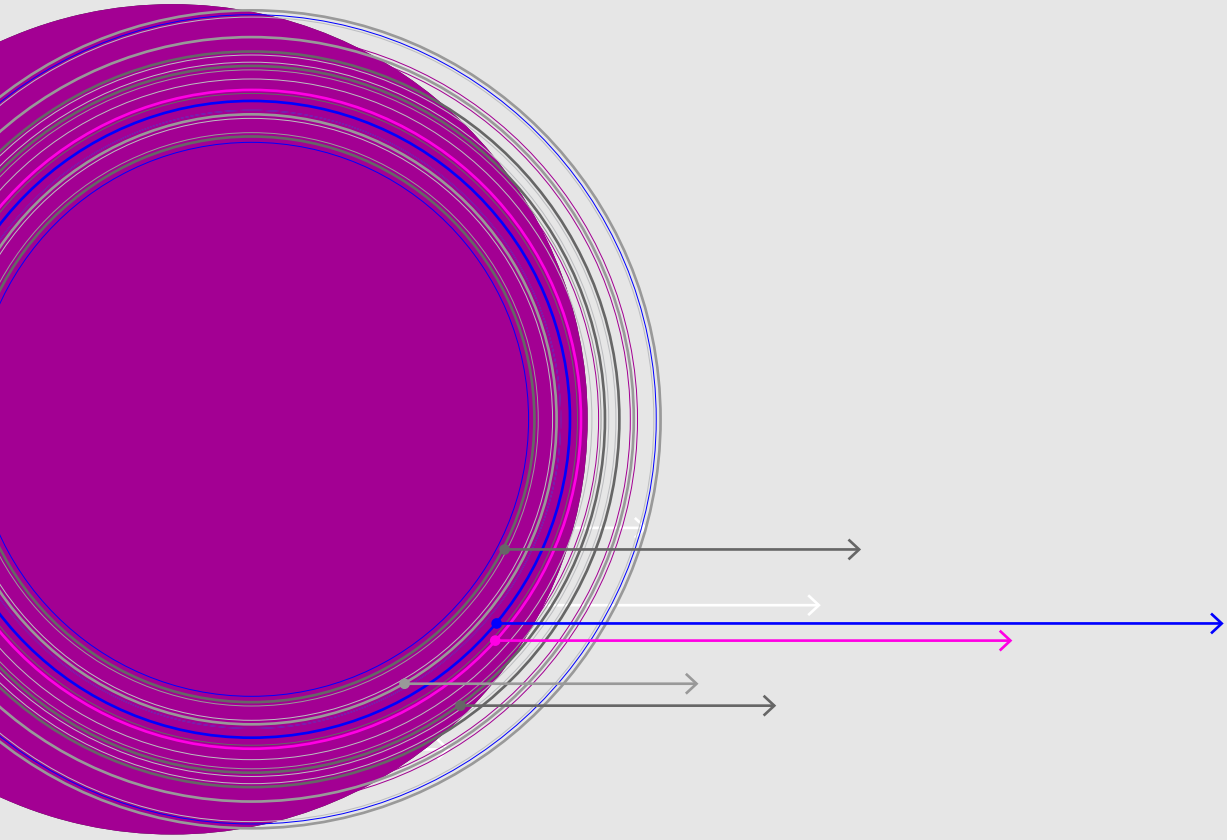

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Breaking Down Barriers to Career Development

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Future Skills Centre
Centre des Compétences futures

Blueprint

Acknowledgements

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About Blueprint

Blueprint was founded on the simple idea that evidence is a powerful tool for change. We work with policymakers and practitioners to create and use evidence to solve complex policy and program challenges. Our vision is a social policy ecosystem where evidence is used to improve lives, build better systems and policies and drive social change. Our team brings together a multidisciplinary group of professionals with diverse capabilities in policy research, data analysis, design, evaluation, evaluation, implementation and knowledge mobilization. As a consortium partner of the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.

About The Future Skills Centre

The Future Skills Centre is a forward-looking organization that prototypes, tests and measures new and innovative approaches to skills development and training. It is passionate about building a resilient learning nation, backed by an agile and responsive skills ecosystem that equips everyone with the skills they need to thrive in a rapidly changing economy and share in Canada's prosperity.

As a Pan-Canadian organization, FSC works with partners across the country to understand how global trends affect the economy, and to identify what skills working-age adults need to thrive within an ever-evolving environment. FSC is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program and was founded as a partnership between Ryerson University, Blueprint and the Conference Board of Canada.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 2

1. Introduction 4

2. Career Guidance and Development in Canada 6

3. Barriers to Career Guidance in Canada 9

4. Barriers that Limit Access to Career Guidance 13

5. Barriers that Restrict the Impact of Career Guidance 17

6. Key Considerations for Removing Barriers to Career Guidance. 21

7. Conclusion 41

References 44

Executive Summary

Canadians are increasingly expected to upskill, adapt and change professions multiple times over their working lives, and this trend will continue. In this context, career guidance[1] and development are critical for both continued labour force attachment and for supporting sustainable economic growth. However, Canadians are not consistently using career guidance services to engage in lifelong learning or workplace adaptation. This paper explores key barriers that limit access to, and restrict the impact of, career guidance services.

The benefits of career guidance are not equally available to all Canadians. Historically marginalized groups face compounded barriers to both the labour force and access to career guidance. These barriers magnify social inequality and deprive the workforce of people's best contributions. Career guidance systems in Canada need to adapt to break down barriers that prevent people from getting the support they need. Doing this means critically examining who is being shut out and what barriers are preventing them from getting help.

As part of the Future Skills Centre's (FSC) Responsive Career Pathways initiative, this paper considers promising practices in breaking down barriers to career guidance to highlight areas for action and evidence-gathering on the part of governments and organizations like the FSC.

1 Hyperlinked terms throughout the paper connect to the Glossary.

Key Findings

Career guidance systems must be designed with a whole-of-person lens.	To fully benefit from career guidance, people with complex barriers may need access to other, complementary supports. Career services that seek to support a "whole" person, rather than just one challenge in isolation, can help prevent clients from falling through the cracks.
More awareness of career guidance and its benefits would promote access.	Intentionally creating greater visibility of career services could do much to normalize their use among a broader swathe of adult clients.
Eligibility for adult training benefits/ vouchers should include career guidance services.	To better support the needs of barriered populations, eligibility for training vouchers like the Canadian Training Benefit should be expanded to include career services.
Technology must be used to expand access and efficiency of career guidance.	There are promising technological practices and services that can markedly improve access for clients who are either unable or less likely to use in-person services.
Success must be measured using diverse metrics.	Measuring the efficacy of adult career services should not be limited to narrow employment or education enrolment outcomes. More responsive career services can be developed by better understanding how different programs help clients to develop soft skills, understand their own aptitudes and competencies and feel confident navigating job processes.

1 Introduction

Introduction

Career guidance and development has the power to shape people's working lives, helping them adapt and thrive in a volatile labour market. It can help people take stock of their skills and interests, identify opportunities for employment and re-skilling and change what they think is achievable. Canadians are already expected to upskill, adapt and change professions multiple times over their working lives, and this trend will continue. In this context, career guidance and development are critical for both continued labour force attachment and overall wellbeing, economic security and career satisfaction. It is also a crucial part of meeting the needs of emerging sectors and supporting sustainable economic growth.

Overall, use of career services by adults is much lower in Canada compared to other OECD countries. According to a survey conducted for this project, only 17% of Canadian adults (25 and over) used career services in the last five years, compared to an average of 44% across the six OECD countries for which there is data (Chile, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, US) (Labour Market Information Council (LMIC), 2021; OECD 2021). Compared to other countries, Canadians are not consistently using career services as a pathway to engage in lifelong learning or workplace adaptation. And the benefits of career guidance are not equally available to all Canadians. **Worse, many of the people who stand to benefit most from career guidance also face the most barriers to accessing it. These are people who are caught in cycles of precarious work, whose jobs are likely to change or disappear due to workforce trends like automation and digitization and people who have non-transferrable or little social capital.**

OECD research shows that workers whose jobs are at high risk of automation are less likely to have accessed career guidance than those whose jobs are at lower risk (OECD, 2021). **Historically marginalized groups like newcomers, people with disabilities and Indigenous people face compounded barriers to both the labour force and access to career guidance. These barriers magnify social inequality and deprive the workforce of people's best contributions.**

Given its importance in navigating the twenty-first century workforce, career guidance must be equitable by design, or else it will exacerbate inequality and hamper labour market productivity. Advancing equity during the transition to a knowledge-based economy means expanding access to lifelong learning. Career guidance systems in Canada need to adapt to break down barriers that prevent people from getting the support they need to find useful training, good jobs and meaningful work. Doing this means critically examining both who is being shut out from career guidance and what barriers are preventing people from getting help.

