



Service Canada's Client Experience Research 2022-23

Executive Summary on the Qualitative Findings

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français

This public opinion research report presents the results of qualitative research conducted to explore client experience with participants who reported service delivery problems or who were not satisfied with their overall experience. Fieldwork was conducted between September 21 and November 6, 2023.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Colledge". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Mike Colledge

President

Ipsos Public Affairs

Executive Summary

Background, Objectives and Methodology

The 2022-23 Client Experience (CX) Survey is the sixth iteration (CX6) of a project that was initiated in 2017. The CX Survey project is a well-established tracking study that provides “perceptions metrics” tailored to Service Canada’s CX ecosystem and includes a qualitative phase of CX research. The research objectives for the qualitative research component were to explore service channel preferences, barriers, and opportunities for improvements to service delivery. These research objectives also include exploring the emotion service dimension of the client journey.

A mix of 37 in-depth interviews and seven (7) online focus groups were conducted between September 21 and November 6, 2023. Participants were Service Canada clients who received an initial decision on their application between January and March 2023, and who responded to the CX Survey, quantitative component of the CX research, from June 6 to July 26, 2023, meeting one of the following screening criteria: rated their overall satisfaction as low; experienced difficulties applying because of barriers to accessing service.

The findings presented in this report are qualitative in nature. The value of qualitative research is that it allows for the in-depth exploration of factors that shape public knowledge, attitudes and behaviours on certain issues. When interpreting the findings, it should be borne in mind that at no point is the intention to produce results that are statistically representative of all Service Canada clients.

Key Findings

Client Experience Journey

When asked for the one word that best summarizes their experience of applying to Service Canada programs, most participants tended to use negative words such as “difficult” and “frustrating”. “Frustration” was frequently brought up again in reference to the emotions participants experienced during the CX journey. Many went on to describe the application process as difficult and requiring considerable effort.

Positive words such as “straightforward” and “easy” were used by some participants. “Relief” and “happy” were the main positive emotions that several participants experienced, and mostly at the end of their CX journey following a positive outcome from their application.

EI CX Journey Highlights

- There was general awareness of the EI program from making contributions to the program over the years.
- Most participants found the application form questions “easy to answer” or “really straightforward” and overall, the application did not involve a great deal of effort.
- The main source of frustration among EI participants emerged *after* the submission of their applications. Several EI participants reported that their applications took several weeks or longer to process which left them feeling “scared” and “vulnerable”.

SIN CX Journey Highlights

- Participants were typically informed by those around them of the importance of obtaining a SIN number to gain employment. Some tended to rely solely on friends and family when becoming aware of the SIN program.
- All SIN participants applied by visiting a Service Canada Centre in person and the main pain point encountered was long queues.

- As participants who were newcomers had been informed of the requirement of a SIN in gaining employment, they felt relief when they were able to successfully obtain their SIN.
- A small number of participants were unable to successfully obtain their SIN number on their first visit to a Service Canada Centre which resulted in feelings of “stress” and “disappointment”.

CPP and OAS/GIS CX Journey Highlights

- High levels of awareness of these programs are due to: contributing to CPP throughout their working lives in Canada; being informed by their older friends or family members about OAS/GIS; and helping their elderly parents with accessing OAS/GIS in the past.
- Participants reported mixed emotions and experiences throughout their journey of applying for CPP and OAS/GIS. Those who were less financially reliant on CPP or had others in their lives to help them (e.g., financial planner) tended to view the entire process as an administrative task and appeared to experience fewer difficulties.
- For others, the transition to retirement was a “scary” process. Several participants found the application process cumbersome, confusing, fraught, and requiring considerable effort.
- While there were feelings of happiness once benefits were received, a small number of participants were left wondering if they were receiving the GIS amount they were entitled to.

CPP-D CX Journey Highlights

- Participants generally harbored negative feelings such as nervousness and anxiety at the start of their CPP-D CX journeys. Some were “forced” to apply by their workplace insurance company, and several had re-applied to the program after being denied benefits in a previous application.
- Compared to the experiences of participants who applied to other programs, CPP-D participants were the most negative about the application process and indicated that the application took a lot of effort. They experienced difficulties with answering questions on the application form and had to rely on others for support.
- The other major pain point CPP-D participants experienced was gathering all the necessary medical documentation. This was an exceptionally time-consuming, costly task for participants.
- In contrast to the predominantly negative experiences reported above, a couple of participants mentioned feeling supported, lucky, and “treated like gold” by an in-person Service Canada representative.

