

Digital Insights

Who are the users of digital government services? Exploring the characteristics of Canadian individuals and businesses using digital government services

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Introduction

Government services are undergoing a digital transformation to modernize their delivery and provide individual Canadians and Canadian businesses with digital programs and services that are efficient, secure and user-centric.¹ Digital government services are also more customizable and provide improved accessibility compared with their offline counterparts,² and this may explain why many Canadians expect all government services to be available online.³

According to the Government of Canada (GC) Service Inventory, which tracks the number of applications made for GC services from all sources,⁴ in 2023/2024, 419 services could be completed entirely online, representing 24.4% of all federal services.⁵ However, despite progress in digital government service delivery, Canada fell from its peak of 3rd place in 2010 to 47th place in 2024 on the United Nations E-Government Development Index—a composite index that assesses the development of digital government at the national level.⁶ Compared with many of its peers, Canada lags in the availability and accessibility of its digital government services and other online offerings. Many of these difficulties can be attributed to a reliance on complex and segregated legacy information technology (IT) systems.⁷ Similar issues have also been identified in internal assessments. According to a report released by the Auditor General of Canada in 2023, less than half (38%) of surveyed federal government IT applications were evaluated as being in a healthy state.⁸

While measuring the availability of digital government services is often the focus of modernization efforts, the factors affecting demand for these services are also important to consider when evaluating their adoption rates. To better quantify some of these demand-side aspects, this article leverages data from two technology use surveys—the Canadian Internet Use Survey (CIUS), to capture individuals' perspectives, and the Survey of Digital Technology and Internet Use (SDTIU), to capture business perspectives. It profiles users of digital government services and examines the barriers faced by current and potential users. The primary focus is on individual Canadians, with some comparisons with Canadian businesses' digital interactions with the federal government, where relevant data are available. The CIUS examines government services broadly, without distinguishing between federal, provincial or local governments, whereas the SDTIU covers only federal government services.

Section 1: Trends in the use of digital government services

According to the GC Service Inventory, online applications for federal services constituted about half (50.4%, or 168 million applications) of all applications made in 2019/2020. However, dramatic growth was observed in the delivery of online services in the years following the onset of the pandemic. In 2023/2024, 267 million applications were completed online, accounting for about two-thirds (65.5%) of all applications received.⁹

The growing use of digital government services is also reflected in findings from the CIUS and SDTIU. From 2018 to 2022, the percentage of individual Canadians interacting in some way with digital government services increased from 67.5% to 76.3%, with the most rapid period of growth occurring from 2018 to 2020 (+6.6 percentage points).

1. See Government of Canada (2025) for more information.

2. See Lamb et al. (2023) for more information.

3. See Interac (2023) for more information.

4. In the GC Service Inventory, the term "applications" refers to all instances where GC services were applied for, such as via web forms or telephone calls. This includes applications by individuals and businesses.

5. See Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2025) for more information.

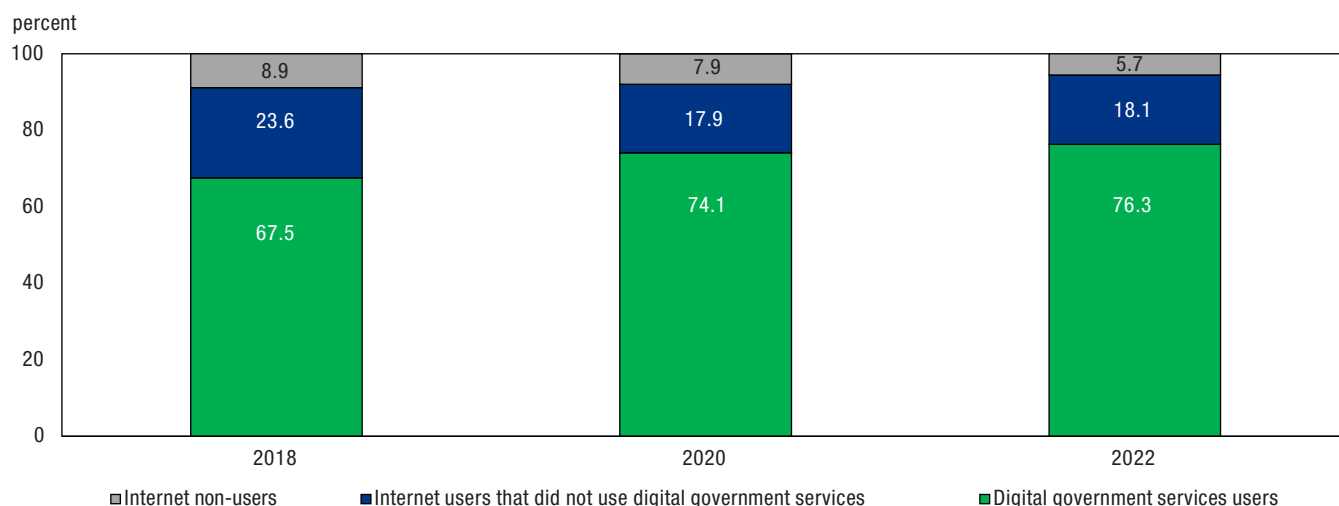
6. See United Nations (2024) for more information.