Policy-makers need to find and scale practices that work to equitably expand access to, and impact of, career guidance systems. This report considers promising practices in career guidance, in other types of career services and related service areas in Canada in order to highlight areas to pilot and from which to gather more evidence. The Future Skills Centre can draw from these insights to further test, measure and learn from additional research and targeted demonstration projects.

2

Career Guidance and Development in Canada

Career Guidance and Development in Canada

This report addresses both career guidance and career development. In keeping with other research in this series, career development is understood as the lifelong process that people engage in to manage learning and work as part of personally determining their future. Career guidance refers to a wide array of services that help people in managing and advancing their career development.

In Canada, career guidance is provided through a patchwork of institutions and service providers including federal and provincial governments, municipalities, community agencies and private organizations (Domene & Isenor, 2018). This report focuses on career guidance services targeting adults who are not in post-secondary education (PSE), and so does not consider the services provided by schools or the PSE sector.

Informal career guidance

Informal career guidance is a powerful force in career planning and access to the labour market. Asking friends, family and colleagues for advice is one of the most common ways to both find a job and manage career decisions. According to a recent OECD report, 67% of those surveyed rely at least to some degree on the advice of family members and friends for career guidance (OECD, 2021). Informal connections are also the second most common factor in how Canadians choose a career service: 26% of respondents to a LMIC (2021) survey indicated that the reason they chose a career service provider was a recommendation from friends or family.

This phenomenon gives an advantage to those with social capital and strong networks. Socio-economic status and family connections meaningfully shape career opportunities, and limit social mobility and opportunities for people without networked privilege. Access to informal career guidance is fundamentally uneven and can further marginalize those with barriers to the labour market. This makes promoting access to formal/structured career guidance even more essential as a tool for equity and fairness for people with barriers to work.

Over the past decades, responsibility for career guidance has devolved away from federal government to the provincial level. Career guidance systems vary by province, which means gauging national trends on access and usage can be challenging (Domene & Isenor, 2018). Federal funding through Labour Market Transfer Agreements supports career guidance through both public employment services (PES), agencies and community-level organizations. The services available depend in part on the funding stream that supports the program and can vary based on the life circumstances of the client, the mandate of the service provider and the client's presenting issue.

The Value of Career Guidance

Access to career guidance has both positive individual and societal impacts. Good career guidance provides ongoing benefits for people, including improving their abilities to manage their careers and pursue lifelong learning (Percy & Dodd, 2020). It also improves individual socio-economic outcomes, leading to improved health, well-being and access to opportunity (Canadian Career Development Foundation, 2020). Part of this may come from job satisfaction flowing from the power of career guidance to help people appropriately match their skills with jobs. Skills mismatches in Canada's economy not only limit overall productivity, but also impact individual professional fulfilment. Research shows that over-educated and over-skilled people tend to be paid less than their matched counterparts and are less satisfied with their jobs (Mahboubi, 2019; Tencer, 2015).

From a broader social perspective, career guidance can lead to a more productive workforce and broader-based prosperity. Canada already faces serious labour market challenges, simultaneously experiencing both workforce shortages and underemployment. Skills matching is a particular problem, with 40% of Canadian university graduates underemployed (Tencer, 2015).

The future of Canada's labour market will require a new approach to career guidance and development. Workers are changing jobs and careers more than ever before and need ongoing access to career guidance (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2021). A large portion of the Canadian workforce that is currently employed is at risk of having their job changed or replaced by technology. Many of these people are low income, have low skills or face other barriers to further employment (Advisory Council on Economic Growth, 2017). **Early research indicates that COVID-19 has generated an even larger demand for career guidance help, both from unemployed people and those employed in vulnerable sectors** (Cedefop et al, 2020).

Public policy paradigms surrounding who needs career guidance, when and how often are only now catching up with existing realities. Policy-makers need to plan ahead of emerging trends and recognize that effective career guidance cannot be a "one and done" process.

Canada's career service ecosystem does not currently have enough to offer potential clients. Its current systems focus resources on youth new entrants — for example, through K-12 as a universal access point or PSE career services — or unemployed or older workers. Recent research shows the need for a third pillar in Canada's career service landscape, focusing on employed adults (Advisory Council on Economic Growth, 2017).

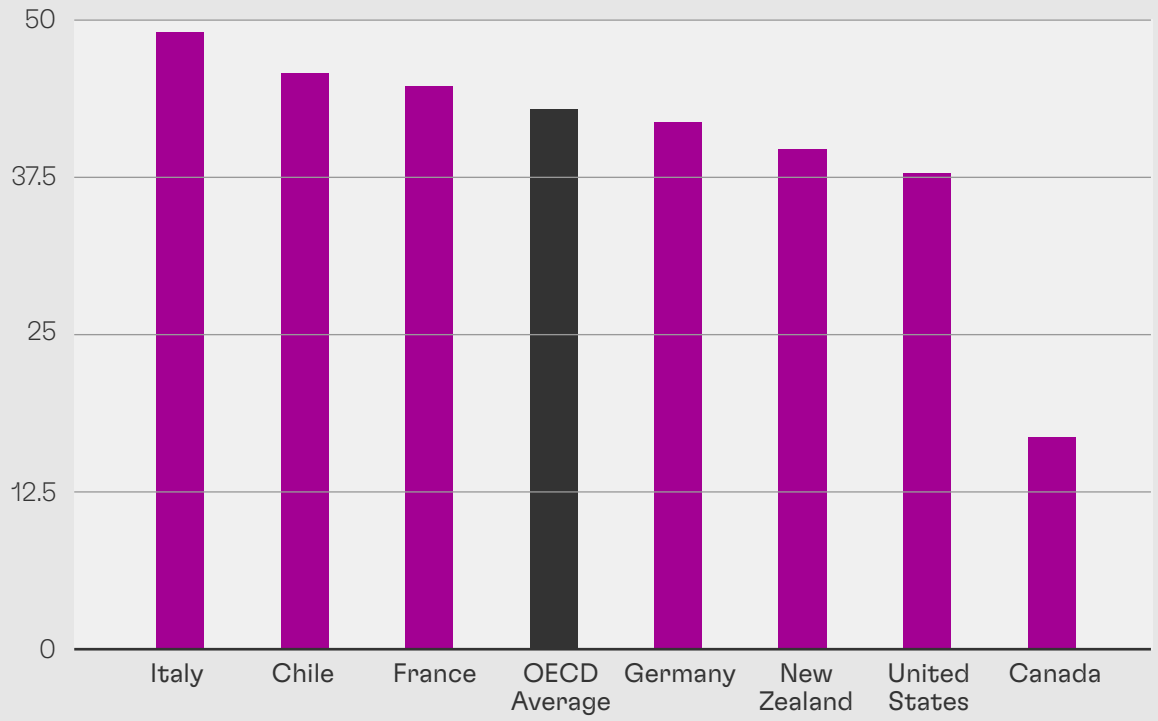
3

Barriers to Career Guidance in Canada

Barriers to Career Guidance in Canada

Overall, Canadian adults access career services less frequently than adults in other comparator countries in the OECD. Only 17% of Canadian adults used career guidance services in the last five years (LMIC, 2021), compared to an OECD average of 43% (OECD, 2021). One could interpret this data as having positive implications: for example, that the labour force is especially strong and/or mobile, or that Canadian adults enter working life with such robust career management skills that re-engaging with career guidance is not necessary. However, this significant difference in how few Canadians use career services would seem to indicate that broad-based barriers to career services exist, and that there is more that policy-makers can do to improve overall access and use.

Figure 1: Use of Career Guidance Services Among Adults



While rates of service use are relatively low, most who did use career services indicated that it was helpful to them. Eighty-one percent of respondents who used career services indicated that the service they received was effective, with 32% saying it was "very effective" and 49% saying it was "somewhat effective" (LMIC, 2021). While education and income seem to have little impact on respondents' experience or perceived effectiveness, employed Canadians (85% vs. 76% for unemployed), men (85% vs. 76% for women), and urban clients (83% vs. 76% for rural clients) were more likely to perceive career services as being effective (LMIC, 2021). The overall rate of perceived helpfulness of services, paired with the low incidence of use, indicates that it is likely that many Canadians who are not using career services would benefit from them.

Using and benefiting from career services is especially important for people who face broader barriers to the labour force. Their needs are often more urgent, and their informal and professional networks, which often play a role in career planning and job seeking, may be less robust than average. Some of the key groups of people who face barriers to both accessing and benefiting from labour force participation include:

Racialized minorities and newcomers:

Racialized minorities and newcomers experience greater unemployment and underemployment than non-racialized or non-newcomer Canadians. Newcomer women in particular experience poorer labour market outcomes than newcomer men (Ng & Gagnon, 2020).

Women:

Women face well-documented and complex barriers to equitable workforce participation. COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted women's employment, especially for mothers, newcomers and young women (Desjardins & Freestone, 2021).

