

# Barriers to Employment: Employer and Workforce Perspectives



**NIAGARA**  
**WORKFORCE**  
**PLANNING BOARD**



Niagara Workforce Planning Board (NWPB) is one of 26 regional planning boards in Ontario making up the Local Boards Network, and one of 9 boards making up Workforce Planning West.

We're an agile and multifaceted learning organization, contributing data and insight to the collective efforts to address workforce challenges and opportunities in our community.

*Our Vision:* A diverse and talented regional workforce contributing to a prosperous community.

*Our Mission:* We support our local community organizations by:

- Bringing objective, accurate, and future-focused workforce research to enhance planning and decision making;
- Working in partnership across Niagara (and beyond) to address workforce development challenges and find solutions.

*Our Values:* We Listen, we are collaborative, we do the right thing, we are community focused, we are inclusive, we are future aware



This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario. The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Ontario.

## Executive Summary

Given the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, NWPB shifted our organizational efforts away from delivering our Employer One survey and toward further supporting the Niagara COVID-19 Business Impact Survey. This report provides insights from this survey in addition to national and provincial trends gleaned from the Canadian Survey of Business Conditions and NWPB's job demand aggregator.

This report also provides a workforce perspective by presenting findings from NWPB's Barriers to Employment Survey, and Trusted Time Inc.'s survey on Employee Engagement and Retention. Through these data collection efforts, a series of themes emerged that speak to labour force trends.

### **Barriers to Pandemic Recovery and Employment**

In the Spring of 2021, local employers indicated that their barriers included factors like the slow return of customers, cash flow, and working within the COVID-19 guidelines. From an employer perspective, financial obligations and needs were a key obstacle to recovery. While hiring was of some importance, the key concern was still business stability. Provincial data from Q4 2021 show that the top obstacles to pandemic recovery included *rising costs of inputs, cost of insurance, and transportation*.

From a workforce perspective, the top barriers to employment mirror those seen before the pandemic, but many individuals reported that the pandemic had made these barriers worse:

- Lack of job posts/opportunity in field of desired employment
- Lack of job posts/opportunity at desired level of compensation
- Lack of job posts/opportunity in geography of desired employment

### **Hiring, Training, and Retention**

Provincially, employers generally expected their number of employees to remain about the same between October 2021 and February 2022 (78.6% of respondents). Only around 14% expected their workforce to increase throughout this time. Some hiring and retention strategies included

- Increasing wages for existing employees
- Encouraging employees to participate in on-the-job training
- Increasing wages offered to new employees



In the spring of 2021, many local employers did not report that they planned to hire; out of 786 respondents, 203 planned to hire part-time employees and 212 planned to hire full-time employees.

From an employee perspective, in NWPB's 2021 *Barriers to Employment* survey, 83.1% of 89 respondents were employed; of these employed individuals approximately half indicated they had looked for new work since January 2020. People that did not look for work were less likely to report that they did not feel underutilized in their workplace than those who did look for work.

Data from Trusted Time Inc.'s *Employee Engagement and Retention* survey shows that when employees feel an employer's obligations have been kept (e.g., written or implied promises to provide secure employment, participate in decision-making, opportunities to advance and grow, etc.) they are more likely to be engaged in the workplace and are less likely to consider quitting their job

Given the conversations that have turned towards potential labour shortages across industries, taking into account both employer strategies for hiring and employment/workplace values of the workforce may prove valuable.

### **Health and Wellbeing**

Local employers were asked about the impact of the pandemic on their workforce. Across all sectors, employers indicated that the areas that saw the most negative impacts throughout the pandemic were:

- Employee mental health
- Overall business stability
- Ownership mental health

Insights from the local workforce show that while mental health was not one of the top barriers to employment, just under 16% of respondents indicated that they had experienced mental health challenges as a barrier to employment; 87.5% of these individuals reported that this challenge had been made worse by the pandemic. These data are consistent with national level trends reported by Life Works which show that, across 2020 and 2021, mental health is far below levels seen prior to 2020. They also reported that approximately 24% of employed individuals have poorer mental health now than before the pandemic<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> LifeWorks (November 20, 2021). The Mental Health Index by LifeWorks – Canada, October 2021. Retrieved from <https://lifeworks.com/en/resource/mental-health-index%E2%84%A2-report-october-2021>



## Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Section 1. Recent Provincial Indicators .....	6
Employer Expectations .....	6
Anticipated Business Obstacles .....	8
Recruitment, Retention, and Training Plans .....	9
Section 2. Recent Local Indicators and Employer Insights .....	11
Local Job Demand .....	15
Job Vacancies .....	17
Section 3: Workforce Insights .....	21
Barriers to Employment Survey .....	21
Employee Engagement and Retention Survey .....	24
Section 4: Employers and the Workforce – Common Themes .....	27
Barriers to Pandemic Recovery and Employment .....	27
Hiring, Training, and Retention .....	29
Mental Health .....	27

## Section 1. Recent Provincial Indicators

Given the rapid pace of changes that followed in the wake of COVID-19, NWPB has made use of data from the Canadian Survey of Business Conditions. These data provide a provincial level snapshot of how COVID-19 continues to create challenges for employers.

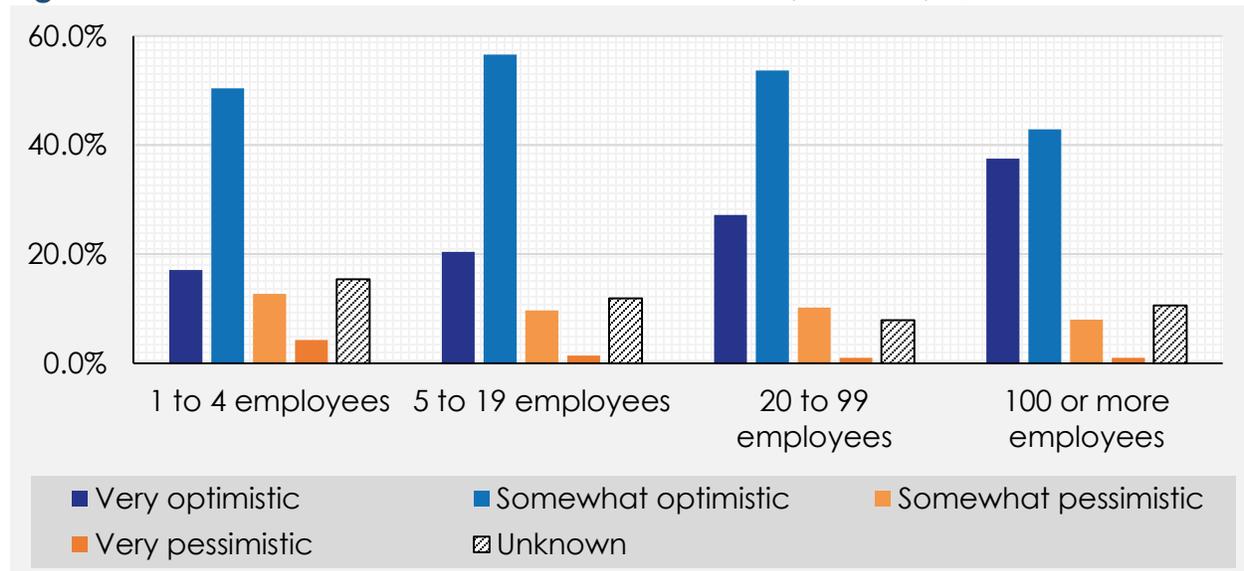
The Canadian Survey of Business Conditions data presented in Section 1 reflect employer insights collected between **October 1 and November 5, 2021**. Thus, questions referring to time periods like “the next 12 months” would range from October 1, 2021- November 5, 2022.

NWPB has also made use of the third wave of the Niagara COVID-19 Business Impact Survey which is included in **Section 2** of this report. Combining these sources allows us to examine local data within the context of provincial trends.

### Employer Expectations

First, we examine provincial trends. Figure 1-1 summarizes employers' future outlook over the next 12 months. Many employers were *somewhat optimistic* about the future.

