Employment and
Social Development Canada

Emploi et
Développement social Canada

Qualitative Client Experience Research on Service Channel Access

Executive Summary

Prepared for Employment and Social Development Canada

Supplier Name: Phoenix SPI
Contract Number: G9292-217901/001/CY
Contract Value: $149,775.74 (including HST)
Award Date: 2021-03-18
Delivery Date: 2022-03-30
Registration Number: POR 136-20

For more information on this report, please contact ESDC at: nc-por-rop-gd@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

Canada

Qualitative Client Experience Research on Service Channel Access

Executive Summary
Prepared for Employment and Social Development Canada
Supplier name: Phoenix SPI
March 2022

This public opinion research report presents the results of qualitative research conducted to explore client experience accessing and using service channels. The fieldwork was conducted between July 27 and December 13, 2021.

It is available upon request in multiple formats (large print, MP3, braille, audio CD, e-text CD, DAISY or accessible PDF), by contacting 1 800 O-Canada (1-800-622-6232). By teletypewriter (TTY), call 1-800-926-9105.

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2022

For information regarding reproduction rights: droitdauteur.copyright@HRSDC-RHDCC.gc.ca

PDF
Cat. No.: Em4-30/2022E-PDF
ISBN: 978-0-660-42233-6

ESDC
Cat. No. : POR-112-06-22E

Recherche qualitative de l'expérience client sur l'accès aux modes de prestation de services

Ce document offert sur demande en médias substituts (gros caractères, MP3, braille, fichiers de texte, DAISY) auprès du 1 800 O-Canada (1-800-622-6232). Si vous utilisez un téléscripteur (ATS), composez le 1-800-926-9105.

© Sa Majesté la Reine du Chef du Canada, 2022

Pour des renseignements sur les droits de reproduction : droitdauteur.copyright@HRSDC-RHDCC.gc.ca

PDF
Nº de cat. : Em4-30/2022F-PDF
ISBN : 978-0-660-42234-3

EDSC
Nº de cat. : POR-112-06-22F

Executive Summary

Phoenix Strategic Perspectives (Phoenix SPI) was commissioned by the Citizen Service Branch of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) to conduct client experience qualitative research on service channel access.

1. Research Purpose and Objectives

Service delivery is fundamental to achieving ESDC's mandate and contributes to the achievement of policy and program results. The research was initiated to 1) understand whether newly adapted channels[1] introduced during the pandemic were working for ESDC's most vulnerable clients; and 2) support the development of the Department's Accessibility Roadmap. This research included long-established service channels (e.g., online, telephone) and the Department's newly adapted service channels.

The objectives of this research study were to: identify what aspects of service channel design and delivery are working well; determine what, if anything, needs to be changed to remove barriers to access for clients with various types of disability; assess whether the adapted service channels provide ease of access to different client groups; determine what, if any, service barriers exist in the service channel design and delivery; and identify what changes, if any, to design and delivery are needed to remove barriers to access.

2. Methodology

A qualitative research approach was used to meet the objectives. Specifically, the research included 12 virtual sessions (mini focus groups, dyads, and one-on-one interviews) and 105 in-depth telephone interviews conducted between July 27 and December 13, 2021.[2] In total, 129 clients participated in this research study. Recruitment was undertaken by telephone and email using program and channel lists provided by Service Canada. Participants included persons with a disability, seniors, youth, 'e-vulnerable' clients (i.e., those who rarely or never use online services and who are not very or not at all comfortable using online services), and 'newcomers' (i.e., immigrants who arrived in Canada in the last three years). More details about the methodology can be found in the Appendix: Technical Specifications.

3. Limitations and Use of the Research Results

This research was qualitative. Qualitative research is designed to reveal a rich range of opinions and interpretations rather than to measure what percentage of the target population holds a given opinion. As such, the results indicate clients' views about the issues explored, but they cannot be generalized to the full population of clients with a disability and clients who used Service Canada's adapted service channels. With the foregoing in mind, the results of this research will be used by ESDC to identify opportunities for service improvements in the context of the ESDC Accessibility Roadmap. In addition, the Citizen Services Branch of Service Canada will use the results to improve the design and/or implementation of its service channels to ensure access to programs and services.

---

[1] This included eServiceCanada, Service Canada Centres – eSIN, and eCommunity Outreach Liaison Service (eCOLS).
[2] The fieldwork was suspended during the electoral period for the 44th general election, from August 15, when the election was called, to October 26, 2021, when caretaker period concluded.

4. Key Findings and Conclusions

There was widespread satisfaction among research participants with their experience contacting Service Canada.

- Most clients expressed at least some degree of satisfaction or said they got what they needed when describing their overall experience interacting with Service Canada. In particular, all clients who participated in the research were very satisfied with the professionalism, attitude, courtesy, and respectfulness of Service Canada personnel.

- Moreover, most clients with a disability who dealt with Service Canada staff described the latter as properly trained and equipped to meet their specific needs. When explaining why they felt this way, clients with a disability pointed to staff's understanding, patience, proactivity, sensitivity, and help finding or completing forms.

Notwithstanding the positive experiences described by many research participants, some encountered problems with their interactions with Service Canada.

- Commonly identified issues or problems included navigating the Service Canada website, wait times when contacting Service Canada's specialized call centres, lack of clear and consistent information, and the inability to resolve an issue or complete a transaction in one service interaction.