People with disabilities:

Canadians with disabilities tend to be streamed into entry-level positions with low wages and precarious employment, such as short-term contracts and involuntary part-time work (Tompa et al., 2020).

Indigenous people:

Indigenous people have an employment rate 8.4 percentage points below the non-Indigenous rate and have a median income 26.2 below the non-Indigenous median income (Skudra et al., 2020). It is clear that career guidance could be a meaningful tool to help Indigenous job seekers: 20.6% of unemployed Indigenous respondents cited "not knowing how or where to look for work" as an important reason they were unemployed, with 25.5% citing "not knowing the type of job he/she wanted" (Statistics Canada, 2021).

We know that people who face barriers to the labour force would particularly benefit from career guidance. There is, unfortunately, relatively little data about who faces what barriers to career guidance itself, especially in Canada. Research completed for the Responsive Career Pathways project (LMIC, 2021) yielded some early insights about the characteristics of those using career services:

- Unsurprisingly, adults 25 and over were less likely to have used career services than youth (15-24) (18% vs. 41%);
- Among adults, women used career services less than men (16% vs. 21%), and those with a completed post-secondary credential were more likely to use career services than those with high school or less (18% vs. 11%);
- Immigrant adults used career services more than their Canadian-born counterparts (25% vs. 15%);
- Unemployed Canadians used career services more than those who are employed (25% vs. 21%), and both groups used services much more than adults not in the labour market (8%).

More information is needed to understand who uses career guidance, what types of services they use, what the overall outcomes are and what aspects of career guidance are more helpful for what kinds of people.

In this report, we consider different barrier types across different points of entry, and inflection points for benefiting from career guidance. We consider barriers that prevent access to career guidance, meaning getting "in the door" and being able to physically and/or virtually access supports. We also consider barriers that restrict the impact of career guidance, meaning factors that make the supports unhelpful or unrealistic, or that keep participants from taking next steps based on the guidance. Each of these categories are made up of different types of barriers: those that come from awareness, situation, human capital and institutional design. The following categories are not a comprehensive or exclusive list of all potential types of barriers to high-quality career services, but rather an organizational framework to better understand frequent barriers and the policy interventions that might exist to mitigate them.

Barriers limiting access		Barriers restricting impact	
Awareness barriers	Situational barriers	Human capital barriers	Institutional barriers
Inclusive of: Awareness of career guidance Where and how to find services Perceived value of career guidance	Inclusive of: Childcare and other caregiving Transportation Time pressures Cost	Inclusive of: Low literacy and basic skills Digital divide	Inclusive of: One-size-fits-all approach Lack of data on outcomes and uptake Low cultural competency

4

Barriers that Limit Access to Career Guidance

Barriers that Limit *Access* to Career Guidance

There are significant data gaps around the use of career guidance services in Canada, especially by adults. The data that is available does not readily lead to clear conclusions. For example, when does increased uptake demonstrate more need for help versus better access to service? However, research and data from other related services (such as employment services and lifelong learning supports) and from public services more generally can provide insights into the most common barriers that need to be considered in promoting successful approaches that help Canadians succeed in the labour market.

Awareness Barriers

To be able to make use of career guidance services, people need to know what services exist, where to find them, and how they could benefit from their use. But OECD evidence from Canada and other jurisdictions suggests that for many adults this is not the case.

Unlike career guidance services in K-12 or PSE settings, there is little familiarity with more formal career guidance options among adults. Many people do not know where to access career guidance services or if they are eligible to use them. In the LMIC (2021) survey, 24% of Canadian respondents who did not use career guidance reported "not knowing that services existed" as the reason they didn't access career guidance (compared to 20% internationally) (OECD, 2021). Many within this group would probably benefit from the career guidance supports available to improve education and income. Among those who did not know services existed, 44% had lower education (high school diploma or less), and 53% had lower household income (less than $70,000) (LMIC, 2021). Canadian-born people and those who were employed were less likely to know about career services: only a small percentage who did not know about services were immigrants (10%) or unemployed (13%) (LMIC, 2021). Other research done by the Toronto Workforce Innovation Group indicated that unemployed job seekers 35–54 were often "unsure about where to go to find help in securing employment" (Toronto Workforce Innovation Group, 2017).

> **Even where potential clients are aware that career guidance services are available,** there will be barriers to uptake if there is not strong awareness of how career guidance services could provide value for them. General lack of awareness of career guidance services for adults creates a persistent perception that services are not appropriate for working age adults.

Older workers who were unemployed surveyed in Toronto said that they thought that "employment services are directed at youth" and wouldn't be useful to them (Toronto Workforce Innovation Group, 2017). In addition to being unaware of a service's value or their own eligibility, potential clients may be concerned with stigma in accessing such services, or overestimate their labour market outcomes without assistance, etc. These motivational factors beyond awareness are addressed in a separate paper within the Responsive Career Pathways project (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2021) .

Skepticism, misconceptions and stigma surrounding career guidance likely contributes to lower rates of uptake. Of Canadian adults surveyed who did not speak to a career guidance practitioner in the past five years, 40% reported the primary reason was "they did not feel the need to" (LMIC, 2021). A large proportion of Canadians who did not feel the need to use services belong to populations who might have particularly benefited from accessing career guidance, even if there was not an immediate need. Of those people whose primary reason for not using career services was that they "did not feel the need to" use them, half had annual household income less than $70,000, a third had high school education as their highest level of educational attainment, and a third were 55–64 years old (LMIC, 2021). Given the broad potential value of career guidance in changing labour markets and over the course of careers, this suggests that there might be low awareness of the potential benefits of professional career guidance; or that the perceived advantages are not enough to outweigh the perceived disadvantages (such as time, effort, stigma). Outreach and program designs that target older adults and those with lower educational attainment may increase both uptake and impact (OECD, 2021).

Situational Barriers

Canadians who are actively interested in using career guidance services may still face other hurdles in their lives that prevent them from taking advantage, even if the services themselves are free or very low cost. These situational barriers in people's lives must be addressed if career guidance is to be an effective component of workforce development and employment supports. **Three in ten working-age Canadians say they want to participate in job-related training but are facing barriers, most significantly insufficient time due to work or family commitments, high training cost or lack of employer support** (Advisory Council on Economic Growth, 2017).

For parents of younger children, access to childcare is a necessary condition to be able to access supports. For people who are already employed, it would be necessary to access career guidance services outside traditional business hours, which means outside of traditional childcare and school hours as well. This childcare pressure would be felt more deeply by people with lower incomes who may struggle to pay for babysitting and/or who lack support networks to assist them (Premji et al., 2014).

This direct barrier compounds discrimination that may be experienced by parents of young children, especially women. **Experts familiar with employment service practices report that a lack of childcare for employment services has been used at times as a de facto "screening tool" to gauge readiness for employment, with the idea that people without childcare to access services will not have childcare to accept employment** (Hassan, 2020). While this practice is reportedly less prevalent today, it may still contribute to exacerbating implicit biases against women with young children in the labour market.

Another practical barrier to access is the ability to physically reach the location of the career guidance services. Access to affordable transportation options or having services offered within a reasonable distance can hold back even those with strong interest in career services (General Manager- Toronto Employment and Social Services, 2017). **Twenty-two per cent of Canadian respondents surveyed said they chose their career guidance provider based on how close it is to where they live** (LMIC, 2021).

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, many services have shifted online, and career guidance services are no exception. The potential for continued online offerings in the long run could mitigate the childcare and transportation barriers, but brings its own equity challenges. The fault lines of digital divides run close to the economic geography that creates other barriers to labour market participation and service access, **with lower-income households less able to afford reliable Internet service and rural residents less able to access regardless of costs.**

Because many career guidance services operate primarily during traditional business hours, access may depend on employer support. Survey results showed that 19% of Canadians who did not access career guidance services reported that the reason was that they did not have time (12% for work reasons, 7% for family or childcare reasons), higher than the OECD international average of 11% (LMIC, 2021; OECD 2021). Similarly, "I was too busy at work" was the most common barrier cited by those who did not access Adult Education and Training but wanted to in a pan-European study (Hovdhaugen & Opheim, 2018).

Another important situational barrier to accessing career services is cost. While many services through PES and settlement agencies are free, adults who want intensive or more specialized career guidance may need to pay for a private practitioner out of pocket. Twenty per cent of career guidance practitioners report working for "a private organization" (Domene & Isenor, 2018). Private costs may include the use of a "career coach." For those Canadians surveyed who did not access career services in the last five years, "it was too costly" was the fifth-most common reason, cited by 7% of respondents. Of those who did use career services, 16% of respondents said the reason they chose their provider was because it was the cheapest (LMIC, 2021).

