

Pathways Forward

MAPPING JOB TRANSITIONS FOR ONTARIO
FOOD RETAIL WORKERS

 brookfield
institute
for innovation + entrepreneurship

JUNE 2021

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Special thanks + Acknowledgements

THE BROOKFIELD INSTITUTE'S research is supported by internal and external advisors and partners who provide subject matter expertise and sightlines to both policymaker and practitioner perspectives.

For their contributions and insight into this report, we would like to thank:

Interviewees

We are grateful to 48 employers, training providers, professional associations, networks and individuals—some anonymous—who were interviewed as we explored 10 potential destination occupations. Thanks go to:

Luis Alves: President, Superior Foods

Keith Atteck: President, ARMA Records Management Association

Megan Bailey: Professor in Health Information Management, St. Lawrence College

Leanne Barr: business owner

Diana Bondois: Food Processor

Laura Butchers: College of Carpenters and Allied Trades

Matt Creary: Union Local 18 of Floor Covering Installers

Isabel Dopta: Communications Director, Food and Beverage Ontario

Jonathan Gould: George Brown College Continuing Education

Jennifer Griffith: Executive Director, Food Processing Skills Canada

Tanya Hilts: Certified Professional Bookkeepers of Canada

Kim Hiscott: Co-Chair, Home Child Care Association

Rose Kottis: Senior Estate Law Clerk, Institute of Law Clerks

Natalie Mehra: Ontario Health Coalition

Baseer Moe: Richmond Staffing

Dianne Mueller: CPB, FCPB, Trifold Bookkeeping Advisors

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Kenneth Vigeant: Professor of Paralegal and Law Clerk Programs, Humber College

Deanna Zenger: Regional Coordinator, Food Processing Skills Canada

Thank you to the nearly 300 people employed in the Ontario food retail sector who generously gave their time to participate in associated qualitative research—including ethnographic work, traditional interviews, focus groups, and an online survey. While their identities will remain anonymous, the Job Pathways in Food Retail initiative would not be possible without their contributions.

We are grateful to all our contributors who helped provide insights and experience. Errors or omissions are the responsibility of the authors.

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Community Partners

Thank you to the following groups who assisted the project team in better understanding existing programs and data in their local communities.



Partners + Funders

This project is supported by JPMorgan Chase & Co.

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The food retail focus is undertaken in partnership with the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW Canada).



Job Pathways is an Employment Ontario project, funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario. The views expressed in this project belong to the Brookfield Institute and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.



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Introduction & Purpose

PRIOR TO THE COVID-19 pandemic, analysis in 2020 by the Brookfield Institute and partners identified that more than one third of workers in Canada were in occupations projected to grow or shrink by 2030.¹ Misalignment in the labour market left tens of thousands of Canadian workers looking for work—with nearly equal shortages for workers in other, in-demand occupations.² Helping to make these connections between workers and employers, and signalling opportunities and potential pathways—is one of the most pressing opportunities of our time.

Our *Job Pathways* approach developed a framework for identifying and realizing opportunities to better connect transitioning workers and employers in search of talent. In late 2019, the Brookfield Institute partnered with United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW Canada), a national union representing more than 250,000 food and commercial workers across Canada.³ UFCW Canada was interested in exploring risks and opportunities for workers, in food retail—in particular, cashiers and clerks working in grocery stores in Ontario.

Workers in these important but often overlooked jobs would soon be identified as “frontline heroes” as the COVID-19 pandemic descended in spring 2020.⁴ Economic upheaval prompted by the health crisis resulted in sudden disruptions affecting millions of Canadians and entire sectors and industries. In this context, the potential uses—and positive impacts—of the *Job Pathways* approach became more pronounced.

Despite economic and technological upheavals, census data show that demand for clerks and cashiers increased in Ontario between 2006 and 2016. Interviews and qualitative fieldwork *did* find evidence of significant change in the nature of clerk and cashier roles over time, and in terms and conditions available to workers. In a sector that might previously have offered secured and low-but-reasonably-paid work, we found precarious and part-time hours mixed with low wages. While many workers expressed deep satisfaction for fast-paced work, for opportunities to interact with people, and for the feeling of *doing good* at work—many of these same workers needed to work two or three part-time jobs to make ends meet. As a result, rather than significant structural disruption

or technological change prompting job losses, our team found a sector with surprisingly high annual turnover, as workers sought better jobs.

This report is intended to support workers in the grocery sector and their representatives to successful job transitions. Given the great diversity of workers in the grocery sector, it is clear that no one pathway will work for everyone. Instead, it is hoped that this report illuminates the possibilities and shared lessons that can be applied to assist different people in different ways. There are also important lessons here for job developers and policymakers, who can learn from employer and worker feedback on their real-world needs for training, information, and other supports.

Methodology

THIS REPORT DRAWS on evidence from a number of sources, including publicly-available data from Statistics Canada and primary data generated through interviews and other virtual fieldwork. While the report makes recommendations for workers across Ontario, the team selected three distinct communities/geographies (the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area, Thunder Bay, and the Town of Ingersoll) in order to focus the project and test hypotheses in a range of labour markets. More detail on methods, including ready-to-use open-access tools and research instruments, are available in *Pathways forward: Mapping job transitions for Ontario food retail workers*.

The *Job Pathways* model uses data linked to the National Occupational Classifications (NOC) to understand growth, disruptions and opportunities associated with specific professions and jobs. This project looked at job pathways associated with **store shelf stockers, clerks and order fillers (NOC 6622)** and **cashiers (NOC 6611)**, specifically focusing on workers employed in the food retail sector in Ontario—including grocery stores, supermarkets and convenience stores—for qualitative field work.

In summary, the methods included:

Scan of grocery sector and Ontario

Food retail is a major industry in Ontario, representing more than \$31 billion in sales and nearly 6,000 stores in 2018.⁵ Market research and trade publications offered a wealth of contextual information, including near real-time analysis as the pandemic progressed. The team complemented desk research with expert interviews, allowing us to better understand standard practices and evolving conditions in an industry with relatively few large employers. It also helped the team seek out and test opportunities for transitions that could occur within an existing employer or sector. Key findings from this stage were published in the *Shake-up in Aisle 21: Disruption, change and opportunity in Ontario's grocery sector* report in May 2021.

Interviews—grocery employers

This report draws on insights from interviews with representatives from three Canadian retailers, including one large national and one large regional chain. The perspectives of senior human resources professionals helped illustrate opportunities and challenges for large employers, and to quickly address assumptions about similarities and dissimilarities in roles in traditional and emerging and growing e-commerce areas of the food retail business.

Cultural probes

This project used the cultural probes method to explore work and work-related decision-making with seven current food retail workers in Ontario. Drawing on digital ethnographic and market research best practices, the project team mailed a “kit” of activities and questions to seven participants, who completed reflective activities and shared data with an interviewer using text messages and multimedia on the chat platform WhatsApp, complemented by traditional interview(s). Participants represented different ages, life stages and job trajectories, genders, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and employers, and were located both in and outside the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area.



Cultural probes proved a rich source of information about workplace realities and decision-making processes for people employed in food retail, recognizing that work is one element of their life and that careers and job transitions can happen over months and years, while data collected for this project reflect snapshots in time.

Adjacency model

This project employed an adjacency model, informed by earlier work.⁶ The model sought to identify optimum fit between the attributes (such as skills, abilities, and work activities) required in the origin occupation(s), and those required by potential destination occupations. The team uses data from the Occupational Information Network (O*NET), which has detailed descriptions and measures of the specific skills, knowledge, abilities, required for occupations—alongside descriptions of their associated tasks and work context. Theoretically, the closer the fit between the occupations (the more similar they are, as judged by the model), the easier it could be for workers to make transitions and perform well in the new role with minimal training.

Quantitative filters

The team applied quantitative filters in order to generate a shortlist of occupations that were similar in attributes (based on our adjacency model), and that met specific criteria. For example, jobs were filtered to include only those that had not seen a decline in employment in recent (2006–2016) census data, as well as occupations that did not usually require university training. While many grocery workers have post-secondary qualifications or other expertise, the approach applied generated a shortlist of occupations accessible to a broad population of grocery workers, requiring very little or no specialized training before a worker could be hired.

In order to consider the different situations of communities across the province, we ran these filters for four regions: the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), the City of Thunder Bay, the Town of Ingersoll, and Ontario.⁷ This created an initial shortlist for each region. The final,

combined shortlist was then created by selecting the occupations that appeared on more than two regional lists, for both origin occupations. At this step, the team chose to consider both origin occupations—clerks and cashiers—simultaneously, as so many workers work or reported to have worked in both.

Focus groups and interviews: Grocery workers

The project recruited grocery workers largely through social media (including Facebook, Reddit, LinkedIn and Twitter), with amplification support from partners, notably UFCW Canada. Ninety-three workers registered interest in participating in any qualitative research and were invited to videoconference-based focus groups (on the Zoom platform) to explore issues around work and job transitions. Twenty-one participants were interviewed through ten focus groups. The team encountered significant challenges with scheduling and no-shows, due in part to the variable shifts and work schedules that exist in the food retail industry.


Survey

Analysis of earlier qualitative work—cultural probes and focus group interviews—allowed the team to generate an updated list of factors, considerations, and preferences that could affect job selection and work transitions. An online survey generated complete responses from 195 participants from across Ontario; as interested participants were notified by email of research opportunities, approximately two-dozen participants may have contributed to both surveys and other qualitative work. The survey identified people's preferences relating to the work and job transitions—for example, highlighting desired wage rates or work environments. This allowed the research team to identify and consider factors that food retail workers reported caring about, analysing results for workers of different ages, genders and disability and caregiving statuses.

Destination occupations: Desk research

The initial shortlist included twenty-six potential destination occupations that appeared at the top of the lists that emerged from adjacency and





filtering processes; these were the occupations with the strongest “fit” to clerk and cashier jobs after our filters. We also identified and added five additional occupations that appeared promising—but slightly lower down the statistical output—as they were within the broader food sector, which we thought might enable easier transitions for some. The team undertook online research—largely focused on the [Government of Canada Job Bank](#) and census data—to filter out occupations that:

- Had a median wage in Ontario below \$15 /hour
- Represented relatively low employment in Ontario (<1,000 people in the province)
- Provided employment in occupations that were, in the team’s judgement and based on public information available in early 2021, likely to face ongoing disruption as a result of COVID19-related shutdowns (examples: tourism, entertainment)

Finally, the team reviewed projections from the Brookfield Institute’s [Forecast of Canadian Occupational Growth](#) and the [Canadian Occupational Projection System \(COPS\)](#) projections to identify and remove any occupations with poor prospects against both forecasts.

Destination occupations: Interviews

A final group of ten potential destination occupations were identified and explored, through outreach and interviews with employers, training providers, professional associations and networks, and workers. The team used interviews to explore local labour markets, understand potential transition pathways and training requirements, and better identify job characteristics that could matter to grocery workers. For example, employers explained regional or rural/urban differences in demand and compensation, identified limitations to existing training programs and potential alternatives, and explained, for example, the solitary or social nature of a job or the invisible requirements that hiring managers sought in potential employees.