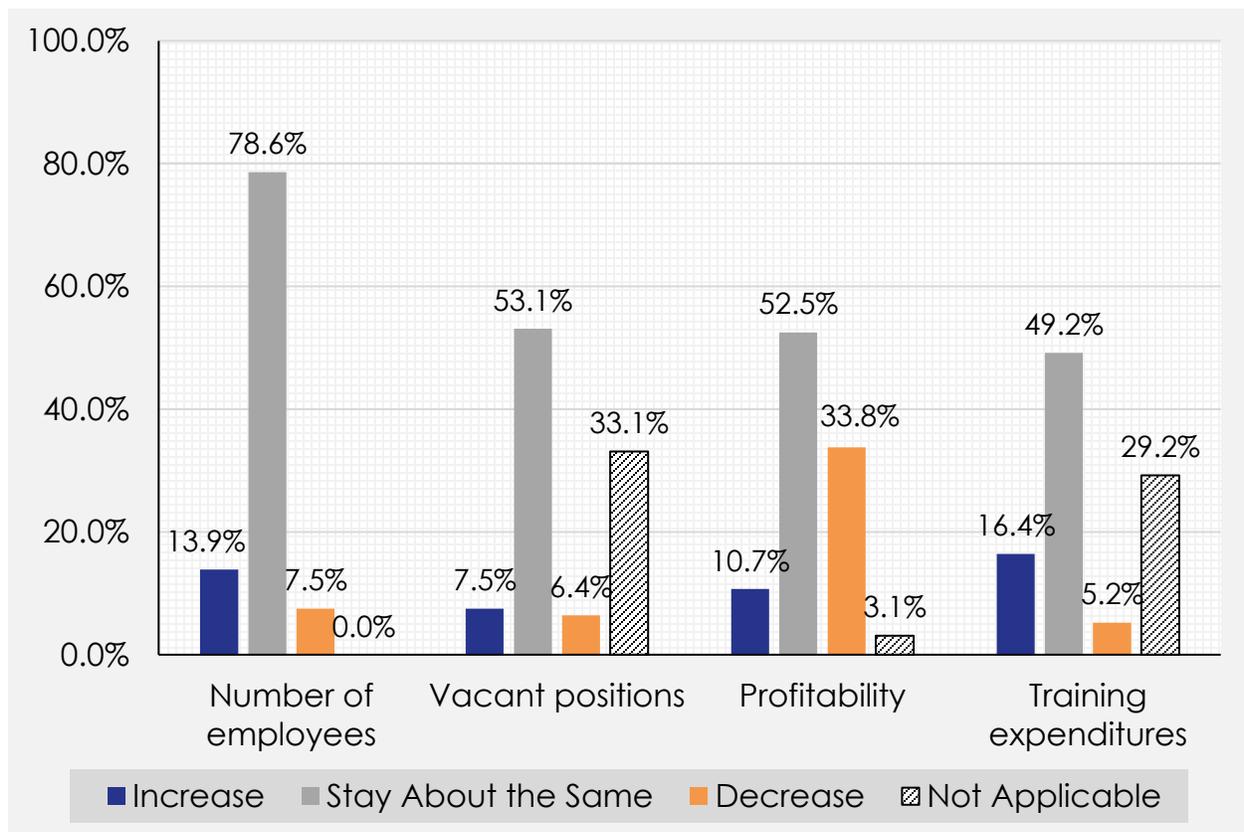
**Figure 1-1. Future Outlook Over the Next 12 Months, Ontario, Q4 2021<sup>2</sup>**



<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey of Business Conditions, Ontario, Table #33-10-0426-01

In the more near term, employers also were asked about any expected changes over the next 3 months. Employers could indicate whether they expected things to increase, stay the same, or decrease across four categories. Figure 1-2 shows the short-term expectations; we see that employers generally expected to see stability over the next 3 months.

**Figure 1-2. Expected Changes Over the Next 3 Months, Ontario, Q4 2021<sup>3</sup>**

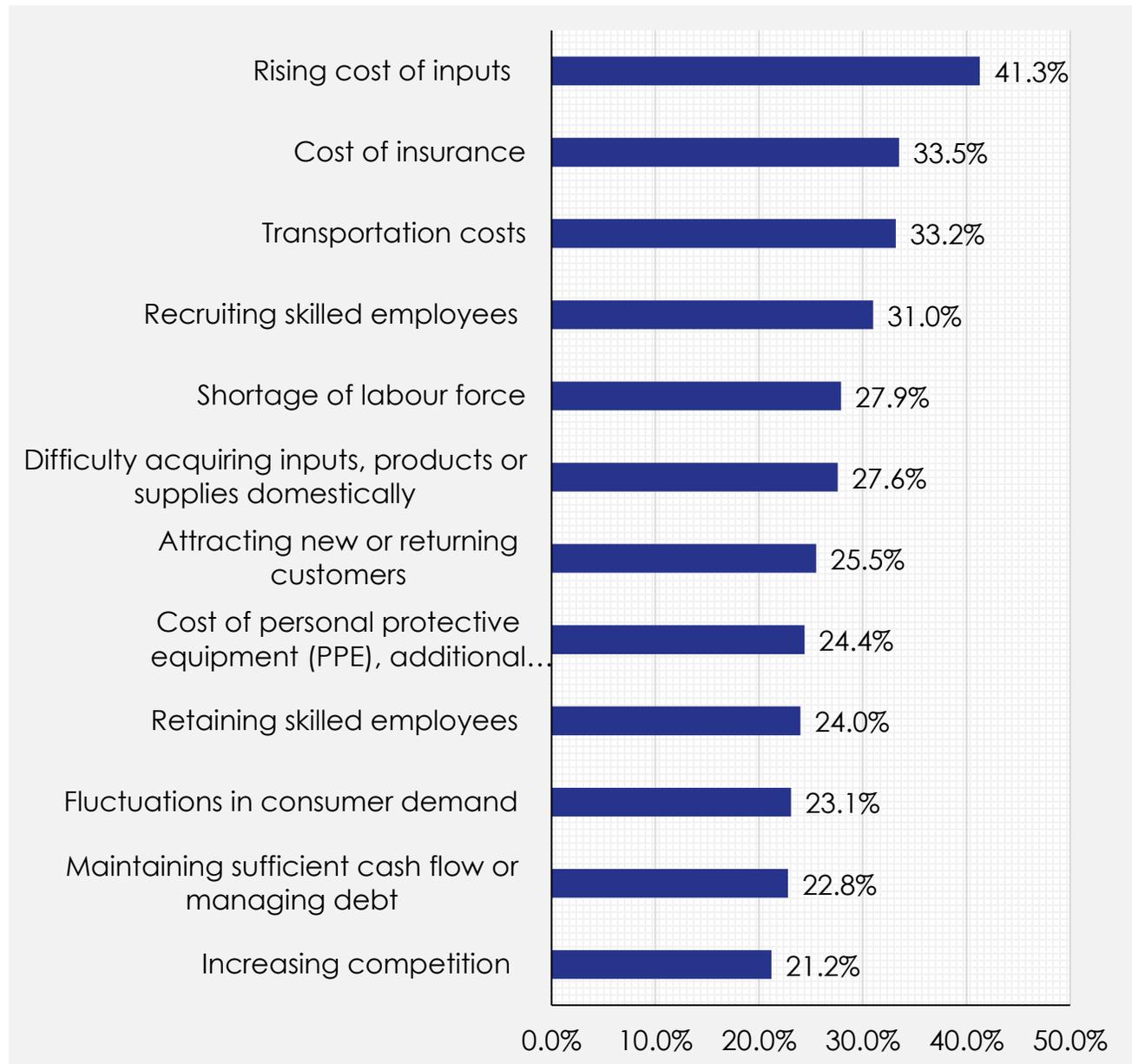


<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey of Business Conditions, Ontario, Table #33-10-0399-01

### Anticipated Business Obstacles

Figure 1-3 outlines the business or organizational challenges employers expect to see over the next 3 months. Note that these data reflect challenges more than 20% of respondents expect.

**Figure 1-3. Expected Obstacles Over the Next 3 Months, Ontario, Q4 2021<sup>4</sup>**

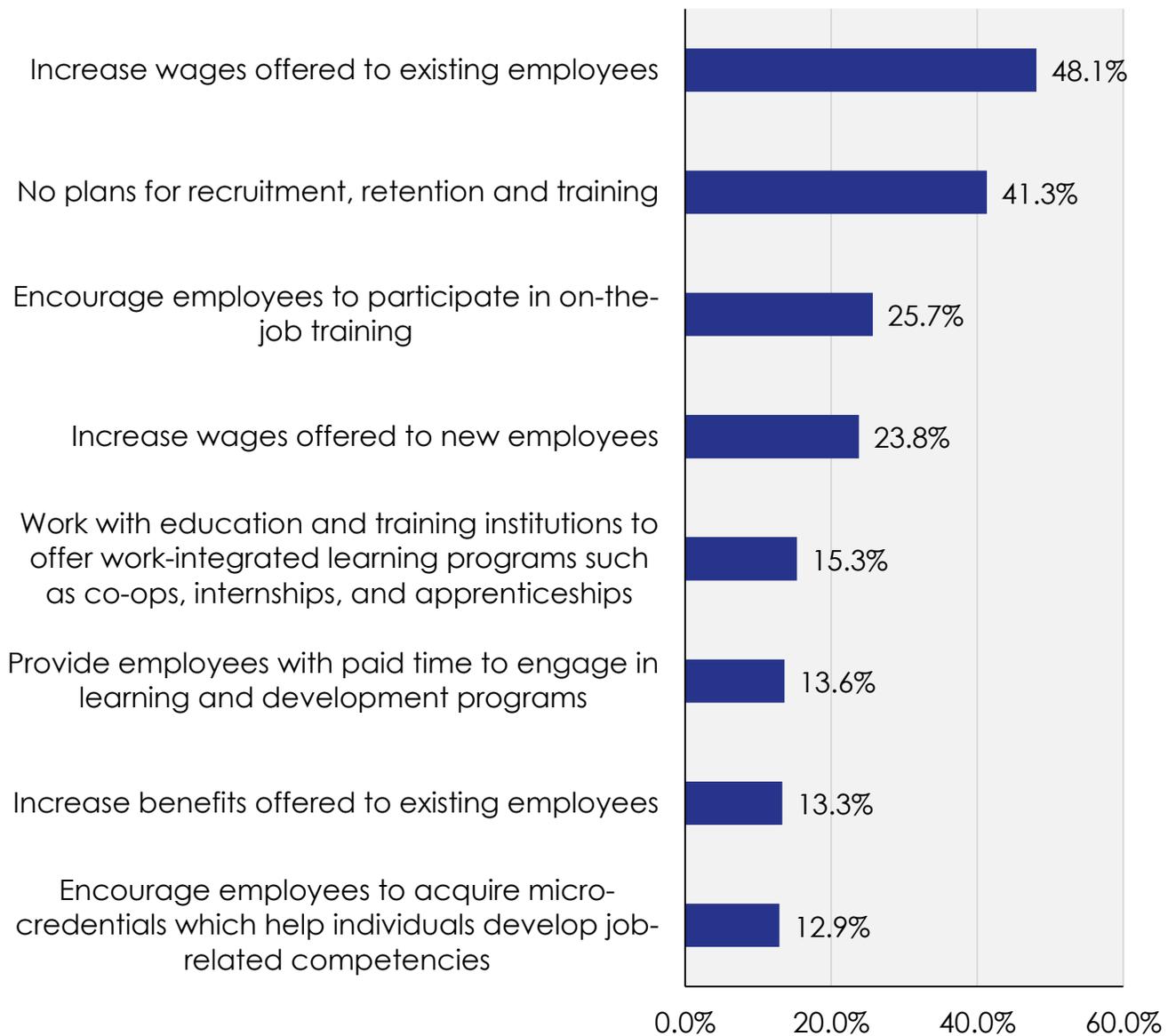


<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey of Business Conditions, Ontario, Table #33-10-0400-01

### Recruitment, Retention, and Training Plans

This section outlines employer plans related to staff retention, recruitment, and training over the next 12 months. Figure 1-4 provides insights on the priorities that at least 10% of respondents indicated they would be focusing on.