5

Barriers that Restrict the *Impact* of Career Guidance

Barriers that Restrict the *Impact* of Career Guidance

Beyond barriers to access, or "getting in the door," there are a host of issues that prevent people from benefiting from career guidance services once they're receiving services. Some of these issues stem from under-investment in the human capital necessary to participate meaningfully in guidance. Other barriers are even more clearly the product of institutional design, where programs and services aren't designed to meet participants where they are.

Human Capital Barriers

In order to benefit from career guidance, people need to have the basic skills to understand, assess and act on the advice and information they receive. Without these skills, next steps like training and education are often out of reach. People with low literacy, for instance, are less likely to participate in and benefit from training and skills education, even when there is comparatively more to gain. A 2003 study found that in Canada, just 20% of people who had low skills and were in low-skilled jobs were involved in an adult literacy or training course/program, compared to 60% of high-skilled people in high-skilled jobs (Lane & Murray, 2018). And having low skills is a barrier to working as well: Ontario Works clients surveyed in 2016 pointed to a lack of education or skills as a major barrier to re-entering the labour market (General Manager-Toronto Employment and Social Services, 2017). Not all Canadians are equally likely to have low basic skills. For example, there is a deep education gap faced by Indigenous Canadians which may impact their ability to benefit from "universal" career guidance systems (Munro, 2019).

While not as extensive as the evidence on adult education and training, research done on career guidance shows a similar "Matthew effect," a phenomenon used to explain how initial advantages within a system tend to beget further advantages (Boeren, 2009). Those who stand to gain the most from career guidance often participate or benefit the least. However, as the OECD notes, there are important differences between the barriers to education and training courses and career guidance services in terms of the time and human capital required. The opportunity costs of career guidance are much lower: prospective participants may only need to commit to a few hours, rather than a few weeks or months. **As a result, addressing unequal participation in career guidance may be more straightforward, and have important downstream impacts for other inequities in training, literacy and job readiness: expanding uptake of career services for barriered populations may serve as an intake point for further lifelong learning** (Cedefop, 2016).

Digital literacy is also a barrier to benefiting from career guidance programs. Career guidance resources and services have become more readily available online during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not yet clear how services will settle into a balance between digital and in-person delivery post-pandemic. But many Canadians who face barriers to the workforce also have low digital literacy: for instance, roughly 30% of Canadians 65 and over do not use the Internet (Davidson & Schimmele, 2019). Moving away from in-person to digital services can disproportionately impact low-income and/or older workers, in part because they are more likely to have low literacy and digital literacy (Cedefop et al, 2020).

Institutional Barriers

People who face barriers to the workforce are often also facing other barriers to thriving. They are more likely to be experiencing addiction and mental health challenges, family breakdown, housing instability and poverty (Avila, 2018).

Career guidance services that are designed to be general, one-size-fits all approaches are not positioned to help clients with these complex barriers. This is especially the case where program measures, funding and incentives push clients to particular outcomes, like near-term employment or education. The move to narrowly-conceived outcomes-based funding — for example, through Ontario's Case Management system — prioritizes "work first" approaches that value short term outputs over long-term service relationships and supports. Services agencies report that these mechanisms "reward agencies for moving people out of service rather than for long-term service" (Toronto Workforce Innovation Group , 2017). This type of model is at odds with being able to dedicate the resources necessary to reach hard-to-serve populations. OECD research shows that these kinds of incentives can contribute to less personalized services, which keep hard to employ people bouncing between short stints in poorly fitting jobs and unhelpful services (OECD, 2021).

Data collection and sensitive evaluation, or the lack thereof, are institutional barriers to people benefiting fully from career guidance. Data collection, interoperability and sharing is an on-going challenge in Canadian employment services. **Because of the highly fragmented nature of the system, it is hard to track whether services are helping people in general** (Domene & Isenor, 2018). Tracking positive outcomes for people with more complex needs, worse starting positions and complex success factors is much harder. **Without better data collection and meaningful program evaluation, it is hard to know what works for these populations, and how to improve and tailor programs to be more effective.**

Finally, services and institutions that are not designed to respect and engage cultural difference are unlikely to provide meaningful and beneficial support. People's career goals are deeply personal and culturally constituted. Many groups within Canada face discrimination and other realities that need to be reflected in guidance for it to feel authentic and helpful. Best practices make it clear that people benefit from career guidance that is responsive to their life circumstance and backgrounds (Ferriss, 2015). Conscious, careful cultural competence and anti-discrimination work is required not only to make career guidance services useful, but also to combat bias.

Research on Canadian employment programs and services shows that they may provide different guidance based on a clients' gender or ethnicity. For example, the LMIC (2021) survey indicates that in Canada, women more often received career guidance services related to job search strategies and getting a job compared to men. Other research done in Canada indicates that immigrant women are more likely to be advised into "feminized" labour roles, even compared to workers with equivalent education and work experience (Senthanar et al., 2020).

Conscious, careful cultural competence and anti-discrimination work is required not only to make career guidance services useful, but also to combat bias.

6

Key Considerations for Removing Barriers to Career Guidance

Key Considerations for Removing Barriers to Career Guidance

The twin policy goals of promoting universality and access while preserving personalization and quality can be hard to reconcile. However, the FSC and other actors looking to advocate for improved career guidance can learn from best practices in employment services and other public supports, and use that knowledge to champion systems that are both more equitable and more effective.

For high-needs or otherwise marginalized clients, services must be able to respond to both their external circumstances and their internal perspectives and attitudes. This duality is especially fundamental when supporting people to find meaningful work and engaging them in a practice of lifelong learning.

> **Effective career guidance must consider clients' external circumstances.** Standalone career services that are disjointed from the life realities of a client will be ineffective. Even the most thoughtful, LMI-based skills matching to an available job or college in a nearby town is not practicable for a client with no transportation options to get there, or no ability to pay for tuition.
>
> **Effective career guidance must be responsive to clients' internal perspectives.** The ability to adapt to people's attitudes and personal experiences greatly impacts the efficacy of career services. For many, what people do for work is intricately connected to who they are: career planning is enmeshed in identity-construction and community building. Career decisions have personal, familial and cultural dimensions. A one-size-fits-most, broad-based approach risks alienating those who already may be less likely to access or perceive value in career guidance services.

Dismantling the barriers to career guidance is not a straightforward task. Career services and their outcomes cannot be easily parsed out from the complex forces and systems that affect who is able to get what job: the economy, our education system, our immigration system, etc. (Cedefop, 2016). **However, career guidance interventions that acknowledge and act on this interconnectedness will have greater impacts, especially for people who are marginalized within those broader systems.**

This report offers the following recommendations to policy-makers to break down barriers to career guidance in Canada. Each of these areas also represent key opportunities for the FSC and other supporters to consider for supportive action and research.

Design career guidance systems with a whole-of-person lens	**Build awareness and promote the benefits of career guidance**	**Expand eligibility for adult training benefits/ vouchers to include career guidance services**	**Leverage technology to expand reach, access and efficiency of career guidance**	**Measure diverse metrics of success**

Design Career Guidance Systems with a Whole-of-Person Lens

Other public services that work with people with complex barriers can provide insight into what works in responding to a client's broader life context. Often, the same barriers to accessing a given service (housing precarity, caregiving responsibilities, mental health challenges) also limit or curtail the possible benefits of a service. Public services that seek to support a 'whole' person, rather than just one challenge in isolation, can help prevent clients from falling through the cracks or feeling alienated from the supports meant to help them.

Promote wrap-around services to support the in-person participation of hard-to-reach populations.

While the expansion of digital service provision during COVID-19 has shifted the career guidance landscape, access to in-person support and bricks-and-mortar is still a crucial service for many people seeking career guidance. Ensuring people have the foundational resources they need to access service is a crucial step in supporting clients with complex barriers. Some key forms of support include:

Childcare and other caregiving: Providing childcare onsite can help ensure easy and flexible access for parents, especially mothers. In cases where childcare is not an onsite option, the provision of money or subsidy to clients to pay for childcare delivered elsewhere is also a helpful resource. Some programs like Ontario's Second Career program have caregiving costs as part of their funded expenses (OECD, 2019).

Transportation: In a 2018 survey of Employment Ontario Service Providers, transportation was identified as one of the primary reasons that clients struggled to access services (Ontario Centre for Workforce Innovation, 2017). Vouchers or other reimbursement for transportation can meaningfully improve access for low-income clients. For example, literacy and basic skills organizations in Ontario can fund eligible clients' transportation as a part of program costs (Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, 2020). Implementing a similar policy for adult career guidance programs could help break down a key barrier to service.

Flexible hours: Providing services at a variety of times can help accommodate people who have competing demands, including those with caregiving responsibilities or those who are currently employed (OECD, 2004). If we want working adults in Canada to use career guidance and preparedness before their industries are disrupted, rather than after they have lost their jobs, service providers need to build programs that are accessible outside of conventional "office hours," including evenings and weekends.