Human-centered design

ACROSS AND THROUGHOUT the project, the team sought to apply a human-centered design lens onto the work. This was done through the use of mixed and complementary methods—with rich ethnographic work alongside traditional interviews allowing the team to ground analysis in considerations of the real people and real places we encountered.

The project team itself presented limitations: as an all-woman group of university-educated people predominantly located in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area, the team had members with experience in retail—but none had worked in an Ontario grocery or convenience store. We sought to address this limitation through choice and phasing of qualitative methods, which built on each other—cultural probes, then interviews/focus groups, then a survey. The project also enlisted four project advisors currently working at store level in food retail in Ontario, recruited following an open call, to provide grounded expertise and recommendations as the project progressed.

Finally, the diversity of workers in food retail is notable—from university students engaged in part-time work, to retirees, to newcomer Canadians with expertise in other sectors, to mid-career workers who may be juggling family responsibilities or multiple jobs. This project found the food retail sector is home to all. As a result, we have aimed to provide job pathways and reflections that speak to a wide variety of people and experiences, so that individuals with different lives and goals might find real but different value through this report.

Impact of COVID-19

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC and ensuing economic shocks caused severe disruption affecting entire industries and millions of workers. This disruption on a scale unseen in generations—required a retooling of some aspects of the *Job Pathways* approach employed in Phase I.

Notably:

- The team anticipated that data from the past—even the recent past—could be a less effective predictor of current or future conditions. As a result, the team relied less on certain indicators such as the number of public job postings, instead combining these indicators with expert opinion on the current and future state.
- Where appropriate, the team used informed judgement to remove destination occupations that appeared likely to be heavily negatively affected by COVID-19 shutdowns and restarts. For example, occupations that relied on servicing large public gatherings such as concerts, amusement parks, or large sporting events were removed from shortlists.

Finally, for public health reasons, all research was carried out at a distance, using telephone or web-based research. This provided both an opportunity for innovation, but also a significant limitation for participant recruitment and direct observation.





Origin jobs: Food retail work in Ontario

Store shelf stockers, clerks and order fillers

PEOPLE WORKING IN these roles work throughout grocery stores—on the sales floor, in fridges and stock rooms, and occasionally outdoors. Sometimes workers specialize in a certain area—for example, produce or dairy—but they can also work across multiple departments. Clerks physically move stock, manage inventory, clean surfaces, cut, clean, and display perishable foods, and provide customer service including giving recommendations and helping customers find items. Responding to customer interactions and providing friendly and helpful service is an important part of the role.

These are not “back room” jobs. Interaction with coworkers can also be frequent. It can be a physically demanding role with long hours spent on your feet and some heavy lifting required. Workers we spoke to highlighted the importance of understanding how to avoid injury. Many clerks reported pride in excelling in important but often invisible work—making a display look beautiful, organizing stock to ensure safe movement around the store, or deftly managing inventory to

minimize spoilage or maximize efficiency. Clerks are of all genders and ages.



Cashiers

CASHIERS MANAGE PAYMENTS at point-of-sale and may scan items, take payment, and sometimes bag goods. While the job appears less physically demanding than clerks, there are considerable physical demands—moving hundreds of pounds of product each shift and standing in one place for long periods. Workers reported technology improvements may have lessened the cognitive demands in this role, with less memorization of codes and more automated processes for making change. However, cashiers are expected to be excellent customer service providers because they are sometimes the only human point of contact during a shopping trip. Cashiers can “make or break” the experience for a customer. They can be any gender or age, though historically it is a stereotypically feminized role, with women making up eighty-two percent of cashiers in Ontario.⁸

Shifts in technology

ANALYSIS SUGGESTS THAT Ontario’s food retail sector has not rapidly adopted labour-displacing technologies or seen major investments that radically change the operations of existing stores. Our research with food retail workers and employers supports the findings that retailers have seen a slow and consistent adoption of new technologies, which may eventually change how work is done. More significant changes are associated with e-commerce adoption—including new “dark stores” and distribution centres, which operate and have different labour requirements than traditional stores.⁹

For clerks and shelf-stockers, hand-held scanners and more centralized ordering systems to help manage inventory have been in place for years—although workers report variations across departments. The adoption of digital pricing (automated digital price tags on shelves) is currently being rolled out in some areas, replacing the time-intensive work of doing signage by hand. Retailers suggest that emerging practices can “make life easier” for clerks—such as customizing the building of pallets so it’s in line with a specific store’s layout.

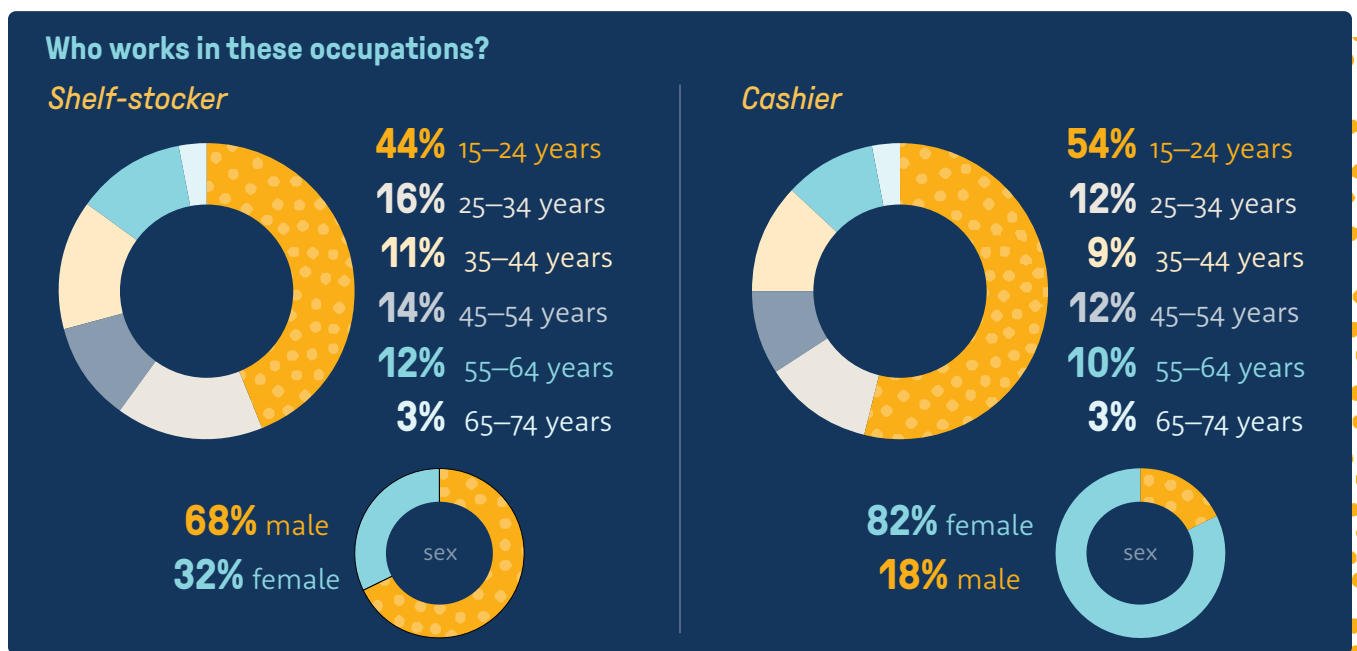
For cashiers, shifts in point-of-sale systems (check-outs) have been rolling out in Canada

for many years, often limited by existing store footprints. This project did find anecdotal but compelling evidence that the introduction of multiple self-checkouts can reduce hours of work available for cashiers, though workers reported being offered “cross training” to enable scheduling for other roles (such as clerk or customer service).

Who’s in the jobs?

PEOPLE WORKING IN grocery stores reflect a range of ages and backgrounds, from university students to semi-retirees, newcomers to Canada and established Canadians. Diversity across grocery workers posed a considerable challenge to this project, as people with different circumstances, characteristics, and goals are in this line of work for different reasons, and look for different factors when transitioning to new jobs.

Experts suggested that grocery worker populations often mirrored the characteristics of communities in which they were located—for example, students in university towns, or newcomers in areas of high settlement. Notably, industry actors reported average annual turnover of thirty to one-hundred percent in grocery stores, reflecting the reality that many workers transition quickly through these jobs, for many different reasons.



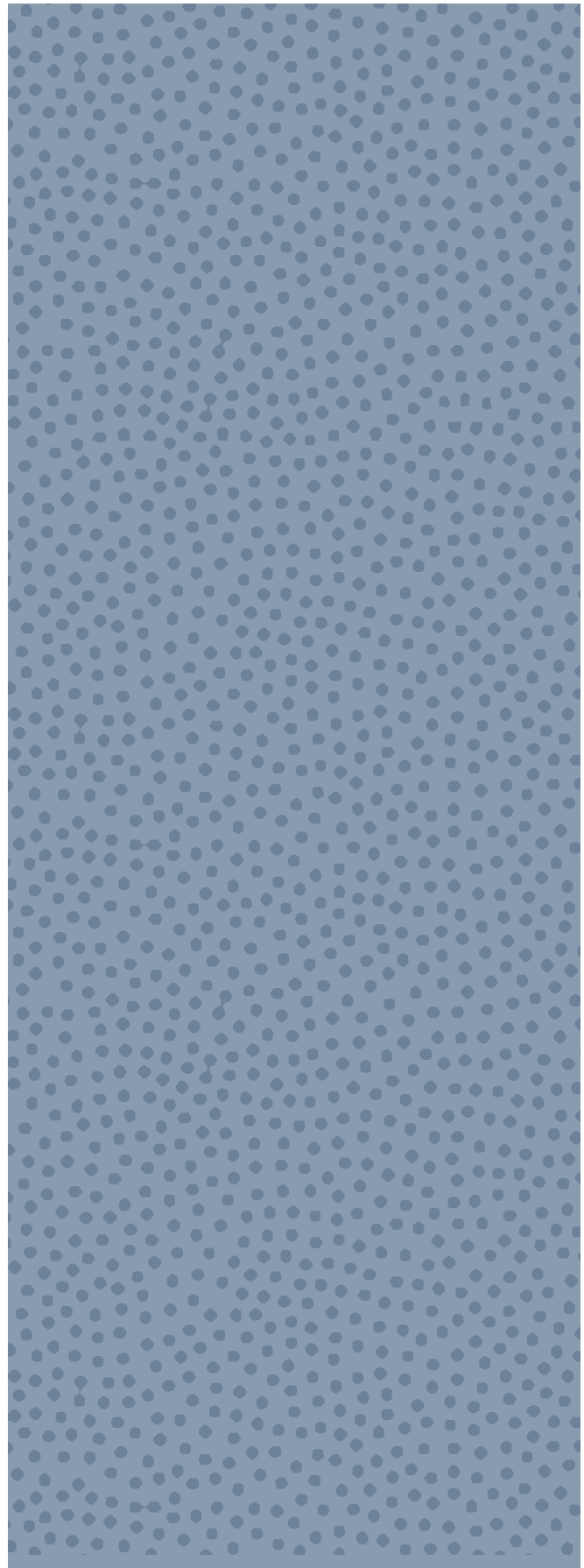
Are we losing food retail jobs at store level?

