



Pop Up PD
for Literacy Educators

Literacy and Essential Skills as a Poverty Reduction Strategy

September 26, 2019



Learning Networks of Ontario



About Pop Up PD for Literacy Educators

- free webinar series developed by Ontario's LBS Regional Networks, Sectors, & the Provincial Support Organizations for Literacy
- supports LBS practitioners with presentations on topics important to them
- English language webinars presented for LBS practitioners annually since 2015-2016; French language transcriptions posted for 2018-19
- **all** webinar presentations, recording links & transcripts here:
<https://e-channel.ca/practitioners/pop-pd-resources>
- webinar topic ideas welcome at: e-channel@contactnorth.ca (or address of your choice)

Today's Webinar...

Literacy and Essential Skills as a Poverty Reduction Strategy



Literacy:
Learning for Life.

L'alphabétisation,
Une leçon pour la vie.

Objectives

- *Background and context*
- *Research highlights*
- *Key recommendations*
- *Discussion – Q & A*



Frontier College: Over a century of service in literacy

- In the beginning: railway and lumber gangs, mining camps, homesteads



Frontier College: Over a century of service in literacy

Today : Inner city neighbourhoods, northern and Indigenous communities, prisons, workplaces, schools, community centres, shelters, and online



Literacy in Canada



- **About half** of working-aged Canadians (49%) **struggle with long or complex text.**
- Almost **one in five** (17%) have **extremely low literacy.**
- Scope of literacy issue **not well understood.**
- **Growing demand** for services and support.

Frontier College is currently active in 167 communities from coast to coast to coast. Last year, we reached over 40,000 children, youth and adults.

Adult Literacy Partners in Ontario

- LBS & Pre-GED
 - Eva's Phoenix, Youth Opportunities Unlimited, Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre, Ottawa Public Library
- Academic upgrading for trades
 - Central Ontario Building Trades, Ontario Masonry Training Centre
- Workplace literacy and essential skills
 - Leamington/Kingsville/Essex area farms, DeBeers Victor Diamond Mine (completed)
- Prison literacy
 - Bath Institution, Collin's Bay Institution-Medium Unit, John Howard Society (Restart)

What do Canadians think?

90% agree that strong literacy skills are essential to attaining a high **quality of life**.

86% believe poor literacy skills negatively impact **employment prospects**.

87% believe that more should be done to **improve literacy rates** in Canada.

Yet only 76% believe that **poor literacy skills** increase the likelihood of **poverty**.

Environics Research (2017)



Literacy & Poverty

Low literacy and poverty are strongly correlated:

In 2012, about 13% of Canadians were in the two highest categories of literacy skills (levels 4 and 5), yet 17% of Canadian adults were in level 1 and below, meaning that they could only find single pieces of information in shorts texts or only had a basic vocabulary.

Average earnings for an adult with “less than high school” are \$23,000, compared to \$60,000 for adults with a university degree.

From 2003 to 2012, Canadian literacy scores declined while the OECD average increased, a disturbing trend as the need for low-skilled workers declines.