Accessible, targeted locations: The location and proximity of a career guidance service meaningfully impacts access and awareness. In Canada, the Expert Panel on Youth Employment heard that for Indigenous youth, needing to travel far from their community to access services was a challenge in itself, by pulling them away from their support system and cultural community (Expert Panel on Youth Employment, 2014). Several OECD countries feature career guidance services that travel to communities where clients are located (OECD, 2004).

Logistical and administrative navigation: Career guidance services that can also assist clients with fundamental tasks necessary for their job readiness can help prevent unnecessary referral or service gaps. For example, individuals experiencing homelessness may need connections to access identification, SIN cards, or other administrative preconditions to participating in programs (McCreary Centre Society, 2014).

Wrap-around supports: Woodgreen and Homeward Bound

"Homeward Bound" is a whole-of-person job-readiness program targeted at precariously housed and homeless single mothers in Toronto, equipping them with the tools needed to transition out of poverty and situations of precarious work. Introduced in 2004, the four-year program provides multiple wrap-around supports for participants who face serious resource challenges. Examples of these wrap-around services include affordable, furnished housing, on-site childcare, youth and children after-school programs, and access to counselling (WoodGreen Community Services, 2021).

The program has seen positive outcomes, demonstrating the impact of whole-of-person approaches to job readiness and career preparation. According to a Woodgreen participant survey, 90% of program participants were receiving social assistance at the time of program intake: within 5 years after the program, 94% of those participants had stable housing and 88% were either employed, on leave or attending school. Additionally, of those employed in full-time positions, past participants are earning an average income of $43,000 (WoodGreen Community Services et al., 2018).

Tailor specific career guidance services for different groups who face barriers

Research highlights the importance of career and employment services tailored to clients' experiences. For example, distinct services for youth vs. adults (McCreary Centre Society, 2014), and Indigenous vs. non-Indigenous clients (Ferriss , 2015). People with mental health needs in particular can benefit from career services tailored to their context, including in navigating the unique program, policy, and discriminatory barriers they may face in looking for work (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2017). Canada is one of several jurisdictions around the world that has developed employment services that are targeted for the unique needs of older workers (Employment and Social Development Canada. (2017). For people with disabilities, vocational rehabilitation — a targeted and integrated model of employment service that brings together vocational and rehabilitation services including career counselling, on-the job training and job search services — can be more responsive to their specific needs in career planning (U.S. Department of Labor et al., 2014).

More hands-on and direct models of engagement targeted at people experiencing long-term unemployment may be especially helpful. Emerging evidence suggests that proactive intervention to assess and address barriers to participation made hard-to-employ participants much more likely to access services. Interventions studied included home visits by case managers that led to connections to language classes, support groups, counselling and other services (Bloom et al., 2007).

Career guidance services that are tailored to specific groups can also lead to better relationships and trust between practitioners and clients.

Tailored Approach: Indigenous Career Guidance Programs

The Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) program from Employment and Social Development Canada provides direct funding to Indigenous organizations to deliver jobs and employment training in Canada. Partner organizations vary: they include post-secondary institutions, community agencies, and Indigenous governments themselves (Skudra et al., 2020). This approach supports the use of Indigenous knowledge within career guidance and can help connect underserved clients to needed resources. Importantly, program funding through ISET can also be used to provide clients with financial help for things like childcare, transportation, tuition and other needed supplies (Employment and Social Development Canada, June 3, 2021). However, gathering and operationalizing data on the specific role of career guidance within these employment programs can be challenging, which limits opportunities to replicate or learn from promising practices (Skudra et al., 2020; Lane & Pittman, 2019).

Incentivize and support service integration and co-location

Research on the most promising job training strategies demonstrates that the most successful programs include a mix of employment services, job training, and supportive services (U.S. Department of Labor et al., 2014). An evaluation of integrated services in three cities found that a one-stop model was more effective at encouraging participation in work supports (Miller et al., 2012). Coordinated support models help everyone but have the greatest impact on those with complex needs. Career guidance services that are partnered or coordinated with other targeted services can help create a much more seamless and functional experience for a client who requires referrals or more intensive support.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has advocated for the development of "single window" employment services, arguing that joined-up services are particularly impactful for populations who face barriers to decent work (Avila, 2018). This kind of integrated or one-stop model underpins the creation and maintenance of American Job Centres (AJCs) in the US. AJCs are intended to coordinate the front-line delivery of over 20 different government programs and include the delivery of career counselling services (Dunham & Kogan, 2018). However, studies on AJCs and other forms of service integration/co-location demonstrate that local capacity and the availability of appropriate and cooperative partners can result in disparities between one stop services, even under the same name (Finn, 2019).

Career guidance services that are partnered or coordinated with other targeted services can help create a much more seamless and functional experience for a client who requires referrals or more intensive support.

In Canada, the integration of employment services with partner organizations and agencies can differ widely from community to community, and from province to province. Some provincial public employment practices have tried to position themselves as one-stop models of service, but in practice rely more on referrals to other public services than functional integration (Research Interview). There are exceptions to this trend, especially when public employment services are joined-up with other organizations that are specifically intended to provide a wider variety of social services. The "Multi-Service Centre" in Tillsonburg, Ontario is such an organization, providing Employment Ontario services alongside literacy programs, home support programs and partnering with other local community hubs (Multiservice Centre, 2021).

Integrated Services: Preserving Quality and Connection

When career guidance is a part of integrated service models within Canada, it is often a spoke, rather than a hub, of a given program. It is frequently offered as a component of other services, such as newcomer settlement services, community re-integration programs or adult education programs. This approach has many advantages: it supports clients to create the preconditions necessary to fully benefit from career guidance, it connects them more seamlessly with services they may need to act on career guidance and often means the person providing career guidance is more familiar with their client's specific circumstances and challenges.

However, this approach may also contribute to the huge variation and lack of standardization within the career guidance field, especially as a part of services provided to targeted populations. Because of its status as an ancillary function of many integrated service models, rather than a clearly defined service that is integrated or coordinated with non-career supports, it can be hard to leverage career guidance as a public policy tool. Further, practitioners working within broader, non-employment services may have weak connections to other career guidance practitioners, a broader field of practice, or opportunities for training and development.

Connecting career guidance practitioners and standardizing their qualifications may be one way of preserving community-based integrated service models while also improving consistency and quality in the provision of career guidance across points of access.

Promote practitioner training and models that support equity-informed service and cultural competencies

A laid-off, 55-year-old white male manufacturing worker and an underemployed 25-year-old Indigenous mother may both be eligible to access publicly funded career guidance services. They may each face real, and even shared, barriers to the labour market. However, they likely also have different attitudes, ideas and values that would impact their level of comfort and engagement while using career services. **The capacity of service providers to recognize and adapt to clients' individual needs and circumstances can improve clients' overall benefit from career guidance.** A meta-analysis of culturally responsive interventions in counselling showed that interventions that were specific to the background and needs of a client produced better outcomes (Nagayama Hall et al., 2016).

Broad-based cultural competency and professional development can build practitioners' ability to support a diverse client base effectively and empathetically, even without deep, population-specific expertise. The importance of cultural competency is already highlighted within the *Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development*: core competency C2.1, labeled "Respect diversity," emphasizes the need for practitioners to demonstrate knowledge, awareness and respect of their clients' differences across a range of factors (Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners, 2004). However, the Standards and Guidelines have widely variable levels of adoption and adherence among practitioners (Research interview). Additionally, some researchers also argue that an "individual-level" focus on diversity within career services does not allow for practitioners and policy-makers to consider larger system-level barriers and social justice issues that impact clients. **Thinking about career guidance from the lens of equity and advocacy could help inform a system that is better attuned to structural barriers like poverty, discrimination and economic marginalization** (Arthur et al., 2013).

In other jurisdictions, cultural competence is a distinct feature of practitioner professionalism. In Germany, the Federal German Employment Agency (BA) trains staff in "inter-cultural competence," including additional cultural competency courses for specific employment groups and targeted training to assist asylum-seekers (European Training Foundation, 2020). They also track the backgrounds of service employees as a metric of their ability to support a diverse client base, and have internal hiring practices intended to reflect external values: for example, the BA has committed to making persons with severe disabilities constitute at least 10% of its future workforce (Federal Employment Agency, 2018). In New Zealand, the Career Development Association is working on creating professional standards for practitioners that reflect New Zealand's status as a "bi-cultural" society of Maori and non-Maori inhabitants (Urbahn, 2014). In the US, the National Career Development Association has "social justice resources" for practitioners on their website and has recently published a second edition of a textbook, *Gaining Cultural Competence in Career Counseling* (National Career Development Association, 2021).

