

Canadian Financial Diaries Research Project



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The Differential Impact of the Pandemic and Recession on Family Finances:

Report on COVID-19 Follow Survey with Phase One Participants

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With the Financial Diaries Team

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Research highlights

This report summarizes the results of a follow-up survey with nineteen low- and modest-middle income Winnipeggers, undertaken in June through September 2020. These respondents were drawn from the 29 Canadian Financial Diaries (CFD) participants who completed a year-long diary in 2019. We were able to recruit 19 of them for this survey. The results of the survey illustrate that low- and moderate-income earners¹ are feeling stressed with increased expenses and uncertainty about future economic stability. Additionally, participants are emotionally taxed by less available childcare and fear for their physical safety. Some participants in this study have been able to access government programs to support some of their immediate financial needs. In fact, for three participants, accessing CERB allowed them to have a higher income than as low-wage workers in their everyday jobs.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely altered participant employment and this occurred in several ways. The people who were most seriously affected were those who were casually employed and did not receive, or did not apply/ineligible for, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). The COVID-19 survey illustrates many of the financial challenges that low- and modest-income earners are experiencing in the pandemic. The results demonstrate the resilience of participants coming from a variety of financial backgrounds. We note that ten phase I participants were not available for the interview, many of whom were unemployed and on the low-end of the income spectrum. These results overstate the experience of employed people able to access the federal government emergency worker supports (CERB).

Most participants can access food and household goods; pay their rent or mortgage; and, albeit with some difficulty, purchase additional supplies and masks for pandemic living. This was particularly the case for the employed, and CERB-receiving, middle-income participants. However, lower income participants in the first wave of COVID-19 were facing more challenges in that casual work, if they had it, dried up, dropping their income. Moreover, they were facing higher expenses as family members stayed at home, shopping went online or at the corner store and became more expensive, and the bus became a less attractive means of transportation leading some to use a more expensive taxi.

Participants are stressed for a variety of reasons—and finances is one part of that stress. They have had to make household and childcare adjustments that have caused greater stress and created more expenses. Some have felt isolated and mentally drained from the pandemic lockdown and reality. Others worry about their financial futures while feeling safeguarded in the present.

¹ Annual household incomes of the participants range from just over \$5,000 to just over \$42,000 and include single people and families who are unemployed and relying on social assistance for income, people who work a few casual jobs, to people who work a full-time modestly paid job. Several low-income earners are living below the official poverty line. We have not separated participants into two groups (low- and modest-middle-income) but use the term to indicate the range of income levels of the participants.

Impact of COVID-19 on employment

The COVID-19 pandemic severely altered participant employment and this occurred in several ways. The people who were most seriously affected were those who were casually employed and did not receive, were not eligible, or did not apply for, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). Some were able to make some adjustments to continue to work while others were not. Two of nineteen participants with infrequent, temporary jobs reported losing their jobs entirely. Other participants were able to continue with some employment. Seven participants reported shifting their work from office to home. Two participants began entrepreneurial ventures in the informal economy.

Income and spending changes

Participants were asked how their income had been affected by the pandemic and economic recession. Ten participants reported an increase in their income; two participants noted a decrease and seven participants stated that their income stayed the same. It was the better-off and employed participants, receiving CERB, who felt that their income was supported. Meanwhile, unemployed people ineligible for CERB found little support as their limited casual income declined and their expenses increased. Higher expenses were associated with having family members home as opposed to in school, work or daycare, purchasing more expensive food with fewer shopping options, and higher transportation costs as out of safety concerns participants took taxis instead of the bus.

Many participants noted that they face higher costs in the pandemic. When participants were asked about household changes during the pandemic, seven participants reported changes from an increase in expenses, to being at home, an inability to pay mortgage due to lost income, a move from one city to another, and changes in building protocols because of COVID-19. Two participants reported an increase in the number of people living in their homes and both were due to the closure of universities.

In terms of how the pandemic has changed *where* respondents purchase items, most responded to this question regarding their food or grocery purchases. Many reported staying closer to home to purchase items and thus sometimes buying from more expensive stores, an attempt to purchase in smaller rather than bigger-box stores, and attempts to make purchases less often. Some reported buying online because they could not shop with their child or because transportation became difficult.

Feelings about current finances

We asked participants how they felt about their finances. Nine of the 19 respondents felt insecure, worried, and/or stressed about their finances. People voiced concerns that they have insufficient income and that it might get worse for their finances. Some share that they needed a little more to 'make ends meet.' One seasonally employed participant noted,

Well, I just paid my car insurance and then I was feeling stressed. This has to do with having a seasonal job. This is in my chequing account and I need money for the winter, I do have more paycheques coming in. I go between stressed and not.

Other respondents voiced greater concern, in some cases comments bordered on desperation. One participant noted, “If something drastic happens or I get ill or unable to work, how do we eat? EIA is not enough...It gets really scary for me. I am a single parent, and I am responsible for my child and it gets scary.” Another respondent noted, “I feel very low. I have really bad feelings. No way to make it work...” Five respondents shared that they felt good/very good and another five said that they felt ‘okay.’

Government support

Government pandemic supports were valued by respondents who received it. However, lowest income participants did not receive it. Seven participants experienced government supports as helpful and were grateful for the assistance. This included people receiving Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). Participants spoke about having more income than usual that allowed some to make needed purchases (e.g., winter tires) or continue or enhance their savings. Three participants talked about the government support as essential to their financial well-being. These participants were receiving CERB or Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) and needed the funds to pay for essentials particularly when employment and income had declined.

However, four participants indicated that the government support did little to change their finances. They were receiving CERB, the Disability economic support program or the Senior economic recovery program. The latter two programs provide recipients a one-time payment of \$200 and so are quite small. Participants receiving it were not highly enthusiastic. The one participant, in this category, receiving CERB noted, “It has been a bit better, more stable. Before if I couldn't work then I was left with less. In some ways it is helpful. But I also worry and can't plan ahead.” One person, who did not receive any government supports, communicated that she was in extreme financial stress and shared “We need help with groceries. We are eating differently now-- just carbs.”

Mental health

Worsening mental health was a prominent change that participants noted. Not being able to see friends and relatives was a source of anxiety for some while others worried about not being able to find and purchase basic staples (toilet paper, masks, and cleaning supplies). A participant with several children noted that she was overwhelmed financially with the kids at home and mentally taxed by the situation. Prior to the pandemic, one participant was receiving regular support from friends in taking care of her disabled child. During COVID-19, those friends were no longer available to assist leaving her to provide all aspects of his care.

Introduction

The Canadian Financial Diaries is a multi-year project that seeks to capture the finances and financial experiences of low- and modest-income earners in Canada. CFD collects quantitative data and the financial flows of participants and qualitative information about participants' financial experiences, well-being, and financial decision-making.

In phase 1, CFD worked with 29 participants for one year (see Table 1 in Appendix 1). During this year of in-person meetings, we met with participants weekly or semi-weekly to record financial inflows and outflows. Participants recorded their financial data on a weekly basis and then provided a written copy of those flows or talked us through their finances. Listed below is a table of the participants in phase 1, including their yearly income, major source of income, their race or ethnicity and family size. Phase one participants earn incomes that hover around Canada's official poverty line and, in fact, those who rely on social assistance or casual employment live below the poverty line.

In June of 2020, three months into Canada's experience with the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession and seven months since the completion of phase 1, the Canadian Financial Diaries field team undertook a qualitative survey [see appendix 1] with participants from the first phase of the research. The purpose of this qualitative survey was to find out how phase 1 participants were faring in the pandemic. We asked a variety of questions about employment, income, expenses, and changes in their financial well-being.

The results of the survey illustrate that low- and moderate-income earners are feeling stressed with increased expenses and uncertainty about future economic stability. Additionally, participants are emotionally taxed by less available childcare and fear for their physical safety. Participants in this study have been able to access government programs to support some of their immediate financial needs. In fact, for three participants, accessing CERB allowed them to have a higher income than as low-wage workers in their everyday jobs.