EMPLOYMENT DATA COMPARING the 2006 and 2016 Canadian census indicate that store-level occupations such as clerks and cashiers in food retail have grown, from 177,490 to 199,120 in Ontario over that period. The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated shift to e-commerce may have increased the demand for clerk-like roles including e-commerce order-fillers, at least in the short term. The team heard anecdotal but credible reports of fewer hours available for cashiers, following the installation of self-checkout kiosks—but with retraining available for clerk/customer-service shifts. E-commerce and automation may be resulting in a gradual decline for cashier workers, something confirmed by a large retailer who also noted that space requirements for self-check-outs, among other barriers, has stopped a more rapid shift.

The significant demand for customer-service and client-facing skills in these roles suggest that many will not be replaced by automation, at least in the near term.

Research suggests that the replacement of full-time roles with part-time positions could be happening, especially for cashiers. This dynamic is reflected in census data and is explained by both shifts in consumer preferences and in employer scheduling patterns. As Sunday shopping policies and family employment and shopping patterns have changed, grocery stores have transitioned from largely Monday-to-Friday daytime shopping to seeing very busy periods on weekday evenings and weekends.

People working in food retail in Ontario are a very mixed group, with a range of backgrounds, interests and work-related ambitions. Yet what many of them have in common is an expectation to transition out of their work, relatively soon. The rest of this report explores a number of options available to workers without specific post-secondary training, with the ability to transition into these new roles in weeks or months.



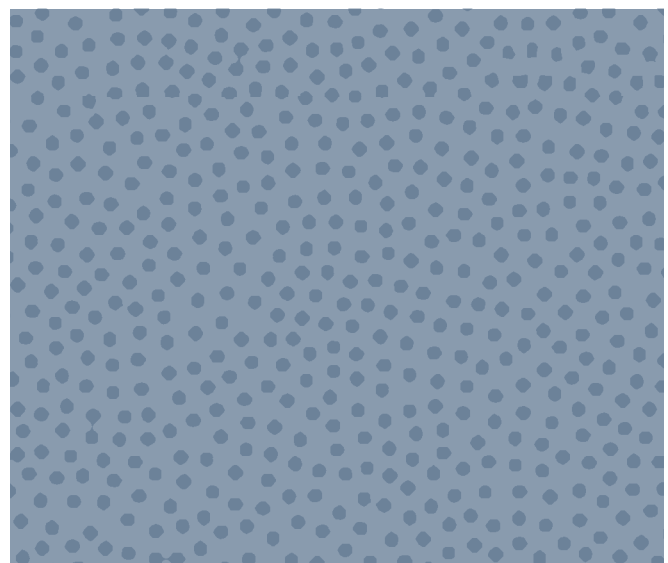


Destination Jobs— Exploring pathways and job transitions

FOOD RETAIL WORKERS in Ontario are a diverse group, with a range of different personal and professional backgrounds, interests, needs, and skill profiles. Given this reality, it is unrealistic to propose only one or two pathways, or only one or two types of jobs. Instead, this report outlines **four possible destinations** that can be accessed with little or no specialized training and **two additional destinations** that require some training but have greater progression and earning potential.

Some of the occupations offer primarily full-time options, some part-time, and some that may be most easily accessed through self-employment. None of these options is perfect for everyone—but all appear to be in-demand and accessible to many food retail workers who may be looking for easy or fast transitions.

The following pages explore different work options, providing information on the work itself, its alignment or non-alignment with clerk and cashier roles and notes on how interested people might make a successful transition:



Job transitions cheat sheet

TO HELP WORKERS in occupations such as store shelf stocker, clerks, order fillers and cashiers explore future career steps, we present this two-page summary of the transitions we explore in this report. For further resources, check out the links included at the end.

Destination occupations

What do these occupations involve?		Median Hourly Wage (Ontario) ¹¹
Home support workers	Provide in-home care or companionship to people who need it; clients are often seniors or those recovering from illness or surgery.	\$18.00
Home child care provider	Support the physical and social development of children, from infancy to about twelve years of age, through education and care. They can do this informally or formally in their or others' homes, in child care centres—or, as licensed early childhood educators, also in schools.	\$15.00
Early Childhood Educators and Assistants		\$19.75
Floor covering installers**	Lay flooring—including tile, linoleum, carpet and wood—in residential homes and businesses.	\$21.25
Labourers in food and beverage processing	Work in bakeries, breweries, processing plants and warehouses to process, pack and ship food and beverages.	\$16.50
Other occupations		
Bookkeepers and accounting technicians	Support people and businesses by coordinating or directly managing financial processes and records.	\$23.00
Law clerks (part of: "Paralegal and related occupations")*	Provide administrative and other support, usually in law firms and often working with lawyers.	\$28.85

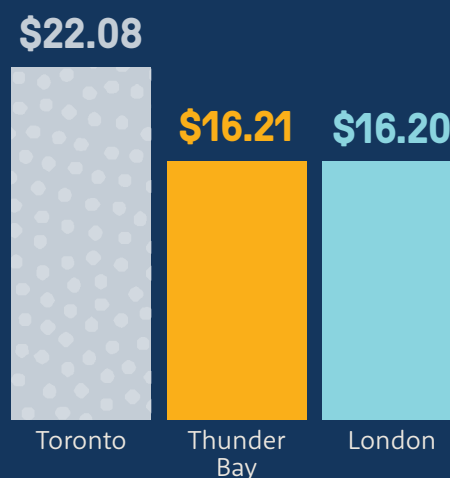
**in large urban areas only*

Ontario living wage rates (2019)¹⁰

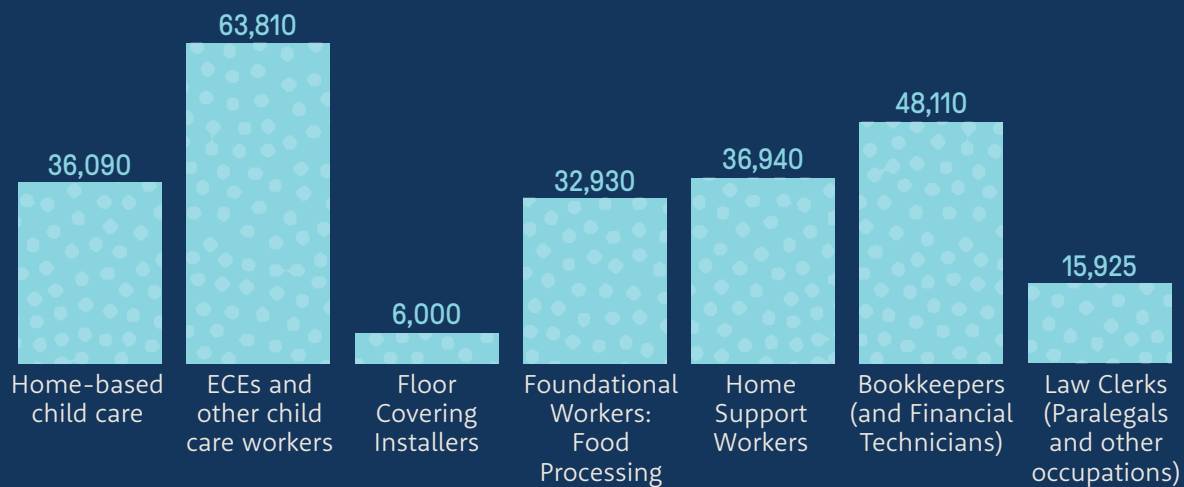
Food retail workers' number one priority for future jobs was their rate of pay. Some of the suggested destination occupations have a median hourly rate below living wage; however, all of these jobs pay more than food retail with full-time hours often available at or near the start.

A "living wage" is calculated based on local data, using a tested national framework. It is the hourly rate that would allow two income earners working full-time hours to support a family of four, based on the actual costs of living in a specific community including transportation, food, rental housing and other essentials.

Here are sample living wage hourly rates:



How many people work in these jobs in Ontario?



COVID-19 related risk

MANY WORKERS MAY have questions about the level of COVID-19 risk on the job. This report does not include data or judgements on work-related COVID-19 exposure risk, as this is dependent on a number of factors including provincial regulations and enforcement, operational changes at the employer level, and community spread. This Brookfield Institute's [COVID-19 and Work in Canada data visualization](#) can help workers explore potential risks associated with different occupations.

You've got the skills!

Download and edit [this customizable resume](#) developed for people with experience in store-based food retail.



Explore the data yourself

THIS REPORT BUILDS on insights from employers, industry actors, and workers in these occupations. Job seekers and other researchers can also access valuable data on public websites:

- Identify a job or occupation's National Occupational Classification (NOC) code on [Employment and Social Development Canada's website](#).
- Canada Job Bank's [Trend Analysis](#) tool includes job descriptions, wage and skill requirement data, and links to active job postings from across Canada.
- Ontario's [Labour Market Information](#) web pages include over 500 job profiles that include charts and graphs explaining things like the educational background and age of people already working in those jobs.

Looking for individual support or more information on what's available near you? Check out what's available on the [Employment Ontario](#) web site.

Opportunity I: Child-care practitioners & Early Childhood Educators

CHILD-CARE PRACTITIONERS provide care and help support the physical and social development of children, from infancy to about twelve years of age.

Although educating and caring for children is critically important for both our economy and our society's youngest members, jobs in child care can be relatively low status and low pay—especially for unlicensed in-home workers, but sometimes even for those formally registered as Early Childhood Educators.

Expanding child care: the future

In April 2021, the federal government announced an intent to build a “Canada-wide, community-based system of quality child care.” What will this mean for those who work in child care?

It is too early to tell for certain—but one can expect continued strong demand for child care workers, especially those with professional credentials. Canada's 2021 Budget states:

“With provincial and territorial partners, the government will work to ensure that early childhood educators are at the heart of the system, by valuing their work and providing them with the training and development opportunities needed to support their growth and the growth of a quality system of child care. Over 95 per cent of child care workers are women, many of whom are making low wages, with a median wage of \$19.20 per hour.”¹²

In Ontario, care and education for children outside of school is provided in a number of different settings and by people with a range of expertise and qualifications.

We explored three potential pathways for entry:¹³

1 Destination occupation: Home child-care provider

Home child-care providers can be employed by families/households as nannies or babysitters. They can also be employed by home child-care agencies or be independent contractors or self-employed. The Ontario Child Care and Early Years Act (2014) sets out rules that apply to licensed and unlicensed home daycares, but not to nannies or babysitters.

Unlicensed home child-care providers can care for up to five children under the age of thirteen, with a maximum of three children younger than two years old. Home child-care providers overseen by **licensed agencies** can care for one additional child (total of six) with the same limit of three younger children.

According to the latest provincial data from 2017 to 2020, there are approximately 19,800 home child-care providers/workers in Ontario.¹⁴

Home child-care agencies provide training, administrative and marketing-focused support to home child-care providers and may also lend equipment and facilitate inspections. For this, licensed agencies take a percentage of child-care fees. Importantly, based on rates provided in interviews, home child-care providers operating with three or fewer children can *easily* make less than provincial minimum wage. According to the latest provincial data, the median salary for a home child-care provider was \$18,410.

This is contrasted with nannies who can command rates above \$20/hour for full-time work in areas of the GTHA.