Build Awareness and Promote the Benefits of Career Guidance

As outlined above, a lack of awareness of career services and their benefits are significant barriers to career guidance, especially for vulnerable populations (OECD, 2021). More needs to be done to make information about career guidance services and benefits readily available. As profiled in more detail in The Behavioural Insights Team (2021) paper, stigma and misconception are meaningful barriers to access and participation: work to improve awareness of services is only one component to change would-be clients' perceptions and spur motivation. However, intentionally creating greater visibility of career services – for example, by sharing anecdotes and career service clients' narratives with a broader audience – could do much to normalize the use of career services to a broader swathe of adult clients. Below are some best practices on spreading high-level awareness of services found in Canada and internationally. Although not all these services provide career guidance, there are strong analogies to be drawn and lessons to be learned from each.

Do proactive, high-touch outreach to targeted populations

Promoting career guidance at locations where target populations access support and other services, like newcomer centres or English Second Language classes, is an effective way to raise awareness among high-needs clients (Research Interview). The Occupational Centre for Women in Korea, for example, uses a model where they work with community centres to connect with marginalized women, as well as visiting markets and other public places that women gather, including going to "hard to reach" neighbourhoods (Avila, 2018.) This model could be adapted to the Canadian context by choosing a target population and working with the community to identify key points of entry. It is also a relatively "light touch" way to draw some of the benefits of integrated services when full integration is not possible.

Use broad based awareness campaigns

Broad based awareness campaigns are a proven, successful method to increase awareness of career services. In 2002, Scottish government agency Careers Scotland used a marketing campaign to increase brand awareness and promote the benefits of career services. The campaign resulted in a 35% increase in brand recognition and a 10% increase in positive perception of career guidance services. Similar campaigns were run in the UK in 2007 and as recently as 2020 in Belgium (McCarthy & Borbély-Pecze, 2020). **Some of the shared elements of these successful awareness campaigns included not only the promotion of the services themselves, but also clearly articulating their benefits.** This kind of campaign is important, given that according to an OECD report, some vulnerable workers who would benefit the most from career guidance, cited they "didn't feel a need" to speak with a career practitioner (OECD, 2021).

In Canada, promoting career services could be modeled on other awareness campaigns, including the one that accompanied the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW) provincial projects, or the Canadian Learn$ave program. This campaign found success in its multi-prong advertising strategy which leveraged local media outlets, and ilustrated how word-of-mouth can be an effective recruitment strategy, especially in challenging attitudinal barriers (Leckie et al., 2010). Government-led awareness campaigns can leverage the full potential of word-of-mouth connection through building recognition, familiarity and trust.

Involve other actors and partners to promote the value of career guidance, including employers

Another way to raise awareness of career services and promote its benefits is involving other actors and partners within the employment ecosystem. For example, Denmark's PES has 'in-enterprise counsellors' who connect daily with employers and assist in recruitment, training and determining future needs (Williamson & Millan, 2017). Other OECD countries have also seen the involvement of trade unions in promoting career guidance. In Norway, trade unions promote the national career guidance portal to its members and representatives. And in Belgium, the Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens de Belgique train their trade union representatives to direct workers to career guidance services and training programs (OECD, 2021). While Canada's culture of trade unions is different from the European context, there may still be opportunities to model awareness of PES career guidance services using these channels, as well as other bodies like professional and regulatory bodies.

Include Career Guidance Services in Eligibility for Adult Training Benefits and Vouchers

In Canada, the government's Canada Training Benefit (CTB) is designed to help working Canadians get access to the skills and training they need to succeed in today's workforce (Government of Canada, 2019). Under the CTB, there are three provisions to help workers:

The non-taxable Canada Training Credit	The Employment Insurance Training Benefit	Leave provisions to protect workers who choose to upskill
(an accumulating credit balance to be used to refund half the cost of courses at education institutions or training programs)	(income support of up to four weeks to help cover the loss of income while workers take training leave)	

These benefits encourage workers to participate in training programs or access education by providing them some financial stability while they do so.

For vulnerable workers, having access to low-cost or free career guidance services can be almost as important as a training program itself. Barriered populations, like older workers, are already less aware of the importance of training, so it can be a challenge for them to navigate which programs are available or most appropriate for their needs (OECD, March 11, 2019). Career guidance services are crucial to help workers or job seekers make these kinds of choices (OECD, April 25, 2019). At the moment, the CTB is not eligible to be spent on formal career guidance services. The CTB only applies to eligible education institutions or occupational training programs.

To better support the needs of barriered populations, the CTB eligibility could be expanded to include career guidance services. At the same time, the CTB could be restructured to become more inclusive. It is currently a refundable tax credit, but the "pay now, get reimbursed later" model of tax credit can be a barrier to many low-income people.

Expand eligibility of existing training vouchers to include career guidance services

Other jurisdictions allow vocational training grants and vouchers to be spent on career guidance activities. Implementation of this varies by country and demonstrates several different approaches that Canada might take. In Flanders, Belgium, a quasi-market system is used: every year, workers can buy EUR 250 worth of vouchers (the government pays for half) that can be used for career guidance (OECD, 2021).

Since the voucher was introduced in 2013, demand for career guidance services has dramatically increased. Now within a 5km radius, the average Flemish citizen can find 12 different public and private offices offering career guidance. Customer satisfaction for the Belgian-Flemish PES, which provides employment and vocational training services, has also been high (86% in 2016) (OECD, Jan 21, 2019). Greece and Germany allow government funded vouchers to be used toward either training programs or career guidance sessions. In France, skills assessment is as an allowable expenditure under their Individual Training Account program funded through an employer levy. And in Denmark, a paid "training leave" offered through the State Grant System for Adult Training can be applied to guidance (OECD, 2021).

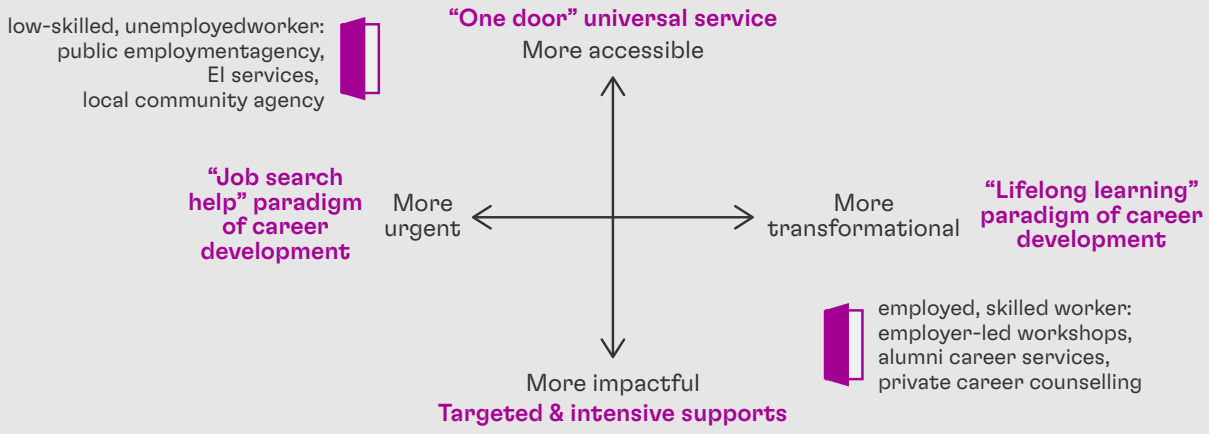
The Netherlands offers a different model. In 2017, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment in the Netherlands created a completely separate temporary subsidy scheme of EUR 600 to access career guidance services specifically. This voucher targeted older workers, aged 45 and over, who work a minimum of 12 hours per week (OECD, 2021). While only meant to be a temporary measure, the program drew such support that it was extended to meet high demand.

It is worth noting that the creation of a publicly-funded voucher system pre-supposes the existence (or rapid growth) of a marketplace of private career practitioners. A private market does exist in Canada: 19% of Canadian survey respondents who accessed career services in the last five years did so by using a private provider (LMIC, 2021). However, introducing vouchers could expand demand beyond the current supply of qualified career practitioners. **Unless carefully managed, the decision to incentivize the growth of private market career services could create further inequity for underserved groups in the long term.** Directing funding to vouchers also could meaningfully change the role, available funding and mandate for public employment services.

Target funding that supports building "higher order" career management skills for underserved populations

Research indicated that barriered populations are already facing a Matthew effect in lifelong learning and adult-facing training: high-skilled, more educated workers are more willing and able to participate in programs than low-skilled, less educated workers (OECD, April 25, 2019). Those who have had positive experiences with education and/or who are better resourced are often better equipped to find, understand and benefit from further supports. As a result of imbalanced uptake, relative inequity can be reproduced or even compounded by interventions designed to promote fairness and opportunity.

