

Canadian Book Consumer Study 2022



**BOOKNET
CANADA**

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Introduction

The *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2022* is the 11th edition of BookNet Canada's annual Canadian Book Consumer survey. This annual survey of Canadian book consumers tracks their awareness, discovery, selection, and acquisition behaviours.

Like past editions, the *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2022* explores Canadian book consumers as book buyers, book borrowers, and other profiles. Offering insight into both print and digital marketplaces, this study also traces the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on in-person and online book consumption through year-over-year comparisons.

Methodology

This study relies on data from our annual Canadian Book Consumer survey. The 2022 edition of this survey was fielded quarterly in March, June, September, and December 2022. All told, the study contains data from 10,840 Canadians, 2,004 of whom were considered book buyers.

- The survey was fielded online through an external provider, to their consumer panel of nearly two million Canadians. The survey was limited to those with internet access who were able and wanted to participate in our panel in exchange for non-monetary incentives as offered by our survey partner (e.g., loyalty reward “point” programs).
- Respondents were English-speaking Canadians, 18 years of age or older, located throughout Canada, and representative of the Canadian population based on age, gender, and geographical region. Selective sampling was based on demographic results from Statistics Canada.
- There is a margin of error of ± 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, meaning that statistics for this group could fluctuate about 3% in either direction if the survey was fielded to the entire Canadian population.
- The data is unweighted.

This study was prepared by BookNet Canada staff.

Highlights

- Spending habits changed: Compared to 2020, 158% more Canadian book buyers spent between \$1 and \$49 on books in a given month in 2022, while 75% less spent over \$100.
- In-person visits are up: 64% of Canadian book buyers visited a bookstore in-person in 2022, up from 55% in 2021.
- Book browsing behaviours increased among Canadian book buyers and Canadian book borrowers in 2022.

Canadian book consumers

Out of all Canadians surveyed for this study, 18% bought new books and 20% borrowed books from the library in 2022, in a given month. Across all purchases tracked in 2022, Canadian book buyers bought an average of 2.6 new books a month last year — 1.6 print books, 0.8 ebooks, and 0.3 audiobooks. Meanwhile, Canadian book borrowers borrowed an average of 4.8 books per month from the public library in 2022 — 3.4 print books, 1.0 ebooks, and 0.4 audiobooks.

Compared to all Canadians, book buyers and borrowers were more likely to:

- live in a city or urban area (48% of buyers and 50% of borrowers vs. 45% of all Canadians);
- have a graduate or professional degree (23% of buyers and 20% of borrowers vs. 15% of all Canadians);
- be employed full time (44% of buyers and 35% of borrowers vs. 33% of all Canadians);
- live in a household of three or more people (44% of buyers and 35% of borrowers vs. 32% of all Canadians); and
- live in a household with someone under the age of 18 (36% of buyers and 31% of borrowers vs. 30% of all Canadians).

Full demographic information for the Canadian book buyers, Canadians book borrowers, and all Canadians surveyed are available in [Appendix A](#).

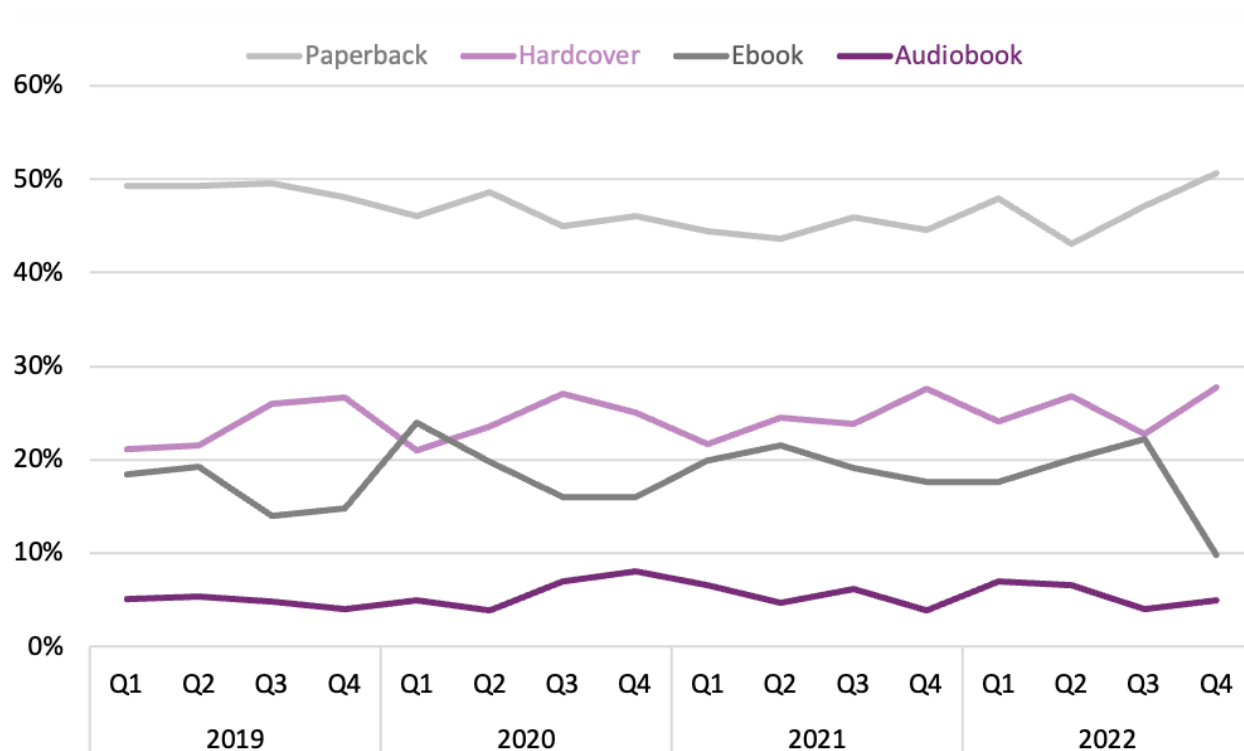
Canadians also consumed books in other ways last year. All told, 11% of Canadians bought used books in 2022, at an average of 3.5 print books per month. A total of 8% of Canadians borrowed books from someone they know, at an average of 2.7 books per month — 2.3 print books, 0.2 ebooks, and 0.2 audiobooks. Another 8% of Canadians received books as a gift in 2022, totalling an average of 2.4 books per month — 1.6 print books, 0.5 ebooks, and 0.3 audiobooks. A final 8% of Canadians also received books for free, including free downloads, for an average of 4.3 books per month — 1.1 print books, 2.5 audiobooks, and 0.8 audiobooks.