Research Methods

Survey

The COVID-19 qualitative survey with phase 1 participants from the Canadian Financial Diaries was created to learn how participants were coping economically and to an extent emotionally in the first few months of the global pandemic (Appendix 2). We sought to understand the financial lives of vulnerable persons and asked questions about employment, housing, and household finances. The survey also functioned as a check-in with previous participants.

Pandemic regulations mandated use of a virtual format for this survey. Thus, this survey was conducted via phone or Zoom, and interviewers asked questions and recorded answers in Google Form. Many participants were interested in a face-to-face meeting had it been possible.

During each hour-long interview, the first ten minutes were spent catching up with participants about their recent news (family, jobs, living situation or whatever news they wanted to share). Building these relational connections via frequent, in-person, and personal communication with participants had been a key element of success in building trust and rapport with participants in

phase 1 of the diaries. It did not take long to create that same rapport on the phone or on Zoom with this initial check-in. Much of the initial check-in information shared by the participant was then captured in the survey instrument.

The first page of the survey instrument asked for sociodemographic information including gender, age, racial or ethnic identity, and when they completed the diaries. The interviewer then posed a series of questions about 10 topics including employment, financial awareness, housing, childcare and family arrangements, government supports, income, spending, saving, borrowing and feelings about finances. At the end of each section, participants could provide any additional information about that topic.

Recruitment

The FD team began the recruitment process by writing an email or text to phase 1 participants. In this written communication, we invited participants to complete a one-time survey with us. We also utilized the phone to contact a few participants although ultimately email or text was the most successful in eliciting responses.

Many participants appeared eager to participate. This could be for a myriad of reasons including interest/need for the honorarium, the opportunity to discuss finances or given the isolation of the pandemic to connect with a researcher.

Recruitment was successful with 19 of 29 potential participants. The ten participants who chose not to contribute to this one-time survey either did not respond to emails, phone calls, or texts (7), were unavailable/unwilling to decide on a time to meet (2) or would only consent to an in-person interview format (1). Some of the participants with whom we were unable to communicate had dropped out of phase 1 several months prior to the completion of the full year of the diaries process, thus it was unsurprising that either they did not want to participate, or we no longer had accurate contact information for them.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted between June 2020 and September 2020, all in a remote format of phone or Zoom. Ten interviews were conducted by Research Coordinator (RC) Jodi Dueck-Read, while Leah Wilson, RA conducted eight interviews and one interview was conducted by Principal Investigator, Jerry Buckland.

Interviews lasted from 40 to 75 minutes. Most interviews occurred over the phone. The Zoom interviews were digitally recorded while phone interviews were not recorded. During the interview, researchers entered information manually into the survey on a Google Form.

Honorarium

The \$20 honorarium was distributed to participants via e-transfer. Four participants did not use e-transfer. We sent cash in the mail to two participants and hand-delivered cash in a socially distanced way to two participants.

Survey Participants

In this section, we present a summary of basic socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The participants come from a wide cross section of the population. Participants are diverse in age, race, or ethnicity, and all have lower to middle incomes.

Age

The age range and average age of participants from phase 1 and COVID-19 survey remained the same, accounting for a year of passage since the completion of phase 1 (Table 1).

Table 1 Age of Participants

	Phase 1 participants	COVID-19 participants
Age-range	19-63 years	21-65 years
Average age	42 years	43 years

Gender

We interviewed more women than men, in similar proportion to phase 1 as evidenced by the gender breakdown in the following chart (Table 2). The predominance of female participants resulted from sources of recruitment and gender differences in retention rates (males more likely to drop out than females); the team was satisfied with a large female sample given their under-representation in the literature.

Table 2 Gender of Participants

	Phase 1 participants		COVID-19 participants	
Men	5	17%	2	10%
Women	24	83%	17	90%
Transgender or non-binary	0		0	
Total	29		19	

Racial/ethnic background

The table on racial/ethnic background indicates that we interviewed fewer visible minorities in the COVID-19 survey as compared with the phase 1 methods (Table 3). Notably, there were far fewer Indigenous persons in the COVID-19 survey. This is due to loss of contact information or indisposition to participate.

Table 3 Racial/ethnic background

	Phase 1 participants		COVID-19 participants	
White	12	41%	10	53%
Black or African	7	24%	3	16%
Indigenous	6	20%	1	5%
Asian	4	14%	4	21%
No racial identity²	0	0	1	5%
Total	29	100%	19	100%

Housing

This table shows that most participants rent their accommodation (Table 4). Notably, one participant purchased a house or condominium between completing phase 1 and participating in the COVID-19 survey.

Table 4 Participant Housing

	Phase 1		COVID-19 survey	
Rent	25	86%	15	79%
Own house or condo	2	7%	3	16%
Lives in family house and does not pay rent	2	7%	1	5%
Total	29	100%	19	100%

The following table further breaks down the type of rental unit occupied by participants (Table 5).

² One participant did not provide a racial identify in the COVID-19 survey.

Table 5 Participant Housing by type of rental unit

	Phase 1		COVID-19 survey	
Rent apartment	15	60%	7	46%
Rent cooperative (Coop) apartment	4	16%	3	20%
Rent from MB Housing	3	12%	2	14%
Rent in rooming house	1	4%	0	0
Rent house or part of house	2	8%	3	20%
Total	25	100%	15	100%

Household

The following table shows that we interviewed many single people (Table 6). One participant is married and has five children. This table also shows the number of people working from home.

Table 6 Household composition and household members working from home

	Phase 1	COVID-19
Range of household members	1 to 7	1 to 7
Average number of household members	1.65	2.26
Persons working from home	0	7

Employment

In this section of the survey, we asked participants about their employment status since completing phase 1 of the Financial Diaries and pre-COVID-19 and when COVID-19 began. We asked how many hours they regularly work, their employment status, and the impact of COVID-19 on their employment.

In the tables below, I compare data from the 29 participants from phase 1 and the 19 participants from the COVID-19 survey (Table 7). The COVID-19 survey reveals that most participants (16 out of 19) had employment with full-time, part-time, or infrequent hours in permanent or temporary jobs after completing the first phase. This means that unemployed phase one participants were less likely to participate in the follow-up survey.

At the time of the COVID-19 survey, 12 participants were employed, two were retired, one had developed a small business and four participants were not employed, not retired nor small business owners. These four unemployed participants received income from EIA and EIA/Disability.

The participant who started a small business reported that she began selling items on the Internet for commission. She began this venture to diversify her income sources as she realized she could not count on one source of income, which previously had been a job in retail. She was laid off from her retail job and not re-hired as of her interview in late August 2020.

Table 7 Participant employment

	Phase 1		Post phase 1		At time of COVID-19 survey	
Employed	18	62%	16	84%	12	63%
Retired	2	7%	2	10%	2	10%
Small business owner	0	0	0	0	1	5%
None (not employed, not retired and not small business owner)—EIA, EIA/disability, and foster parent	9	31%	3	16%	4	21%
Total	29		19		19	

Types of employment

Participants were employed in a variety of sectors and in a variety of jobs including: early childhood education, secretarial assistant, accounts payable, research assistant, program assistant, plant propagation assistant, inbound member service representative, postal clerk, retail salesclerk, small business owner, lunchroom clerk, contractor at employment agency, administrative assistant, compensation advisor, bike mechanic, letter carrier and cleaner (Tables 8 and 9). As noted, many of these jobs are either at the assistant or clerk level. The vast majority of employed phase one participants earned a wage not well above the minimum wage (currently \$11.90/hour).

As noted in the table below, not all participants sustain themselves from employment income. In many cases, participants on EIA or EIA disability had infrequent, temporary jobs.

Table 8 Participant employment by number of hours worked

	Phase 1		COVID-19	
Full-time (35+ hours/week)	10	55%	7	58%
Part-time (15-32 hours/week)	3	16%	2	16%
Infrequent (>15 hours/week)	5	27%	3	25%
Total	18		12	

We note that the COVID-19 survey has only one fewer participant from the permanent employment category but five fewer participants from the temporary employment category. Poorer diaries participants were under-represented in the COVID-19 survey.