Interviews suggested that practitioners move into home-based child care for a number of reasons. Some describe it as a calling—an opportunity to combine care work and entrepreneurship. However, others find it a pragmatic and flexible way to earn income from home while one’s own children are young—saving thousands of dollars in daycare costs while engaging in paid work.

Some observers noted that there were high levels of newcomer and racialized women in this profession. Some saw this (in child care centres) as an indicator of increasingly multicultural communities, while others expressed concern with the sometimes isolated and low-paid nature of in-home care.

While this role clearly requires skills associated with child development, interviews also highlighted the value of other skills. Interviews suggested that self-employed providers would benefit from “business” skills (including financial literacy) while all providers are required to document developmental information and communicate with parents.¹⁵

Destination occupation: Child-care practitioner

Daycares and child-care centres report strong and consistent demand for child-care workers, including those with care skills or experience who may not hold formal qualifications or credentials. These roles are sometimes labelled Early Childhood Education (ECE) Assistants, Daycare Assistants or Child-care Practitioners. Job bank data and field work suggest these roles are often recruited at \$14 to \$16/hour, with the median hourly wage for ECEs and ECE Assistants at \$19.75 hourly.¹⁶

Interviews suggest that full-time work is available in different parts of Ontario, with child-care workers most commonly working eight- or nine-hour shifts between 7:00 am and 6:00 pm.

Experienced care workers report a high degree of turnover in the industry because of the relatively low pay and benefits offered by different providers—workers may move to secure slightly better wages or conditions. Child-care work can also be socially and physically demanding work that also requires documentation skills and the ability to communicate with both children and parents.

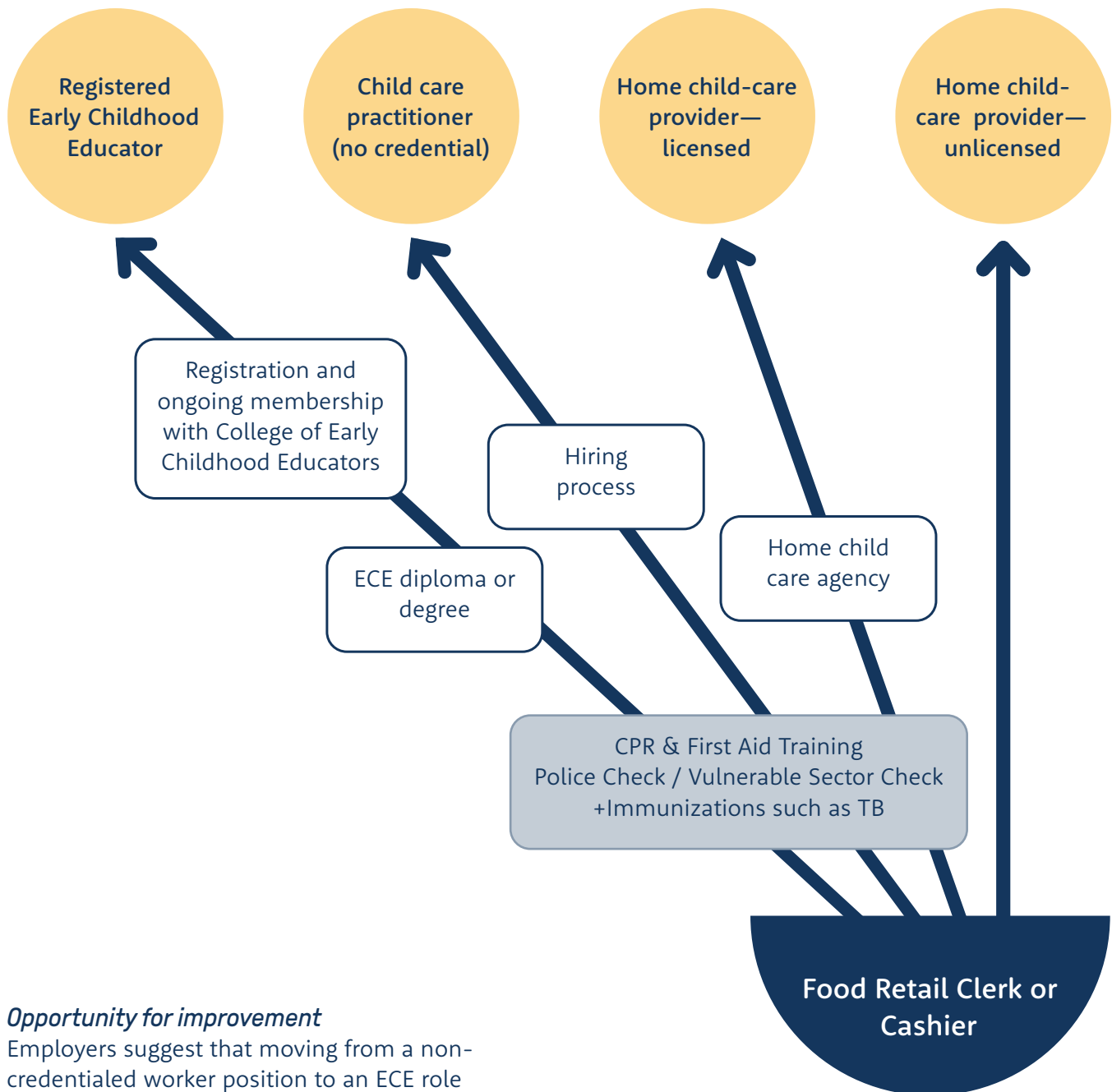
Applicants for any roles will be expected to hold recent child/infant CPR and first aid certificates, as well as a recent police or vulnerable sector check. There may be additional requirements for health screenings or immunizations, and some employers include trial days as part of the onboarding process.

“I used to work as a cashier and I’ve seen individuals who take the job seriously and are proactive at problem solving, teamwork, getting jobs done, and helping others—which would be great for child care.... Grocery clerks and cashiers have strong elements of socializing with customers and other employees, so they do have a good start”

Registered ECE, Toronto, woman in her 30s with more than five years’ experience

Pathway 1

Potential pathways to child care



Opportunity for improvement

Employers suggest that moving from a non-credentialed worker position to an ECE role was uncommon. One employer reported that current workers studying part-time in college programs were required to complete experiential placements in locations other than their work—a requirement that made little sense to employers and required workers to take holidays from work in order to complete practical placement hours.

They also suggested that a three- or four-semester college ECE program was a lot to ask



those entering child care for the first time. More accessible, shorter *Pre-Apprenticeship*¹⁷ training programs could entice new entrants to the profession and provide incentives for child-care workers to undertake training and gain experience before deciding to train and qualify as an ECE.

3 Destination occupation: Early Childhood Educator

The *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007* defines the practice of early childhood education as: “the planning and delivery of inclusive, play-based learning and care programs for children in order to promote the well-being and holistic development of children.”

In Ontario, there are approximately 83,000 Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) and about 20,000 home child-care providers, according to the latest provincial statistics. Of these, in 2019, there were 57,500 members in good standing with the College of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario.

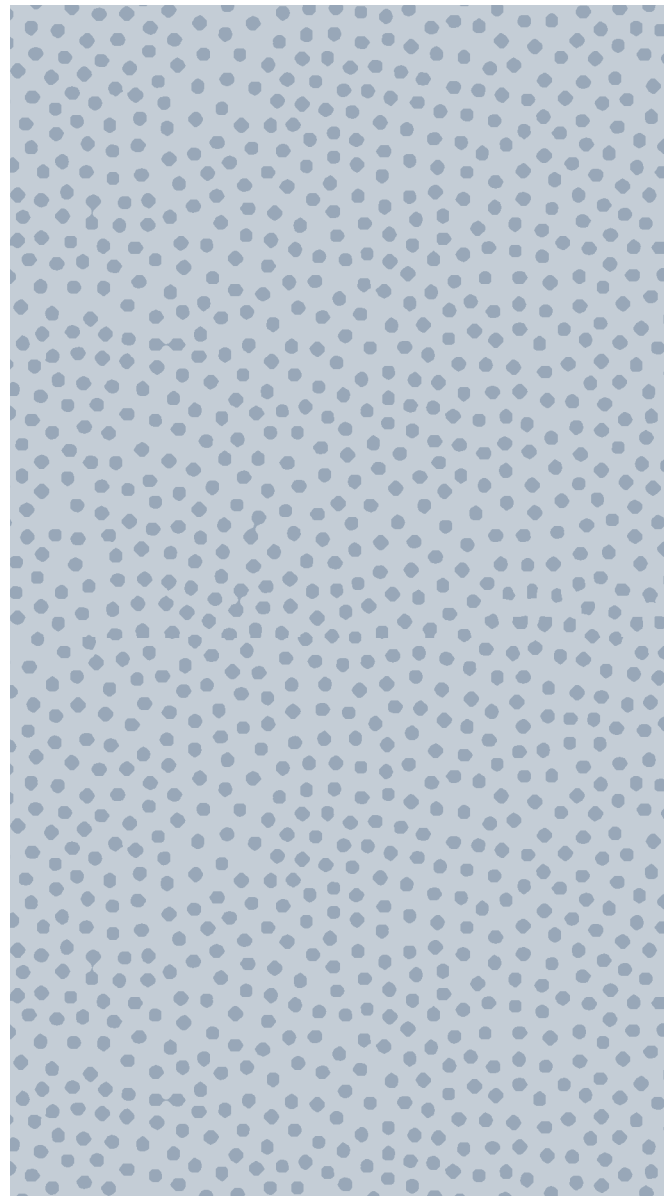
Nearly all (ninety-eight percent) were women, fifty-five percent worked in licensed care (including home-based and centre-based care) and thirty-two percent were employed by schools or school boards.

The majority (approximately eighty-five percent) of applicants to the College hold ECE diplomas from one of more than two dozen Ontario colleges, though applications are also accepted from people with related degrees or alternative education qualifications.

ECEs can choose to work in a variety of settings and roles—as leaders in child-care settings or EarlyON Centres, as home visitors or operators of independent home child-care providers, in schools or beyond. Interviews suggest that ECEs in school-based settings receive the highest hourly pay (though they are only employed for about ten months) with rates that exceed \$26/hour for qualified ECEs with more than four years

of experience.¹⁸ The median annual salary was \$34,391, according to 2016 census data.

Early childhood education is high stakes (with inattention potentially compromising children’s safety) and alongside direct care, roles can have significant documentation and paperwork requirements. However, it is a role in high demand with an established and recognized credential. Interviews suggest ECE training can also be used as a pathway to teaching or to further specialization in areas such as autism support in formal health and educational settings.





Opportunity II: Floor covering installers

FLOOR COVERING INSTALLERS lay carpet, tile, linoleum, and other types of flooring in residential homes and businesses. This includes preparing floor surfaces and foundations, laying or installing new floors, and applying any finishes.

This job is physically demanding, requiring strength and stamina—installers reported often dirty conditions and are expected to be on their feet or knees for hours at a time. Strong high-school-level math skills are required for measuring and calculating materials. Floor covering installers will also have to be required to operate some machinery and trained on how to work with heavy materials safely.

About 6,000 people work in this occupation in Ontario, with half employed in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area. People in this industry are overwhelmingly (over ninety-five percent) men¹⁹ and with employers and experienced workers noting that the work environment can be “rough,” and potentially a difficult environment for “shy or demure” people.