However, cost and time are not the only factors that can perpetuate a Matthew effect in career guidance. The structure and quality of career services within Canada vary widely, as do services' purported goals. This variability is by design, insofar as it is intended to be responsive to the many different needs of prospective clients. But patterns in which clients use what kind of career service demonstrates a hard-to-quantify but important gulf in access. **Put simply, low-skilled or at-risk workers are typically more likely to be directed to certain types of career services, often aimed at rapid re-employment, re-skilling or work readiness. By contrast, people who are high-income or well-educated often have access to services that are designed to promote lifelong learning, self-knowledge and overall career management: this might be through their employer, a professional workshop or a private career practitioner.**



Again, this difference in services can reflect both the desires of the clients themselves, as well as a reasonable response to a hierarchy of needs: proposing to do a Myers-Briggs typology test with someone who is worried about making rent for their family is likely going to be both unwanted and unhelpful. But if a large swath of the population who could benefit from career planning — low-income, low-skilled, or at-risk workers — perceive career services to be transactional or crisis-prompted, their understanding of other, valuable career guidance tools might be narrow, misconstrued, or even stigmatized. A Canada in which populations with structural disadvantages receive service to "become employed" while populations with privilege are afforded resources to "manage their career" is a Canada that is less fair, less dynamic and less prepared to meet a changing world of work.

Data collected by the LMIC on Canada showed that higher income, higher education, urban, prime -aged and male populations more often seek career services in order to progress in their current job. Significant differences were observed across populations that sought career services to progress in their current job compared to others. This included high-income clients (27% vs. 14% for low-income), urban-based clients (21% vs. 13% for rural), prime-aged (22% vs. 9% for adults aged 55 and over), more educated clients (22% vs. 14% for lower education) and male (24% vs. 16% for female) (LMIC, 2021). **This would seem to indicate that populations with structural privilege are more likely to use services for ongoing, "lifelong learning" reasons, rather than just-in-time support.**

There are many different strategies policy-makers could use to help connect barriered populations to more diverse and client-driven career guidance tools, and a combination of many approaches is probably necessary. It will certainly require clearly incentivizing and subsidizing the use of non-emergency, "lifelong learning" career management services for barriered populations, either through an individually-awarded voucher/benefit for private use, or through bulking up targeted public funds.

A Canada in which populations with structural disadvantages receive service to “become employed” while populations with privilege are afforded resources to “manage their career” is a Canada that is less fair, less dynamic and less prepared to meet a changing world of work.

Leverage Technology to Expand Reach, Access and Efficiency of Career Guidance

COVID-19 has accelerated innovation in the digital provision of career services, in Canada and around the world (Cedefop et al., 2020). It is unlikely that moving to a digital-only approach in career guidance would result in improved outcomes for populations with complex needs: in-person career guidance is generally more effective than digital-only supports (OECD, 2021). However, digital services can markedly improve access for clients who are either unable to or less likely to use in-person services. Digital technologies can help remove the barriers of geography and lack of transportation (through remote access), the barrier of stigma (through confidential or discreet service use) and barriers around caregiving and responsibilities (through flexible, client-led learning) (OECD, 2021). Digital services can also help broaden access to targeted resources that clients may not be able to access in their community, including guidance in other languages or specialized information about specific sectors and professions.

Information and communication technologies and data practices can be used to improve the efficacy, availability and adaptability of career guidance systems for all clients in a variety of ways. These include things like more accurate use of LMI, better connections between employers and job seekers and improved efficiencies and economies of scale within public employment services. This report, however, focuses on promising digital and technological practices for serving populations who face barriers to using and fully benefiting from career guidance services.

Develop online career guidance resources designed for adults with low literacy, and teach the digital literacy skills needed for job-seeking

Researchers estimate that that about 40% of working-aged adults in Canada do not have the literacy skills required to perform well or be highly productive in most jobs (Lane & Murray, 2018). This reality underlines the importance of connecting more adults, including working adults, to career guidance and reskilling opportunities. However, it also demonstrates that online resources for career guidance should be developed with literacy as a meaningful metric of accessibility. Plain language should be used wherever possible. This is important because online resources are more likely to be self-serve and text-based than in-person supports. Using a plain language approach is important to respond to the elevated and specific career guidance needs of target populations: these include unemployed people, who tend to have lower literacy rates than employed peers and newcomers, who may be new to English or French (Kannon, 2019). Plain language resources that are shared online can help practitioners who are serving clients with low literacy. These resources can also help clients themselves, who may be doing self-directed Internet research.

Alberta's ALIS service is an example of plain language use within career services. Part of their website is specifically tailored for practitioners who serve clients with low literacy, with resource booklets and job descriptions written for "easy reading" (Government of Alberta, n.d). Developing plain-language career guidance resources can improve clarity and comprehension for all clients, not just those with low literacy: the use of plain language is encouraged by the Canadian government's own style guidelines for that reason (Government of Canada, 2020).

Job-specific digital literacy and preparedness resources can be a valuable tool to enable self-directed career management. The functional digital skills needed to engage in job-hunting and career research can have standalone value separate from vocation-specific digital training. For example, an evaluation of a program that trained job seekers in South Africa to use LinkedIn found a persistent effect on employability, increasing the likelihood of post-program employment by seven percentage points (Wheeler et al, 2021). Older job seekers interviewed in Boston highlighted technology training around jobhunting, including with social networking sites, as an important feature of programs that helped them (Center for Social & Demographic Research on Aging Gerontology Institute & John W. McCormack School of Policy and Global Studies, 2018). And in Australia, the free Career Transition Assistance program for job seekers offers tailored career assistance and functional digital literacy to teach adults over 45 to leverage technology while they look for work (CVGT Australia, n.d). The program aims to help clients feel more confident applying for jobs online and using social media, apps and smartphones as part of their career journey (Australian Government, 2020). Building the digital competency to look for work online helps people benefit more fully from other career guidance resources.

Use data and artificial intelligence for easy engagement and tailored career guidance services

Innovations in digital provision can work to help expand the reach and efficacy of career guidance systems. They can help identify, target and reach out to clients with elevated needs or those who may not otherwise use career services. Some examples include:

Using statistical / digital profiling to identify (and reach out to) high-needs PES clients. In Flanders, Belgium, public employment services developed a statistical profiling model called "Next Steps" that, among other functions, estimates the likelihood of a client becoming long-term unemployed. The Flemish service is working on developing a tool that suggest specific online programs to a client based on their data profile, and in Denmark, the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment has also used machine learning techniques to develop a profiling model for job seekers (Desiere et al., 2018).

Using AI chatbots to connect clients to resources. If done effectively, chatbot services may be able to provide a low-intensity, high-convenience entry point for those less likely to access career guidance. Additionally, chatbots may be able to help allocate resources and "triage" those seeking career guidance, answering routine questions while referring clients who have higher needs to practitioner-led supports (Attwell & Hughes, 2021). In the UK, an AI-enabled chatbot called "CareerChat" has been piloted in three major cities (Ange's Scribble, 2020). The service is aimed at working adults aged 24-65 in low-skilled or at-risk jobs, and is designed to connect workers to accurate labour market information and career pathways information (European Training Foundation, 2020).

Collect and share data online to understand who is and is not accessing career guidance resources

There is a pervasive lack of data on who accesses career guidance, types of services they use and which services they feel had impact (Redekopp, 2015). This makes it challenging to identify patterns in what barriers to career help exist for which populations. To meaningfully improve access to career guidance on a system-wide level, there need to be shared practices of information gathering and analysis aimed at understanding where service gaps exist.

A commitment to more sophisticated data practices and open data principles could help leverage information that is already being collected to inform better policy-making. For example, Ontario currently gathers usage data of Employment Ontario programs for populations targeted as "designated groups," including categories like persons with disabilities, Indigenous people and newcomers (Ontario Eastern Workforce Innovation Board, 2019). Demographic information like age, gender and educational attainment is also collected from clients. However, this information is not readily available on a province-wide level through the provincial government's OpenData portal and is instead packaged out on a regional basis to Local Employment Planning Boards. Better use of open data principles through Canada's various employment services sectors could generate much-needed information on equity and access to career guidance resources.

Measure Diverse Benchmarks of Success

Important barriers to successful career guidance and connection to the labour market include concrete, observable resource gaps: lack of transportation, lack of training or qualifications, inability to understand the labour market, etc. However, there are other, crucial barriers to the job market that are harder to describe, let alone easily quantify: things like self-efficacy, the ability to build relationships, motivation and self-knowledge (Cedefop, 2016). People who struggle with these factors face real barriers to meaningful work. Importantly, they also face challenges in operationalizing or benefiting from other job-related resources they are provided (Myers et al., 2011).

Developing these capacities is a core function of career guidance as a field of practice. Career practitioners in Canada surveyed in 2010 identified "self-awareness of occupational interests, relevant attitudes, personal values, job-related skills" as the number one need in the adults they serve: by contrast, "acquiring employability and essential skills" was listed seventh (Bezanson et al.,, 2009). While exploring personal strengths, interests and long-term planning is understood to be a core focus of career guidance for youth, it is comparatively absent from policy conversations around adult employment and career services.