Canadian book buyers

What they bought

All told, 73% of books purchased by Canadian book buyers in 2022 were print books, 17% were ebooks, and 6% were audiobooks.

Looking closer at the sales performance by format, paperback book purchases have stayed relatively stable, hovering between 40% and 50% from 2019 to 2022. Hardcover books have stayed between 20% to 30%. Ebooks have been fluctuating around 20% until the last quarter of 2022 where they dropped to 10% of purchases. Audiobooks have been the most consistent, staying around 5% from 2019 to 2022. The graph below shows the distribution of purchases by format since 2019. Year over year, the sales of most formats in 2022 have either exceeded or returned to their pre-pandemic sales volume.



Looking across Canadian book buyers in 2022:

- Book buyers aged 35 to 44 bought the most print books (25% of print book purchases)
- Book buyers aged 34 and under bought the most ebooks (27% of ebook purchases)
- Book buyers aged 34 and under bought the most audiobooks (42% of audiobook purchases)

In 2022, the majority of book buyers bought Adult books (73%), while 16% also bought Young Adult books and 11% bought Juvenile. Out of the Adult books, 61% were Fiction and 39% were Non-Fiction.

These are the top Fiction and Non-Fiction subjects purchased by Canadian book buyers in 2022:

Fiction

- Fantasy — 16% of Fiction purchases
- Suspense & Thriller — 14% of Fiction purchases
- Mystery & Detective — 14% of Fiction purchases
- General — 13% of Fiction purchases
- Romance — 12% of Fiction purchases

Non-Fiction

- Biography or Memoir — 22% of Non-Fiction purchases
- Self-Help — 17% of Non-Fiction purchases
- Other — 15% of Non-Fiction purchases
- History — 13% of Non-Fiction purchases
- Spirituality — 8% of Non-Fiction purchases

Buying books from a diversity of perspectives — as well as Canadian perspectives — also mattered to book buyers last year. In 2022, Canadian book buyers searched for books:

- by Canadian contributors (34%);
- about Canada or regions within Canada (28%);
- about a group or culture written by people from that group or culture (23%);
- about Indigenous peoples (13%);
- by Indigenous contributors (12%); or
- that are partly or fully written in another language (10%).

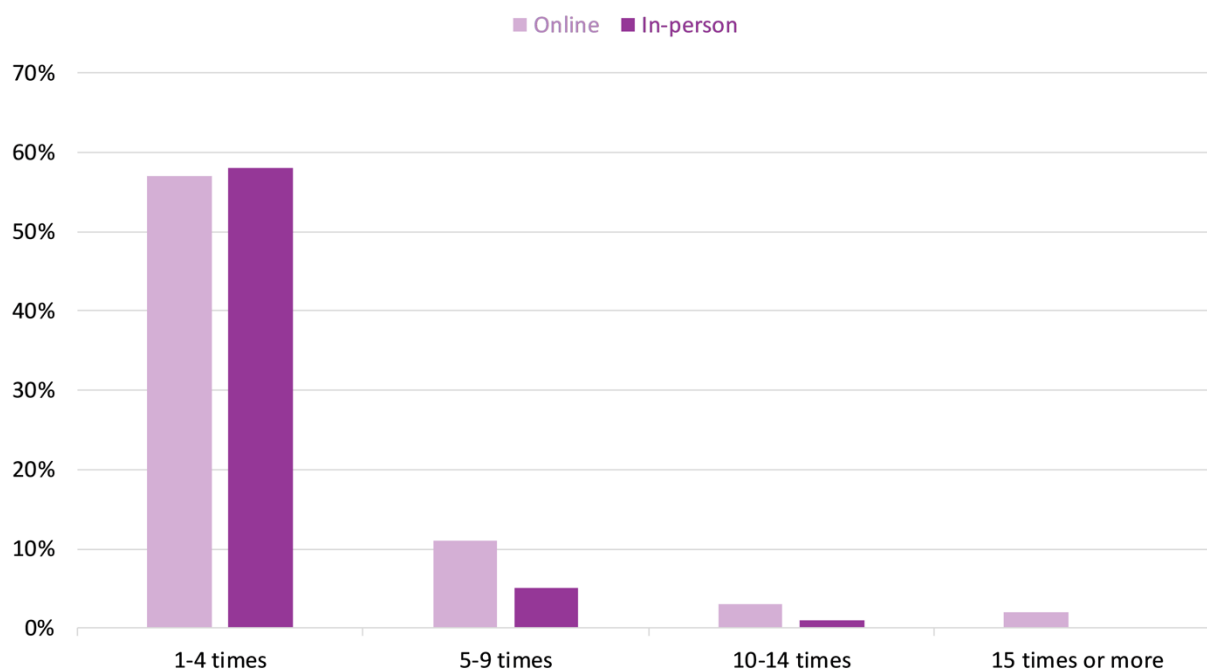
Where they bought

Canadian book buyers returned to buying books more and more in person in 2022. The graph below shows the percentage of in person and online purchases by quarter from 2019 to 2022. In 2019, in person and online purchasing was very close

to 50% each. In both 2020 and 2021, online purchases jumped up to around 65% and in person purchases dropped to 35%. Over the entire year, book buyers bought 58% online and 42% in person in 2022, compared to 65% online and 35% in person in 2021.



It follows that Canadian book buyers also visited bookstores in person more frequently in 2022. Overall, 64% of Canadian book buyers visited a bookstore in person and 73% visited online at least once per month in 2022. The graph below shows the frequency of online and in person bookstore visits by Canadian book buyers last year. Most Canadian book buyers visited a bookstore one to four times in 2022 (57% online and 58% in person); some visited five to nine times (11% online and 5% in person); others 10 to 14 times (3% online and 1% in person); and a small group visited online bookstores 15 times or more (2%).