Floor covering installers can be self-employed or work for others, usually for construction companies or floor covering outlets.

Floor covering installers often work alone and sometimes with a partner or small team, depending on the size of the job. This occupation is in high demand across Ontario, in both rural and urban settings, with expectations that the demand will only grow as the current workforce ages out in the next five to ten years.²⁰

Those working in this occupation have the option of entering an apprenticeship pathway into a skilled trade or simply taking on work without a formal designation. Those following the apprenticeship route can expect pay starting above \$20/hour during their three to five years of training, and rates above \$40/hour once fully qualified. Those entering through the informal

“In my opinion, women would not be suited for this employment. Older individuals would not be suited for this employment. Sensitive people would not be suited for this employment. People with any physical conditions or disabilities would not be suitable for this employment. Sorry—I know that this is not politically correct—but it is factual and honest”

Employer

pathway are often paid an hourly rate (starting at \$15/hour) or for “piece work” by the square foot.

Government statistics suggest relatively low earnings, but this data can be skewed by part-time workers and a large volume of informal or cash-based work. Provincial data puts the median annual salary at \$31,488, but interviews suggest that qualified tradespeople can easily gross \$50,000 annually, with especially skilled workers or those regularly working overtime making more than \$100,000, in addition to pension and benefits.

Multiple interviewees noted that the current workforce is homogeneous and that women in particular may find the atmosphere and physical requirements of the work to be challenging. Some also noted that those with inflexible schedules may find the early morning starts to be difficult to juggle with family obligations.

Interviews also suggest that newcomers to Canada and racialized people are under-represented on Ontario job sites—and interviews suggest that employer bias and work site culture can pose a barrier to entry for racialized people and women. Two female floor-covering installers pointed out that change is happening, noting that this occupation requires thick skin and a good work ethic, and gave examples of how they managed this physically demanding work through use of equipment—for example, using dollies to move large flooring rolls. These reports were strikingly similar to how a grocery clerk explained the safe handling and movement of heavy dairy products.

This work is usually indoors and takes place in regular shifts during the day, typically beginning with early starts. Travel or overtime is sometimes required, depending on jobs—but can bring 1.5x or double pay.

“If you got the drive, I think anybody can really do a physical job. The pay and the benefits are amazing. ...I was 5'2" and I went for it. I can do it. Anybody can.”

Interviewee (woman)

Between jobs, a floor covering installer may face downtime—“lay-offs” are part of the job, when work stops and until another job opens up. Workers described the emotional impact of a first layoff as challenging—though this is how this business works. Tradespeople looking for work can either seek it out themselves, or join a union to gain access to a list when jobs become available. Interviews suggest that with current demand, quickly finding work is not difficult. It was also noted it was less competitive than other popular trades such as carpentry or electrical work.

Demand for skilled workers is high and the current workforce is aging rapidly. As a result, a number of incentives and grants are available to encourage people to move into this trade, including an Incentive Grant for Women worth up to \$6,000.

We explored two potential pathways for entry:

1 Apprenticeship to a skilled trade

To start an apprenticeship, a person must be at least sixteen years old and have completed grade ten or its equivalent.

Those who have previous flooring experience can request to have their hours credited towards their apprenticeship. Only paid work experience would qualify. Currently, the wait time for someone applying into the flooring apprenticeship program is about six months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously, that waiting period was around three months. Due to the delay, those already with work experience are permitted to join the union and start working while they wait for the apprenticeship course to begin. The apprenticeship program generally takes around five years to complete.

Mid-career workers can complete an Application for Pre-Apprenticeship Training and sign up for training courses on the CCAT web site.

The costs:

In Ontario, the College of Carpenters and Allied Trades offers training and pathways to apprenticeships. Apprenticeships involve 6,000 hours of training, of which about ninety percent is on-the-job and the rest is two ten- to eleven-week blocks of in-school training.

Apprentices are responsible for their own basic tool set and equipment (hard hat, safety glasses, and boots). Training courses cost about \$1,100 not including textbooks, and apprentices are responsible for paying a union initiation fee (\$168 to \$412) and a yearly payment of about \$68 to the Ontario College of Trades during their

Apprenticeship. Grants, tax deductions, and loans ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars are available to help defray many of these costs.

Importantly, apprentices are paid during training. Hourly rates start at \$20.62/hour for the first term, increasing by at least \$2/hour each term. A fully-trained journey-level Floor Covering Installer earns \$41.23/hour, based on the current Ontario rates. Vacation pay, health insurance, pension and other benefits are in addition to these rates.

trade more informally. This could involve starting a business to become a self-employed as a contractor, or being hired by a company that is willing to provide on-the-job training. Multiple interviewees suggested that there was a rise in the proportion of floor covering installers who were unlicensed, due to the high demand for workers, and the time investment involved in becoming a skilled journeyman.

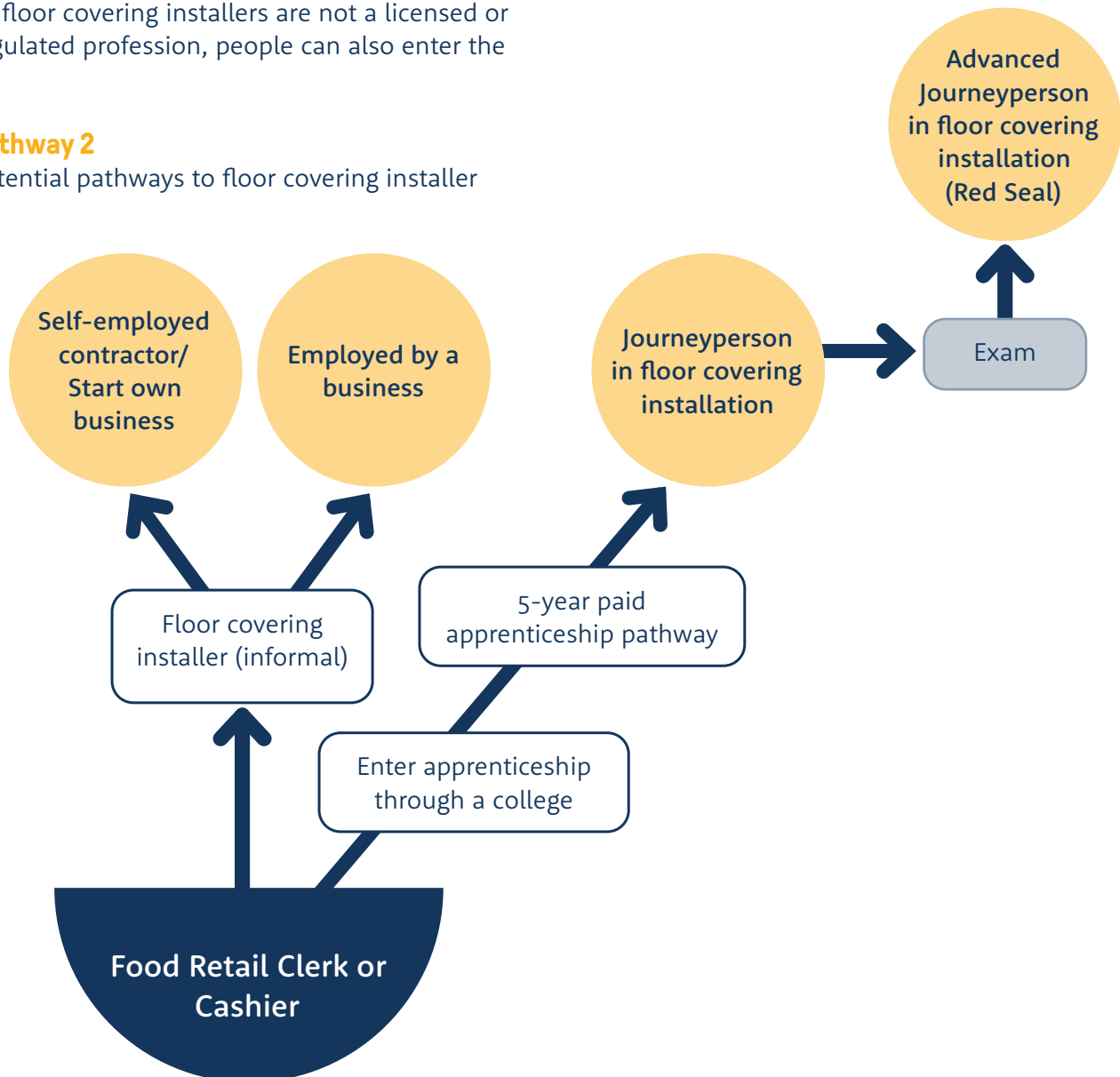
One interviewee noted that employers are incentivized to hire workers who do not go through the official apprenticeship training program because they can pay them less,

2 Unlicensed pathway

As floor covering installers are not a licensed or regulated profession, people can also enter the

Pathway 2

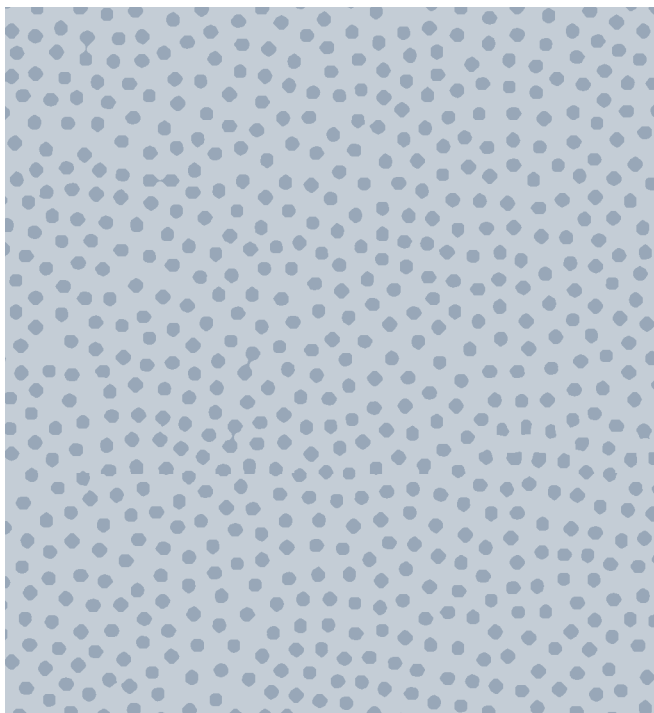
Potential pathways to floor covering installer



often with cash, but the job quality often is not comparable to that of a skilled worker. As a self-employed contractor, workers would have more flexibility in their desired wages and schedule, but could face precarious employment if they are working “under the table.” Unless provided by their business, they will also may not have access to benefits such as health insurance, sick days, and vacation pay.

Floor covering installers who take the unlicensed pathways typically get paid per job based on the square footage size of the project and the materials that are being installed. They will also get paid for the preparation work required, and sometimes travel time between job sites. Generally, the bigger the square footage, the greater the pay.

One interviewee who owns a flooring business in Thunder Bay says unskilled workers can also work for a skilled worker as a “helper” but that floorers are so busy that they may not be able or willing to train those with no experience. They noted that these “helpers” often do not last because work in floor covering installation is so physically demanding that workers decide to find another job.