Table 9 Participant employment by status of employment

	Phase 1	COVID-19
Permanent	7	6
Temporary (includes seasonal employment, term or contract work, casual jobs, and other short-term work)	11	6
Total	18	12

Income

Monthly household income, by category, was estimated by the participants (Table 10). It ranged from \$465 to \$4,700 with an average of \$2,328 and a median of \$2,153.

Table 10 Type and amount of monthly income by categories

Participant	Government support	Employment	Family	Informal sales/gig economy	Total
1	\$2000 \$106	0	0	0	\$2106
2	\$1150	0	0	0	\$1150
3	\$465	0	0	0	\$465
4	\$900	0	\$200	0	\$1100
5	0	\$3700 (two jobs)	0	0	\$3700
6	\$600-700	1693	0	0	\$2293
7	\$2000	0	0	Unknown	\$2000
8	Unknown	0	0	0	Unknown
9	0	\$3,208	0	0	\$3208
10	\$292	\$2000	2200	300	\$4800
11	0	\$4333	0	0	\$4333
12	\$800	\$1000	0	0	\$1800
12	0	\$2200	Informal/ food	0	\$2200
14	0	\$2000	300	0	\$2300
15	0	\$2600	0	0	\$2600
16	0	\$1600-\$2000	0	0	\$1600-\$2000
17	1300	0	0	0	\$1300
18	2000	0	0	0-200	\$2000
19	550	2200	Irregular	0	\$2750

Research Results

Household changes during COVID

In this section we asked participants about their current housing situation, how many people were in their household, changes in household numbers, the number of people working from home in their household, and about any other changes that may have occurred in their living situation.

When participants were asked about household changes during the pandemic, twelve participants reported no changes. Seven participants reported changes from an increase in expenses, to being at home, an inability to pay mortgage due to lost income, a move from one city to another, and changes in building protocols because of COVID-19 (Table 11). These actions are caused by the pandemic, the economic recession, or the participants' response to these global changes.

Only two participants reported an increase in the number of people living in their homes and both were due to the closure of universities. In one household³, some members returned home after universities closed and, in another household, the roommate of one participant had to return home (outside the province) earlier than anticipated because of university closures.

Table 11 Household changes during COVID-19

Change	Financial impact
More expenses	“Now the bills are increasing with everyone at home. Water bill-doubled, electric bill-increased with everyone home. Just husband and son going out”
Stopped paying mortgage for 1 month	One participant reported that her housemate had to move out earlier because of the pandemic. This caused the participant to lose some income. She also was not employed for one week. She stopped paying her mortgage for one month.
Job in another province and moved into a bachelor apartment instead of living with a roommate.	More expenses for food and living
Some household improvements	Unknown
Changes due to COVID (less people allowed in building and more cleaning and distance protocols)	N/A

³ In both cases household refers to people living in the same unit although they may or may not share food or other housing expenses.

Other household changes

When completing this section on household changes, we asked a broad question about household changes that participants have experienced since the pandemic began. There was much variation in responses from required adaptations to COVID-19 protocols and these responses demonstrate the struggles participants faced and their resilience to deal with the pandemic and economic recession. They include:

- Decline in household income
- A rise in household expenses, e.g., groceries for family members staying at home
- Concerns about one's health vulnerabilities
- Impact on mental health
- Less support available to assist with disabled child, and
- Hope for improvements in the future, e.g., housing changes.

Worsening mental health was the most prominent change. A few participants noted the negative impact of pandemic regulations on their mental health. Not being able to see friends and relatives was a source of anxiety for some while others worried about not being able to find and purchase basic staples (toilet paper, masks, and cleaning supplies). A participant with several children noted that she was overwhelmed financially with the kids at home and mentally taxed by the situation. Prior to the pandemic, one participant was receiving somewhat regular support from friends in taking care of her disabled child. During COVID-19, those friends were no longer available to assist leaving her to provide all aspects of his care.

Two participants had hoped to change their living situations but because of COVID-19, they chose not to or viewed it as difficult or impossible. This included one participant living with their family who had hoped to move out on their own and another participant who had hoped to find a different apartment to rent.

Situations of care

In this section, we asked participants about their childcare and family arrangements. We asked whether they had children, disabled persons, or seniors to care for and what the arrangements had been prior to the pandemic and now during COVID-19 (Table 12). During this time ('wave one') the COVID-19 pandemic led the government to close daycares and schools and halted school-age programs changing household dynamics and situations of care for children, disabled people, and seniors. Respondents who are caregivers noted that they faced added responsibilities during the lockdown.

Table 121 Situations of care and impact on participants

Situations of care	Number of families	Barriers	Impacts
Participant with disability	1		Reported difficulty in finding care for nights and weekends.
Participant with terminal partner	1		One participant reported spending more time taking care of a partner with a terminal illness
Children under 18	4		Children are at home more and need more care and resources such as computer printers. One participant notes the children eat much more at home.
Disabled children under 18	2 of the 4 families with children under 18	Racialized refugee family	One participant reported finding care for her disabled son after several months providing his care as a single parent. She indicated that she could not find a school-age program for him and instead found a temporary fix for him to attend a daycare facility, which he has aged out of.
		Racialized newcomer family	Another participant with a disabled child noted that she and her husband share responsibilities for their teenager. While they are eligible for respite care, in this era of COVID-19, they have decided to care for his well-being themselves. This participant also requested and was granted a period of COVID leave through their workplace to increase the amount of personal time caring for child.

Government Financial Supports

In this section, we asked participants what government supports they regularly received prior to the pandemic. We then asked about their awareness of government programs that could assist them during COVID-19, what government supports they were receiving, their awareness about other friends or family receiving such supports, how they learned about economic support programs and if they acquired assistance in filling out the application. Lastly, we asked participants their

understanding of how the government program worked and how this assistance affected their finances.

Many participants received some type of government support including the provincial social assistance support (5 respondents), federal employment insurance (3 people), provincial assistance for rent (3 respondents), and federal GST repayment (15 participants).

Table 13 Government supports that people were receiving prior to the start of the pandemic

	Number of participants
Rent Assist	3
GST	15
Child tax benefit	4
EIA	5
EI	3
OAS	1
CPP	1
Disability credit	1
Student loan	1

As evidence in the next set of tables (Table 14 and 15), a majority of CFD participants were aware of COVID-19 supports from the federal and/or provincial governments.

Table 14 Number of participants aware of government programs to assist or provide additional monies during the pandemic

Aware	Unaware
15	4

Table 15 Number of participants whose family or friends are receiving economic COVID-19 supports from government

Yes	No	Don't know/maybe
14	3	2

Thirteen of the 19 CFD participants accessed economic supports during the pandemic (Table 16).

Table 16 Number of participants receiving economic COVID-19 government supports

Yes	No
13	6

CFD participants depend on the news (7 respondents) and Internet (5 participants), and friends and family (4 people) as sources to learn more about financial assistance during the pandemic (Table 17).

Table 17 Ways participants learned about economic COVID-19 supports from government

News	7
Internet	5
Friends/family	4
Work	1
Community organization	1
Bank account	1
Multiple sources	6

Those CFD participants, who received supports, completed the required government forms and the majority did so without assistance (18 and 19).

Table 18 Number of participants who completed an application to receive additional COVID-19 economic supports from government

Yes	11
No	8

Table 19 Number of participants accessing assistance to fill out COVID-19 economic supports applications

Yes	2	One participant assisted her husband to fill out the form
		Another participant contacted Service Canada for assistance.
No	9	
N/A	7	

Seven of 19 participants received CERB as a primary source of financial inflows during the early months of the pandemic (Table 20). In addition, some participants received of the much smaller one-time funding from the province.

Table 20 Type of COVID-19 economic support accessed

CERB or CERB/EI	7
None or N/A	7
Disability economic support program (MB)	1

MB government frontline worker (MB Risk Recognition program)	2
Seniors economic recovery credit (MB)	1
Unsure (CERB or CESB)	1

Participants explained how the government programs functioned and assessed the ease of access to this program (Table 21). Most participants receiving the assistance said that accessing it was straightforward. However, one participant noted that it was complicated and experienced some frustration, “[t]he EI route asked lots of super detailed questions that were frustrating and apparently you had to provide that information.” Some participants received the money after applying for it, while a few others, saw monies appear in their chequing accounts without previous knowledge of when it would appear.