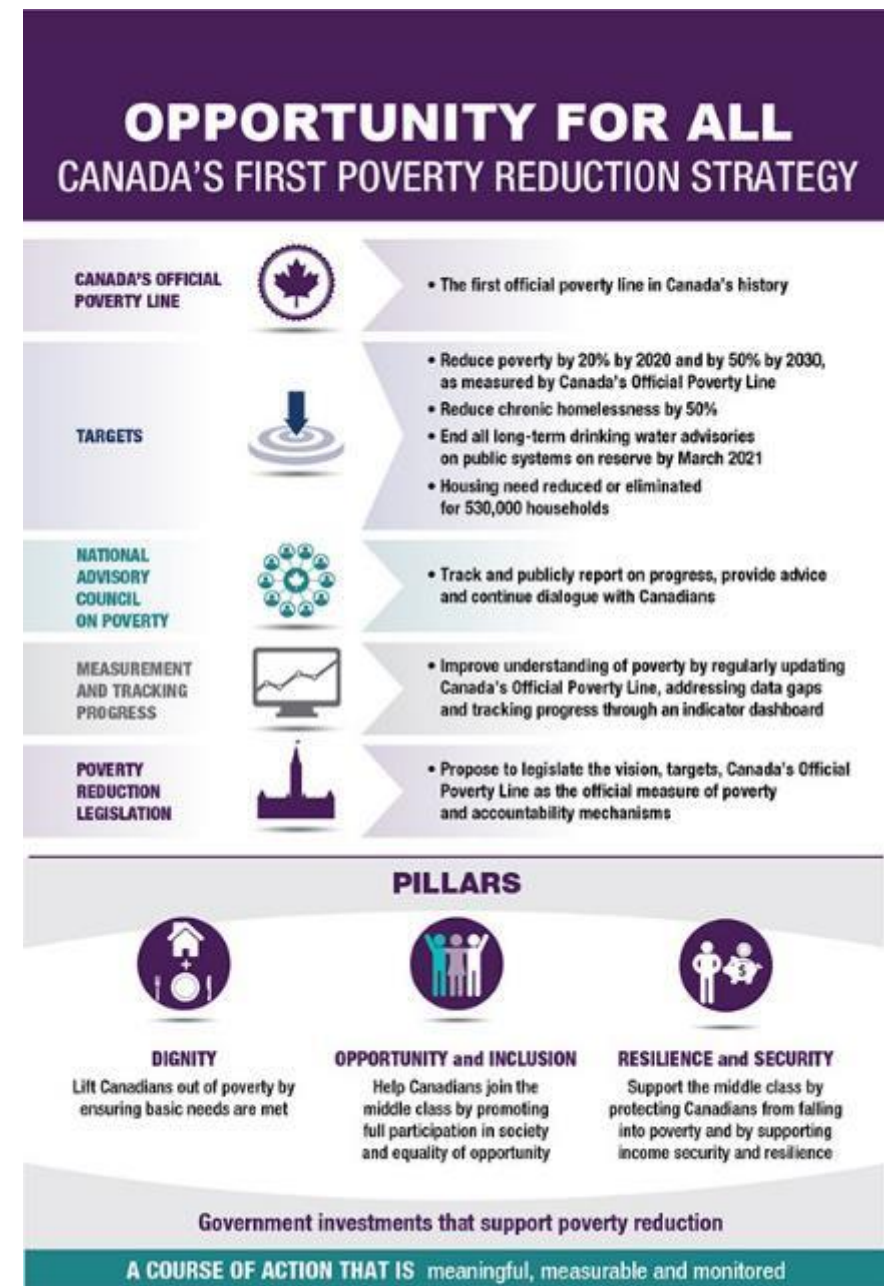
Research has confirmed that investments in literacy and essential skills provide exponential returns.

Sources: “Insights on Canadian Society: The association between skills and low income.” Statistics Canada. 2016.
“How Essential Skills Training Unlocks Business Value” *CB Insights* ABC Life Literacy Canada, Canadian Literacy and Learning Network. 2014.

Poverty Reduction Strategies

- Literacy is a means to tackle poverty.
- Literacy is a key indicator of poverty reduction.

Most provincial/territorial strategies acknowledge the value of literacy, education, or skills training in alleviating poverty but **literacy support as a foundational and broad-reaching tool is represented unevenly, especially for adults.**





Literacy and Essential Skills

as a Poverty Reduction Strategy

NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

FUNDED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S NATIONAL ESSENTIAL SKILLS INITIATIVE

Research Objectives

1. Articulate key factors underlying the positive relationship between literacy and poverty;
2. Highlight a series of best practices in the delivery of literacy programming for lower skilled adults living in poverty; and,
3. Consult with a broad range of stakeholders to identify challenges and new innovative approaches in the delivery of literacy and poverty reduction programs for Canadians.