The emphasis career services place on rapid placement in jobs and training, and the corresponding policy and funding incentives that support this emphasis, crowds out other, central functions of career guidance in Canada. These include helping people to develop long-term career management skills, to understand their own aptitudes and competencies and to feel confident navigating job processes. The inability to easily identify or capture these other types of benefits, and the corresponding system-wide focus on benchmarking "quick wins" by placing clients in employment or training, has an outsized and adverse impact on clients with complex needs (Myers et al., 2011). Clients who are prematurely nudged into jobs or training who aren't ready have lower job retention and higher service recidivism. This cycle is discouraging for practitioners and clients alike (Research Interview).[2]

Aside from personal growth and the acquisition of soft skills, data from the LMIC (2021) survey indicated that the users of Canadian career services were able to better achieve short-term goals or overcome barriers to employment or enrolment of education. Of Canadian adults who used career services, 24% reported addressing barriers such as mental health, transportation, housing, support network, or clarity on future direction within six months (LMIC, 2021). Further investigation on how career services are causally connected to these types of near-term positive client outcomes, if at all, would be a valuable research topic.

2 This was also a theme across many CCDF materials, especially this report, which was not public at the time of writing but which we were able to see an early draft of.

Support the development and use of assessment tools that evaluate client needs, barriers and long-term progress.

Even among international peers, there is lack of consensus about how to best measure longer-term impacts and outcomes of career guidance in a systematic and effective way (Cedefop, 2020). However, there is widespread agreement that better tools for evaluation and assessment are needed, especially when framing career guidance policy as a tool for social equity and lifelong learning.

Better assessment and evaluation mechanisms within career guidance are particularly critical for barriered and hard-to-employ populations. **An inability to track progress outside of the markers of being in employment or training means that important outcomes of career guidance programs for these populations are not being measured or considered in programmatic decisions.**

CASE STUDY

PRIME Assessment Tool from the Canadian Career Development Foundation

PRIME is an employability assessment tool developed by the CCDF to collect and analyze data on a wider and more diverse set of client outcomes. The goal of PRIME is "to transform public career/employment services through the power of meaningful accountability that tracks and reports the full impact of these vital and essential services" (Canadian Career Development Foundation, May 20, 2020). It was first developed in 2011 and has been updated several times since, through phased tests and evaluations in the field. PRIME is a tool for practitioners and policy-makers to more consistently measure clients' progress and capture the service they are provided, data that is significantly absent within Canada (Redekopp et al., 2015). PRIME assesses clients' strengths/needs at their entry to service, tracks changes through the period of service engagement and at the end determines changes, providing a total picture of each client's journey and the impact of services (Canadian Career Development Foundation, May 20, 2020).

Research from PRIME uses "Employability Dimensions" to better capture indicators of health and well-being, social integration and labour market attachment (Canadian Career Development Foundation, May 20, 2020). These dimensions include assessing clients' access to adequate childcare, knowledge of their own interests, ability to overcome setbacks/disappointments, access to stable housing, etc. (Canadian Career Development Foundation, Sept 9, 2020), Measuring these indicators helps career practitioners tailor resources and coaching to meet a client's specific needs.

Prioritize career management skill-building

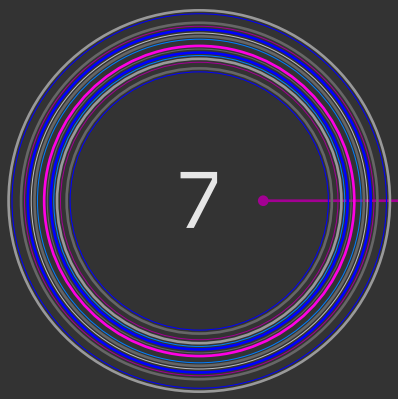
One expert interviewee identified that decision-makers' collective focus on Canada's "skills gap" is too narrow: instead, she suggested, our labour force and economy are also greatly impacted by an "articulation gap." In many instances, people who do possess sought-after skills and competencies do not have the tools to accurately self-identify experiences and work history connected to those skills

and/or effectively articulate or demonstrate their experience and competencies to employers. Policy decision-makers typically talk about skills acquisition in terms of either how to search for the next job (job search skills), or how to be technically and vocationally qualified for the next job (skills training), but dedicate comparatively little focus to how to enable people to draw from existing experience, reflect on personal strengths and consider needed adaptations for the next job (career management skills, including articulation, self-knowledge and meta-cognition skills) (Neary et al., 2016).

The "people without the right jobs, jobs without the right people" problem in Canada is one that attracts considerable focus and discussion. However, tackling this challenge may not just be an additive process, requiring more people to re-skill, up-skill or re-train, but also an extractive process, helping people to recognize, contextualize and leverage sought-after skills and abilities they already have. The latter process requires career management skills. For clients, being able to understand and articulate their interests and capacities can mean saved time and resources: either through not having to acquire additional formal qualifications to find the right job, or through having the knowledge to make better choices about what further education and/or qualifications will help them meet their goals.

In addition to efficiency implications, closing the articulation gap has specific equity implications. Articulation gaps have elevated impacts on certain groups, including people who are hard-to-employ, who have low-skilled or low-income jobs or who are precariously employed. These groups may be even less equipped to be able to clearly identify and communicate their in-demand competencies in a way that confers employer recognition or allows for job mobility. **Canadians with structural privilege are more likely – through informal and formal experience – to have the career management skills to articulate their professional value: yet they are less likely to need to rely on career management tools in order to be seen as credible or qualified by employers.**

Canada's articulation gap is just one example of how career management skills are distinct from either vocation-specific training or traditional job search skills. Often, the latter two are more associated with, and prioritized within, public employment services. Career management skills and more hands-on job search skills are complementary, connected and mutually reinforcing: both are integral components of a full career services landscape. But when they are collapsed into a single category by policy-makers, the specific and important benefits of career management skill-building – especially for marginalized populations – can get lost in the mix.



7 Conclusion

Conclusion

Many precarious, marginalized and low-skilled workers and would-be workers who face barriers to the labour market in Canada also have reduced access to both informal and formal channels of career guidance. This inequity, and the associated loss of potential, is limiting on both an individual and societal level. Building career services that are more accessible and more impactful will require more attention, more resources and more research and should focus on better supporting Canada's most economically vulnerable.

This paper provides high-level considerations on the basis of available literature for decision-makers to consider in support of responsive career pathways, but there is still much to be learned about both the nature of barriers to career guidance and the practices and interventions that work to overcome them. The FSC and other partners can play an important role in spearheading much-needed research, evidence-gathering and advocacy to implement and advance ideas presented here.

Key Implications

Career guidance systems must be designed with a whole-of-person lens.	To fully benefit from career guidance, people with complex barriers may need access to other, complementary supports. Career services that seek to support a "whole" person, rather than just one challenge in isolation, can help prevent clients from falling through the cracks.
More awareness of career guidance and its benefits would promote access.	Intentionally creating greater visibility of career services could do much to normalize their use among a broader swathe of adult clients.
Eligibility for adult training benefits / vouchers should include career guidance services.	To better support the needs of barriered populations, eligibility for training vouchers like the Canadian Training Benefit should be expanded to include career services.
Technology must be used to expand access and efficiency of career guidance	There are promising technological practices and services that can markedly improve access for clients who are either unable or less likely to use in-person services.
Success must be measured using diverse metrics.	Measuring the efficacy of adult career services should not be limited to narrow employment or education enrolment outcomes. More responsive career services can be developed by better understanding how different programs help clients to develop soft skills, understand their own aptitudes and competencies and feel confident navigating job processes.

Career guidance services are a fundamental policy tool in preparing for the future of work, one that is often overlooked. Ongoing efforts to develop structure, nomenclature and shared understanding between varied stakeholders in education and industry are evolving, but job seekers must have the ability to apply these frameworks to their own lives and goals. To ensure that the benefits of system-wide transformation are equitable and widespread, individual career management abilities of Canada's workers and would-be workers need to be built up.

Without question, improving career guidance services that support people to rapidly re-employ and re-skill is crucial, especially for those who are un-or-underemployed. However, building truly equitable and effective career services will mean integrating them into a broader ecosystem of lifelong learning. Investing in high-quality and whole-of-person career services will help promote both greater fairness and opportunity in Canada's labour market.

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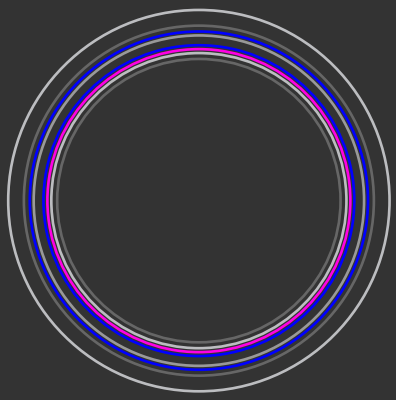

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