

HRPA

**COVID-19 RETURN TO
WORKPLACE SURVEY**

KEY FINDINGS REPORT



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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused one of the greatest shifts in the world of work in decades, and HR professionals have been instrumental in helping their organizations navigate the unique challenges the pandemic has created.

With the COVID-19 situation now rapidly changing, and the province slowly turning a corner in its pandemic recovery, we conducted this survey to learn more about how HR professionals are planning for the return to the workplace. The survey was conducted between May 19 and May 27, 2021, with 829 participants sharing their insights on how their organizations are preparing for the future of work.

The HRPA recognizes that this past year has been especially difficult for HR professionals and we thank everyone who took the time to participate in the survey and share their valuable insights.

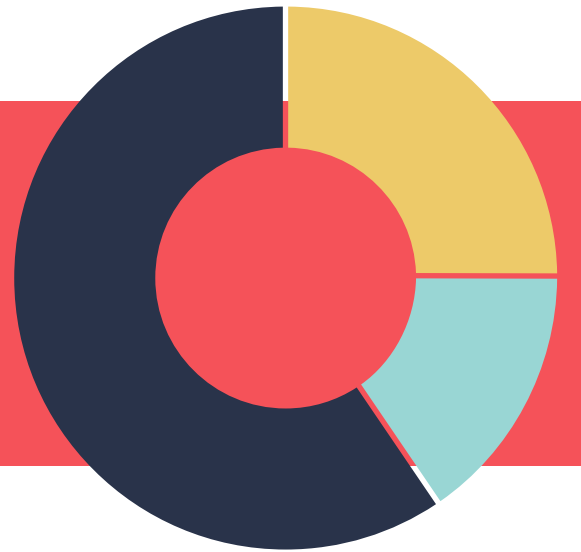
Return to Workplace Planning

The survey found that while HR professionals are actively involved with return to workplace planning, there are still many uncertainties which have complicated the process. Key highlights from survey include:

- 63.7% of respondents have formed a planning group or similar to plan for the return to the workplace. Many of these groups involve cross-functional teams, external advisors, and engagement from bargaining agents.
- Respondents who are planning to return employees to the workplace are largely waiting for guidance from the provincial government as well as for vaccination rates to increase. While there is still a high degree of uncertainty around when organizations can begin returning their employees to the workplace, responses indicate that employee health and safety is a top priority for HR professionals.
- 19.6% of respondents said their organizations will permanently restructure due to COVID-19 and 34.5% are still unsure. While 45.9% of respondents said they have no plans to restructure, it is likely that operating models for many organizations have changed considering the increased flexibility and hybrid work models many respondents stated their organizations are offering.
- Only 5.6% of respondents stated that they are planning to bring all their employees back to the workplace at once, with most organizations looking at a staggered approach (24.5%), bringing employees back in phases (28.8%), or a hybrid model.
- 60% of respondents are actively seeking or will seek input from employees about their feelings on returning to the workplace, indicating the high value HR professionals have placed on employee mental health and engagement throughout the pandemic. In addition, 76.5% of respondents stated that their organizations are prepared to increase mental health supports for employees.

Has your organization formed a Planning Group or something similar to focus on return to workplace plans? (n=829)