Research Methodology

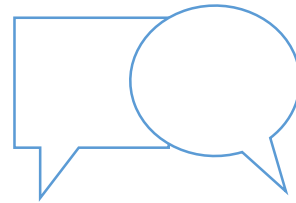
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Literature Review

- Review of publications by governments, service providers, academics, and other sources.
- Document the state of knowledge on the relationship between literacy and poverty

2



Key Informant Interviews

- 30 interviews with key informants from a range of backgrounds, expertise, and experiences
- Interviews explored best practices, challenges, and innovations in literacy programming for adults living in poverty

3



National Research Survey

- A diverse sample of over **400 organizations** from across Canada participated in the survey.
- The survey sought the opinions and expertise of those working with adult learners, especially marginalized or multi-barriered adults.



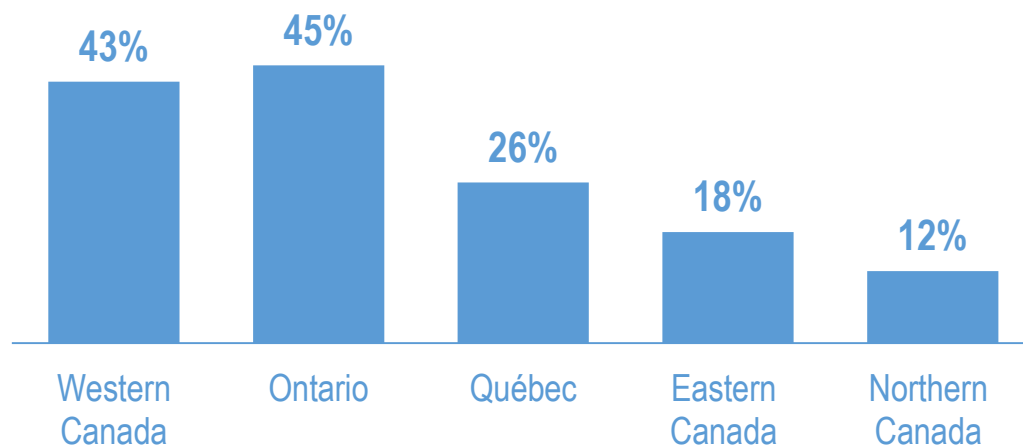
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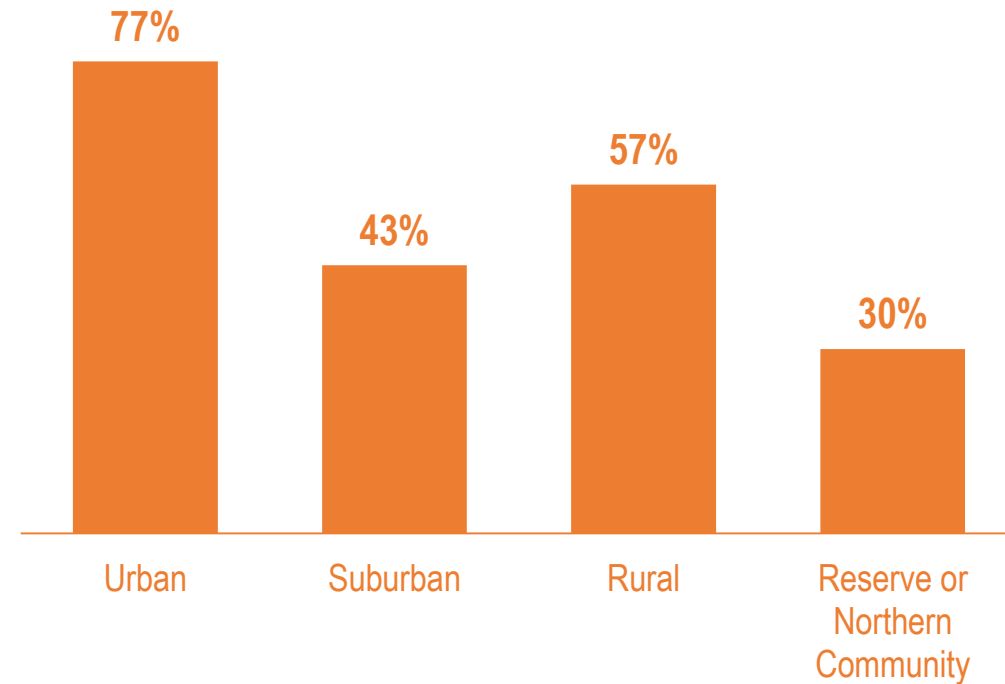
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Survey Sample