Table 21 Functioning of COVID-19 economic support program.

CERB	“Awesome. It's just like EI, I do it Friday nights and get it on my bank on Tuesday.”
	“CERB works as relief money from the federal budget, given to people who lost their jobs and slowed down businesses as a result of COVID, and with that slow-down, employment ceased with employer, and filling out bi-weekly reports, received the benefit. Provincial incentive-encourage people who are on CERB to not be on CERB because it's a financial burden on the federal government, while also keeping businesses going back to full pre-virus capacity. Had to apply during certain period of time, which qualified for. Applied through an online application.”
	“Application-complicated, went through EI route and the CRA process was supposedly simpler. The EI route asked lots of super detailed questions that were frustrating and apparently you had to provide that information. Tracked down paycheque history-had to access that through a third-party website. Eventually got that sorted and the cheques came easily. Had to then resubmit through EI reporting, got that done and then continued to get support.”
	“If you meet the qualifications you apply at the first Monday of the month and it appears in your account in 3 business days.”
Unsure if CERB or CESB	“Phone call—I was informed this was faster. Direct deposit through banking in 2 business days.”
Disability economic support program	“I received a one-time cheque.”
MB government frontline worker	“They will contact me about the amount. We have not received it yet and we think it will be \$1000 but we do not know.”
	“Applied online & received direct deposits”
Senior economic recovery credit	“OAS and pension decipher how much you get.”

In the following table (Table 22), I categorized the financial impact of government supports on participant finances by developing themes. Fifteen participants responded to this question. Most participants who received the relatively substantial CERB support were satisfied. However, those unemployed people who received smaller provincial supports were not well supported.

- Seven participants experienced government supports as helpful and were grateful for the assistance. This included people receiving CERB or various provincial supports (Disability

economic support program, MB government frontline worker, Senior economic recovery credit). Participants spoke about having more income than usual that allowed some to make needed purchases (e.g., winter tires) or continue or enhance their savings.

- Three participants talked about the government support as essential to their financial well-being. These participants were receiving CERB or CESB and needed the funds to pay for essentials particularly when employment and income had declined.
- Four participants indicated that the government support did little to change their finances. They were receiving CERB, the Disability economic support program or the Seniors Economic Recovery Credit. Senior economic recovery program. The latter two programs provide recipients a one-time payment of \$200 and so are quite small. Participants receiving it were not highly enthusiastic. The one participant, in this category, receiving CERB noted, “It has been a bit better, more stable. Before if I couldn't work then I was left with less. In some ways it is helpful. But I also worry and can't plan ahead.”
- One person, who did not receive any government supports, communicated that she was in extreme financial stress and shared “We need help with groceries. We are eating differently now--just carbs.”
- Four participants did not respond to this question.

Table 22 Financial impact of economic government supports on participant finances.

	Participant experience	Type of government economic supports
Helpful and allowed participant to pay bills, purchase big item or to save	“I got more money in my bank than I've had in 10 years. I got my income tax, GST, the second whammy of GST, \$2000 from CERB all in two weeks. It's been very good. I put some aside for the end of the year.”	CERB/EI
	“I have paid ahead on my bills. I can put the money I receive from EIA into the bank. It has helped me in that way.” It has helped me. If we have another pandemic and I am single with only single support, it might not help me. My answers will change when I am without a child.	EIA/Disability; Disability economic support program
	“Really helpful. This has been a big support for me. Before this I never earned \$2000 a month. When I got it, it was a big help for me. But still I wonder how things will happen after?”	CERB
	Significant benefit for continuing to meet savings goals, was able to save quite a bit of the money rewarded through the benefit. Resulting in comfortability and confidence in finances, looking	CERB

	Participant experience	Type of government economic supports
	forward to the next 5-10 years. Without funding, would have had to dip into savings and had the opposite effect.	
	“Money is good. We bought a car at the beginning of the pandemic. We need winter tires.”	MB government frontline worker
	Additional support was a nice surprise and applied to line of credit. Applied to additional costs coming in from dog bills	Senior Economic Recovery Credit
	Very good, \$2000 was beneficial and more than regular compensation.	CERB
Essential	“Yes, it was essential. Even if working during pandemic, the income would not be enough. Even with hours the same pre-pandemic-all the costs are double now.” Kids are eating all the time at home, usually going shopping once a week. Now goes every two of three days to provide for kids and family. The support was a rescue from the government.	CERB or CESB
	“It helps a lot because my husband was laid off and we were worried when he would be back to work. How would things work in the next months? It helps a lot.”	CERB
	Participant would have become a burden on parents who take care of bills. If that didn't come through, then would have been uncomfortable as she did not want to ask parents for money.	CERB
Not big impact	It helped a little; didn't do much.	Disability Economic Support Program
	“I sent Pallister a letter and told him that the cheque was a slap in the face and the letter was only to make him look good. People living in poverty can't afford masks. The intention of the money was for helping to pay bills, groceries and other equipment needed to protect yourself.”	
	“It helps a little bit. I am aware of my budget. I am trying to keep just a little bit.”	Senior Economic Recovery Credit
	“It has been a bit better, more stable. Before if I couldn't work then I was left with less. In some	CERB

	Participant experience	Type of government economic supports
	ways it is helpful. But I also worry and can't plan ahead.”	
	I didn't even realize about the GST additional supports.	
Participant in economic distress	We need help with groceries. We are eating differently now--just carbs.	Nothing

When we asked participants if they had further comments on government supports one person indicated that she has a lot of issue with childcare for her disabled child and needs to pay privately to have a sitter on occasion, which is an additional expense. Another participant noted the economic and emotional stress of the pandemic by saying that “CERB and EI are stressful along with my health.”

Internet and Information Communications Technology

We asked participants how they accessed the Internet from home, whether they use the Internet for managing finances, and how their use of the Internet may have changed since the pandemic began.

The majority of CFD participants access the Internet through Wi-Fi at their homes.

Table 23 Number of participants with Internet access at home and mode of access

Wi-Fi	16
Phone data	1
No Internet access at home	2

Fifteen CFD participants use online banking, while four participants reported that they go to the bank or use phone banking. Additionally, four participants do not use e-transfers.

Table 24 Use of bank websites or apps to manage finances

Use bank website or apps to manage finances	No. of participants	How use
Yes	15	Online banking, e-transfers
No	4	Go to bank (3), Phone banking (3)

Impact of COVID-19 on employment

The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected participant employment and this occurred in several ways (Table 25). The people who were most seriously affected were those who were casually employed and did not receive, or did not apply for, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). Some were able to make some adjustments to continue to work while others were not. Two participants with infrequent, temporary jobs reported losing their jobs entirely. Other participants were able to adjust continue with some employment. Two participants reported shifting their work from office to home⁴. Two participants began entrepreneurial ventures in the informal economy. One of them began selling items on the Internet for commission, making and selling earrings and charging more for photography sessions. Another participant reported starting an “Etsy” store.

Some participants more fully and permanently employed, were laid off for a period of two to five months during which the permanent full-time employees reported receiving CERB (this is discussed further below, in the section on government supports).

Table 25 Employment changes because of pandemic

Employment changes	Number of people	Type of work
No major changes	7	Participants that did not work previously or were retired participants did not report any major changes to their employment. Two participants working in accounts payable and in a seasonal position also reported no major changes to their employment.
Laid-off for a period of 2-5 months	3	The early childhood educator (full-time, permanent) returned to work on June 25, 2020 after not working since mid-March 2020. She collected CERB during that time.
		The bicycle mechanic/educator (full-time, permanent) did not work for three months and collected CERB.
		One salesclerk (full-time, permanent) was laid off for a period of two months during which she started an “Etsy” store.
Job was lost	2	Two participants receiving EIA as their main source of income also reported losing their infrequent and temporary jobs as research assistant & lunch clerk. The participant who was a

⁴ Seven participants report working from home. Only two participants reported this as a major change to employment.