- **63.7% Yes**
- 25.9% No
- 10.4% Not Sure

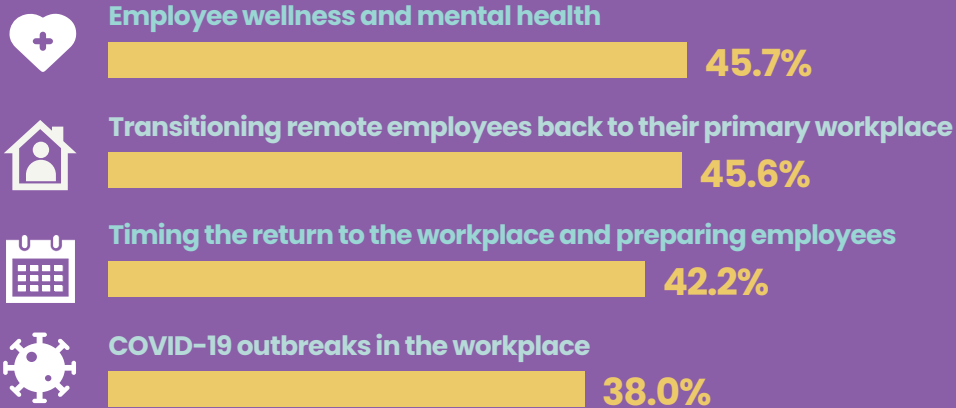


Will your organization do any permanent restructuring as a result of COVID-19? (n = 821)

- **45.9% No**
- 34.5% Not Sure
- 19.6% Yes

What are your top three concerns regarding return to workplace planning? (n = 822)

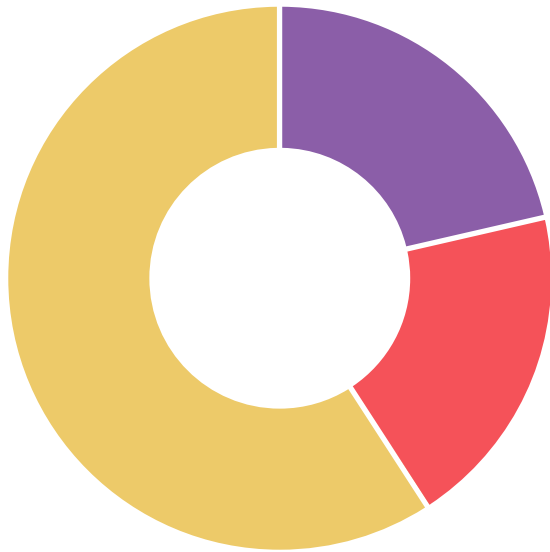
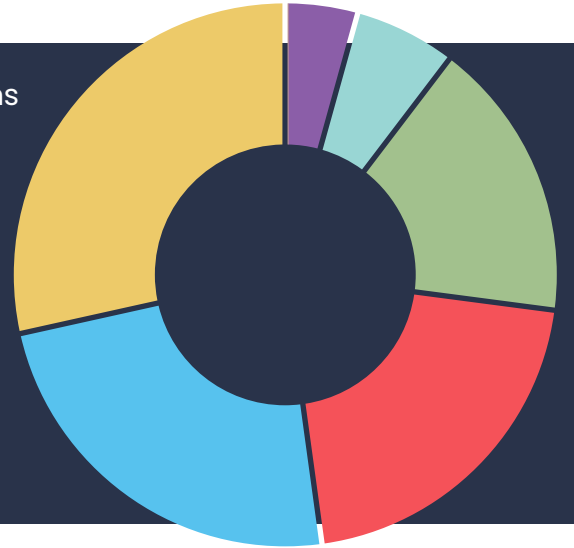
The top answers selected by respondents were:



*Respondents could choose multiple options.

What approach is your organization planning to take when it begins returning employees to the workplace? (n = 816)

- **28.8% Employees will be brought back in groups/phases**
- 24.5% Employee days in the workplace will be staggered
- 20.1% Other
- 16.9% Employees will have the option to remain remote
- 5.6% All employees will be brought back at once
- 4.0% All non-essential employees will remain remote

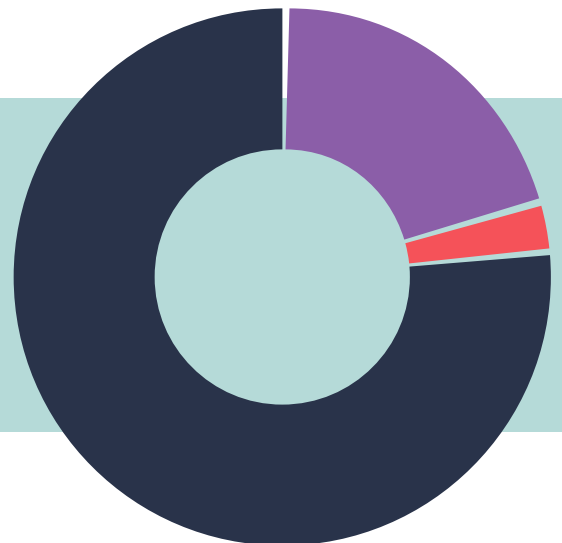


Has your organization surveyed or planning to survey employees on their feelings about returning to the workplace? (n = 828)