**Figure 1-4. Recruitment, Retention, and Training Plans; Ontario, Q4 2021<sup>5</sup>**



<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey of Business Conditions, Ontario, Table #33-10-0416-01

We can examine the sectors in which the most common hiring/training/retention plans were most prevalent (see Figure 1-5).

**Figure 1-5. Recruitment, Retention, and Training Plans; Ontario, Q4 2021<sup>6</sup>**

Industry	Increase wages offered to existing employees	No plans for recruitment, retention, and training	Encourage employees to participate in on-the-job training	Increase wages offered to new employees
Accommodation & food services	66.3%	26.0%	27.7%	54.2%
Health care & social assistance	63.5%	19.6%	26.2%	27.0%
Wholesale trade	57.5%	34.9%	25.8%	24.2%
Manufacturing	57.0%	23.9%	34.5%	27.5%
Arts, entertainment & recreation	56.4%	32.4%	30.5%	28.6%
Real estate & rental & leasing	54.8%	42.2%	17.9%	13.5%
Administrative & support, waste management & remediation services	52.8%	35.1%	37.5%	30.2%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting	52.1%	27.6%	34.9%	26.1%
Other services (except public administration)	50.9%	42.5%	25.7%	15.3%
Finance & insurance	50.7%	43.7%	35.0%	25.3%
<b>All industries</b>	<b>48.1%</b>	<b>41.3%</b>	<b>25.7%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>
Retail trade	46.5%	36.7%	36.9%	32.8%
Information & cultural industries	45.0%	43.1%	23.2%	14.6%
Mining, quarrying, & oil & gas extraction	40.4%	39.1%	30.0%	21.0%
Construction	38.4%	52.3%	22.2%	20.7%
Professional, scientific & technical services	34.1%	58.8%	16.0%	11.8%
Transportation & warehousing	33.0%	59.8%	14.1%	17.0%

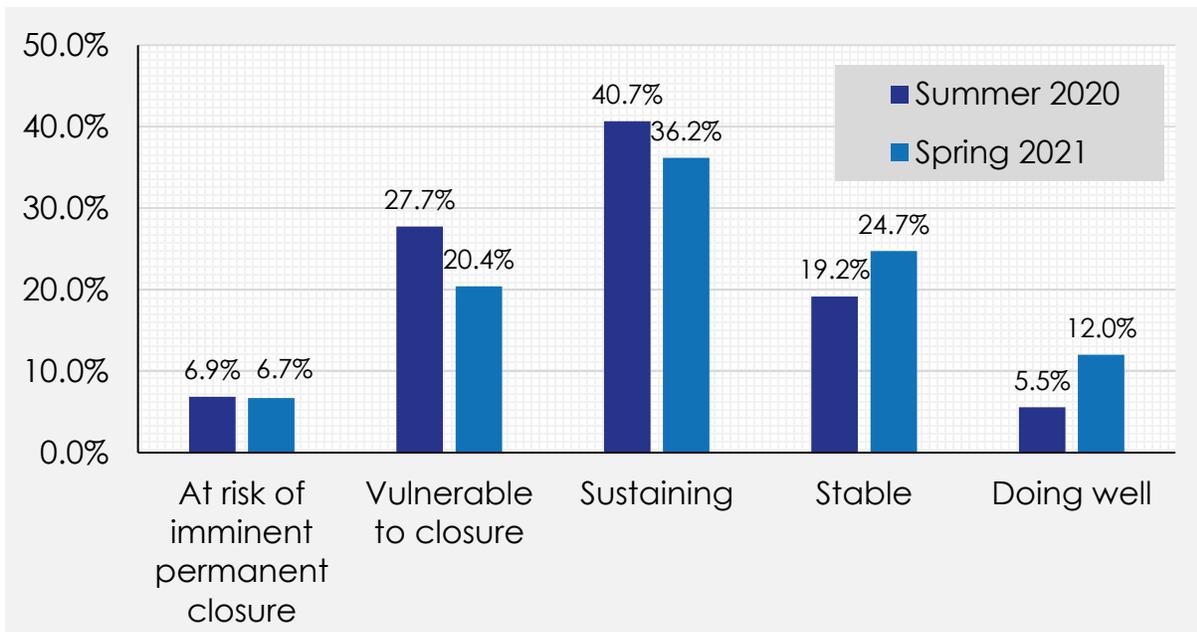
<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey of Business Conditions, Ontario, Table #33-10-0416-01

## Section 2. Recent Local Indicators and Employer Insights

In March and April of 2021, the Niagara Economic Rapid Response Team conducted the third COVID-19 Business Impact Survey and received 786 employer responses. While these data also are discussed in our Local Labour Market Report, a review of the data here provides context for how COVID-19 has impacted local businesses and their obstacles to recovery.

Figure 2-1 shows that Spring 2021 saw a larger percentage of employers indicating that they are *stable* or *doing well* than in the summer of 2020.

**Figure 2-1. Business conditions in Niagara, June 2020 and March/April 2021<sup>7</sup>**



In Spring 2021, the sectors where we were more likely to see employers reporting they were vulnerable to closures were *accommodation and food services*; and *arts, entertainment, and recreation*.

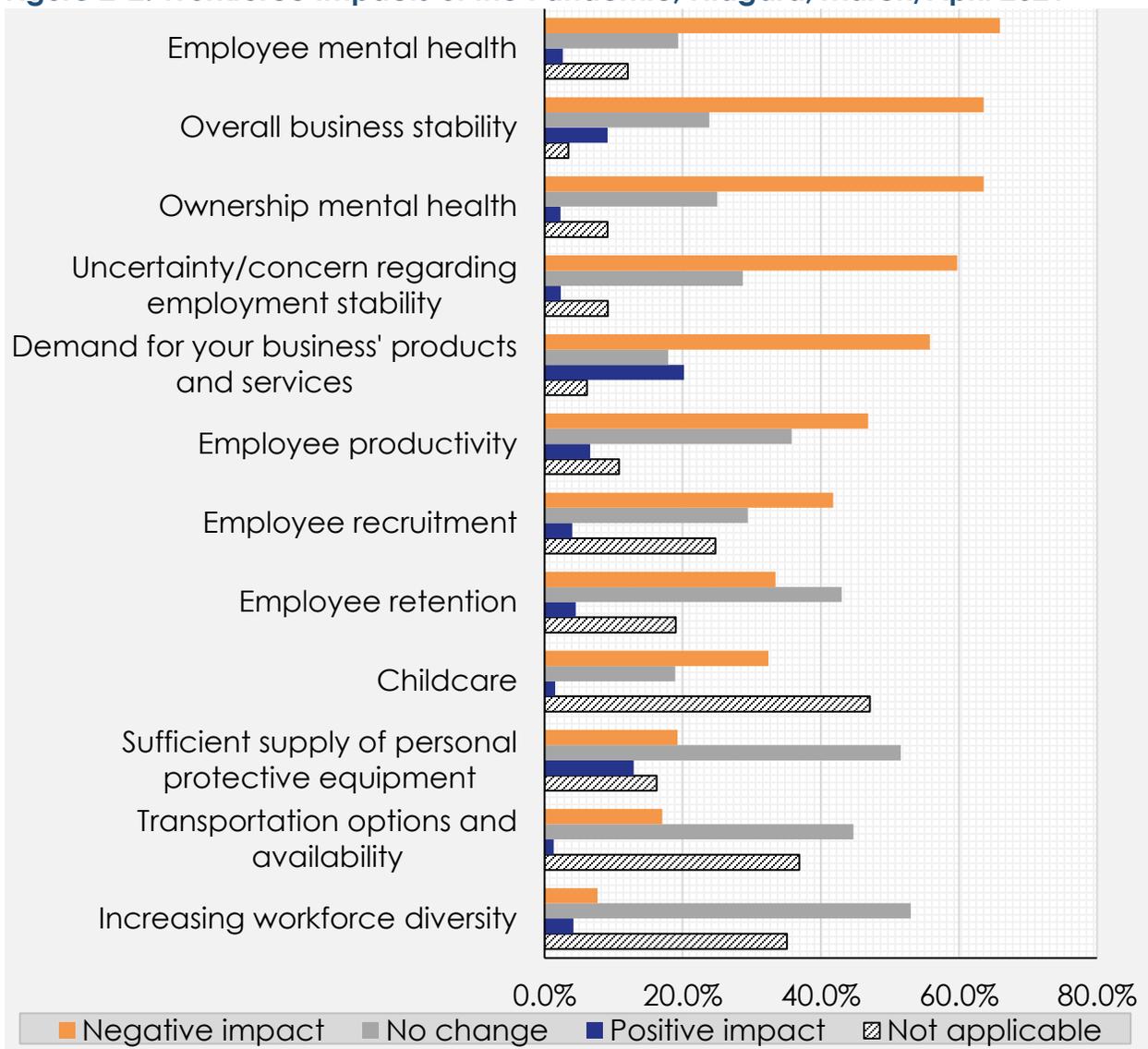
The sectors where we were more likely to see employers reporting they were doing well were *construction*; *finance and insurance*; *health care and social assistance*; and *professional, scientific, and technical services*.