Opportunity III: Foundational work in food processing

THERE IS A severe shortage of “labourers in food and beverage processing” (NOC 9617,) which is the title that government agencies use to track these jobs. People who are employed in these jobs work in food and beverage processing and packaging plants—including bakeries, breweries, confectionery, meat plants, fruit and vegetable processing plants, and in warehouses that package and ship these items. Ontario’s food and beverage processing industry is large and varied, so there are many different job titles—packers, packagers, production helper, food processing labourers—these are people who do the physical work that keeps Ontarians and others fed.

Employers, recruiters and market specialists report that labour shortages are constraining innovation and growth—and that problem may get much worse over the coming decade, as many workers retire. Employers sometimes use immigration (sponsoring foreign workers) or agency-based employment to source new workers, though this comes at higher cost to employers, to cover agency fees. Wages can be low and conditions challenging—and research with grocery workers suggests that factories and processing facilities are the least popular work environments for food retail workers.

That said, people who are looking for physical work — in the GTHA and around Ontario—will find many options in this area. Research suggests that job postings (such as those on employment website Indeed.com or Canada’s Job Bank) often include a low starting hourly rate without benefits—however, in interviews, small- and medium-sized employers report a willingness to offer regular full-time hours and benefits to those who work well in the role.

Experts suggest that the human resources culture, including recruitment marketing practices, in this sector can be very traditional. Restrictions around site visits linked to COVID-19 can also make job hunting more challenging, with workers not able

to view their work sites easily ahead of time. Hiring may be done online—via company or third-party job sites—or by visiting or contacting the company directly.

Men (forty-seven percent of workers) and women (fifty-three percent of workers) are fairly evenly represented in this occupation and it includes a mix of full- and part-time jobs. Nearly all workers are employed by others—while large companies with formal human resources teams and sometimes unionized work exist—the sector is also dotted by small- and medium-sized businesses. Most workers in these jobs hold no formal educational credentials or the equivalent of a high school diploma (seventy-one percent) and the median income in Ontario is \$35,852/ year.

“This industry, this sector has done very well. And people...workers from other industries are moving to this industry... this is the only industry that is hiring aggressively right now. As we speak today, I have an open order of about 75 workers to be hired ASAP. I’m talking about frontline floor workers—I’m not talking about technicians or highly-skilled engineers or supervisors.”

Sector expert

Many of these jobs, sometimes because of municipal zoning, are located outside of the GTHA and might require access to a car. Hours of work vary by employer but shift-based work is common. Sector actors report that many large employers prefer to hire on an hourly or temporary basis through agencies, then transition workers on as employees after three months, as a form of “probationary” period.²¹

Research suggests that some employers may be biased towards hiring older workers who (they judge) have some demonstrated commitment to staying in similar work. For some, there is a perception that younger workers are less interested in physical labour—or in work where you cannot have your phone with you. Some jobs in food processing happen in challenging (dirty, smelly or cold/freezing) conditions—for example, in meat processing or sanitation. Many jobs are not subject to those conditions—employers highlighted packaging or labelling work as “cleaner” and less labour-intensive. Interviews suggested that because of high levels of turnover and demand, in some larger employers, productive workers who stay on for one or two years can find themselves on a supervisory pathway, though still on the floor.

Industry-wide talent initiatives

Different provincial and national initiatives are aiming to help address labour shortages in the food and beverage industry:

- Food Processing Skills Canada has developed clear skills frameworks and specialized training for workers and employers in this industry. People looking to enter a pathway in food and beverage processing might consider applying to the Succeeding at Work program, which is funded and includes technical and soft-skills training and supports to find a job.
- Food and Beverage Ontario offers the “Careers Now” portal at tasteyourfuture.ca, allowing those who sign up to receive information on training and job opportunities, mentorships, and career fairs.



Importantly, the physical nature of this work, or the nature of the work environment, will not appeal to everyone. However, given the high demand for workers, a labour-focused job in food and beverage processing could be a promising option for seeking an in-demand job offering full-time hours and benefits, without a long pathway in.

Alternative: Specialized skills in food retail: Butchers & Meat Cutters

Butchery or meat cutting is a promising occupation for people who enjoy the food retail environment, but want to develop a more specialized skill. Food retailers confirmed the importance of quality meat cutting to their stores—especially higher-end grocers—but struggled to find skilled and experienced meat-cutting staff. High demand for these skills means that workers can expect higher wages or faster pathways to full-time hours and benefits. Those considering this occupation could consider asking their current or potential employer about on-the-job training or pre-apprenticeship options.²² Alternatively, select colleges in Ontario offer programs—though some have been suspended as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Ontario, statistics indicate that most people in this job (eighty-eight percent) are men, sixty-three percent work full-time and ninety-three percent are employed (with seven percent self-employed.)²³

Opportunity IV: Home support

ALSO KNOWN AS: home care attendant, home care, companion, housekeeper.

Home-support workers provide care, housekeeping and/or companionship for people who need it. They travel to clients' homes—most often assisting seniors or those recovering from surgery. Their clients may have physical disabilities or be experiencing dementia but live at home.

Their responsibilities include:

- Helping people bathe, dress, groom themselves or use the toilet
- Preparing meals or completing simple housekeeping tasks such as laundry
- Supporting people with mobility issues to move around
- Provide reminders to take medication

Home support workers provide important in-home care and support, but are not required to have specific training or qualifications. Care providers with more formal training and qualifications—such as Personal Support Workers (PSWs) or nurses—are responsible for more complex or medical care. Home support workers can expect to visit multiple homes per shift, and sometimes encounter different pay rates for in-home time versus time spent travelling between homes. Those exploring this occupation should confirm with potential employers what travel pay or allowances are paid. For many employers or locations, access to a vehicle is required.

Home support work can be physically and emotionally demanding involving a mix of lifting, bending and sensitive personal care. In contrast with support workers in sites like hospitals or long-term care homes, home-support workers work mostly independently in an unstructured environment. The job can involve regularly entering a stranger's home, and assessing and

providing for the needs of clients (who may be harder to care for because of memory, dementia or hearing/communications challenges). It is a job for people who are both emotionally and physically strong and who are driven to care for others.

Home support workers often work for a mix of not-for-profit and for-profit businesses and agencies. Less than ten percent of workers are self-employed.

In Ontario, more than nine in ten workers (ninety-one percent) in this occupation are women. Newcomers and racialized women are also heavily represented in this field. Home support workers can be required to work at all hours (“24/7”) but, depending on employers, might also find predictable shift work. An example is an agency that provides morning (7:00 am–3:00 pm) and afternoon (3:00 pm–10:00 pm) shifts. Scheduling may be based on workers’ availability, with those with more flexible availability often scheduled for more hours.

In some cases, if a client cancels their appointment, a shift can be cancelled or shortened with little notice, affecting pay. Home support workers can also be employed by clients or families directly, with some offering live-in accommodation as an option.

Interviews indicate a very high demand across Ontario, including in urban and rural communities. While formal training is not required, employers prefer to hire those with previous care experience—including unpaid care of family members. Job postings are common on Canada’s [Job Bank](#) and other popular web sites. Employers also advertise on their own websites—with virtual job fairs also a feature of recruitment during the pandemic.

Pathways considerations

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ontario provincial government last year initiated a \$3/hour wage premium to workers in home and community care who are providing publicly funded services.²⁴ The funding was expected to benefit approximately 38,000 workers, representing a sixteen percent pay increase and a boost from an average of \$18/hour (\$23,893/year) to \$21/hour. The increase applies only to workers providing publicly-funded services, and is not available to supplement wages for those providing

“We prefer candidates who have more personal experience—have ever cared for grandparents or parents. As long as they have some customer-service experience—today I’m going to recruit someone who has a coffee shop background.”

Employer, GTA

private services, such as those paid for by families. An agency providing private home support reported “not being able to compete” with publicly-funded providers on this wage premium, because the increased cost of services was not something families were able to take on.

Home support workers have the lowest pay and often the most precarious conditions of care workers in the healthcare and social service sector. Those looking to increase their wages may consider taking courses to secure more specialized work, or look to move into a hospital or long-term care setting (see: [NOC 3413—Nurse aides, orderlies and patient service associates](#)). Interviews suggested employers paid a slight wage premium



to Personal Support Workers (from an additional \$1 to \$3/hour). People seeking wage increases or different working conditions (for example: less travel, a more formalized work setting) might also consider moving from home care work into Personal Support Aid or Resident Assistant roles in assisted living facilities.

“The work can be very exhausting, more so emotionally than physically, but that is dependent on the population you work with.”

Experienced former home worker, man, 30s

Evolving training opportunities

One agency employing home support workers is scaling a paid training program across the GTHA — offering two weeks’ paid in-class training to those who sign and complete a one-year contract as a home-care worker.

In response to a severe shortage of workers, **Ontario’s Long-Term Care Staffing Plan** has resulted in **accelerated training programs for PSWs**, starting in Spring 2021. Programs are tuition-free and six months in length — with the second half of the program involving paid on-site training. This option may be of interest to workers exploring care occupations more broadly. However, there are still job quality issues in this area— including reports of issues accessing full-time jobs and hours.

Other opportunities

So far, this report has explored options for traditional, full-time work that is in demand, can be quickly entered and are traditional jobs rather than self-employed opportunities. Our investigations also highlighted some options and opportunities that look a little different, perhaps involving a longer training pathway or interesting opportunities relating to self-employment:

Bookkeeper—Self-employment opportunities

Bookkeepers and accounting technicians support people and businesses by coordinating processes, or directly managing financial and business records. The nature of bookkeeping work, as a somewhat solitary, office-based job—can be very different from food retail work. However, bookkeeping is also a relatively well-paid, office-based occupation where that offers options for both employment and self-employment. For a certain kind of person, this job could be a promising fit.

Bookkeeping is often office-based daytime (8:00 am–4:00 pm or 9:00 am–5:00 pm) work, using an evolving suite of cloud-based accounting programs. Flex hours may be an option and overtime may be required during very busy periods, such as tax season. Interviews suggest pay rates range from \$16 to \$25/hour, based on experience, and up to \$50 to \$65/hour for self-employed bookkeepers. The clearest pathway identified into this occupation involved work with a small bookkeeping or accounting firm providing on-the-job training, rather than work in a larger firm that might require more specialized training and experience.

Bookkeepers and accounting technicians are found all over Ontario, though forty-five percent of jobs are in the Toronto area. College-based bookkeeping programs are available, though alternative private training providers and job-based training is also a way in.²⁵ Credentials are not required to work as a bookkeeper, though Canadian Institute of Bookkeeping provides a credential in partnership with many colleges and

Certified Professional Bookkeepers of Canada’s training, networking events and a certification pathway that might be of particular interest to those interested in building a bookkeeping business or professional brand.