- **60.0% Yes**
- 23.9% No
- 16.1% Not Sure

Is your organization prepared to support employees with increased mental health supports given the reported stress/anxiety levels associated with COVID-19? (n = 711)

- **76.5% Yes**
- 17.6% Not Sure
- 5.9% No

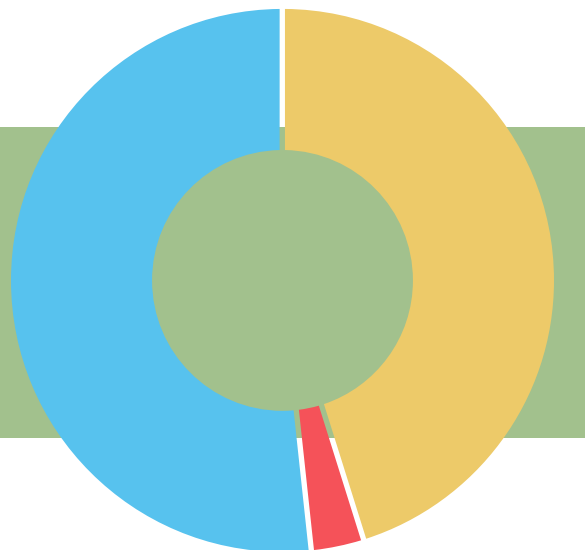
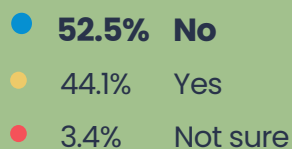


Remote & Flexible Work Options

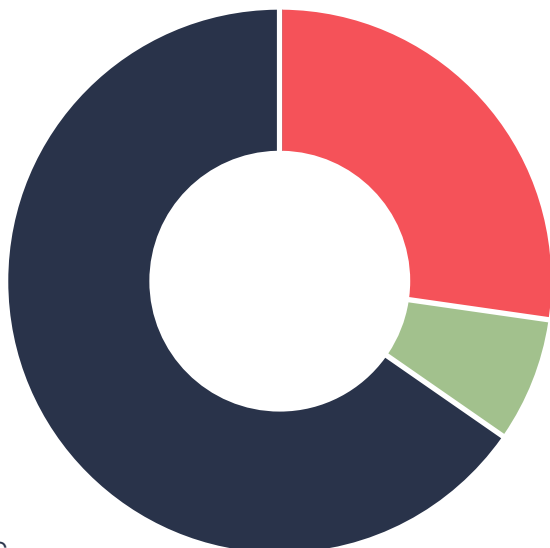
The COVID-19 pandemic created a massive shift towards remote work for many organizations that are now considering the best path forward for their employees and their businesses:

- Prior to the pandemic, 52.5% of respondents did not have a remote work or flex work policy, with 57.5% of respondents stating that they created or changed their policies since the pandemic began.
- 64.2% of respondents are planning to permanently retain or expand remote working options, while 26% are still unsure of their plans.
- In the case of employees who request to continue working remotely, many respondents said that they would review requests on a case-by-case basis, while many others are still unsure how they will proceed. Other responses suggested that organizations will be flexible regarding remote work options, although employees may be required to be in the workplace some of the time.