<sup>7</sup> Niagara Economic Rapid Response Team, COVID-19 Business Impact Survey Wave 2 and 3. NWPB graciously acknowledges the collaboration of all Niagara's municipalities on the creation of this data.

Employers also were asked about the impacts of the pandemic on their workforce. Across all sectors, employers indicated that the areas that saw the most negative impacts were (see Figure 2-2):

- Employee mental health
- Overall business stability
- Ownership mental health

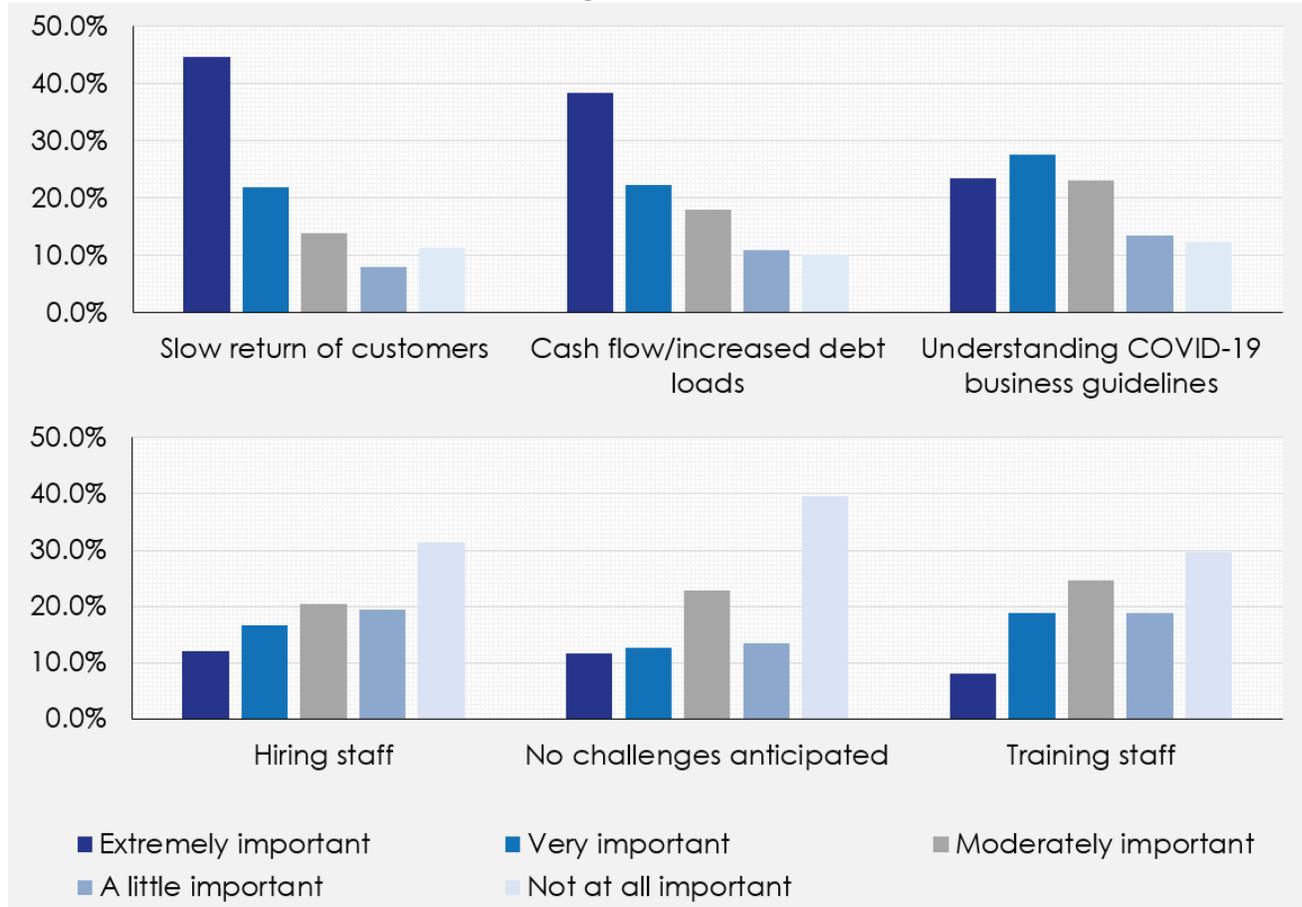
**Figure 2-2. Workforce Impacts of the Pandemic, Niagara, March/April 2021<sup>8</sup>**



<sup>8</sup> Niagara Economic Rapid Response Team, COVID-19 Business Impact Survey Wave 3

In addition to these workforce impacts, employers identified a number of obstacles to recovery. The main barriers to recovery that employers expected to face are outlined in Figure 2-3.

**Table 2-3. Obstacles to recovery, Niagara, May 2021<sup>9</sup>**



Not surprisingly, the most significant barriers to recovery were:

- Slow return of customers
- Cash flow/increased debt loads
- Understanding COVID-19 business guidelines

These responses reflect that the top barriers to recovery are mainly operational, along with challenges with consumer confidence. Unlike past years, hiring and training of staff are less of a concern given the economic downturn.

<sup>9</sup> Niagara Economic Rapid Response Team, COVID-19 Business Impact Survey Wave 3

Given these obstacles, employers noted what types of assistance would be beneficial to their business (see Table 2-4):

**Table 2-4. What Type of Assistance Would Most Benefit Your Business? Spring 2021, Niagara**

<b>Extremely Important</b>		<b>Moderately Important</b>		<b>Not at all Important</b>	
Financial incentives for business growth	37.7%	Business planning & strategy	25.7%	Access to new international markets	50.9%
Financial incentives for new business investment	31.3%	Market intelligence	24.8%	New business partnerships	36.2%
Advocacy to provincial and/or federal governments	29.8%	Staff training	23.0%	Sourcing new suppliers	34.6%

Though hiring seems to be less of a focus for employers in terms of recovery, some employers still reported plan to increase – or recover – the size of their workforce. It is important to note here that not all employers indicated they would be hiring (see Table 2-5).

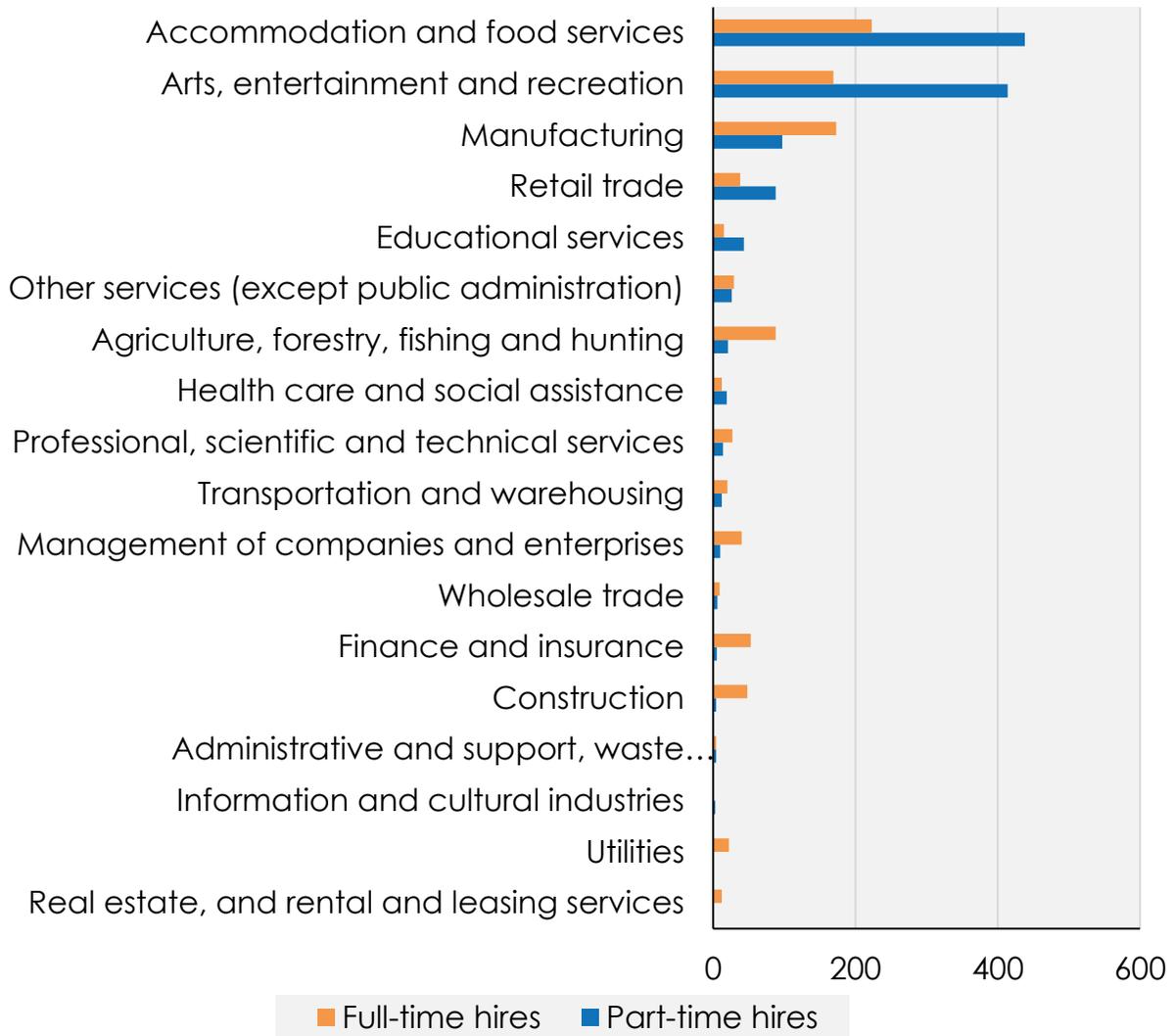
**Table 2-5. Employer hiring plans, Spring 2021, Niagara**