Employment changes	Number of people	Type of work
		research assistant retained one of her other temporary, infrequent jobs. The lunch clerk reported no other employment.
Experienced short period of unemployment (1 week)	1	The letter carrier with a temporary, part-time job sustained a week of unemployment and has been otherwise employed.
No available work	1	A participant receiving EIA/Disability reported that she has not been called for her infrequent, temporary job as a receptionist since COVID-19 began and as she does not have skills to do this job remotely, she does not think that she will get this job back.
Unable to work due to poor mental health	1	This participant who has a full-time, temporary position as a contractor at temporary agency reports that her mental health has been too grave to consider working during this time.
Working from home	2	The inbound service call representative and program assistant reported working from home.

Income changes

Participants were asked how their income had been affected by the pandemic and economic recession. In asking these questions, we found that ten participants reported an increase in their income; two participants noted a decrease and for seven participants their income stayed the same. They rated the type of increase or decrease from little, incremental to dramatic. As we will see below, it was the better-off and employed participants, receiving CERB who felt supported. Meanwhile, unemployed people ineligible for CERB found little support during this time even as their limited casual income declined and their costs (see below) increased.

Table 26 Impact of pandemic on income

Little to no increase	3		
Incremental increase	3	Dramatic decrease	1
Dramatic increase	4	Little to no decrease	1
Total increase	10	Total decrease	2
		Stayed the same	7

Sources of income change

Participants noted a variety of ways that their income has fluctuated or changed. Notably four participants talk about the monies from CERB as providing more income. Among the other reasons for fluctuations are other governmental supports, a job promotion and raise, less informal sales of art, more sales on an online platform and the move from part-time to full-time employment.

Other fluctuations in income

One participant noted that EIA recipients did not get additional monies during the pandemic. “Some people got additional money but not us as single people. It is like punishment that we don't get any additional supports. There are a lot of scams. Now they will take time for the government to get it back. We should have gotten at least an additional \$300 or food assistance or something.”

One participant noted that she is seeking additional sources of income in addition to CERB/EI. She counts on her foster mom for small loans to purchase laundry services or cigarettes. She notes that she recently borrowed money to pay for a doctor’s note, a requirement to apply for the disability tax credit.

Another participant noted that working from home provided a financial benefit as they expend less for transportation.

Spending

In this section, we asked participants about their spending habits during the pandemic. In particular, we asked what they were spending money on, how the pandemic has shifted what they spend money on, whether they perceive that they are spending more money now, and how the pandemic influences where they spend money.

In terms of shifts in spending, participants provided many nuanced responses. Some participants note their spending has stayed the same, some report a reduction in spending and some participants

report an increase in spending. However, when asked whether participants are spending more or less money since COVID-19 began, most reported spending more (Table 27).

Table 27 Participant perception of spending

More	12
Less	5
Same	2

Twelve or 63% of participants thought their spending went up during the lockdown. Reasons for the rise include using taxis instead of busses, facing an increased cost for groceries, dealing with new expenses for cleaning supplies and masks, and being forced to buy clothes online instead of in secondhand shops.

In terms of how the pandemic has changed where they purchase items, most participants responded to this question regarding their food or grocery purchases. Many report staying closer to home to purchase items and thus sometimes buying from more expensive stores, an attempt to purchase in smaller rather than bigger-box stores and attempts to make purchases less often. Some report buying online because they cannot shop with their child or because transportation has become difficult.

Several participants note a relationship between spending and mental health. One person reported an increase in spending on cigarettes, another person noted spending more on food for comfort, and another notes that she is more worrisome and that her anxiety is increasing due to shaky finances.

Some participants found that they did not spend much during the early months of lockdown (when many stores were closed and some participants did not go to work) and then spending increased as they were able to leave their homes, go back to work or as restaurants opened. Ultimately, participants perceive they spend more money when they can leave the house and shop in retail outlets. Given most participants live near the poverty line and are spending largely on necessities, the short-term decline in spending will likely be followed by a rise in spending, to purchase badly needed goods and services.

Transactions

In this section, we asked participants about their experience using debit and credit cards as primary modes of transactions and their perception of credit card spending. All participants (19) reported that they had a debit card. Fourteen participants also had credit cards while participants report having no credit card to use for purchases. Some participants reported that using debit or credit was not a change for them. One person reported that she had started using credit more often because of phase 1 and learning that she only had a certain number of debit transactions for which she was paying. Many people were using debit/credit cards more since the pandemic lockdown. We found that,

- Three participants report that they use credit card for everything. “I used to use a lot of cash for all kinds of things but now I use credit card for everything. I don't use cash.”
- Six participants report increased spending using a credit card (online buying, takeaway). Only one participant reported spending less on their credit card.

Participants voiced different experiences using debit/credit cards more frequently. Here are some of their comments,

- “Cash is dirty and has germs.”
- Using cash will keep people working at the bank so we do not become a cashless and ‘personless’ economy
- For those who rely on debit cards, they recognize the number of transactions they can make is limited and beyond that they pay additional fees. This puts them at a disadvantage
- Debit/credit-based transaction seemed less real, ‘I don’t see the money’
- Even after shifting to the digital payment participant still tracks credit card use on paper

Savings

We asked participants several questions about their savings habits in part to see if their savings habits had changed since the pandemic began. Questions that were asked included, whether they were currently saving money, how they were saving money, whether saving money was a change from a pre-pandemic practice, if participants had taken from savings to spend in the pandemic, how much they were saving, where they save money, what tools or services they were using to save money, and the intention of their savings. The results of these questions are summarized below (Tables 28 through 34). Most participants, 13 of 19, are currently saving money (Table 28). Most of that savings goes to financial institutions (13) and some is saved informally (1) (Table 29).

Table 28 Currently saving money

Yes	13
No	6

Table 29 Types of saving by number of participants

Types of saving	No. of participants saving this way
Savings account at bank	4
High-interest savings at bank	1
Home in cash	1
TFSA	5
GIC	1
Automatic payment to savings from employer	1
RRSP	1
Stock portfolio	1

Of the 13 participants currently saving, seven of them stated they are saving more since the pandemic lockdown (Table 30). One participant reported saving less and the remaining five participants did not comment. This is at odds with the national level trends that showed average Canadian households were increasing their savings at this time. This reinforces the point that most diaries participants, living near or below the poverty line, are not a good position to save more.

Table 30 Sense of savings amount

Saving more since pandemic began	Saving less than when pandemic began	No comment or N/A
7	1	11

Moreover, nine of 19 participants said that they had dipped into existing savings to meet spending needs during the lockdown. Items that they needed these funds for are largely basic necessities such as groceries and utility bills (Table 31).

Table 31 Use of savings during COVID-19

Have you used any money from your savings during the COVID-19 pandemic?		How/why and amounts of savings used
No	10	
Yes	9	“I spent money from my TFSA--everything. What do you eat with \$50 for food?”

Have you used any money from your savings during the COVID-19 pandemic?		How/why and amounts of savings used
		<p>“Sometimes when the credit card is due, I have to dip into my savings. “</p> <p>To pay bills</p> <p>I have a savings and have had to use some of it for the pandemic.</p> <p>“Used for unexpected utilities bills and ordering food, printing costs incurred as a result of the pandemic. With Ramadan coming, used money for savings. Unexpected water bills covered with money from savings. When submitted meter readings to hydro, didn't read it for once or twice, hydro said no, but after this, they said the readings were low and they said it was much higher. Higher hydro costs as a result of pandemic-almost \$1000 in cost.”</p> <p>TFSA, and daily savings account-did use a bit of money in the beginning when wasn't working but after that, has been adding and replacing that money.</p> <p>Moved funds from savings to chequing-only \$20</p> <p>At the highest level she had \$7,000, used \$1000, and now has \$6,000</p>

Table 32 Savings amounts

Savings or no savings	Comment
No savings-3	I had \$10 last week but I used it all.
Savings-16	Personal savings \$600
	Disability savings account and RESP for son.
	RESP \$5000 for daughter
	RRSP but I try not to touch it.
	We bought a car with our savings two weeks before the pandemic began.