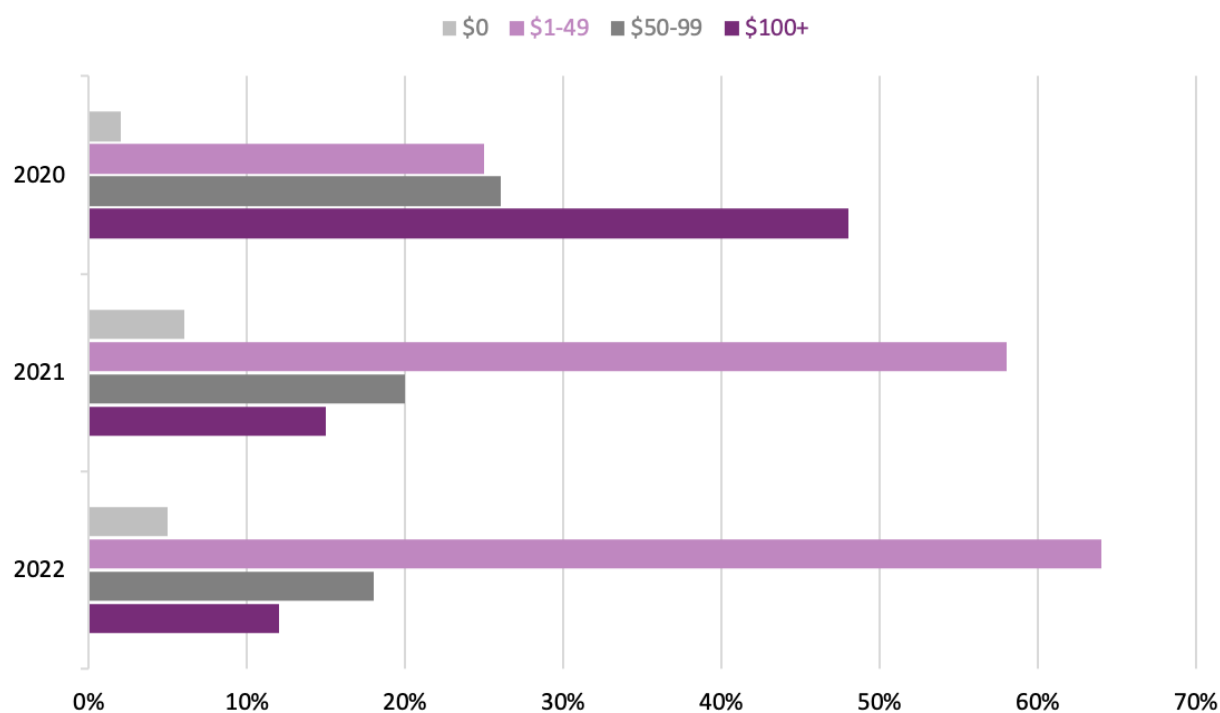


Regardless of where they shopped, Canadian book buyers chose to buy from a particular place for a variety of reasons. The top five reasons Canadian book buyers gave as to why they shopped where they did were:

- Convenient place to shop (31%)
- Good price/offer/promo (29%)
- Book(s) in stock/available immediately (28%)
- Good selection of books (23%)
- Easy checkout process to buy books (20%)

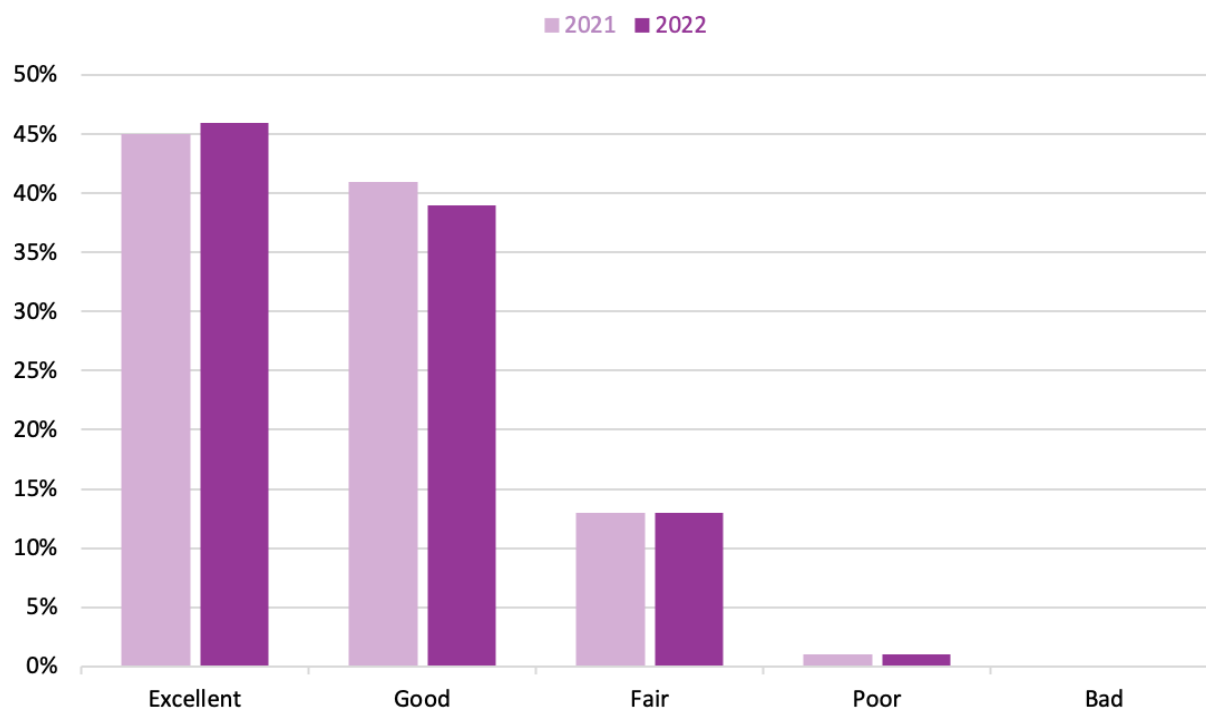
How they bought

In 2022, the majority of Canadian book buyers spent between \$1 and \$49 on books in a month (64%), with many spending between \$50 and \$99 (18%). This spending has shifted dramatically year-over-year. From 2020 to 2022, 158% more Canadian book buyers spent between \$1 and \$49 on books per month, while 75% less spent over \$100, shown in the graph below.