Expectations

Many with little or no prior experience in dealing with Service Canada tended to hold positive or neutral expectations going into the journey. Others who had had previous interactions with Service Canada or had friends with experiences of applying to programs delivered by Service Canada were more pragmatic in their expectations.

In assessing whether expectations were met, participants tended to focus on two aspects: timeliness of receiving a decision and the outcome of applications. Participants whose applications took what they perceived to be an unreasonable amount of time to process and who were relying on the benefits to cover their living costs felt that their expectations were unmet. Participants who received a negative outcome, EI and CPP-D participants specifically, felt “rejected” and “abandoned” at a time of need.

Service Standards

There was broad consensus that it is important for Service Canada to have service standards both from an aspirational and accountability perspective. Participants confirmed that timeliness and high-quality services were important service standards to have.

Other service standards suggested included: consistency; accessibility; empathy, respect and dignity; and efficiency.

Service Channels

In-person

- In-person was the preferred channel for all SIN and some OAS/GIS participants. SIN participants believed that their chances of success were greater by visiting an office in person, while some OAS/GIS participants said it was more convenient to get help by speaking with a Service Canada representative in person.
- The main pain points encountered were long queues and perceptions of reduced levels of service when COVID-19 measures were still in place.
- In terms of positive interactions, representatives at Service Canada Centres were described by participants as “nice”, “professional”, “patient” and providing excellent “customer care”.

Specialized Call Centre

- Following up on the status of an application was the most common reason participants contacted a Specialized Call Centre.
- Wait times was the most common pain point experienced by participants while very few had used the call-back service. Once connected to a Service Canada representative, several participants were dissatisfied with the service they received. The information provided lacked details on the progress of their application and the service did not include tailored advice on what to do next.
- There were some positive interactions where representatives were able to reassure participants by providing more information about the process or by committing to resolve issues that were delaying applications.

Online

- Participants who had visited Canada.ca looking for more information reported mixed experiences. Some felt that the program’s website was easy to find and provided clear information. Others experienced issues with generic information, too much text, and lack of clarity on how to apply.
- Most EI participants did not experience issues with the online application portal.

My Service Canada Account

CPP-D and OAS/GIS participants tended to not make use of My Service Canada Account (MSCA) to complete and submit their applications. They were older, “not computer savvy” and found it easier to use mail and in-person channels.

Participants reported few difficulties with registering or signing into MSCA. Most appeared to have had their accounts for several years prior to their most recent application. Many were disappointed by the claim or application status fields because the information provided there was vague such as “status pending” or “in progress” messages appearing, which in turn led them to call a Specialized Call Centre to seek more detailed information.

Participants who used MSCA generally trusted that Service Canada is doing its best to protect their personal information. They adopted an attitude of resignation that security breaches happen and affect both private and public organizations, but this did not stop them from using online services.

Client Groups

Participants with disabilities were predominately from the CPP-D program. The research highlighted numerous ways in which the CPP-D application process was challenging. The length of the application form and the scope of questions were perceived to be onerous, especially for those on medications, with restricted hand movement, and for those with mental health disabilities that affect focus. Participants with a mental health disability believed that the CPP-D application form and the program as a whole defined disability too narrowly.

Moreover, the research underscored the importance of continuing to offer non-digital service channels for e-vulnerable clients. Mail applications and the ability to speak to a Service Canada representative in-person or via telephone were important for many older participants who tended to be e-vulnerable.

Participants for whom English or French is not their first language or newcomers with low awareness of programs, the ability to speak to a Service Canada representative by telephone or in-person was highly valued.

Service Improvement Recommendations

Participants made numerous service improvement recommendations that are grouped into the following themes:

- addressing timelines;
- enhancing the online experience;
- equity, diversity, and inclusion;
- staff training and empowerment;
- transparency in the process; and,
- proactive service delivery approach.