7. See Lamb et al. (2023) for more information.

8. See Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2023) for more information.

9. See Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2025) for more information.

Chart 1
Use of digital government services by individual Canadians, 2018 to 2022



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Internet Use Survey, 2018-2022.

In 2022, individuals were most likely to report that they researched information using government sources (53.1%); accessed an account for a government program or service (40.6%); or paid a government service fee, tax, fine or ticket (40.0%).

Table 1
Use of digital government services by individual Canadians, by type of activity, 2022

Activity	Digital government service users
	percentage of individual Canadians
Total, all activities	76.3^A
Researched information	53.1 ^A
Accessed an account for a government program or service	40.6 ^A
Paid a government service fee, tax, fine or ticket	40.0 ^A
Filed your income taxes on your own	29.4 ^A
Submitted a form or application for a government program or service online	25.5 ^A
Downloaded a government form that was submitted in person	23.0 ^A
Communicated with a government organization by email or via social media	12.9 ^A
Expressed your opinion or provided feedback during an online government consultation relating to government policies or programs	8.0 ^A
Other activities	5.3 ^A

^A coefficient of variation of 0.0% to less than 16.5%

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Internet Use Survey, 2022.

Interactions with federal digital government services were even higher among Canadian businesses during a similar period (2019 to 2023). Similar to individual Canadians, the percentage of businesses using these services increased from 90.4% in 2019 to 94.3% in 2021. However, use subsequently fell in 2023 to 92.8%.¹⁰ This decrease may be attributable to many services being available only online during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The digital government services most accessed by businesses in 2023 were tax declarations (76.6%) and downloading documents or forms (70.9%).

10. Since additional service categories were added to the survey question in 2023, the decrease in the use of these services from 2021 to 2023 may be understated.

Table 2
Use of federal digital government services by Canadian businesses, by type of activity, 2023

Activity	Federal digital government service users
	percentage of Canadian businesses ¹
Total, all activities	92.8 ^A
Tax declaration	76.6 ^A
Download documents or forms	70.9 ^A
Other online payments to government organizations	35.2 ^A
Apply for or renew business permits or license	28.9 ^A
Apply for grants, subsidies, benefits, or government-provided insurance	22.0 ^A
Obtain data	16.6 ^A
Register or change a business name, number or tax account	16.3 ^A
Check the status of an application or other service request	13.5 ^A
Request other services	7.1 ^A
Other activities	6.4 ^A
Provide feedback on services received	4.6 ^A
Submit information related to a government request for proposal	4.5 ^A
File a patent or other intellectual property application	1.0 ^A

^A standard error of less than 2.5%
1. Statistics exclude responses of “Don’t know” from the denominator to improve comparability across sizes and sectors.
Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Digital Technology and Internet Use, 2023.

Section 2: The profile of government service users

In the digital age, access to digital technologies and the Internet has become crucial for receiving services, finding information, and participating in new economic and social opportunities. However, not everyone enjoys the same level of connectivity or has the digital skills required to fully use what digital technologies have to offer, giving rise to the phenomenon known as the digital divide.¹¹ Understanding where digital divides exist and their severity is an important first step in addressing them.

Internet use is a prerequisite for digital government service use, but their digital divides are not identical

Internet use in general and the use of digital government services share many of the same digital divides. For example, in both of these cases, the 2022 CIUS found that the rate of use was highest among individuals aged 25 to 34 and lowest among those aged 65 and older.