Overall, just over half of all books that Canadians bought were purchased at full price (55%) while 28% were bought either as part of a sale or were discounted in some way.

On average, Canadian book buyers paid \$23.06 for a hardcover book, \$15.86 for a paperback, \$12.62 for an ebook, and \$12.87 for an audiobook in 2022. Interestingly, the value for money perception didn't change much year over year. In 2021 and 2022, book buyers said the value for money was excellent — 45% and 46% respectively, 41% and 39% said it was good, and in both years 13% said it was fair, 1% said it was poor, and none said it was bad, as shown in the graph below.



In 2022, well over half of Canadian book buyers always or sometimes:

- preferred to pay for a bundle of content over buying one single item — 35% yes and 37% sometimes; and
- added books to their online cart to get free shipping — 27% yes and 38% sometimes.

How did Canadian book buyers discover the books they purchased? As in past years, the top three ways Canadian book buyers became aware of the books they bought were by:

- Reading other books by the author or illustrator (22%)
- Browsing or searching online or in person (20%)
- A recommendation or review (18%)

When shopping at bookstores, Canadian book buyers were most likely to find the book they purchased on the main shelf (19%) or display/promotional table (6%). Online book buyers most likely found the books they bought by searching for the specific book (24%), browsing by genre/subject (9%), or browsing by author (6%).

Why they bought

What made Canadian book buyers decide to purchase a book in 2022? Similar to past years, the top five reasons book buyers bought a book last year were:

- Like/interested in subject (30%)
- Description of the book (19%)
- Like the series (17%)
- Recommendation/review (16%)
- Low price/on special offer (15%)

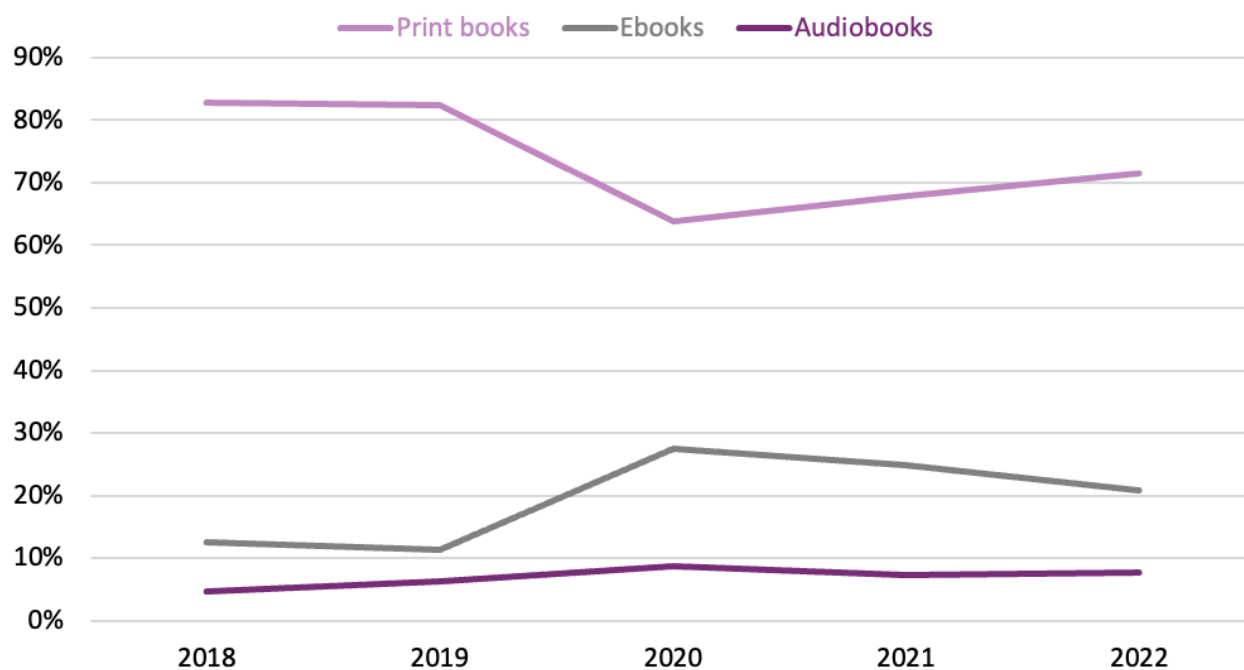
But why buy books instead of borrowing them? Just like in 2021, the top three reasons Canadian book buyers bought books in 2022 instead of borrowing were:

- To be able to reread the book whenever they want (15%)
- To have the book right away (14%)
- To own it for their display, collection, or archive (11%)