Did your organization have a remote work or flexible work policy before COVID-19? (n = 789)



Is your organization planning to permanently retain or expand remote working options for its employees as a result of COVID-19? (n = 786)



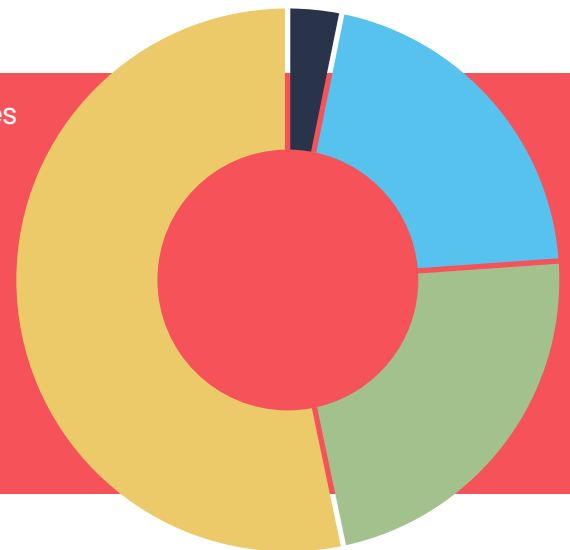
Vaccination and Paid Sick Leave

Employee vaccinations and paid sick leave will both continue to be topics of concern for employers as the pandemic continues. HRPA members and students shared the following insights regarding their organization's vaccination and paid sick leave policies:

- The majority of respondents (74.6%) are planning to make vaccination voluntary for employees, with 19.7% indicating that there will be restrictions for those who choose to not be vaccinated.
- 78.8% of respondents stated that their organizations provide paid sick days for COVID-19 related absences above what is available through government programs.
- 28.1% stated that employees at their organization have used at least one of the federal or provincial sick leave benefits available.
- While the provincial sick leave program was only recently implemented, the low usage of both government sickness benefits suggests that there is more that needs to be done to make paid sick leave easily accessible to all workers in Ontario.

What is your organization's position regarding COVID-19 vaccines for employees returning to the physical workplace? (n = 743)

- **54.9% Vaccination will be voluntary**
- 21.8% Other
- 19.7% Vaccination will be voluntary with restrictions for non-vaccinated employees
- 3.6% Vaccination will be mandatory



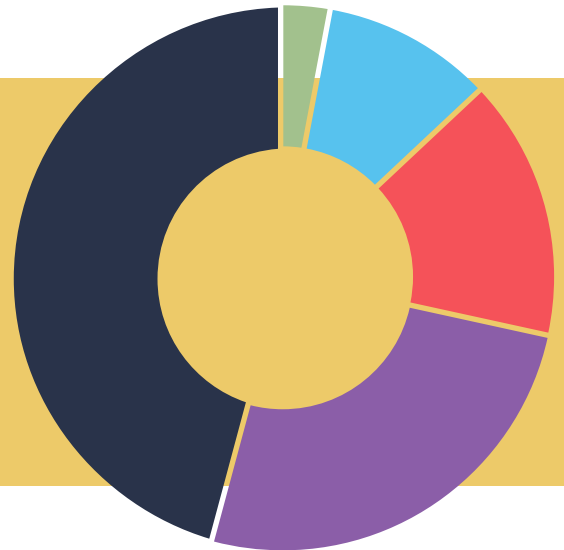


Has your organization provided paid sick days for COVID-19 related absences above what is available through the Ontario COVID-19 Worker Income Protection Benefit or the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CSRB)? (n = 760)

- **78.8% Yes**
- 13.8% No
- 7.4% Not Sure

Has your organization or your employees utilized any government funded paid sick leave programs? (n = 722)

- **47.8% Neither benefit has been used**
- 24.1% My organization does not qualify for these benefits
- 13.0% Both benefits have been used
- 9.3% Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit
- 5.8% Ontario COVID-19 Worker Income Protection Benefit