Savings or no savings	Comment
	Just got a retirement savings--TFSA. I have years to become something.
	Almost all money in savings
	TFSA-10% of everything goes to TFSA, no cap on how much goes in there. High interest savings account Another TFSA investment account-\$100/month Stock portfolio -dividend based so it has income on it's own, \$3/month Regular savings account-CERB money there.
	I have savings broken down --I have a TFSA for the house and bank savings in 5 categories for dental, travel, car, education and mental health.
	Whatever I can save I leave in my savings account. I might have to go back to work.
	Different goals for different accounts. Priority wise, 5 months ahead is the main goal. Puts more money into what wants to hit first. And wants to pay off student loans.

Table 33 Why saving more or less now?

Anxiety about future/environment is unpredictable
Future orientation
Reduced daily expenses of transportation so more money to save
Spending less and working more
More income so more saving

Table 34 Intention for saving

Future
Holiday
Ongoing expenses
House
Tuition

Borrowing

In this section, we asked a series of questions about loans: what kind of loans they currently had, and how much they owed. In particular, we were curious if people had taken out any loans during the pandemic.

As illustrated in the table below, nine participants currently have loans from family members, government institutions and private lenders. While the exact dates of these loans is mostly unknown, all of them pre-date the pandemic. Three of the nine participants have two loans, while one participant has three loans. There are two car loans, two mortgage loans and four school loans.

Table 35 Loans

Participant #	Name of loan	Currently paying	Date of loan, if known	Monthly payment	Lender	Total amount to pay
1	Sister	Yes	Unknown, prior to pandemic	\$100-\$200	Sister	\$7200
1	School	Yes	Unknown, prior to pandemic	\$25	Unknown	\$300
2	Credit card	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	\$400
3	Car	Yes	February 2020	Unknown	TD Bank	\$25,000
4	Student	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
4	Family	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Family and friends	\$5000
5	Student	Not paying during pandemic	Unknown, prior to pandemic	Unknown	Government	\$14,000
6	Household line of credit	Unknown	Unknown, prior to pandemic	Unknown	Unknown	\$400
7	Mortgage	Yes	Unknown, prior to pandemic	\$1000	Unknown	Unknown

Participant #	Name of loan	Currently paying	Date of loan, if known	Monthly payment	Lender	Total amount to pay
8	Mortgage	Yes	Unknown, prior to pandemic	\$740	RBC	\$145,000
8	Car loan	Yes	Unknown, prior to pandemic	\$240	Scotiabank	\$7500
8	For Down payment	No	Unknown, prior to pandemic	Unknown	Father	Unknown
9	Student	No	Unknown, prior to pandemic	Unknown	MB government	\$4500
9	Student	No	Unknown, prior to pandemic	Unknown	Federal government	\$1000

Feelings about finances

In this section of the survey, we asked how participants felt about their finances. In particular, we asked how COVID-19 has affected their feelings about finances, how their finances are different now than pre-COVID, and what they would tell a government official about their finances during the pandemic. Lastly, we opened a space to invite them to talk about whatever aspect of their finances was not covered in this survey and provide any concluding thoughts.

The first question asked participants how they felt about their finances. Most responses tied in with the impact of the pandemic and economic recession. Nine of the 19 respondents feel insecure, worried, and or stressed about their finances. People voiced concerns that they have insufficient income and that it might get worse for their finances. Some share that they needed a little more to ‘make ends meet.’ One seasonally employed participant noted, “Well, I just paid my car insurance and then I was feeling stressed. This has to do with having a seasonal job. This is in my chequing account and I need money for the winter, I do have more paycheques coming in. I go between stressed and not.”

Other respondents voiced greater concern, in some cases comments bordered on desperation. One participant noted, “If something drastic happens or I get ill or unable to work, how do we eat? EIA is not enough...It gets really scary for me. I am a single parent and I am responsible for my child and it gets scary.” Another respondent noted, “I feel very low. I have really bad feelings. No way to make it work...”

Five respondents shared that they felt good/very good and another five said that they felt ‘okay.’

Table 36 How do you feel about your finances?

Feelings about finances	#	Comments
Good/very good	5	
Okay	5	
Insecure/need more income/worrisome/stressed	9	I feel very low. I have really bad feelings. No way to make it work--out of balance, disproportionate. I need at least \$200-\$300 more to make it.
		I need help/more income.
		I feel insecure, the reason why I decided to get lots of insurance. If something drastic happens or I get ill or unable to work, how do we eat? EIA is not enough. That is why i took a lot of insurance so i can make it through the storm. This is why I also have student loans. I am a student and I see how people struggle. It gets really scary for me. I am a single parent and I am responsible for my child and it gets scary.
		I am more worrisome when EI/CERB ends. I am looking into starting my own business. Starting a business will be hard.
		It provokes some anxiety and with the time, I am trying to use logic with my present situation and realized that in the past I was taking for granted whatever money I had. It made me very aware of self-conscious about my finances. I still like to do some more budgets. I am trying to cut some more corners, minimize my life-style.
		Not secure, unknown, worried about not only the past but what is coming.
		Well, I just paid my car insurance and then I was feeling stressed. This has to do with having a seasonal job. This is in my chequing account and I need money for the winter, I do have more paycheques coming in. I go between stressed and not.

Feelings about finances	#	Comments
		Little bit more worried than usual, as not making as much before last September and has tuition, mortgage, insurance to pay off. So lots of financial burden at the moment. But is very happy with own place, was worth the move but worried about the future

Participants were asked a related question, specifically, how the pandemic and economic recession was affecting their feeling about finances. Responses were like the question above. Eleven of the 19 respondents voiced fear, worry, or insecurity about their finances in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some people voiced moderate concerns, for instance, one participant shared, “We are a bit afraid to spend money. When we bought the car, we did not know this would happen.” Another participant reflected more concern stating, “Expenses are increasing. You are now taking more money out. I'm not sure how to continue.” And some participants reflected fear, one sharing,

I was actually very fragile. I just trying to get to safety, concerned about my life, so I learned to be indoors to work with my life and not get wrapped up in the situation and to be stronger emotionally and to work with the limitations.

Participants also reflected resilience in moving on with their lives. One participant noted that once they found hand sanitizer, they were able to continue with their lives. Another participant found a way to make their own soap.

Table 37 COVID-19 impact on participant feelings about finances

Feelings about finances	#	Comment
Scared/worrisome/insecure	11	“It's a little scary not knowing how bad or how long it is going to get. The horror of that first weekend when the grocery shelves were empty. I drove down Main Street and there was not a car to be seen and I saw the sign about COVID testing and it was mind-blowing.”
		“It has made it worse without any assistance from the government.”
		“Just made me frustrated. It has been difficult to find things we need and purchase them. I want to do my part in COVID-19 and I am unable to at times. Now, I can because I finally found places where I can buy hand sanitizer. My mom had to make masks for us.”

Feelings about finances	#	Comment
		<p>“We are a bit afraid to spend money. When we bought the car we did not know this would happen. I don't want to buy a house now.”</p> <p>“It has made it more scary because of the infections. We pray it does not happen here. What if this happens? How do we manage? Expenses are increasing. You are now taking more money out. I'm not sure how to continue.”</p> <p>“I was actually very fragile. I just trying to get to safety, concerned about my life, so I learned to be indoors to work with my life and not get wrapped up in the situation and to be stronger emotionally and to work with the limitations. I have a roof and place to be. I have learned to use and make cleaning supplies. I am making my own soap.”</p> <p>“I felt pretty upset about my ceramic studio and the loss of money from the ceramics.”</p> <p>“It's scary because nothing is permanent and things change--workwise. Will we always have work so we have to be ready financially?”</p> <p>She has concerns about a possible shut down</p>
More awareness of finances	4	
No change	2	
Increased guilt	1	Has a guilty feeling because now knows it's possible to save more but just doesn't. When everything shut down, realized could cut excess costs but it highlighted that this is possible. Stress eats junk food so as soon as back to work-this increased as there's a grocery store next door.
More money	1	

Finally, in terms of participant experiences, a question asked how they felt they were managing their finances through the recession. Three shared that they had no problems and five said that it was difficult. These respondents noted that online purchases can be expensive, that working from home creates greater pressure or opportunity to impulse buy, and one mother noted several challenges,

It has been more difficult because we have to spend on things we did not need before. It is not that easy any more. Everything has to be private, like taxis to get around. Some days I don't have anyone to stay with my son and it is very expensive.