Canadian book borrowers

What they borrowed

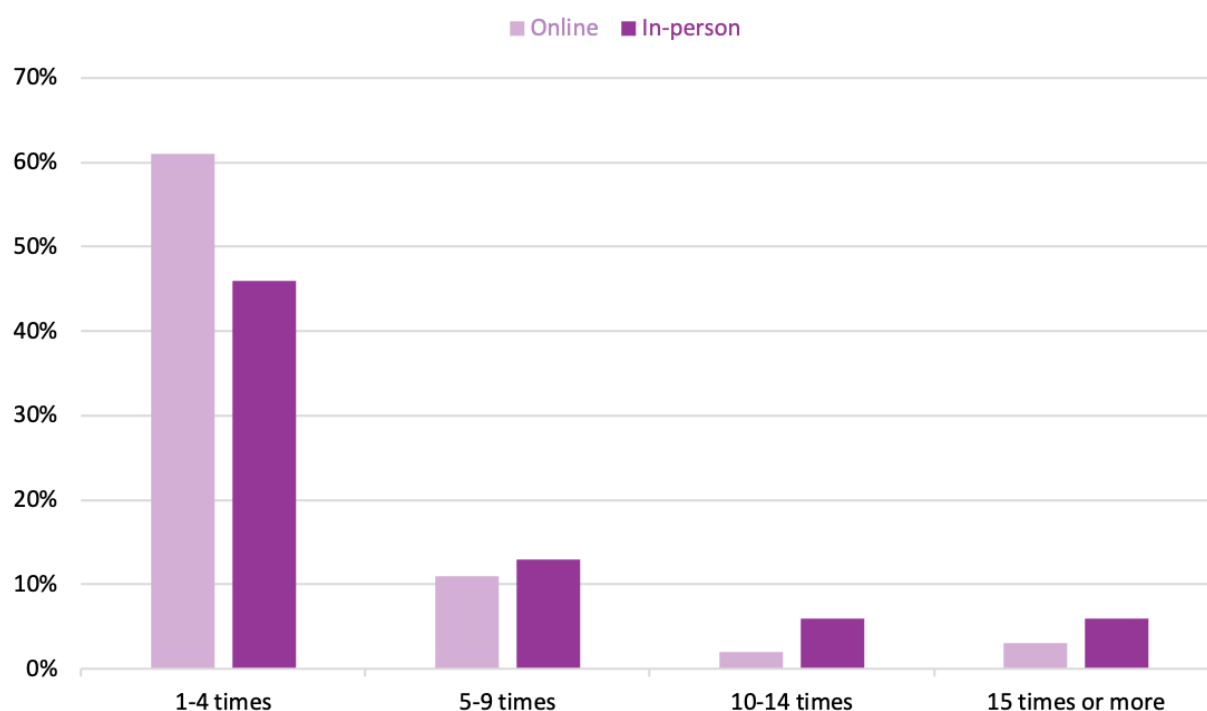
Overall, 71% of all books borrowed in 2022 were print books, 21% were ebooks, and 8% were audiobooks. The graph below shows the books Canadians borrowed by format over the last five years.



Here, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadian library circulation is clear, with significant decreases in print book borrowing and increases in ebook borrowing in 2020 — print borrowing was down 23% and ebook borrowing up 119% from 2018 to 2020. In 2022, the percentage of print books borrowed by Canadian book borrowers has continued to recover — up 12% since 2020. The percentage of borrowed ebooks has also decreased — down 24% since 2020. Yet, the percentage of audiobooks borrowed has steadily increased over the last five years, up 66% since 2018.

Where they borrowed

In 2022, many Canadian book borrowers visited their local library either online (77%) or in person (70%) in a given month. The graph below shows the frequency of library visits either online or in person for Canadian book borrowers last year. In both cases, the majority of book borrowers visited the library between one and four times in 2022, at 61% for online and 46% for in-person library visits.



Canadian book borrowers visited the library in 2022 for a variety of reasons, but year over year the top five reasons have remained the same. Last year, the top reasons for visiting the library were:

- To pick up holds (44%)
- To browse displays and shelves for books to borrow (36%)
- To discover a new book, author, and/or illustrator (24%)
- To put books/materials on hold (17%)
- To read magazines/newspapers (14%)

How they borrowed

Canadian book borrowers generally borrowed books for themselves in 2022, at 64% and up from 6% the year before. That being said, many Canadian book buyers also checked out books for another adult (20%) or a middle grade child (6%) last year.

In 2022, most book borrowers borrowed only books from the library (74%). Though, 26% of Canadian book borrowers also checked out something else from the library last year. The most popular items were DVDs at 10%, next were magazines (6%), movies (5%), CDs (5%), and music (3%).

How did Canadian book borrowers discover the books they borrowed from the library? The most popular ways book borrowers discovered books in 2022 were:

- Browsing by genre or subject (42%)
- Searching specifically for the book (32%)
- Browsing books by author/illustrator (30%)
- Having read other books by the author/illustrator (29%)
- Having a recommendation/ or reading a review (18%)

Canadian book borrowers took many actions both online and in-person when deciding which book to borrow last year. In 2022, the most popular decision-making actions were:

- Reading the book description (54%)
- Checking to see if the library has it (48%)
- Reading reviews about the book (30%)

Why they borrowed

Why did Canadian book borrowers borrow books in 2022, rather than buy them? The top three reasons were:

- To save money (56%)
- To not spend money (50%)
- To read it, but not to own it (41%)

That being said, many Canadian book borrowers also bought books last year — 18% bought new books and 19% bought used books.

Canadian book borrowers who bought new books bought an average of 3.0 books per month — 1.8 print books, 0.9 ebooks, and 0.3 audiobooks. Compare this to Canadian book buyers, who bought an average of 2.6 books a month last year — 1.6 print books, 0.8 ebooks, and 0.3 audiobooks. Most book borrowers spent anywhere from \$1-49 on these books (59%), while others spent \$50-99 (19%) or \$100-149 (7%) a month last year.