	<b>Hiring</b>	<b>Not Hiring</b>	<b>No Response</b>
Part-time positions	203	168	412
Full-time positions	212	178	393

Figure 2-6 outlines employer-identified hiring needs over the next 6 months (starting from March/April 2021) by industry. Overall, there was an anticipated need of 1,204 part-time hires and 983 full-time hires. Most of the hiring was expected in

- Accommodations and food services
- Arts, entertainment, and recreation
- Manufacturing

Figure 2-6. Anticipated hiring plans over the next 6 months, Spring 2021, Niagara



To supplement these consultations, we can track the job demand for each of these sectors. Tables 2-7 to Table 2-9 outlines the top 10 jobs in demand for the three industries that expected to make the most hires.

### Local Job Demand

Table 2-7 outlines online job posts for the accommodations and food services sectors. The top job in demand was *food counter attendants, kitchen helpers, and related support occupations*.

**Table 2-7. Accommodations and Food Services Job Demand, April-October 2021, Niagara**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Job Posts</b>
Food counter attendants, kitchen helpers & related support occupations	1,206
Cooks	751
Food & beverage servers	390
Light duty cleaners	270
Hotel front desk clerks	220
Janitors, caretakers & building superintendents	175
Bartenders	175
Food service supervisors	174
Restaurant & food service managers	171
Maîtres d'hôtel & hosts/hostesses	123

Table 2-8 shows that the most in-demand occupation in the arts, entertainment and recreation industry was *program leaders and instructors in recreation, sport, and fitness*.

**Table 2-8. Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation Job Demand, April-October 2021, Niagara**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Job Posts</b>
Program leaders & instructors in recreation, sport & fitness	47
Cooks	36
Other customer & information services representatives	25
Light duty cleaners	23
Landscaping & grounds maintenance labourers	20
Food & beverage servers	16
Bartenders	15
Food counter attendants, kitchen helpers & related support occupations	14
Operators & attendants in amusement, recreation & sport	14
Cashiers	13
Recreation, sports & fitness program & service directors	13

In the manufacturing industry the most in-demand occupation was *retail salespersons*. It is important to note here that this industry includes wineries/breweries/distilleries as they fall within beverage manufacturing.

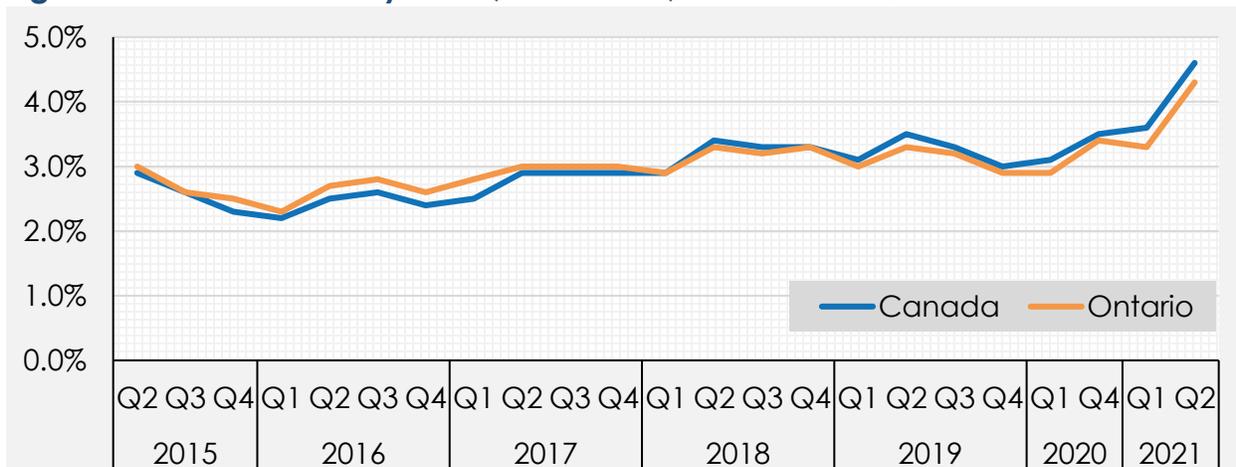
**Table 2-9. Manufacturing Job Demand, April-October 2021, Niagara**

Occupation	Job Posts
Retail salespersons	111
Food & beverage servers	90
Material handlers	60
General farm workers	53
Cooks	53
Other labourers in processing, manufacturing & utilities	50
Food counter attendants, kitchen helpers & related support occupations	41
Welders & related machine operators	37
Labourers in food & beverage processing	37
Bakers	36

### Job Vacancies

The above data show that although hiring strategies were not a main goal of employers' immediate recovery plan, many jobs were still available. Indeed, provincially and nationally we see that job vacancy rates increased throughout the pandemic (see Figure 2-10). *Note: Q1 2015 is excluded as data quality indicators noted to use with caution; Q2 and Q3 2020 data were not available.*

**Figure 2-10. Job Vacancy Rates, 2015-2021, Ontario and Canada<sup>10</sup>**



<sup>10</sup> Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0326-01 Job vacancies, payroll employees, job vacancy rate, and average offered hourly wage by industry sector, quarterly, unadjusted for seasonality

Figures 2-11 to 2-13 present national and provincial job vacancy rates for the top local industries that expected to hire in Niagara throughout 2021. Figure 2-13 shows that job vacancy rates for accommodations and food services was higher throughout 2021 than what has been seen in prior years.

**Figure 2-11. Accommodations and Food Services Job Vacancy Rates, 2015-2021, Ontario and Canada<sup>11</sup>**

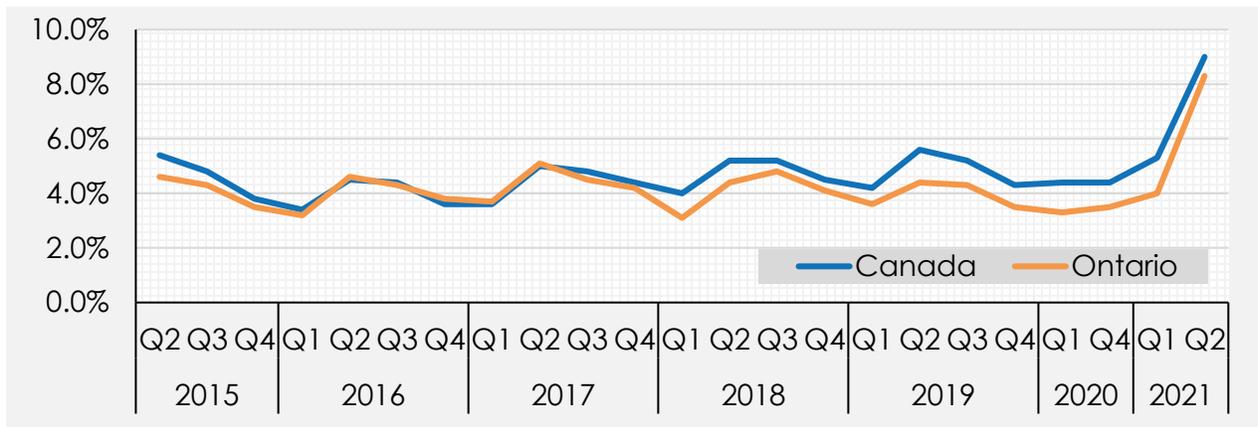
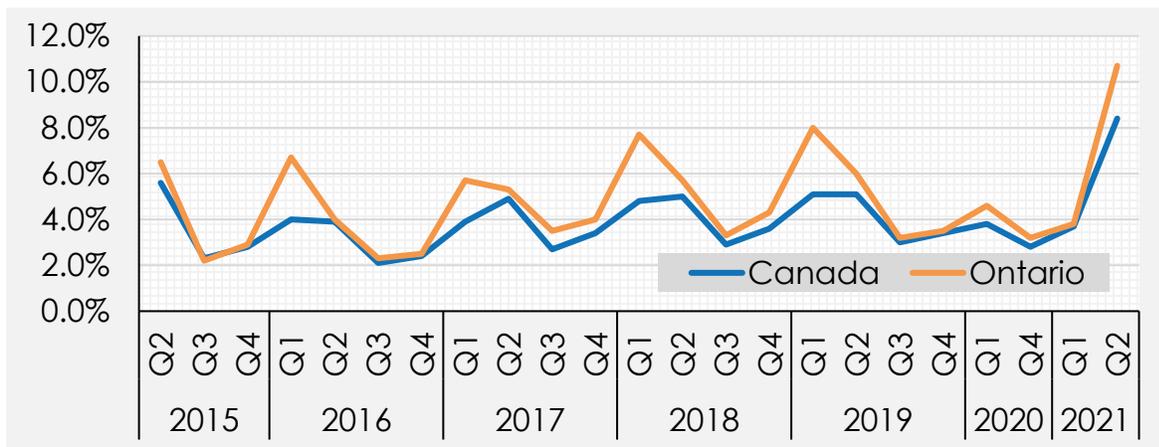


Figure 2-12 indicates that while the arts, entertainment, and recreation industry tends to have seasonal fluctuations in terms of job vacancy rates, again, 2021 was an outlier in terms of the level of vacancy rates across the industry.