These trends can be explained, in part, by the fact that using the Internet is a prerequisite for using digital government services. However, digital divides can also vary by technology. For example, despite having a nearly universal Internet use rate (99.2%), the use of digital government services (71.8%) was much less common among those aged 15 to 24 in 2022, likely because many in this age group have parents, guardians or caregivers capable of interacting with the government on their behalf.

As shown in Table 3, digital divides in the use of digital government services also exist across many other socioeconomic and geographic characteristics. Moreover, these patterns are present across the most reported types of online interactions with the government, as previously discussed (i.e., researching information, accessing accounts and making payments).

11. See Kwok & Korpela (2024) for more information.

Table 3
Internet use and use of digital government services by individual Canadians, by socioeconomic and geographic characteristics, 2022

Characteristics	Internet users	Digital government service users
	percentage of individual Canadians	
Total, Canadians aged 15 and older	94.5^A	76.3^A
Age group (years)		
15 to 24	99.2 ^A	71.8 ^A
25 to 34	99.4 ^A	91.3 ^A
35 to 44	99.0 ^A	89.0 ^A
45 to 54	98.3 ^A	83.4 ^A
55 to 64	94.6 ^A	76.0 ^A
65 and over	82.6 ^A	55.4 ^A
Gender¹		
Men+	94.8 ^A	78.4 ^A
Women+	94.2 ^A	74.2 ^A
Highest certificate, diploma or degree completed		
High school or less	87.9 ^A	58.3 ^A
Some post-secondary (including university certificate)	95.5 ^A	78.5 ^A
University degree	98.9 ^A	90.1 ^A
Employment status		
Employed	98.4 ^A	85.4 ^A
Not employed	87.6 ^A	61.5 ^A
Knowledge of official languages		
English only	95.7 ^A	77.4 ^A
French only	85.5 ^A	60.7 ^A
Neither English nor French	91.5 ^A	63.4 ^A
Both English and French	97.4 ^A	82.2 ^A
Household composition		
Multi-person household	97.5 ^A	80.4 ^A
Single-person household	87.1 ^A	66.0 ^A
Census family income quartile		
Quartile 1	85.9 ^A	63.0 ^A
Quartile 2	95.4 ^A	75.4 ^A
Quartile 3	97.9 ^A	81.8 ^A
Quartile 4	98.8 ^A	84.9 ^A
Racialized group²		
Black	95.6 ^A	77.0 ^A
Chinese	98.2 ^A	87.0 ^A
Filipino	96.8 ^A	82.9 ^A
Arab	96.1 ^A	83.1 ^A
Korean	96.9 ^A	86.8 ^A
Japanese	98.2 ^A	80.6 ^A
Latin American	97.5 ^A	82.1 ^A
Southeast Asian	97.9 ^A	89.7 ^A
South Asian	98.6 ^A	80.4 ^A
West Asian	97.1 ^A	83.2 ^A
Other or multiple racialized groups	94.6 ^A	78.7 ^A
Non-racialized and non-Indigenous	93.2 ^A	73.7 ^A
Immigrant status (since 1952)		
Landed immigrant	96.7 ^A	82.2 ^A
Non-landed immigrant ³	94.0 ^A	74.9 ^A
Disability status		
Person with a disability	90.4 ^A	67.9 ^A
Person without a disability	94.7 ^A	77.1 ^A
Province		
Newfoundland and Labrador	91.7 ^A	74.6 ^A
Prince Edward Island	92.6 ^A	70.4 ^A
Nova Scotia	91.9 ^A	71.1 ^A
New Brunswick	90.9 ^A	71.8 ^A
Quebec	92.2 ^A	73.7 ^A
Ontario	95.5 ^A	77.1 ^A
Manitoba	92.6 ^A	71.9 ^A
Saskatchewan	93.7 ^A	71.5 ^A
Alberta	95.2 ^A	78.2 ^A
British Columbia	96.9 ^A	80.6 ^A

Table 3

Internet use and use of digital government services by individual Canadians, by socioeconomic and geographic characteristics, 2022

Characteristics	Internet users	Digital government service users
	percentage of individual Canadians	
Rural or urban status⁴		
Rural	91.9 ^A	70.2 ^A
Urban	95.1 ^A	77.6 ^A

^A coefficient of variation of 0.0% to less than 16.5%

1. The Canadian Internet Use Survey uses the concepts of “men+” and “women+” when referring to gender. For data quality and confidentiality reasons, and because of the small number of individuals identifying as non-binary on the survey, disseminating data for non-binary individuals is not possible for this statistical program. Instead, the “men+” and “women+” categories are derived by considering several other demographic characteristics.