Table 38 Managing finances during COVID-19

Easy	2	
Better	1	
Difficult	5	It has been more difficult because we have to spend on things we did not need before. It is not that easy any more. Everything has to be private, like taxis to get around. Some days I don't have anyone to stay with my son and it is very expensive.
		It has been a bit tricky because of online credit purchases, I did not feel like I was spending much and it didn't end up being a savings. I paid things as I normally would have. Maybe a few clothing purchases that I would have made
		I would say I am not that good because during the pandemic we stay home so sometimes you feel burnout at work, because you get disoriented because of working at home so I tend to buy stuff online and then go out and buy stuff that I don't really need. Sometimes you just decide to buy stuff which is not good.
Managing	3	I feel like I am managing but only because of the help of others. I've gotten a few hampers and am now getting on every week from Bear Clan. I don't have to spend as much on groceries now.
		Nice to not spend as much money on going out, but stressful without spending money on those stress reliving activities, including shopping, going out with friends, mostly other activities like dance classes.
Same or similar	2	

Finally, respondents were asked an open-ended question, 'When you think about your finances now in comparison to before the pandemic, what would you say is different?' This is a list of participants' responses,

- "I am spending less money so more money is staying in the bank. The opportunities to spend money are less. I don't go out. When I go back to work, I am going to watch where it goes."

- “I can pay my bills two weeks before the due date instead of just a week. I want pandemic to end and get back to normal; it's the new normal and the government can't support us all for a long time. In some ways people are complaining or struggling.”
- “I would have to say that I'm more buying things like cleaners and stuff and I have a good stock of it now. I used to buy it only when needed and now I am stocked up.”
- “Not a huge impact. We kept jobs so things are the same.”
- “The only thing that is different is that I have had access to more money, because I got \$2000 a month and I've never had that much. I am not doing more savings than before so it is just a balance of the impact of COVID. Receive more money then you spend more money.”
- “Before I didn't work I didn't eat. But now I can eat. I am very worried and stressed all the time. It has negatively impacted my health.”
- “You can deal with less. Always be aware of your needs. Before I might choose something for fun (a little bit) and I knew that I can probably avoid it. I start to be more conscious of the value of money. I have been helping relatives who have full time jobs, but then I pay the consequences. It was how I was feeling in that moment. I learned a lot and feel more aware and how to control my finances.”
- Before the crisis, everything was stable, for a long time, felt stable and got from resources. Process as normal, but now it's different. The schools provide limited options and this is an unknown. Spent more on cleaning products, hand sanitizers. Never purchased these before but has had to now. Required in all transport, in house, these are all extra expenses. Even small daughter has worried about this.
- Uncertain but manageable
- A little less stability. The mechanics job probably will not happen so less work in winter. “The one job that I have is stable but hooking up with other odd jobs is more difficult.”
- “I would say because of working from home it has given me more flexibility because of the other expenses that were taken off me (transportation and others), so it helps.”
- Spend more on groceries-a little bit more, goes all out with trying new things and trying different cuisines, but spending less on going out-only on picnics and camping, so things that need less money
- Similar feelings to before the pandemic but highlighted certain feelings during
- Not too much besides eating more take-out
- Intentions-with buying intentionally and evaluating things before purchasing, i.e. instead of impulse buying. Things that thought had figured out-realized it might not work. Had to

change views on things financially, has a clearer view on what wants to accomplish and be at. Opened eyes. Mentors help with stock and keeping a balance in stock.

- Work is more consistent as is the income now, as compared to before when she was PT. Now she is FT and permanent which adds stability

Twelve of the 19 participants thought they were facing more financial volatility ‘ups and downs,’ since the pandemic began. Some respondents noted how this led to more anxiety and depression. One respondent noted the ‘bright side’ of their experience through the lockdown,

“The ups and downs have in some ways been positive. For example, biking rather than going to restaurants and drinking. After first month of not knowing what was going to happen, got to save more as spending was limited.”

Table 39 Participant assessment of ups and downs in the pandemic: Have you experienced more ups and downs since the pandemic?

Yes	12
No	6
No answer/unclear	1

Final thoughts on finances

Only four participants report that they do not think more about finances while 15 participants report spending more time thinking or worrying about finances during COVID-19.

“Finances have made me stressed. COVID also stresses me out. It has taken a huge toll on my health and well-being. I want to be mentally stable and not stressed out.”

“Finances were a forefront thought during the pandemic and provided the opportunity to look at things in detail. Now I have more awareness of little details and it is more present in mind now than before. I never used to be overly concerned, but now I am constantly checking banking, interest rates, savings. The interest rates for savings were a big shock.”

Financial knowledge

In this section of the survey, we asked questions about participants’ financial awareness, what they had learned since completing the diaries, and what courses or training they may have completed during the year.

Participants considered how their financial knowledge and practices had changed since completing the diaries. Participants reported that their financial goals, tracking of finances and their ability to budget or save was dependent on their financial situation. But most participants noted changes in their financial practices after or because of phase 1 of the Financial Diaries. Many of these practices include (continued) careful monitoring of expenses as well as reducing expenses, getting a raise, getting out of debt, and setting a savings goal (Table 40).

One participant noted significant changes in their mental and financial health because of their participation in the diaries,

My goal has always been to save and invest. When starting the [Canadian Financial Diaries] project, I had lots of debt but towards the end of 2018, I was mentally and financially free with paying off debt. I had mental peace and was able to sleep at night. I'm saving now and investing in mutual funds.

Table 40 Participant report of financial practice change as result or after CFD to improve finances

Financial practice	No. of participants
Tracking finances/watching expenses	10
Budgeting & saving	3
Shopping at a grocery store rather than a convenience store	1
Getting a raise	1
Getting out of debt	1
Creating own income to diversify income sources	1
Considering new low-risk investments	1

When asked about other ways that they have attained knowledge about their finances since the completion of phase one, 14 participants reported no new specific learning while five participants reported learning about debt consolidation, savings, mortgage and investment, and the foreign exchange market.

Table 41 Participants financial knowledge acquisition and how attained

Knowledge attained	How
Debt consolidation	Meeting with a debt consolidator
Savings	Participation in a savings circle
Mortgage and investment	Completion of Certificate with the Insurance Council of Manitoba
Retirement saving, how to save and pay off debt	Reading
Foreign exchange market; how to manage and multiply money	Online class

Discussion/Conclusion

The COVID-19 survey illustrates many of the financial challenges that low- and modest-income earners are experiencing in the pandemic. The results demonstrate the resilience of these participants coming from a variety of financial backgrounds. We note that ten phase 1 participants were not available for the interview, many of these individuals were unemployed and on the low-

end of the income spectrum. These results overstate the experience of employed people able to access the federal government emergency worker supports (CERB).

Most participants can access food and household goods; pay their rent or mortgage; and, albeit with some difficulty, purchase additional supplies and masks for pandemic living. This was particularly the case for the employed, and CERB-receiving, middle-income participants. We noticed that lower income participants were facing more challenges in that casual work, if they had it, dried up, dropping their income. Moreover, they were facing higher expenses as family members stayed at home, shopping went online or at the corner store and became more expensive, and the bus became a less attractive means of transportation leading some to use a more expensive taxi.

At the same time, participants are experiencing a lot of financial and emotional stress. The financial turmoil that low-income people felt might have added to this stress.

CFD participants know about and have accessed government support programs. Almost half of the 19 participants have accessed CERB to provide for their financial needs while workplaces have been locked down or not operating. For several participants, CERB has served as a lifeline for financial well-being. However, there is a mixed reception to government emergency programs. This is because supports for unemployed participants were small or nonexistent. Five participants are feeling financial stress and one is experiencing extreme financial distress. This is easily understood even if one's unemployment supports (e.g., social assistance) are steady because costs are rising.