**Figure 2-12. Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation Job Vacancy Rates, 2015-2021, Ontario and Canada<sup>12</sup>**

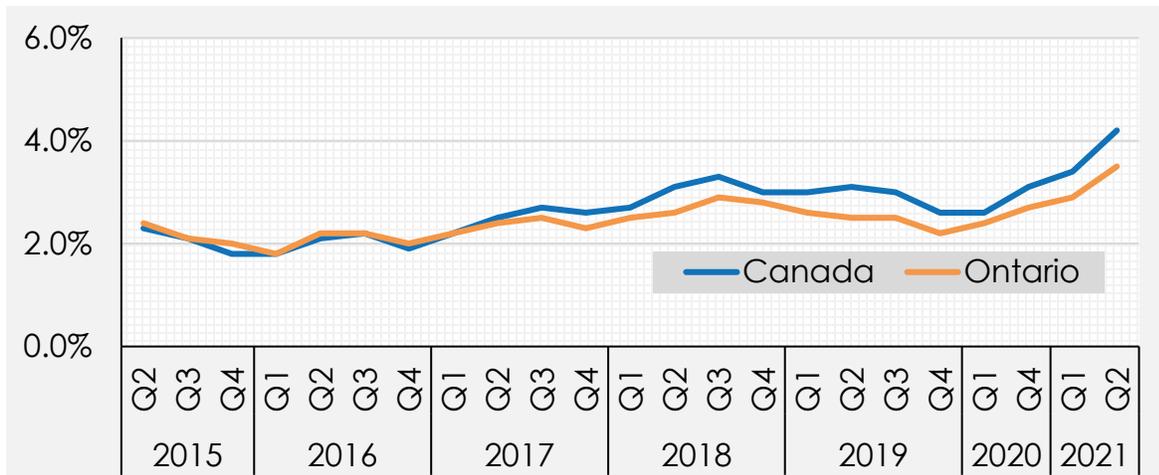


<sup>11</sup> ibid

<sup>12</sup> Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0326-01 Job vacancies, payroll employees, job vacancy rate, and average offered hourly wage by industry sector, quarterly, unadjusted for seasonality

In manufacturing we see a steady increase in job vacancy rates over time. Rates tended to be higher in 2021 than prior years (see Figure 2-13).

**Figure 2-13. Manufacturing Job Vacancy Rates, 2015-2021, Ontario and Canada<sup>13</sup>**



When we consider the above employer insights, we have the following takeaways:

- Compared to the June 2020 Business Impact Survey, a larger proportion of businesses indicated that they were stable or doing well in Spring 2021.
- The sectors that were more likely to be vulnerable to closure were *accommodation and food services* and *arts, entertainment, and recreation*. These two sectors also were likely to indicate that they planned to hire over the next 6 months (as reported in Spring 2021).
- In terms of employer-identified workforce impacts, the top impacts were
  - Employee mental health
  - Overall business stability
  - Ownership mental health
- The top obstacles to business recovery were focused on consumer confidence and business stability; less focus was on hiring/training staff.
- The most beneficial assistance to recovery included factors like financial incentives for growth and new investments, and advocating to the provincial/federal government.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

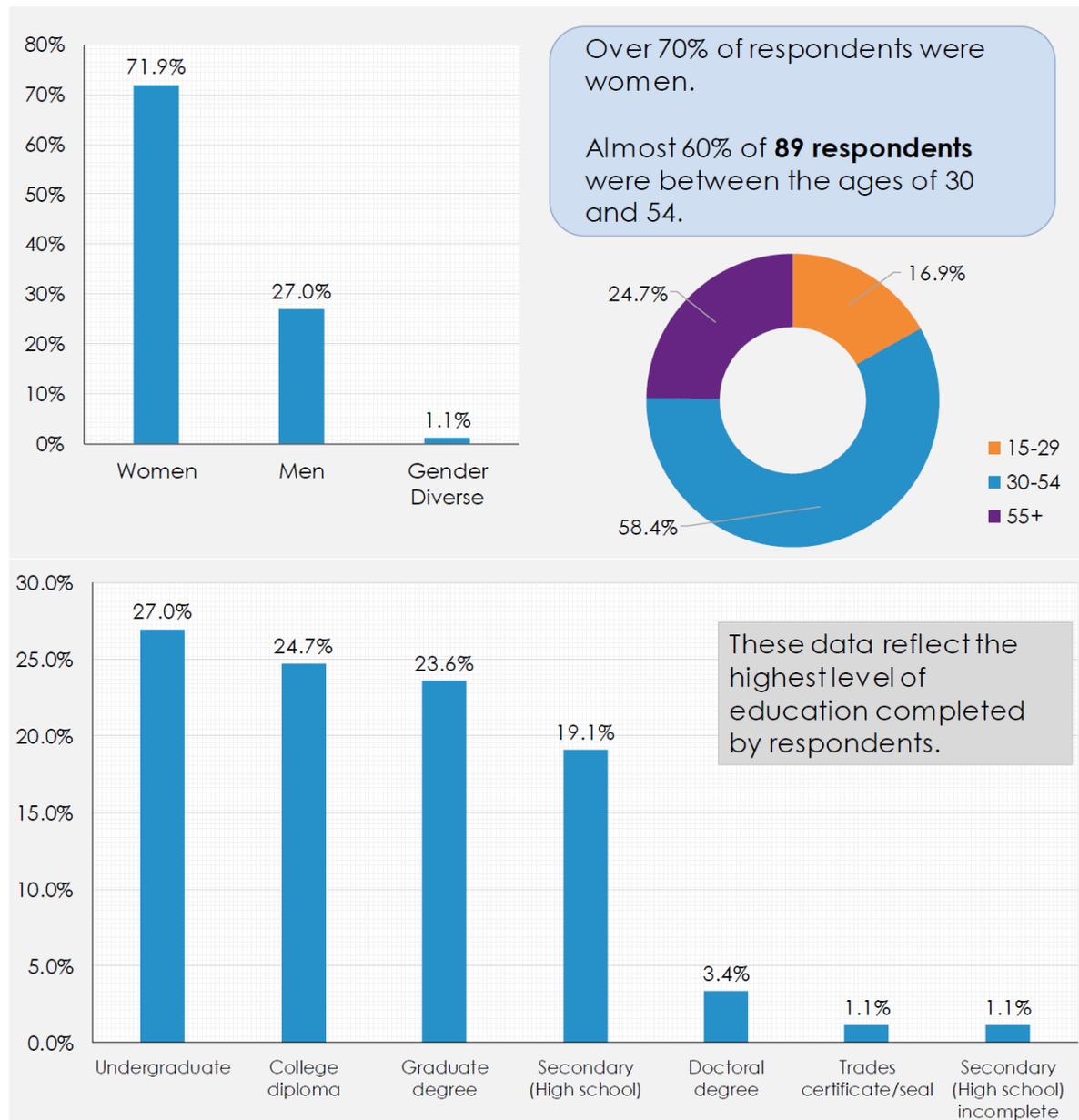
- Though hiring was not a top priority for employers, some sectors planned on hiring throughout 2021. The top sectors were:
  - Accommodations and food services
  - Arts, entertainment, and recreation
  - Manufacturing
- National and provincial trends show that these three industries also reported higher levels of job vacancy rates in 2020/2021 compared to prior years.

## Section 3: Workforce Insights

### Barriers to Employment Survey

NWPB conducted a *Barriers to Employment* survey throughout the summer of 2021. This survey reflects the insights from 89 individuals in Niagara's local labour force. Figure 3-1 outlines some of the demographic information for this survey.