2. Variables for racialized groups were derived from responses to a question asking which population groups a person belongs to. Racialized groups are population groups that are classified as visible minorities under the *Employment Equity Act*. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.”

3. Because of limitations in the level of detail available for immigrants in the Canadian Internet Use Survey, the category “non-landed immigrants” also includes those born in Canada.

4. All areas outside population centres are classified as rural. A population centre has at least 1,000 residents and a population density of 400 people or more per square kilometre, based on population counts from the 2021 Census of Population.

Note: Internet use includes personal use of Internet during the past three months from any location and excludes business and school-related use.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Internet Use Survey, 2022.

Many of the digital divides in the use of digital government services persist when simultaneously controlling for multiple characteristics in a multivariate model (found in Appendix A). This model found that in 2022, men,¹² people younger than 65, employed individuals, university graduates and individuals in multi-person households were more likely to use digital government services than their respective counterparts. Chinese people were also more likely to use these services than those who are non-racialized and non-Indigenous.

Additionally, the multivariate model found that residents of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta were less likely to use digital government services than residents of British Columbia (the reference group).¹³ People who speak French only were also less likely to use digital government services than those who speak both English and French. Finally, those in the lowest census family income quartile were less likely than those in the highest quartile to use digital government services.

Use of federal digital government services was consistent across most business sizes and industrial sectors

Compared with individuals, Canadian businesses showed fewer digital divides in their use of federal digital government services, by enterprise size and industrial sector, the characteristics available in the SDTIU. This uniformity may be because businesses generally face a greater regulatory burden than individuals, leading to more government interactions and making online services more necessary to reduce administrative burden.¹⁴

Only businesses in the finance and insurance (87.9%) and management of companies and enterprises (86.2%) sectors had usage rates below 90% in 2023. Lower use of digital government services in these sectors was primarily attributable to a smaller percentage of businesses than average applying for grants, subsidies, benefits or government-provided insurance¹⁵ (-10.3 percentage points and -19.9 percentage points, respectively).

12. The CIUS uses the concepts of “men+” and “women+” when referring to gender. For data quality and confidentiality reasons, and because of the small number of individuals identifying as non-binary on the survey, disseminating data for non-binary individuals is not possible for this statistical program. Instead, the “men+” and “women+” categories are derived by considering several other demographic characteristics.

13. British Columbia was not selected as the reference group for any analytical reason; it is the last province in the standard ordered list used by Statistics Canada.

14. See Martins & Veiga (2022) for more information.

15. Because “grants, subsidies, benefits or government-provided insurance” was one category on the SDTIU, it is not possible to definitively determine which of these programs businesses were referring to in their responses.

Table 4
Use of federal digital government services by Canadian businesses, by size and industrial sector, 2023

Enterprise size and industrial sector	Federal digital government service users
	percentage of Canadian businesses ¹
Total, private sector businesses	92.8^A
Enterprise size	
Large enterprises ²	97.1 ^A
Medium enterprises ³	94.8 ^A
Small enterprises ⁴	92.3 ^A
Industrial sector⁵	
Information and cultural industries	99.3 ^A
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	96.6 ^A
Professional, scientific and technical services	95.5 ^A
Wholesale Trade	95.0 ^B
Arts, entertainment and recreation	94.9 ^A
Other services (except public administration) ⁶	94.3 ^B
Retail Trade	93.7 ^A
Educational services	93.4 ^A
Utilities	93.0 ^A
Construction ⁷	92.8 ^B
Real estate and rental and leasing	92.8 ^B
Manufacturing	91.9 ^A
Accommodation and food services	91.8 ^B
Health care and social assistance	90.9 ^B
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	90.5 ^B
Transportation and warehousing	90.2 ^B
Finance and insurance	87.9 ^B
Management of companies and enterprises ⁸	86.2 ^B

^A standard error of less than 2.5%

^B standard error of 2.5% to less than 5.0%

1. Statistics exclude responses of "Don't know" from the denominator to improve comparability across sizes and sectors.

2. Large enterprises have 100 or more full-time employees, except for manufacturing enterprises where large enterprises have 500 or more full-time employees.