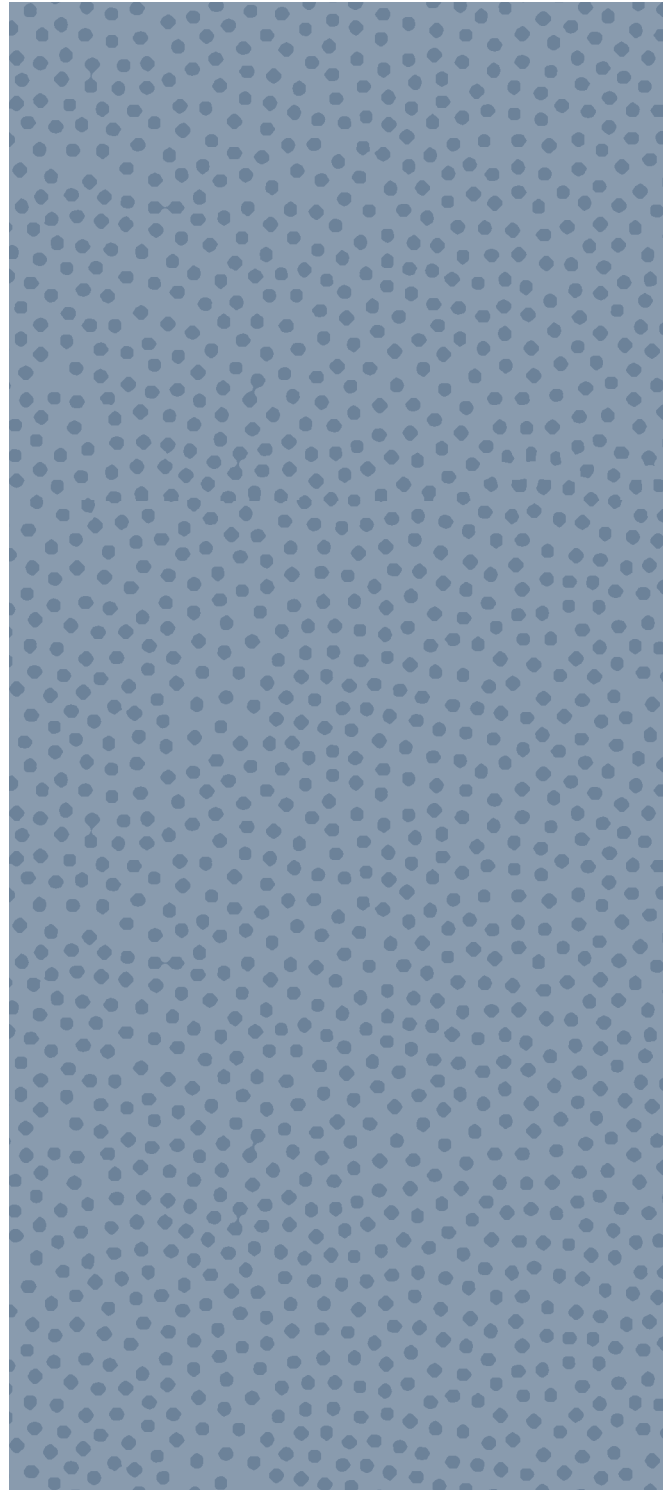
Law clerk—Opportunity in large urban areas

Law clerks are administrative professionals who often work in medium- and large-sized law firms. Incoming law clerks may start with tasks such as photocopying, file management or answering phones, but with experience and as relationships develop, move up to more senior assignments assisting lawyers with researching case law, advising clients and preparing legal documents.

Law clerks are listed under “Paralegal and related occupations - NOC 4211” but are different from paralegals, which is a licensed occupation governed by The Law Society of Ontario. Research suggested that the employment outlook for paralegals may be mixed — especially with some aspects of the court system on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic. This, along with the intensive college-level training, examination and licensing, might make a transition into a paralegal role more challenging. Fieldwork suggested that demand for law clerk roles, especially in larger law firms that are largely found in and around large cities, appeared more promising.

Law clerks also require college-level training, with programs offered by a range of Ontario colleges. An accelerated program can take nine months to complete and there are options for (often unpaid) co-operative placements. Law clerks work in law offices—larger offices will employ many law clerks, alongside many lawyers. Working hours could involve a standard day between the hours of 8:00 am – 5:00 pm but may also involve long days and nights if you are “working when the lawyers work.” The job involves focused computer work which may include specific legal software applications. In Ontario, eighty-three percent of people in this occupation are women and most are employees.

While the pathway into law clerk work is longer than others, it is also a more lucrative career. Median income in this occupation is \$53,391 and employers reported experienced law clerks can earn considerably more, alongside health insurance and other benefits.





Cross-occupation takeaways

Lessons from transition: mid-career workers are in demand

EMPLOYERS ACROSS ALL occupations welcomed mid-career entrants. Many expressed appreciation for middle-aged workers (people in their 30s to 50s) who they believed had a strong work ethic and transferable expertise. Mid-career transitions are possible and the Ontario employers we reached for this project expressed a willingness to employ older or mid-career workers, who are willing to take on these jobs.

Despite efforts, people underrepresented in occupations can sometimes expect barriers

Invisible barriers, including racism and sexism in training or job sites, can make it especially hard for women and racialized people to enter a trade, and for men to feel welcome in a care profession. Research uncovered stories from workers and entrenched attitudes from industry actors that are important factors for potential entrants to be aware of, and for employers and policy actors to work on.

Some of the roles listed in this guide are very “gendered” — women make up the bulk of

workers in home support and child care, while men are heavily represented as floor covering installers. Newcomers and racialized groups are heavily represented in home support, child care and food processing, while we heard floor-covering installers were still largely male and white.

In-demand occupations can be undervalued, affecting pay and attractiveness of jobs

Many of the occupations investigated are critically important, but workers in those jobs may not be recognized for the important work that they do. Home support, child care and food processing in particular are essential to a functioning economy and society—but workers and professional associations suggest these positions need to be “elevated” to be better appreciated by the public and workers respected for their skill and the role they play. Workers considering transitions into these occupations should be prepared for this tension.

Research with food retail workers suggested that “recognition for the work I do” is important to many people. Employers could consider how they

work with industry associations to counter the low status of these roles through recognition.

Workers need training that provides hands-on skills grounded in strong foundational understanding

Destination occupations highlighted in this report were all accessible without a college diploma. College-based options were available for all—in some cases, providing people with credentials (such as ECEs, PSWs, apprentice or journey person floor-covering installers) that led to higher earnings.

However, employers often spoke about the ability to apply knowledge in the job, which they reported wasn't consistently delivered through college-based training. Direct exposure and practical work experience were invaluable, as was an understanding of foundational principles—be they about health and safety, principles of child development or how small business finances work. Employers were sometimes willing to provide on-the-job mentoring, but saw this as a major time and financial investment that sometimes required government wage support to be affordable.

A range of training options beyond formal classroom-based college programs were highlighted by employers. Some used “co-op” students and internships as an opportunity to road-test potential employees. Employers recommended specific private training courses or programs that they believed delivered better-trained employees in shorter periods of time.

People should expect to learn continuously in most jobs

While most occupations *required* little or no formal training to enter, employers and experts stressed the importance of continued professional development to stay on top of the field. Workers wishing to remain employed and well-compensated should look for regular training provided through unions, industry associations and professional networks. This is particularly important as these occupations continue to evolve, grow

and sometimes formalize/professionalize as our economy changes.

“My only concern with hearing what you said is, again, stress on the education and even the courses. I will say 100 percent that the courses don't have enough practical. There's a very big difference between theory and practical. So it's unique, both sides of it, you need both the theory and the practical and, you know, to potentially work under somebody to help you be able to, you know, understand and get off to a better start.”

Employer

Job seekers need to be dedicated, flexible and use “old fashioned” skills

Research suggested that many online job postings lack important information that allow job seekers to make informed choices about work. Online job sites might allow candidates to submit resumes, but fail to “break through.” Interviews suggest that more traditional methods—dropping by workplaces or union halls to ask questions, sending short resumes with custom notes outlining your commitment or interest in that particular employer—can go a long way to creating an impression and an opportunity with employers. Interviews suggest this may be especially true in small- and medium-sized firms



without human resources teams or in occupations where there is a high cost for training new staff, such as taking on a “helper” in meat cutting or floor installation.

Combining modern methods including online applications with “old fashioned,” more direct outreach may be a more successful strategy for job seekers in finding jobs and—just as important—in accessing information to compare options.

Advancement options and wage increases are hard to spot

It is very difficult to understand “market rates” for wages and benefits when applying for jobs. Employers reported using internships, co-ops and short-term (agency) contracts to minimize risk when “trying out” an employee. Successful workers can be “brought on” as an employee after a successful probation, or continue to work in a more informal way. Job seekers may need to “ask around”—talking to coworkers and prospective employers—to learn what wages expectations should be three to six months after starting. In many cases, we found entry-level postings did not include information on advancement pathways.

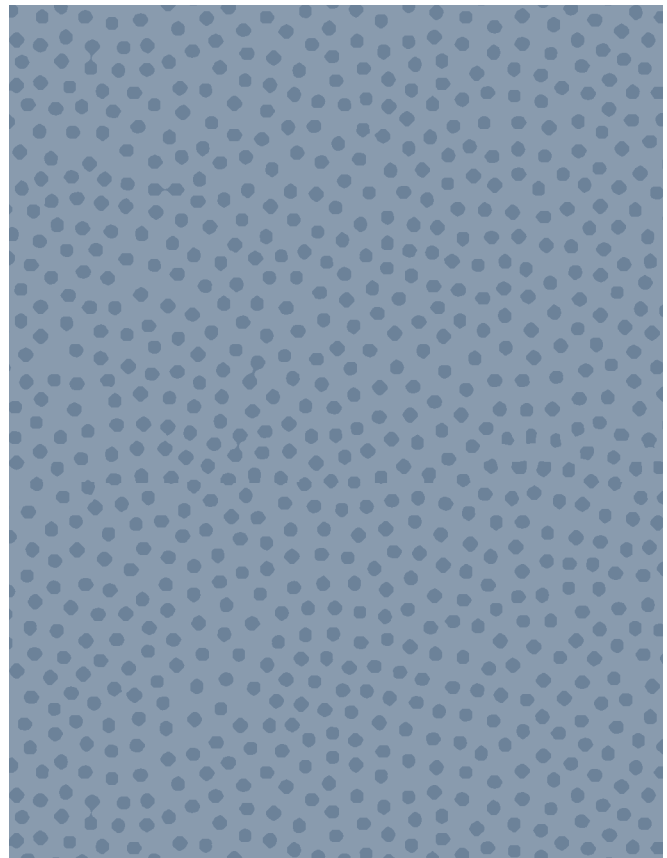
Workforce development agencies could consider the role they might play in addressing this information gap.

What employers say they want and what they actually want can be hard to unpack

It is difficult to explain what a “good worker” looks like. There may be a role for third parties, including workforce developers, in helping employers to explain job requirements very clearly. The Ontario government’s [Essential Employability Skills](#) are a good place to start to understand employer needs. We found that employers often referenced examples of personal and interpersonal skills as very important, from being able to demonstrate personal responsibility, to working in a team, and to being flexible and adaptable.

“These companies are full benefits, working with them. You know, when we generally do the big ones, the big players in this industry, they either do temp to perm, or not permanently. So temp to perm is a three-month probation, they would like to you know, they would like us to manage those first three months that manage that risk.”