**Figure 3-1. Demographic data, Niagara, Summer 2021**

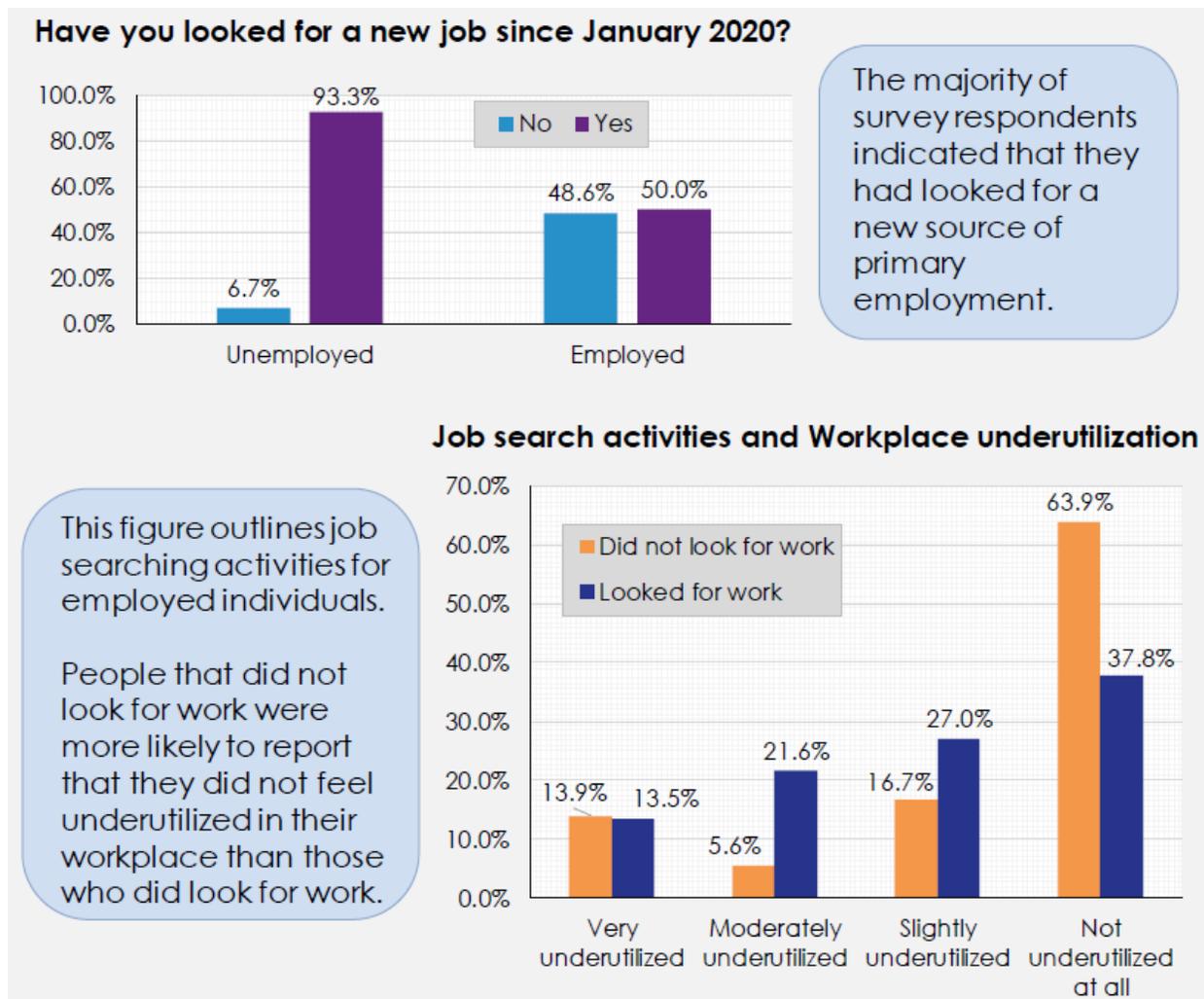


In terms of employment status, 83.1% of respondents were employed either for an employer or were self-employed. Of these individuals:

- 60.8% had permanent employment
- 78.4% worked full time
- 63.5% were working from home

Respondents also indicated whether they had looked for a new job since January 2020. Figure 3-2 shows that most individuals had looked for new employment. For employed individuals, it was less likely for people to search for a job if they did not feel underutilized at work.

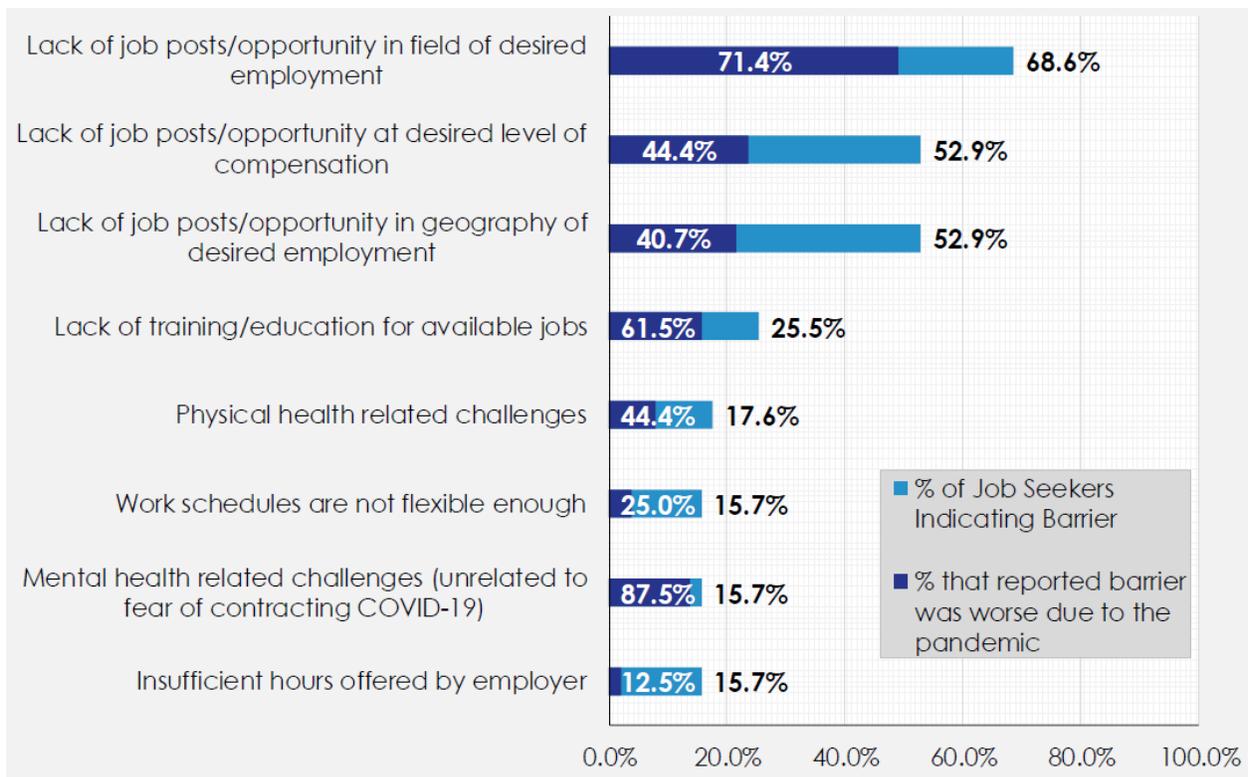
**Figure 3-2. Job Searching Activities, Niagara, Summer 2021**



Individuals that did look for work had the opportunity to highlight their top barriers to employment. Figure 3-3 shows that the top barriers to employment mirror barriers experienced prior to the pandemic.

It is important to note that a number of these barriers were made worse by the pandemic. Notably, *lack of opportunities in individuals' desired field of work* and *mental health-related challenges* were made much worse due to the pandemic.

**Figure 3-3. Barriers to Employment, Niagara, Summer 2021**



The following figure highlights individuals' comfort with discussing mental health concerns and using entitled supports/time off work:

**Figure 3-4. Comfort Discussing Mental Health Concerns and Utilizing Entitled Supports/Time Off, Niagara, Summer 2021**



The above data highlight the breadth of employment barriers that some individuals experienced throughout the pandemic. In addition to this survey, NWPB partnered with Trusted Time Inc. and the South Niagara Chambers of Commerce to facilitate a survey on employee engagement and retention.

### Employee Engagement and Retention Survey

These data were collected throughout the Summer of 2021 and reflect insights from 570 individuals working in small-to-medium enterprises across Niagara. The most common industries that were represented in this survey were:

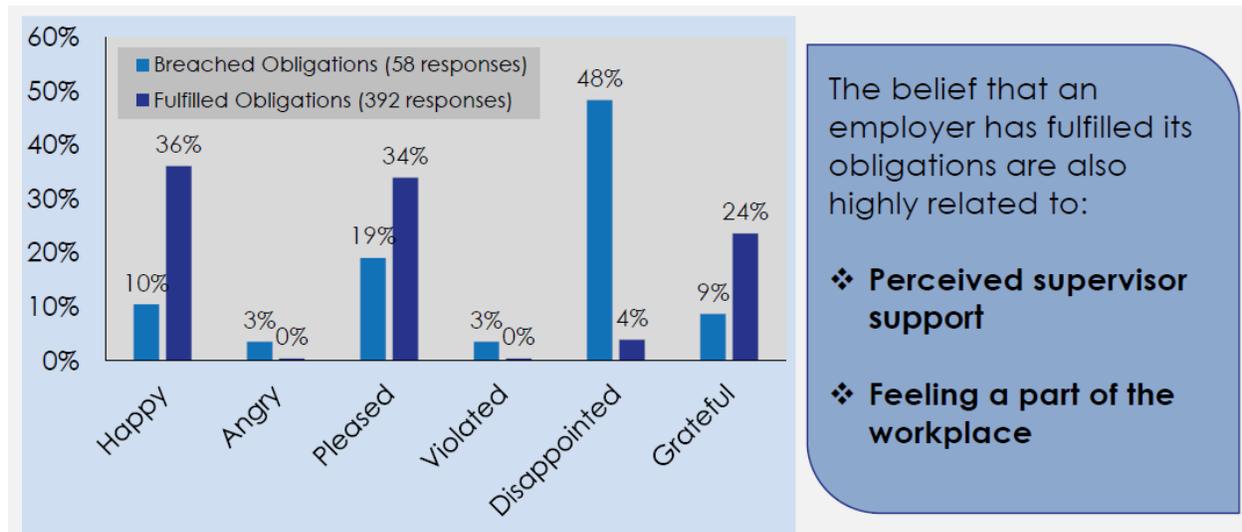
- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Not-for-profits
- Business and finance
- Professional, scientific, and technical services

This project specifically examined how employee perceptions of employers' breach or fulfillment of their obligations to employees (whether written or implied) play a role in workforce engagement and retention. Some examples of employer obligations include:

- Reasonably secure job
- Participate in decision-making
- Provide a good working atmosphere
- Fair treatment by supervisors and managers
- Opportunities to advance and grow
- Provide an environment free from violence and harassment

Results of this survey shows that when employees perceived obligations as being fulfilled, they were more likely to feel happy. When employees perceived obligations as being breached, they were more likely to feel disappointed (see Figure 3-5).

