that could impact our labour market, such as future lockdowns that may require business and/or school closures.

The Planning Board is working on an ongoing project exploring the impact of different scenarios that may emerge in the next 12-24 months, and how they will impact both the workforce and employers in our region. For more information about the COVID-19 Scenario-Based Planning project, please see [www.planningboard.ca](http://www.planningboard.ca) or contact Tingting Zhang ([tingting@planningboard.ca](mailto:tingting@planningboard.ca)).

The current survey reveals that approximately 25% of respondents are concerned about their ability to continue working or find new work after the pandemic. This finding may provide opportunities for local training programs, employment counsellors and other supportive services to assist those whose employment status may be more uncertain than it was before COVID-19. Similarly, the 33% of respondents who reported that COVID-19 has had a substantial impact on their ability to pay for basic necessities could be targeted for additional support and services in our local communities.

Recognizing factors that correlate with precarious employment, as noted in the earlier snapshot on precarious employment (p.13) and the Planning Board's upcoming report on this topic (see [www.planningboard.ca](http://www.planningboard.ca) in March 2021), can help us continue to improve community services and access to needed supports for the most vulnerable members of our communities.

While work on the impact of COVID-19 on the local labour market will continue for the foreseeable future, the above report helps us to understand experiences and challenges faced by members of our region several months after the emergence of this crisis. Similarly, our first COVID-19 impact report ([www.planningboard.ca](http://www.planningboard.ca)) captured the immediate labour market experiences of the four county region. The Planning Board is committed to addressing and understanding new and ongoing labour market challenges arising from the impact of this pandemic. For information about future projects, and tools you can use as an employer or job seeker to help you navigate this changing labour market, please visit our website or contact Gemma Mendez-Smith ([executivedirector@planningboard.ca](mailto:executivedirector@planningboard.ca)).





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