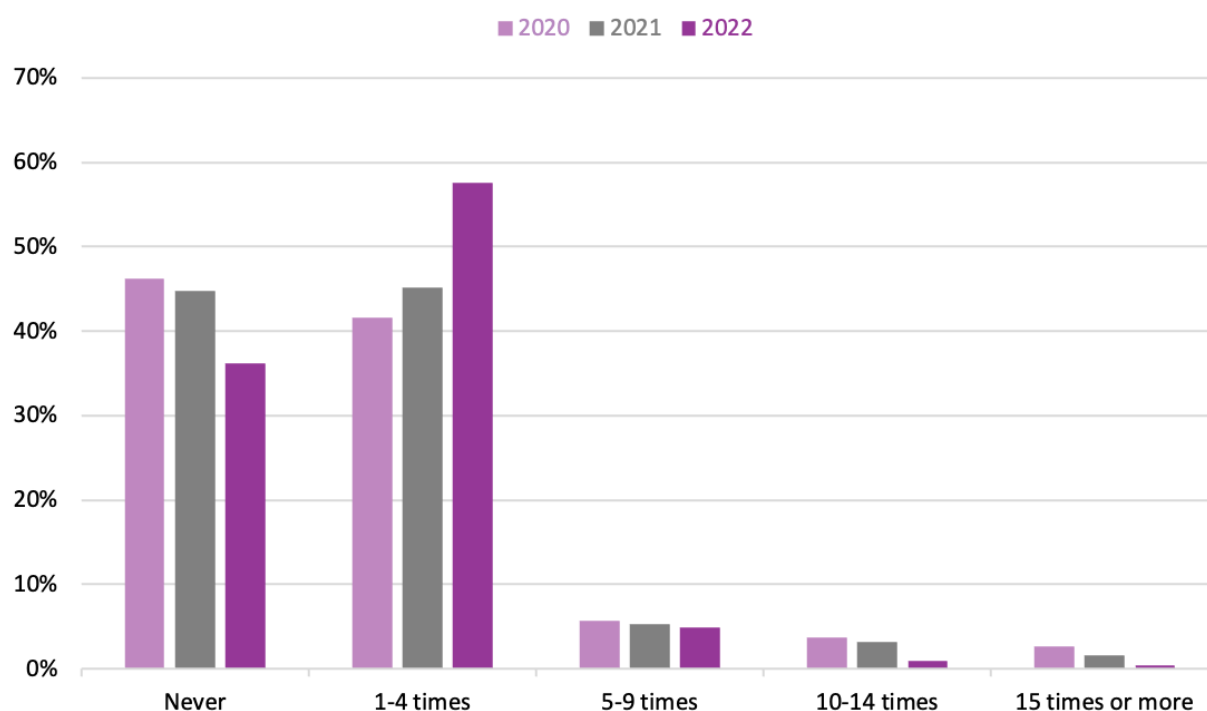
In comparison, book borrowers also bought an average of 3.7 used print books in a month last year, with most spending between \$1-49 in a given month (74%).

The impact of book browsing

Browsing bookstores

In 2022, Canadian book buyers are back to visiting their local bookstores in-person. In 2022, 37% of Canadian book buyers felt that COVID-19 was impacting their book buying, down from 47% in 2021 and 45% in 2020.

Out of all the book buyers we surveyed for the Canadian Book Consumer survey last year, 64% visited a bookstore in person, up from 55% in 2021 and 54% in 2020. The graph below shows the frequency of in-person bookstore visits by Canadian book buyers from 2020 to 2022. Looking year over year, most book buyers visited a bookstore in-person at least one to four times — a percentage that increased 38% from 2020 to 2022. More frequent visits were not as popular. In 2020, only 6% of respondents visited a bookstore in person five to nine times, and in 2021 and 2022 only 5% did. Furthermore, only 4%, 3%, and 1% of respondents visited a bookstore 10 to 14 times in 2020, 2021, and 2022 respectively, and the downward trend continues for visits equal or higher than 15 times.



In contrast, the percentage of online bookstore visits by Canadian book buyers has remained relatively consistent over the last three years — 73% in 2020, 76% in 2021, and 73% in 2022 visited a bookstore online at least once.

Why did Canadian book buyers choose to visit a bookstore in-person in 2022? The top four reasons book buyers visited in-store in 2022 were related to browsing:

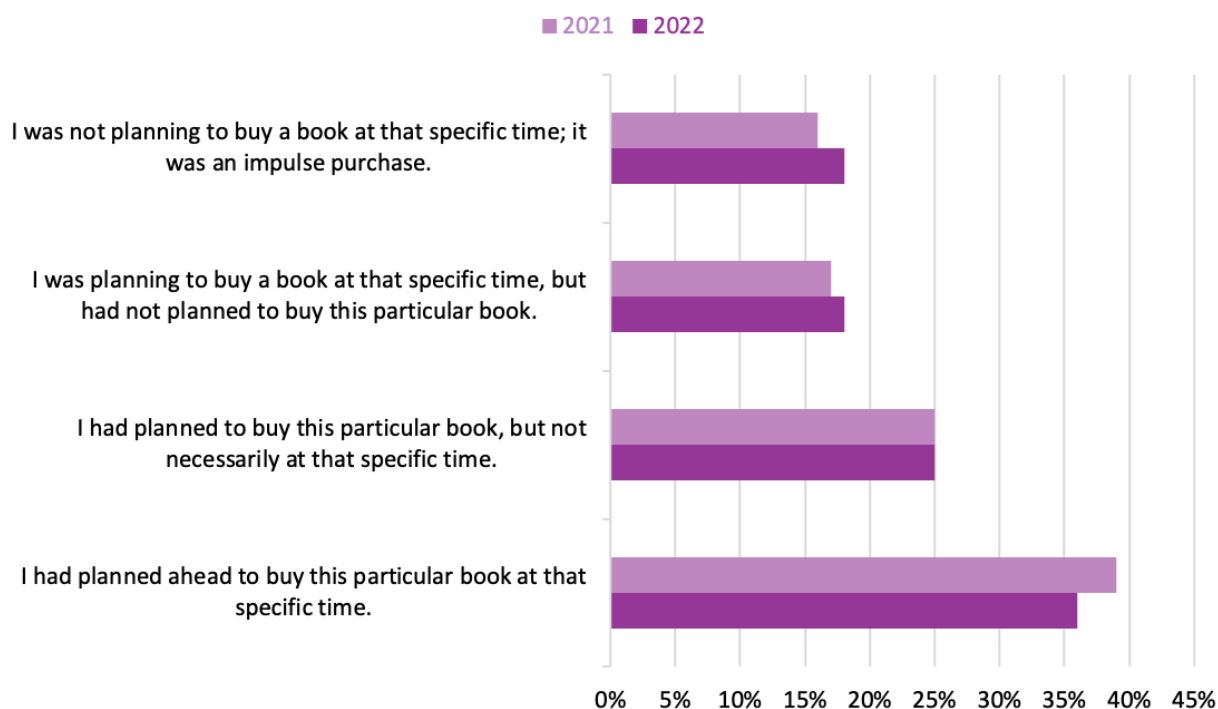
- Browse books to pass time (29%)
- Browse for book deals and sales (26%)
- Browse displays and shelves for books to buy (26%)
- Browse new releases (23%)

While these top reasons are shared from 2021 to 2022, there is a significant increase in the percentage of Canadian book buyers who actively browsed their local bookstore last year. In 2022, more Canadian book buyers visited a bookstore in person to:

- Browse books to pass time — up 30% from 2021 to 2022
- Browse for book deals and sales — up 28% from 2021 to 2022
- Browse displays and shelves for books to buy — up 20% from 2021 to 2022
- Browse new releases — up 10% from 2021 to 2022

And this browsing translated into book sales. Out of all the book purchases we tracked through the Canadian Book Consumer survey in 2022, 20% of Canadian book buyers became aware of the book they bought by searching or browsing either online or in-person. Of those book buyers, 33% discovered the book they bought by browsing in-store — up 38% from 2020.