**Figure 3-5. Emotional Relationships with Perceived Breach or Fulfilment of Employer Obligations**



Ultimately, these data suggest that if employees believe that the employer contract has been fulfilled, we are more likely to see:

- Higher levels of employee engagement
- Lower levels of employee intention to quit

Taking these two surveys together, we can glean a common theme in terms of workforce retention.

NWPB's Barriers to Employment Survey indicated that although many individuals reported being employed, a large portion also looked for new employment since January 2020 – **importantly**, this was more likely to occur if individuals felt *underutilized* in their workplace.

Trusted Time Inc.'s Employee Engagement and Retention survey reiterates the fact that if employees do not feel like they have the support to feel utilized (e.g., participate in decision making, opportunities to advance and grow, etc.), they are more likely to have

- Lower levels of workplace engagement
- Higher levels of an intention to quit
- Less likely to feel a part of the workplace

Thus, increasing workforce retention is likely to occur by ensuring employees feel valued in the workplace, believe they have strong supervisor support, and feel that the employer obligations have been fulfilled.

It is important to note here that these trends in workforce retention mirror those seen prior to the pandemic. For instance, in the summer of 2019 NWPB surveyed 184 local employees to gain insight on the most important job attraction and retention factors. The top three responses by percentage of responses are outlined in Figure 3-6.

**Figure 3-6. Job Attraction & Retention, Labour Market Insights Survey, Niagara 2019**

Most Important Aspects of a Job Offer	Most Important Retention Factors
Compensation (56.0%)	Personal satisfaction in work (60.3%)
Meaningfulness of work (49.5%)	Culture of dignity & respect (47.3%)
Non-compensation benefits (47.8%)	Feel valued by peers & managers (45.1%)

We see that while compensation is an important method of attracting individuals to a job, retention is more focused on being satisfied and valued in the workplace.

## Section 4: Employers and the Workforce – Common Themes

This section outlines the common themes seen across provincial trends, local employer insights, and the two workforce-focused surveys. Some of the themes that carry through these data are:

- Mental health challenges
- Barriers or obstacles to pandemic recovery and/or employment opportunities
- Hiring and training

### Mental Health

**Employers.** Local employers were asked about the impact of the pandemic on their workforce. Across all sectors, employers indicated that the areas that saw the most negative impacts were:

- Employee mental health
- Overall business stability
- Ownership mental health

**Workforce.** NWPB also received insights on mental health from the local workforce. While this indicator was not listed as a top barrier to employment, just under 16% of respondents indicated that they had experienced mental health challenges as a barrier to employment; 87.5% of these individuals reported that this challenge had been made worse by the pandemic.

These data are consistent with national level trends reported by Life Works which have shown that, across 2020 and 2021, mental health is far below levels seen prior to 2020. They also reported that approximately 24% of employed individuals have poorer mental health now than before the pandemic. Mental health challenges have been higher for some demographic groups (i.e., women, younger individuals, individuals with children, full-time post-secondary students)<sup>14</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> LifeWorks (November 20, 2021). The Mental Health Index by LifeWorks – Canada, October 2021. Retrieved from <https://lifeworks.com/en/resource/mental-health-index%E2%84%A2-report-october-2021>

## Barriers to Pandemic Recovery and Employment

**Employers.** From a provincial perspective, some of the obstacles employers anticipated experiencing between October 2021 and February 2022 were:

- Rising costs of inputs (e.g., labour, materials, etc.)
- Cost of insurance
- Transportation

Locally employers indicated that some of the obstacles to recovery they expected to experience (as of Spring 2021) were more focused on consumer confidence and pandemic guidelines:

- Slow return of customers
- Cash flow/increased debt
- Understanding COVID-19 business guidelines

From an **employer** perspective, we see that financial obligations and needs were a key obstacle to recovery both at the provincial and local level. While hiring is of some importance, employers were still concerned about the stability of their business.

Additional insights on business stability showed that *accommodations and food services* and *arts, entertainment, and recreation* were industries where we were more likely to see employers reporting they were vulnerable to closure.

**Workforce.** Insights from the **local workforce** demonstrate that the top barriers to employment mirror those seen prior to the pandemic. However, many individuals felt that the pandemic had made these barriers even worse:

- Lack of job posts/opportunity in field of desired employment (68.6% of respondents)
  - 71.4% felt this was exacerbated by pandemic
- Lack of job posts/opportunity at desired level of compensation (52.9% of respondents)
  - 44.4% felt this was exacerbated by pandemic
- Lack of job posts/opportunity in geography of desired employment (52.9% of respondents)
  - 40.7% felt this was exacerbated by pandemic

Together we see that employer barriers were centred on sustaining operations whereas some workforce barriers were around finding appropriate employment opportunities. Conversations have recently turned towards a widespread challenge of labour shortages. While there was still measurable job demand throughout 2020 and 2021, the next theme highlights potential reasons for why difficulties around hiring and employment opportunities may have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

### Hiring, Training, and Retention

**Employers.** Provincially, employers generally expected their number of employees to remain about the same between October 2021 and February 2022 (78.6% of respondents). Only around 14% expected their workforce to increase throughout this time. For employers that did want to recruit and train staff, some of the strategies included:

- **Increase wages for existing employees (48.1% of respondents). Top industries noting this were:**
  - Accommodations and food services
  - Health care and social assistance
  - Wholesale trade
- **Encourage employees to participate in on-the-job training (25.7% of respondents). Top industries noting this were:**
  - Administration and support, waste management and remediation services
  - Retail trade
  - Finance and insurance
- **Increase wages offered to new employees (23.8% of respondents). Top industries noting this were:**
  - Accommodation and food services
  - Retail trade
  - Administration and support, waste management and remediation services

Locally, in the spring of 2021 we saw that many employers did not report that they were planning to hire. Out of all 786 respondents, 203 indicated they planned to hire for part-time employees and 212 indicated planning to hire for



full-time employees over the summer/early fall of 2021. The sectors where anticipated hires were most commonly reported included:

- Accommodations and food services
- Arts, entertainment, and recreation
- Manufacturing

Provincial data show that these three industries also saw higher levels of job vacancy rates throughout 2020/2021 than in the years prior (2015-2019). Alongside job vacancy rates, we saw a fair amount of local job demand for each of these industries between April and October of 2021. Therefore, recent trends do suggest that work opportunities are available.

**Workforce.** From an employee perspective, employment was top of mind throughout the pandemic. In NWPB's *Barriers to Employment* survey, 83.1% of 89 respondents were employed; of these employed individuals approximately half indicated they had looked for new work since January 2020. People that did not look for work were less likely to report that they did not feel underutilized in their workplace than those who did look for work.

Data from Trusted Time Inc.'s *Employee Engagement and Retention* survey shows that when employees feel an employer's obligations have been kept (e.g., written or implied promises to provide secure employment, participate in decision-making, opportunities to advance and grow, etc.) they are more likely to be engaged in the workplace and are less likely to consider quitting their job.

Together, these employee insights demonstrate that workforce retention is likely to occur by ensuring employees feel valued in the workplace, believe they have strong supervisor support, and believe that employer obligations have been fulfilled.

It is important to note here that these insights on workforce retention mirror trends seen prior to the pandemic. In the summer of 2019 NWPB surveyed 184 local employees to gain insight on the most important job attraction and retention factors. The top job attraction factors included *compensation*, *meaningful work*, and *non-compensation benefits*, while the top job retention factors included *feeling satisfied in one's work*, *being in a culture of dignity and respect*, and *feeling valued by peers and managers*.

Thus, we see that while compensation is an important method of attracting individuals to a job, retention is more focused on workplace satisfaction.



When we consider these hiring trends, one industry of note that came up frequently both in the provincial and local data was **accommodations and food services**. Provincially we see that this industry plans to increase its wages for both current and potential employees; it also has high levels of job vacancies. Locally, we see that this is a sector that also planned on hiring throughout 2021, and we have seen a high number of job posts for work in this industry. Given the insights from employees, perhaps this is a sector where the above attraction and retention strategies may prove particularly valuable.



# **NIAGARA WORKFORCE PLANNING BOARD**

For additional information on the local labour market, and to review previous publications, please visit our website at [www.nwpb.ca](http://www.nwpb.ca)

Contact Us:

3350 Schmon Parkway, Unit 1B  
Thorold, Ontario  
L2V 4Y6

Email: [info@nwpb.ca](mailto:info@nwpb.ca)

Telephone: 905-641-0801