- Other barriers or challenges encountered by research participants were linked to a specific program. By design, this included the CPP disability (CPP-D) program, Employment Insurance (EI) Sickness, and the Social Insurance Number (SIN) program. While few participants reported issues in relation to EI Sickness or SIN, clients with a disability experienced problems in relation to the CPP-D program throughout their journey.

- Many clients with a disability who sought information on Service Canada's website could not find what they were looking for or needed assistance understanding the information they did find. When it came to applying for CPP-D, the most frequently identified challenges related to the length of the application form, as well as the amount, and type, of information required to complete the form. Few CPP-D clients identified challenges when following up on their application. Among those who did, difficulty using the Service Canada website and wait times when contacting Service Canada's specialized call centre were most common.

Overall, feedback on the newly adapted service channels was positive, with users routinely expressing satisfaction with them.

- Service Canada clients who used the newly adapted channels typically described them as clear, easy to use, convenient, and useful in relation to their transactions with Service Canada. Users of these channels routinely indicated that they would recommend them to someone they knew who needed help with applying for a benefit or SIN.

- Critical feedback from clients who used the adapted service channels was limited. For those who used eServiceCanada, the main issue raised about the service was the two-business day wait time, which was not helpful for those who needed immediate assistance. In addition, the timeframe of two business days for being contacted by a Service Canada agent was viewed as not precise enough for some research participants. They wanted to know the time of day to expect to hear from Service Canada to ensure they did not miss the call. Concerns related to eSIN tended to focus on technical problems or glitches trying to submit the form online. The

only concern raised about eCOLS was reliability—that is, call disconnections (i.e., dropped calls) and telephone latency or call quality.

Clients identified a variety of things Service Canada could do to address some of the challenges they faced and/or to make access to its programs more user-friendly. The most frequently identified suggestions are included below, and they are organized by the service channel.

- *Telephone*. Suggestions to improve the service provided by the specialized call centres tended to focus on reducing wait times—for example, having more agents answering calls during peak hours, extending call centre hours, keeping call centres open on weekends, and offering the option to schedule a callback rather than wait on hold for the next available agent. In addition to addressing wait times, research participants offered several suggestions to help maximize the likelihood that their inquiry/reason for calling could be addressed in its entirety during the call. This included having phone agents who are more knowledgeable about program details and requirements; delegating more authority to front-line call centre staff so they can review a client's file and help address the issue or inquiry; facilitating phone transfers to management if a phone agent cannot resolve a client's issue; and storing client information as part of call records so clients do not need to repeat information already provided, and agents do not need to put clients on hold to go check information.

- *Service Canada website*. Suggestions to improve the Service Canada website focused on making the site more user-friendly and easier to navigate—for example, adding Frequently Asked Questions sections for various programs, making it easier to locate application instructions, improving the search function, and providing direct links to commonly requested forms. In addition, some research participants suggested adding a real-time chat service that could be accessed through the website.

- *eServiceCanada*. Suggestions included offering the ability to specify or narrow the timeframe for a callback appointment and/or to suggest times for the appointment; having Service Canada representatives call back more than twice; providing an 'other specify' option in the 'How can we help you?' section for clients to use to fully describe the nature of the issue; and allowing CPP-D clients who do not have a terminal illness to use the service.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the research findings, each of which has implications for Service Canada when it comes to service channel design and delivery.

- For some clients, the service channels they choose to use to interact with Service Canada are dependent on the nature of the intended service interaction. In other words, these clients select the service channel that, in their view, is best suited to the service interaction. This suggests a potential need to reconsider future service channel design and/or improvements from the perspective of function. For example, if clients prefer to use Service Canada's website for quick access to things like application forms, these forms should be clearly accessible from the landing page of the website. If clients use the phone to ask specific questions for which they want a resolution, agents should be able to access client files or previous call logs to maximize the likelihood the question can be addressed in one transaction.[3]

- Many clients do not separate their service channel experience from a specific Government of Canada program—that is, their experience with Service Canada is framed by the program they

---

[3] It is understood that Service Canada may already consider service channels in the context of the transactions they are mostly likely to be used for.

applied to and/or which prompted them to contact Service Canada. This reinforces the continued need to explore service interactions from both program and channel specific perspectives. For clients of the EI program, the addition of a Frequently Asked Questions section on the website might help to improve their experience. However, for clients of the CPP-D program, it might not help in any significant way to add clarity regarding the program, something clients with a disability routinely identified as a reason for following up with Service Canada by telephone (i.e., needing assistance understanding the information they found on the website).

- Many of the same problems were identified both by clients with and without disabilities when it came to interacting with Service Canada, specifically with regards to navigating the website and finding information and wait times when contacting Service Canada specialized call centres. Where persons with disabilities identified additional problems or suggestions, or where their experience differed from those without disabilities, problems or proposed solutions have been clearly identified. Service Canada is encouraged to use this content to inform a Universal Design approach to service. In the context of the ESDC Accessibility Roadmap, design improvements informed by the feedback from persons with disabilities can be expected to improve service design for all clients of Service Canada.

5. Contract Value

The contract value was $149,775.74 (including HST).

6. Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify, as a Senior Officer of Phoenix Strategic Perspectives, that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not contain any reference to electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leader.

Alethea Woods
President, Phoenix SPI

Phoenix
Strategic Perspectives Inc.