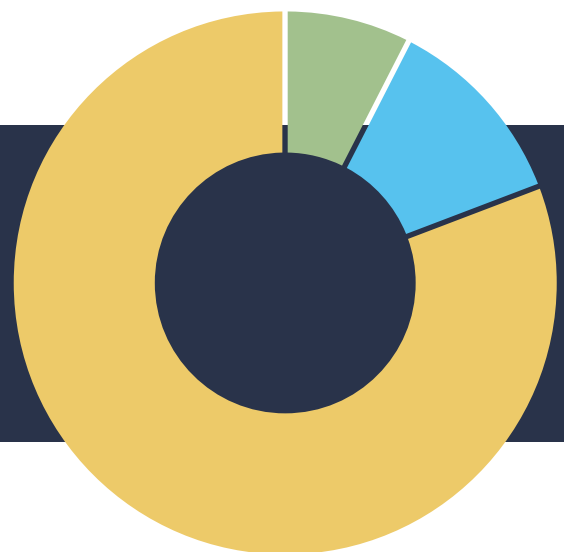
Workplace Health and Safety

A major theme that emerged from survey responses is that employee health and safety is a top priority for HR professionals as they plan for the return to the workplace. Respondents indicated that they are considering a broad range of options to make the workplace as safe as possible. Some highlights include:

- In many organizations, health and safety planning has already begun with 79.8% of respondents saying they have created a workplace health and safety plan.
- 83.9% of respondents have or are planning to create procedures for handling COVID-19 outbreaks in the workplace. Plans include following public health guidance, communicating with employees who may have been affected, and requiring affected employees to self-isolate.
- 15.4% of survey participants stated that their organization is planning to introduce rapid testing in the workplace, while 44.5% are not sure. The results suggest that organizations are still considering all their options to enhance health and safety measures, but there is still much uncertainty around how rapid testing will factor into the workplace.

Has your organization created a workplace health and safety plan for COVID-19? (n = 712)

- **79.8%** Yes
- 11.8% Not Sure
- 8.4% No



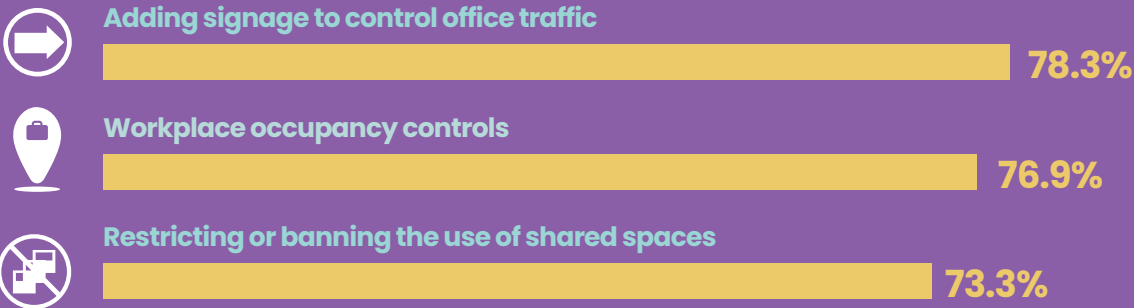


Has your organization created procedures for handling COVID-19 outbreaks in the workplace? (n = 714)

- **65.4% Yes**
- 18.5% No, but we are planning to
- 12.3% Not Sure
- 3.8% No

Has your organization implemented or planning to implement any of the following measures to ensure physical distancing in the workplace? (n = 697)

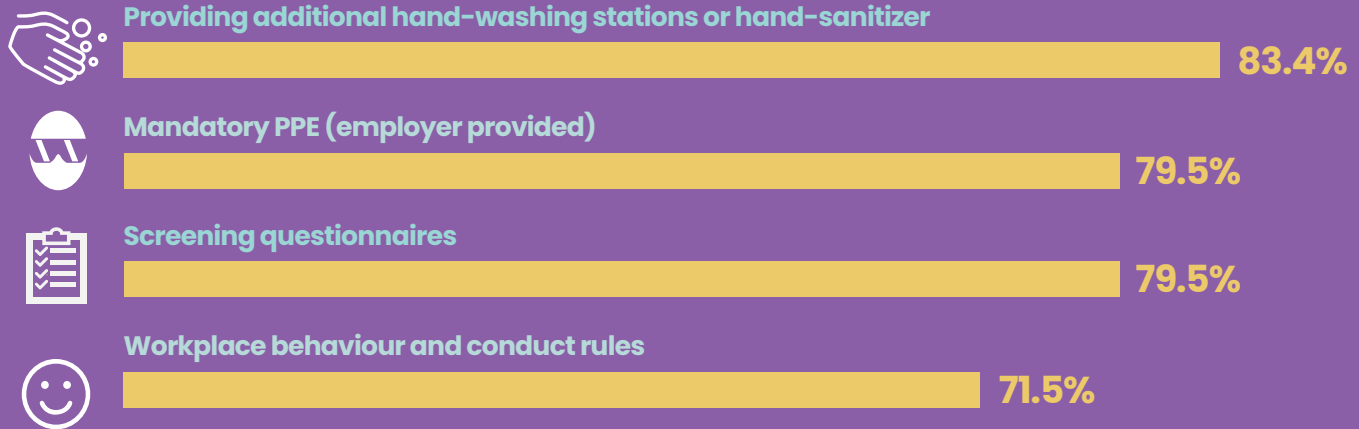
The top answers selected by respondents were:



*Respondents could choose multiple options.

What measures has your organization, or will your organization implement as it relates to maintaining a safe, healthy and hygienic workplace for employees and visitors? ? (n = 699)

The top answers selected by respondents were:



*Respondents could choose multiple options.

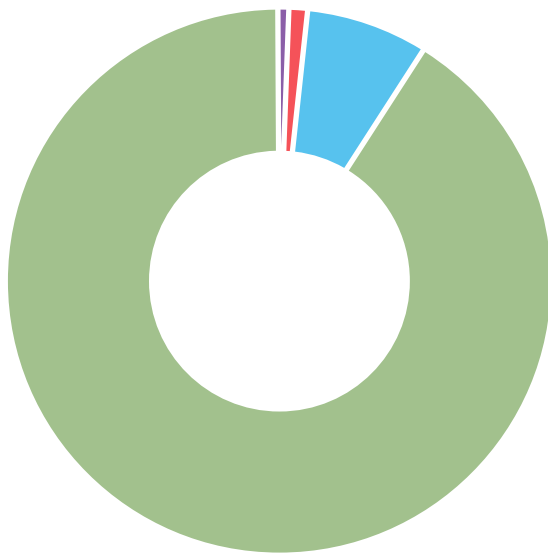
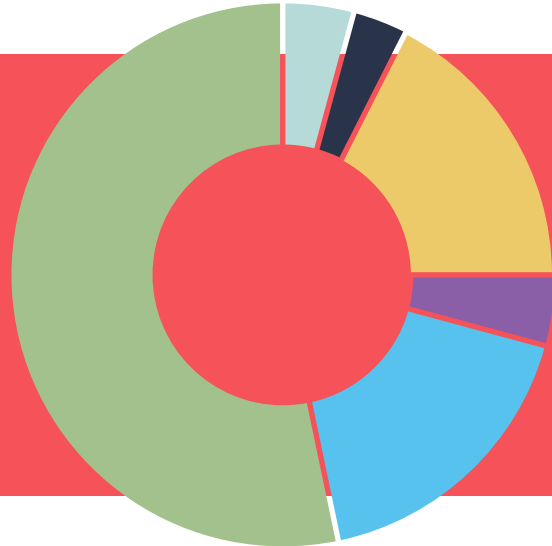


Does your organization plan to introduce COVID-19 rapid testing in the workplace? (n =712)

- **44.5% Not Sure**
- 40.5% No
- 15.4% Yes

What is your current HRPA registration class?