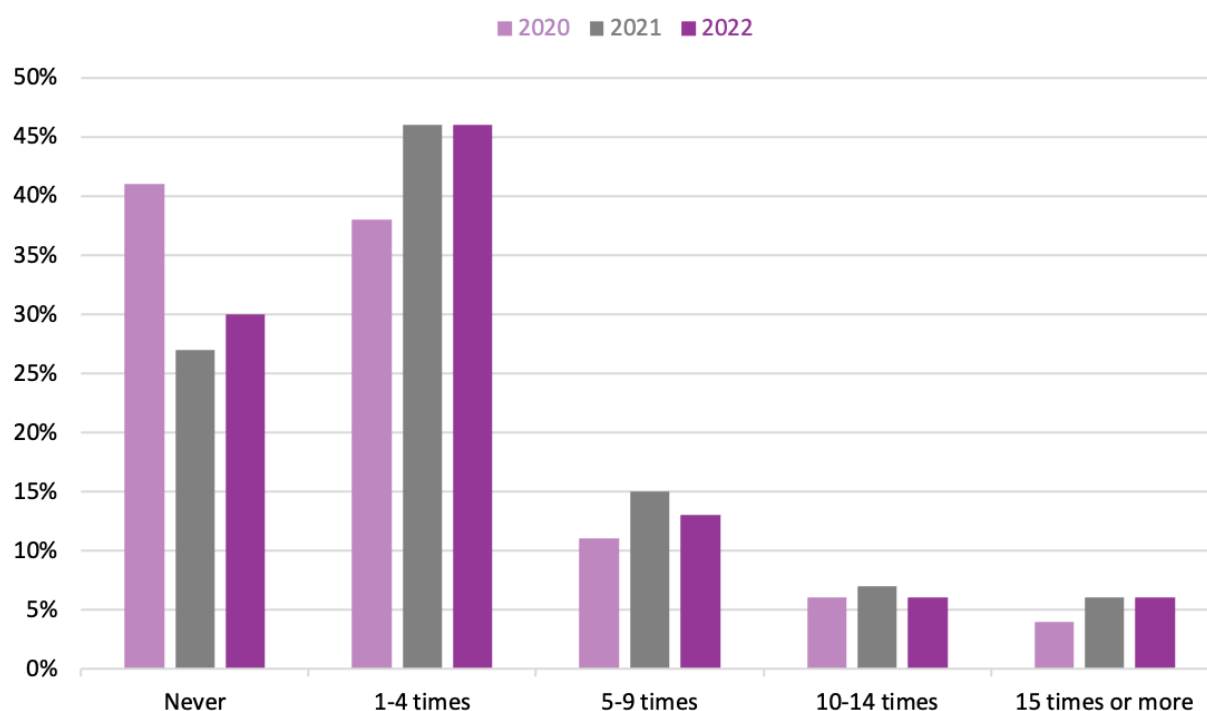
Compared to past years, slightly more Canadian book buyers bought books spontaneously in 2022, shown in the graph below. Here, 18% of all book purchases in 2022 were impulse purchases, up 13% from 2021. The number of purchases where the book buyer was planning to buy a book at that specific time, but not a particular book also increased to 18%, up 6% from the year before. The number of purchases where buyers had planned to buy a particular book, but not necessarily at a specific time remained the same for both years (25%). And the number of book buyers who had planned to buy a particular book at a specific time decreased to 36%, down 8%.



Browsing libraries

Canadian book borrowers also returned to visiting their local library in person in 2022. Last year, 46% of Canadian book borrowers felt that COVID-19 was impacting their book borrowing, down from 58% in 2021.

For Canadian book borrowers in 2022, 70% visited a library branch in person at least once — down from 73% in 2021 but up from 59% in 2020. Almost half of book borrowers visited a library branch between one and four times in 2022 (46%), shown in the graph below. Another 13% of Canadian book borrowers also visited the library in person 5 to 9 times last year, a percentage that is relatively consistent over the last three years. More frequent visits — from 10 to 14 times or 15 and higher — are consistently low among respondents, with the highest responses in 2021 for the 10 to 14 times option (7%) and the lowest in 2020 for the 15 times or more option (4%).



Interestingly, the number of online library visits by Canadian book borrowers has also increased from 50% in 2020 and 69% in 2021 to 77% in 2022.

In 2022, Canadian book borrowers visited the library for a number of reasons, with two out of the top three being related to book browsing:

- To pick up holds (44%)
- **To browse displays and shelves for books to borrow (36%)**
- **To discover a new book, author, and/or illustrator (24%)**

Just as we saw for Canadian book buyers, Canadian book borrowers also browsed books at the public library at increasing rates last year. In 2022, more Canadian book borrowers visited the library to:

- Browse displays and shelves for books to borrow — up 33% from 2021 to 2022
- Discover a new book, author, and/or illustrator — up 118% from 2021 to 2022

This browsing also impacted the books that Canadian book borrowers ended up taking out on loan in 2022. Last year, browsing accounted for two of the top three ways book borrowers became aware of the books they borrowed:

- **Browsing genre/subject area (42%)**
- Having searched specifically for this book (32%)
- **Browsing books by author/illustrator (30%)**

About BookNet Canada

BookNet Canada is a non-profit organization that develops technology, standards, and education to serve the Canadian book industry. Founded in 2002 to address systemic challenges in the industry, BookNet Canada supports publishing companies, booksellers, wholesalers, distributors, sales agents, and libraries across the country.