3. Medium enterprises have 20 to 99 full-time employees, except for manufacturing enterprises, where medium enterprises have 20 to 499 full-time employees.

4. Small enterprises have 0 to 19 full-time employees and at least 5 employees.

5. Industrial sector is based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

6. Excludes private households (NAICS code 814).

7. Excludes specialty trade contractors (NAICS code 238).

8. Excludes corporate, regional and subsidiary management offices and companies (NAICS code 551114).

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Digital Technology and Internet Use, 2023.

Section 3: Problems encountered when accessing digital government services

To better understand the supply-side attributes affecting demand for digital government services, the CIUS and SDTIU asked respondents about the problems they encountered while using these services and the reasons why non-users did not use them.

In 2022, the problems most commonly encountered by individual Canadians accessing digital government services included having difficulty finding the right information on websites (46.0%), difficulty finding customer service assistance (31.6%) and difficulty finding correct websites (29.9%). The percentage of individual digital government service users identifying at least one problem increased from 40.2% in 2018 to 52.0% in 2020 and 65.8% in 2022.

Meanwhile, Canadian businesses that use federal digital government services reported challenges less commonly. Fewer than 1 in 10 businesses (8.1%) that used digital government services reported encountering a problem in 2023, slightly down from 9.7% in 2021, when the use of these services was higher, and up slightly from 6.5% in 2019. These differences compared with individual Canadians may be explained, in part, by businesses requiring more consistent interaction with government organizations than individuals, increasing businesses' familiarity with online services. Additionally, the broader definition of digital government services used in the CIUS—which included all levels of government—may have captured more situations where users could have encountered challenges, compared with the SDTIU, which examined federal services only.

Among individuals who did not use digital government services in 2022, the most common reason given was a lack of need, interest or time (73.7%). Among businesses that did not use federal digital government services in 2023, a majority (83.9%) reported no specific barrier or obstacle preventing online interaction with the federal government; they just did not want or need to do so.

Conclusion

The digital transformation of government services seeks to improve their availability and efficiency. However, the supply of such services is only one piece of the puzzle. This article used demand-side data to better understand the profile of individual and business users of digital government services.

The profile of individuals who use digital government services largely reflects the broader patterns of the digital divide, with a few exceptions, and few specific barriers are preventing non-users from adopting these services. In contrast, similar proportions of businesses by enterprise size and industrial sector used federal digital government services, likely related to these services being essential in reducing administrative burden. However, this high-level analysis may not fully capture all the digital divides among businesses because of the focus on basic enterprise-level attributes. Future research could examine additional attributes, such as business age and the sociodemographic characteristics of business owners, to further investigate whether businesses experience digital divides similar to those identified among individuals.

Despite few individuals reporting specific barriers to accessing digital government services, some experienced issues when attempting to use these services, primarily related to difficulties finding the information they needed. Businesses were much less likely to report such issues and were more likely to use these services than individuals.

As the number and sophistication of services available online grow over time, the variety of ways to interact with government services online is expected to expand, increasing the need for timely metrics on digital government services.

Methodology

Statistics for individual Canadians are from the 2018 to 2022 iterations of the [Canadian Internet Use Survey \(CIUS\)](#). The CIUS has a target population of individuals aged 15 years and older living in the 10 provinces of Canada, excluding residents of Indigenous reserves.

Statistics for Canadian businesses are from the 2019 to 2023 iterations of the [Survey of Digital Technology and Internet Use \(SDTIU\)](#). The target population used in this article is businesses with five or more employees across most industrial sectors. Respondents for the SDTIU are information technology managers or equivalent.

At the time of publication, the 2022 CIUS and 2023 SDTIU were the most recent iterations of each survey. All estimates presented in this paper were weighted to be representative of their respective target populations.

In this paper, statistics on the use of digital government services from the SDTIU exclude responses of “Don’t know” from the denominator to improve comparability across sizes and sectors and over time. In contrast, the previously published SDTIU [table 22-10-0122-01](#) includes “Don’t know” responses in the denominator.