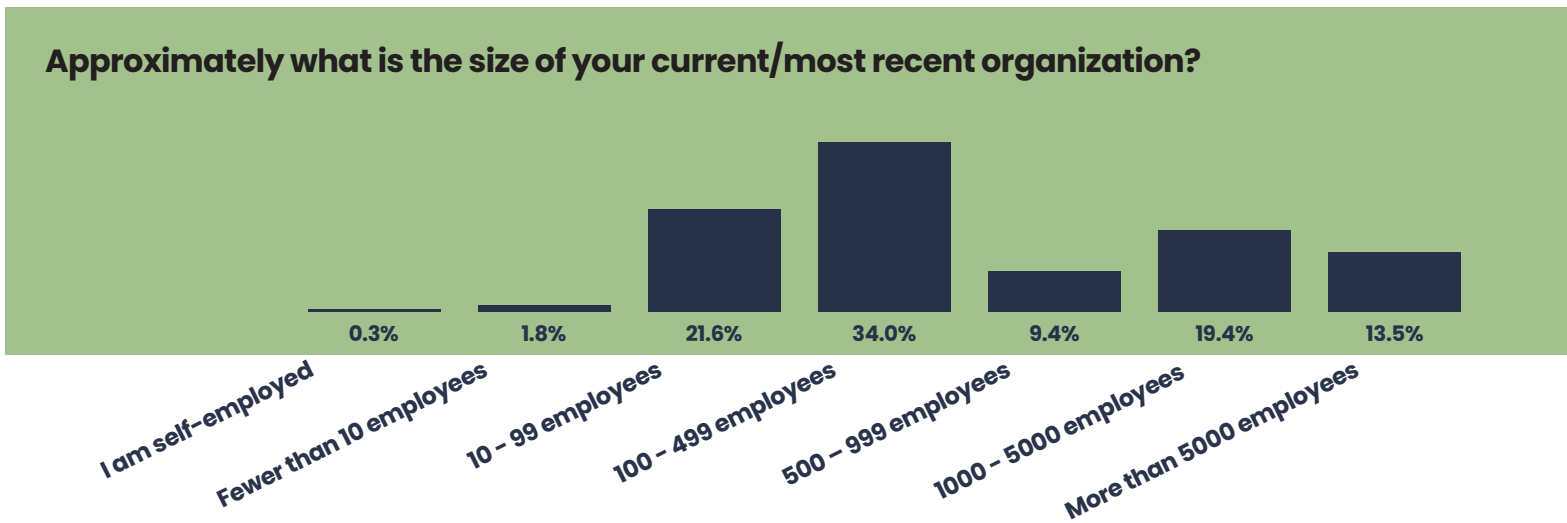
- 19.6% CHRP
- 52.4% CHRL
- 3.9% CHRE
- 19.1% Practitioner
- 2.0% Allied
- 3.0% Student



Is your workplace federally or provincially regulated?

- 8.3% Federal – Canada Labour Code
- 90.3% Provincial – Employment Standards Act
- 0.3% I am self-employed
- 1.1% I don't know

Approximately what is the size of your current/most recent organization?



In what sector does your organization operate?

Answer	%
Agriculture	0.4%
Automotive Services	1.3%
Banking	2.7%
Business/Professional Services / Consulting (other than HR)	4.0%
Communications/Media and Publishing	1.4%
Construction Industries	2.8%
Educational Institutions and Services - Post-Secondary	6.5%
Educational Institutions and Services - Secondary	2.7%
Energy (e.g. Oil, Gas, Electricity)	2.0%
Engineering	1.8%
Finance, other than banking	2.7%
Government and Public Sector Agencies / Commissions	11.8%
Health and Social Services	3.5%
Hospitality and Recreation Industries	1.8%
Housing	0.1%
HR Consultant - Firm	0.6%
HR Consultant - Independent	0.0%
Information Technology, Software, Services	7.4%
Insurance	3.7%
Legal Services	1.0%
Management Consulting	1.1%
Manufacturing	8.2%
Material Handling / Storage	0.3%
Not-For-Profit	12.6%
Packaged Consumer Goods	1.0%
Pension Funds and Services	0.4%
Pharmaceutical	0.3%
Policing	0.1%
Primary Resources (e.g. Mining, Forestry)	0.4%
Real Estate	1.3%
Recruitment and Staffing	0.9%
Regulatory Agency	0.6%
Research / Scientific	0.4%
Retail	2.6%
Sales / Marketing	1.0%
Transportation (e.g. Air, Rail, Trucking)	1.7%
Telecom / Internet	0.9%
Trade Union	0.4%
Wholesale / Distribution	2.0%
Other (Please specify)	5.5%
Total	100%