BookNet Canada acknowledges that our operations are remote and our colleagues contribute their work from the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Wendat, and Mi'kmaq Peoples, the original nations of the lands we now call Beeton, Brampton, Guelph, Halifax, Toronto, and Vaughan. We endorse the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and support an ongoing shift from gatekeeping to spacemaking in the book industry.

The book industry has long been an industry of gatekeeping. Anyone who works at any stage of the book supply chain carries a responsibility to serve readers by publishing, promoting, and supplying works that represent the wide extent of human experiences and identities in all that complicated intersectionality. We, at BookNet, are committed to working with our partners in the industry as we move towards a framework that supports "spacemaking," which ensures that marginalized creators and professionals all have the opportunity to contribute, work, and lead.

BookNet Canada's services and research help companies promote and sell books, streamline workflows, and analyze and adapt to a rapidly changing market. BookNet Canada sets technology standards and educates organizations about how to apply them, performs market research, and tracks 85% of all Canadian English-language print trade book sales through BNC SalesData.

BookNet Canada has extensive research available on our [website](#), both free and for purchase.

- [Canadian Book Market 2022](#): A comprehensive guide to the Canadian market in 2022 with in-depth category data.

- [*The State of Publishing in Canada 2021*](#): A thorough overview of the Canadian English-language publishing landscape, with data from small, mid-sized, and large publishers.
- [*Perennial Bestsellers: The Most Reliable Books to Stock by Category 2017–2021*](#): A SalesData and LibraryData subscriber exclusive resource to identify backlist titles that have sold reliably over the last five years.

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If you have any questions or comments about this or other studies, please contact the research team at research@booknetcanada.ca.

Industry-led and partially funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, BookNet Canada has become, as The Globe and Mail puts it, “the book industry’s supply-chain nerve centre.”

Learn more at booknetcanada.ca.

Appendix A: Demographics

The following tables compare the demographics of Canadian book buyers, Canadian book borrowers, and all Canadians in 2022, as collected by the Canadian Book Consumer survey 2022.

Gender identity

	Book buyers	Book borrowers	All Canadians
Man	46%	41%	47%
Woman	54%	59%	52%
Non-binary	1%	1%	0%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	0%

Age

	Book buyers	Book borrowers	All Canadians
18-24	10%	7%	6%
25-34	18%	10%	11%
35-44	17%	16%	13%
45-54	18%	17%	16%
55-64	18%	18%	22%
65+	20%	31%	32%

Region

	Book buyers	Book borrowers	All Canadians
Atlantic	7%	6%	7%
Central	60%	57%	57%
Prairies	18%	20%	20%
West Coast & Northern Territories	15%	17%	16%

Location

	Book buyers	Book borrowers	All Canadians
City or urban area	48%	50%	45%
Suburban area	36%	35%	36%
Small town or rural area	16%	15%	19%

Education

	Book buyers	Book borrowers	All Canadians
Less than highschool	1%	2%	3%
Highschool graduate or equivalent	15%	16%	21%
Some post secondary education, not completed	11%	11%	13%
College or university degree/diploma	50%	51%	47%
Graduate or professional degree	23%	20%	15%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	0%
Other	0%	0%	0%

Employment status

	Book buyers	Book borrowers	All Canadians
Employed full time	44%	35%	33%
Employed part time	11%	9%	9%
Self employed	9%	7%	7%
Not employed	5%	6%	7%
Retired	21%	33%	34%
Student	5%	4%	3%
Homemaker	4%	5%	4%
Prefer not to say	0%	1%	1%
Other	1%	2%	1%

Relationship status

	Book buyers	Book borrowers	All Canadians
Single (never married)	30%	26%	27%
Living with partner	10%	9%	10%
Married	47%	49%	46%
Separated	2%	3%	3%
Divorced	7%	8%	9%
Widowed	4%	5%	6%
Other	0%	0%	0%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	0%

Household size

	Book buyers	Book borrowers	All Canadians
One - myself	21%	26%	26%
Two	35%	38%	41%
Three	21%	17%	16%
Four	15%	12%	11%
Five	5%	5%	4%
Six	2%	1%	1%
Seven	1%	0%	0%
Eight	0%	0%	0%
Nine	0%	0%	0%
Ten or more	0%	0%	0%

Children under 18 living in household

	Book buyers	Book borrowers	All Canadians
Under 3 years of age	5%	3%	3%
3-5 years of age	6%	5%	4%
6-8 years of age	8%	7%	5%
9-10 years of age	7%	8%	4%
11-12 years of age	8%	7%	4%
13-17 years of age	17%	15%	12%
None under 18 years of age	64%	69%	70%

Household income

	Book buyers	Book borrowers	All Canadians
Under \$15,000	3%	4%	5%
\$15,000-\$24,999	5%	7%	7%
\$25,000-\$34,999	9%	11%	12%
\$35,000-\$49,999	10%	11%	12%
\$50,000-\$74,999	23%	21%	21%
\$75,000-\$99,999	18%	16%	15%
\$100,000-\$149,999	18%	15%	14%
\$150,000 and over	11%	9%	8%
Prefer not to say	3%	5%	5%
Other	1%	1%	1%

Non-dominant identity

	Book buyers	Book borrowers	All Canadians
Class (working class, low income, etc.)	17%	18%	17%
Religion (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jewish, etc.)	10%	10%	7%
Blackness	4%	3%	2%
Indigeneity	1%	2%	2%
People of colour	13%	13%	10%
Gender (trans, queer, 2-Spirited, non-binary, etc.)	3%	3%	2%
Sexuality (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual, aromantic, etc.)	8%	6%	6%
Disability (physical, mental, or emotional activity impairment/limitation temporarily, episodically, or permanently, etc.)	11%	11%	12%
Neurodiversity	3%	3%	2%
Family structure/single	8%	11%	9%
Age (young, senior)	22%	27%	27%
Language (English not the first language)	11%	10%	9%
Other	1%	1%	1%
Prefer not to say	2%	3%	3%
No	38%	36%	38%