Third-party employment service





Next steps

ONTARIO'S ECONOMY RELIES on millions of skilled workers. Not all in-demand jobs require high levels of formal training and credentials, and many employers in those areas are willing to hire and train mid-career workers seeking to make transitions. As Canada emerges from the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially hundreds of thousands of workers may seek, or require, support to transition from one occupation to another.

There is **an important role for workforce policy actors and job developers to help workers uncover and explore opportunities.**

Low-wage workers may need encouragement—a reminder that low pay does not equal low skill or low value—and help articulating their expertise and transferable skills. This research also highlighted numerous information gaps—in hiring practices, wage and benefit rates, promotional pathways—that could be bridged to help transitioning workers make more informed decisions about work.

During a period of crisis in Ontario, research also uncovered examples where market forces are not delivering living-wage employment options despite a shortage of workers. Many important industries—food, construction, child development, health, and social care—require many new entrants to remain functional and productive in contributing to both wellbeing and economic growth. There is **a role for many—unions and professional associations, training providers and policymakers—to help address some of the system-level issues this report raises**, to support workers in making important and smooth transitions into these occupations.

We encourage food retail workers to use the links in this report to explore different jobs and the data available about them. Store-level grocery workers demonstrate a range of useful and transferable skills, and **we hope that this report’s “menu” of options—especially the links on page 17—provides food for thought for those considering transitions**. We have explored only a half-dozen opportunities that are accessible to those looking to transition quickly, but many more interesting opportunities are available for those interested in longer transitions.

People working in grocery stores have many transferable skills, and **accessing support through public providers like Employment Ontario, your employer or your union** (such as the UFCW’s WebCampus site) can also provide useful information to help navigate job pathways.



Appendix: Survey findings

THIS REPORT IS grounded in the responses of a convenience survey of 195 Ontario grocery workers explored their work-related preferences.

Approximately thirty-seven percent of respondents were in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area and seventy-five percent identified as women, nineteen percent as men and two percent as non-binary or third gender. Twenty-three percent identified as having a visible or invisible disability and roughly thirty-nine percent were key or primary caregivers to a family member or friend. The convenience sample over-represents people who identify as white, who made up eighty-five percent of respondents when nearly thirty percent of Ontarians are racialized.²⁶ Union membership was not tracked.

While this survey has its limitations, when combined with qualitative fieldwork it does generate some interesting insights.

Survey insights

- **For many workers, grocery work was expected to be transitional**

Most respondents (forty-nine percent) identified grocery work as a “job but not a career.” Only thirteen percent said it aligned with their long-term career goals while eight percent were working while studying and thirteen percent saw it as a short or medium-term job while they sought work in another field. Sixteen percent used their job to fit alongside other activities, like work, caregiving, or retirement. More than half (fifty-one percent) were interested in transitioning to a new job and twenty-nine percent were unsure, with thirty-nine percent of respondents expecting to be working in another sector or job three years from now.

- **Grocery work is an important source of income**

Most of our respondents indicated it was their “main” source of household income (fifty-eight percent) with twenty-eight percent indicating it was one of “a couple or more” sources of needed income, and thirteen percent explaining it as a source of income that wasn’t really needed. Focus groups included a retired worker

who worked as a grocery clerk largely to keep active, who gave his earnings as gifts to his postsecondary-student children.

- **People working in the grocery industry often have post-secondary education**

While clerk and cashier roles do not require training after high school, nearly forty percent of people reached by online survey (partial or fully completed) had college or university degrees and nearly six percent were educated at the graduate level. This is consistent with findings from qualitative fieldwork.

- **People working in food retail are interested in a range of possible future work environments**

The most preferred work locations were indoors (sixty-seven percent), including in their own home (fifty-two percent), in an office (forty-one percent) or in another retail store or customer-facing place (thirteen percent). The least preferred work location was in a factory or food processing plant (nine percent), school or daycare (seventeen percent), hospital or long-term care setting (nineteen percent), and warehouse or distribution centre (twenty-two percent). Thirty-two percent could imagine working outdoors.

- **People working in grocery are interested in jobs with different physical demands**

Desk-based, computer-based, and work that involved long periods standing are the favoured options (considered by sixty-two percent, seventy-two percent and sixty-one percent of respondents, respectively) with jobs involving bending, kneeling, crouching or crawling considered as an option by thirty-eight percent. Carrying heavy objects (thirty-one percent) was the least popular. That said, the physical demands came as the tenth most important out of eleven job-related considerations, ahead only of commute.

- **Grocery workers are social types who like to keep busy**

More than seventy-three percent of workers were considering jobs that involve lots of

public-facing or coworker contact. Work with seniors was considered by about forty-seven percent of respondents, with child-focused (thirty-five percent) and solo work (thirty-seven percent) identified as the least popular options. Sixty-eight percent of respondents were looking for a job that could keep them busy with a variety of different tasks.

- **Schedules matter**

With most grocery workers (seventy-four percent) preferring a set work schedule that they could plan around, with forty-nine percent seeking to schedule work around other commitments and thirty-six percent considering work with a varied schedule and opportunities to work overtime. Half of the respondents (forty-eight percent) were looking for full-time work, with nearly seventy percent seeking work at or above 24 hours per week.

- **Workers are seeking to be rewarded for loyalty**

With forty-four percent looking for an opportunity to see “gradual improvements in things like scheduling and pay” and twenty-four percent prioritizing jobs that came with growth and career advancement opportunities. Considerably fewer respondents were looking for the “best possible job security” (fourteen percent) or jobs that fully acknowledged their experience/expertise (ten percent).

- **Earning expectations are realistic**

The most popular desired earnings bracket for survey respondents was \$500 to \$800/week (twenty-seven percent), with one-fifth (twenty-one percent) of respondents wanting to earn more than \$500 or \$1000 to \$1400/week. Fourteen percent were not clear on their earnings goals and five percent preferred not to say.



Endnotes

- 1 The Brookfield Institute's *Ahead by a Decade* forecast found that nineteen percent of workers were in occupations projected to grow and fifteen percent were in occupations projected to decline in employment share.
- 2 According to the Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS), from 2014 to 2016, seventeen occupations already representing 1.2-million workers showed signs of labour shortages, indicating room for growth. Conversely, twenty-nine occupations that representing over 980,000 workers showed signs of surplus, predicting a contraction.
- 3 About UFCW, http://www.ufcw.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=59&Itemid=2&lang=en
- 4 Joseph Tunney, "PM calls grocery store employees 'heroes' after grocery chains cancel pay bump," CBC News, June 19, 2020 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/grocery-store-workers-pandemic-covid-coronavirus-1.5619715>; Josh Pringle, "Sobeys launches 'Hero Pay Program' to reward staff during COVID-19 pandemic", CBC, March 22, 2020, <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/sobeys-launches-hero-pay-program-to-reward-staff-during-covid-19-pandemic-1.4863578>.
- 5 G. Condon, Who's who 2020: Canadian grocer magazine's annual directory of chains & groups in Canada, *Canadian Grocer* p.104-105.
- 6 Earlier tools include RBC Upskill and the MaRS + Google planext tool, which use potential fit between jobs to help people plan their career transitions based on underlying skills. This project also built on the model developed during the first (2019) phase of the *Job Pathways* project, as outlined in *Lost & Found: Pathways from Disruption to Employment*.
- 7 Excepting the Labour Market - Information Council metric for Job postings, considered only at provincial level due to data availability.
- 8 Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, "Job Profile: Cashiers (NOC 6611)," Ontario's Labour Market, <https://www.services.labour.gov.on.ca/labourmarket/jobProfile/jobProfileFullView.xhtml?nocCode=6611>.
- 9 Expert interview, Canadian food retail executives.
- 10 "Living Wage by Region," Ontario Living Wage Network, https://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/living_wage_by_region.
- 11 "Personal Support Worker - Home support near Toronto" Job Bank (Government of Canada), March 23, 2021, <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/marketreport/wages-occupation/24584/22437>
- 12 "Budget 2021 A Recovery Plan for Jobs, Growth, and Resilience" Government of Canada,, <https://www.budget.gc.ca/2021/home-accueil-en.html>, p. 103.

- 13 Membership Data Report 2020, CECE, https://www.college-ece.ca/en/Documents/Membership_Data_Report_2019-2020.pdf
- 14 Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, “Home child-care providers (NOC 4411),” Ontario’s Labour Market, <https://www.services.labour.gov.on.ca/labourmarket/jobProfile/jobProfileFullView.xhtml?nocCode=4411#quickFactsSection>
- 15 Interviews revealed an important opportunity for policymakers to provide greater clarity to / support for child care providers with non-English language skills. Providers with strong or adequate verbal communication in English can struggle with documentation requirements (“logs”), which are required in English.
- 16 Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, “Early childhood educator assistant in the London region (NOC 4214),” Ontario’s Labour Market, <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/marketreport/jobs/5180/geo27234>
- 17 Pre-Apprenticeships are free opportunities for people who wish to work in a trade, but don’t have the skills or experience to enter a formal apprenticeship program – such as a Child Development Practitioner.
- 18 Examples: Faywood Boulevard Child Care Centre – CUPE CA; OSSTF Algoma
- 19 Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, “Job Profile: Floor covering installers (NOC 7295),” Ontario’s Labour Market, <https://www.services.labour.gov.on.ca/labourmarket/jobProfile/jobProfileFullView.xhtml?nocCode=7295>
- 20 Ontario Job Outlooks and Canadian Occupational Projections suggest “average” or “balanced” demand, however fieldwork suggested that some regions of Ontario may be experiencing shortages and employers and training providers expressed concern about what they saw as an aging workforce.
- 21 Those considering working for an employer who uses temp agency workers may wish to “ask around” to understand the employer’s reputation and practices. Research by the Institute for Work & Health explores increased health and safety risks non-clerical temps may face, and a *Toronto Star* investigation (Sara Mojtehdzadeh and Brendan Kennedy, “Undercover in temp nation,” September 8, 2017, <https://projects.thestar.com/temp-employment-agencies/>) noted that “the use of temp agencies limits companies’ liability for accidents on the job, reduces their responsibility for employee rights, and cuts costs”.
- 22 Karon Liu, “Facing labour shortages across Canada, the butcher trade is looking at ways to beef up their numbers,” *Toronto Star*, November 13, 2019,; https://www.thestar.com/life/food_wine/2019/11/13/why-this-man-wants-you-to-consider-a-career-as-a-butcher.html.
- 23 Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, “Job Profile: Butchers, meat cutters and fishmongers (NOC 6331),” Ontario’s Labour Market, <https://www.services.labour.gov.on.ca/labourmarket/jobProfile/jobProfileFullView.xhtml?nocCode=6331#paySection>
- 24 “Ontario extending temporary wage enhancement for Personal Support Workers,” Ontario Government, March 18, 2021, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/60798/ontario-extending-temporary-wage-enhancement-for-personal-support-workers#quickfacts>
- 25 We heard positive feedback on short courses or diplomas offered by Trifold Bookkeeper Advisors and TriOS College that lasted 13 to 32 weeks.
- 26 2016 Census highlights: Factsheet 9, Ontario Ministry of Finance, <https://www.fn.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/census/cenhi16-9.html#:~:text=This%20pie%20chart%20shows%20the,minority%20at%203.3%25%20and%20visible>