Participants are stressed for a variety of reasons—and finances is one part of that stress. They have had to make household and childcare adjustments that have caused greater stress and created more expenses. Some have felt isolated and mentally drained from the pandemic lockdown and reality. Others worry about their financial futures while feeling safeguarded in the present.

Appendix 1 Overview of Phase 1 participants

Gender	Expected yearly income	Source of income	Race/ethnicity ⁵	Family size	No. of children in household
F	\$24,000	EIA	African	7	5
F	\$9,000	EIA/Disability	White	1	
F	\$10,000	Employed	White	1	
F	\$42,000	Employed	Asian	1	
F	\$9,000	EIA/Disability	White	1	
F	\$41,400	Foster parent	Indigenous	4	3
F	\$26,000	Employed	African	1	
M	\$9,700	Employed	White	1	
M	\$8,966	EIA/Disability	African	1	
F	\$23,000	Employed	Indigenous	1	
F	Unknown	EIA/Disability	White	2	1
F	\$18,000	Retired/pension	White	1	
M	\$25,000	Employed	Asian	1	
F	\$11,424	EIA	Indigenous	1	
F	\$8,160	EIA	Indigenous	1	
F	\$8,000	Employed	White	1	
F	\$8,808	EIA	Asian	2	1
M	\$16,800	EIA	African	4	2
F	\$23,726	Retired/pension	S. American/White	1	
F	\$2,640	EIA	Indigenous	3	2
F	\$12,000	EIA/Student	African	2	1
F	Unknown	Employed	Asian	2	1
F	\$17,000	Employed	White	1	
F	\$21,000	Employed	White	1	
M	\$10,000	EIA	Indigenous	1	
F	\$14,400	Employed	African	1	
F	\$2,000	Employed	African	1	
F	\$24,000	Employed	S. American/White	2	
F	\$15,000	Employed	White	1	
Male: 5 Female: 24		EIA: 12 Employed: 14 Foster parent: 1 Retired: 2	White: 12 Visible minority: 17 Indigenous: 6 Black/African: 7 Asian: 4		

⁵ This column does not represent participants' self-identification.

Appendix 2 Survey

Objective of the survey: The COVID-19 pandemic, that began to affect Canadians directly in March 2020, has led to major human and economic trials that continue today. This survey is intended to learn about the phase 1 diaries participants' current socio-economic situation, how they are managing finances, and how government supports have been accessed.

Participant code: _____

Gender:_____

Age:_____

Please describe your race/ethnic identity:_____

Part I: Socio-economic situation

In this section we will ask you questions about employment, financial awareness, housing, childcare and family arrangements, use of technology and financial supports.

1. Employment

- 1.1. Are you currently (casually or formally) working?
- 1.2. What is your current work?
- 1.3. How many hours a week do you work?
- 1.4. Is this work casual, self-employment, contract or permanent?
- 1.5. If not employed currently, have you been employed since the diaries ended (note specific month and year for each participant)
 - 1.5.1.If yes, since the diaries ended (specific date for participant), what job(s) have you held?
- 1.6. If not employed now, did the COVID-19 pandemic impact your employment status?
 - 1.6.1.How?
- 1.7. Is there anything more you would like to say about employment?

2. Financial awareness

- 2.1. Since you completed the diaries process have you learned anything new about your finances?
- 2.2. Have you taken any additional courses, workshops or trainings on money or financial management?
- 2.3. I Is there anything more you would like to say about financial awareness?

3. Housing

- 3.1. What is your current housing situation? (rent, own, apartment, rooming house, etc.)
- 3.2. How many people currently live with you?
- 3.3. How many people currently work in your home?
- 3.4. Has your housing situation changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began?
 - 3.4.1.How?

3.5. Has the number of people currently living with you changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began?

3.5.1.How?

3.6. Is there anything more you would like to say about your housing situation?

4. Childcare and family arrangements

4.1. Are you currently caring for a child (under 18 years old), a disabled person, or a senior in your household?

4.2. What are your current family care/childcare arrangements?

4.3. How are your current family care/childcare arrangements different since the COVID-19 pandemic began?

4.4. What other household changes have occurred since the COVID-19 pandemic began?

4.4.1.Please explain.

4.5. Is there anything more you would like to say about your childcare or family arrangements?

5. Government supports

5.1. On a regular basis (and before the COVID-19 pandemic began), what government supports do you receive (EI, EIA, CERB, Child tax benefit, other)?

5.1.1.What is the approximate monthly amount?

6. Internet

6.1. How do you do your banking (e.g., paying bills, depositing cheques, checking balances) now?

6.1.1.Has it changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

6.2. Do you have Wi-Fi at your home?

6.2.1.Has this changed since start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

6.3. Are you using any internet sites or bank websites or apps to manage your finances?

6.3.1.Has this changed since start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Part II: Financial Management

In this section, we will ask questions about how you are managing your finances.

7. Income

7.1. What are your sources of income now?

7.1.1.How much do you earn from each source?

7.1.2.Has the pandemic changed your income? (Dramatically, incrementally, little to none)

7.2. Has your income increased/decreased since the COVID-19 pandemic began?

7.2.1.By how much?

7.2.2.From which source(s)?

7.3. Is there anything more you would like to say about income?

8. Spending

8.1. What types of things are you spending your money on now?

- 8.1.1. How much do you spend on each area?
- 8.2. How has the pandemic shifted your spending? (Dramatically, incrementally, little to none)
- 8.3. Are you spending more/less money in total since the COVID-19 pandemic began?
 - 8.3.1. Are you buying different types of things since the COVID-19 pandemic began?
- 8.4. Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed where you make your purchases, e.g., online?
 - 8.4.1. How?
- 6.4. Is there anything more you would like to say about spending?

9. Transactions

- 9.1. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many retail stores will not accept cash and require debit or credit payments. Has this affected you?
 - 9.1.1. How?
- 9.2. Please tell us about your experience using debit or credit since the COVID-19 pandemic began.
- 9.3. Has your credit card spending increased since the COVID-19 pandemic began?
 - 9.3.1. Please tell us about this.

10. Saving

- 10.1. Are you regularly saving money now? How much and how often? Where do you deposit it?
 - 10.1.1. Is this more/less since the COVID-19 pandemic began?
 - 10.1.2. If applicable, can you tell us why has it changed?
- 10.2. Are you using any tools or financial services to save money now?
 - 10.2.1. Has this changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began?
- 10.3. What is your savings intended for?
- 10.4. Is there anything more you would like to say about savings?

11. Borrowing

- 11.1. Do you have any outstanding loans now?
 - 11.1.1. How much?
 - 11.1.2. From where?
 - 11.1.3. Is this more/less since the COVID-19 pandemic began?
 - 11.1.4. If applicable, why has it changed?
- 11.2. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, what kind of loans have you received and for how much?
 - 11.2.1. What are the terms?
- 11.3. Is there anything more you would like to say about borrowing?

Part III Government support and general feelings

In this section we will ask you questions about government supports and your feelings about finances.

12. Awareness and utilization of government supports

- 12.1. Are you aware of any government programs to assist you during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 12.2. Are you (or friend/family) receiving any special COVID-19 pandemic supports offered by the federal or provincial governments?
- 12.3. How did you learn about it?
- 12.4. Was the application complicated
 - 12.4.1. Did you get any help with the application process?
- 12.5. How does the program work?
- 12.6. How has the support impacted you and your finances?
- 12.7. Is there anything more you would like to say about government supports?

13. Feelings about finances

- 13.1. How do you feel about your finances now?
- 13.2. How has COVID-19 impacted your feelings about your finances?
- 13.3. How have you felt about managing your finances during COVID-19?
- 13.4. When you think about your finances now in comparison to before the COVID-19 pandemic, what would you say is different?
 - 13.4.1. Have you experienced more ups and downs?
- 13.5. Is there anything more that you would like to tell us about your finances?