Appendix A

Multivariate logistic regression results

Table A.1

Use of digital government services by individual Canadians, by socioeconomic and geographic characteristics, 2022

Characteristics	Digital government service users	
	percentage of individual Canadians	odds ratio from logistic regression
Total, Canadians aged 15 and older	76.3^A	...
Age group (years)		
15 to 24	71.8 ^A	1.7**
25 to 34	91.3 ^A	4.1**
35 to 44	89.0 ^A	2.8**
45 to 54	83.4 ^A	2.1**
55 to 64	76.0 ^A	1.8**
65 and over (ref.)	55.4 ^A	...
Gender¹		
Men+	78.4 ^A	1.2**
Women+ (ref.)	74.2 ^A	...
Highest certificate, diploma or degree completed		
High school or less	58.3 ^A	0.2**
Some post-secondary (including university certificate)	78.5 ^A	0.5**
University degree (ref.)	90.1 ^A	...
Employment status		
Employed	85.4 ^A	1.5**
Not employed (ref.)	61.5 ^A	...
Knowledge of official languages		
English only	77.4 ^A	0.9
French only	60.7 ^A	0.6**
Neither English nor French	63.4 ^A	0.7
Both English and French (ref.)	82.2 ^A	...
Household composition		
Multi-person household	80.4 ^A	1.5**
Single-person household (ref.)	66.0 ^A	...
Census family income quartile		
Quartile 1	63.0 ^A	0.8**
Quartile 2	75.4 ^A	1.0
Quartile 3	81.8 ^A	1.1
Quartile 4 (ref.)	84.9 ^A	...
Racialized group²		
Black	77.0 ^A	0.9
Chinese	87.0 ^A	1.5*
Filipino	82.9 ^A	1.3
Arab	83.1 ^A	1.0
Korean	86.8 ^A	1.3
Japanese	80.6 ^A	0.9
Latin American	82.1 ^A	1.1
Southeast Asian	89.7 ^A	1.7
South Asian	80.4 ^A	0.8
West Asian	83.2 ^A	0.8
Other or multiple racialized groups	78.7 ^A	1.0
Non-racialized and non-Indigenous (ref.)	73.7 ^A	...
Immigrant status (since 1952)		
Landed immigrant	82.2 ^A	1.1
Non-landed immigrant ³ (ref.)	74.9 ^A	...
Disability status		
Person with a disability	67.9 ^A	1.0
Person without a disability (ref.)	77.1 ^A	...

Table A.1
Use of digital government services by individual Canadians, by socioeconomic and geographic characteristics, 2022

Characteristics	Digital government service users	
	percentage of individual Canadians	odds ratio from logistic regression
Province		
Newfoundland and Labrador	74.6 ^A	0.9
Prince Edward Island	70.4 ^A	0.7*
Nova Scotia	71.1 ^A	0.7*
New Brunswick	71.8 ^A	0.8*
Quebec	73.7 ^A	0.8
Ontario	77.1 ^A	0.8*
Manitoba	71.9 ^A	0.7**
Saskatchewan	71.5 ^A	0.7**
Alberta	78.2 ^A	0.7**
British Columbia (ref.)	80.6 ^A	...
Rural or urban status⁴		
Rural	70.2 ^A	0.9
Urban (ref.)	77.6 ^A	...

... not applicable

^A coefficient of variation of 0.0% to less than 16.5%

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) (p < 0.05)

** significantly different from reference category (ref.) (p < 0.01)

1. The Canadian Internet Use Survey uses the concepts of “men+” and “women+” when referring to gender. For data quality and confidentiality reasons, and because of the small number of individuals identifying as non-binary on the survey, disseminating data for non-binary individuals is not possible for this statistical program. Instead, the “men+” and “women+” categories are derived by considering several other demographic characteristics.

2. Variables for racialized groups were derived from responses to a question asking which population groups a person belongs to. Racialized groups are population groups that are classified as visible minorities under the *Employment Equity Act*. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.”

3. Because of limitations in the level of detail available for immigrants in the Canadian Internet Use Survey, the category “non-landed immigrants” also includes those born in Canada.

4. All areas outside population centres are classified as rural. A population centre has at least 1,000 residents and a population density of 400 people or more per square kilometre, based on population counts from the 2021 Census of Population.

Note: Internet use includes personal use of Internet during the past three months from any location and excludes business and school-related use.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Internet Use Survey, 2022.

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