- Proportion of Respondents Offering Services in Various Regions

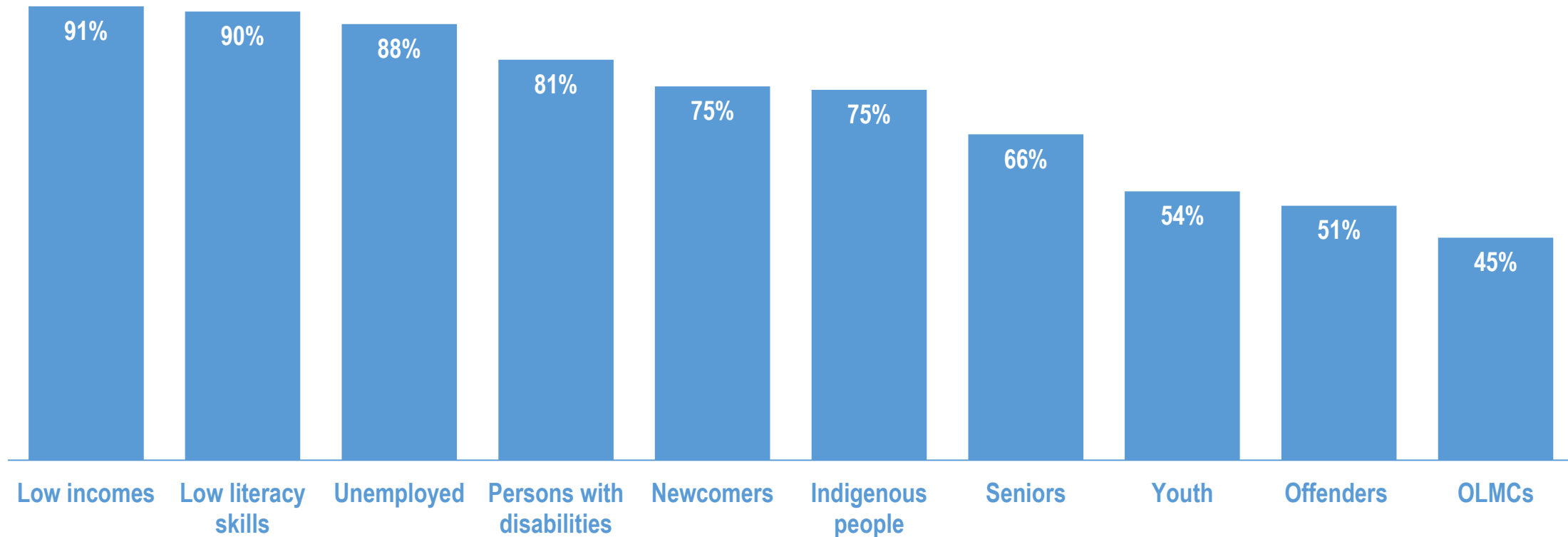


- Proportion of Respondents by Community Type



Survey Sample

- Proportion of Respondents Providing Services to Targeted Learner Groups



Research Findings

Clear, well-established relationship between literacy skills and poverty

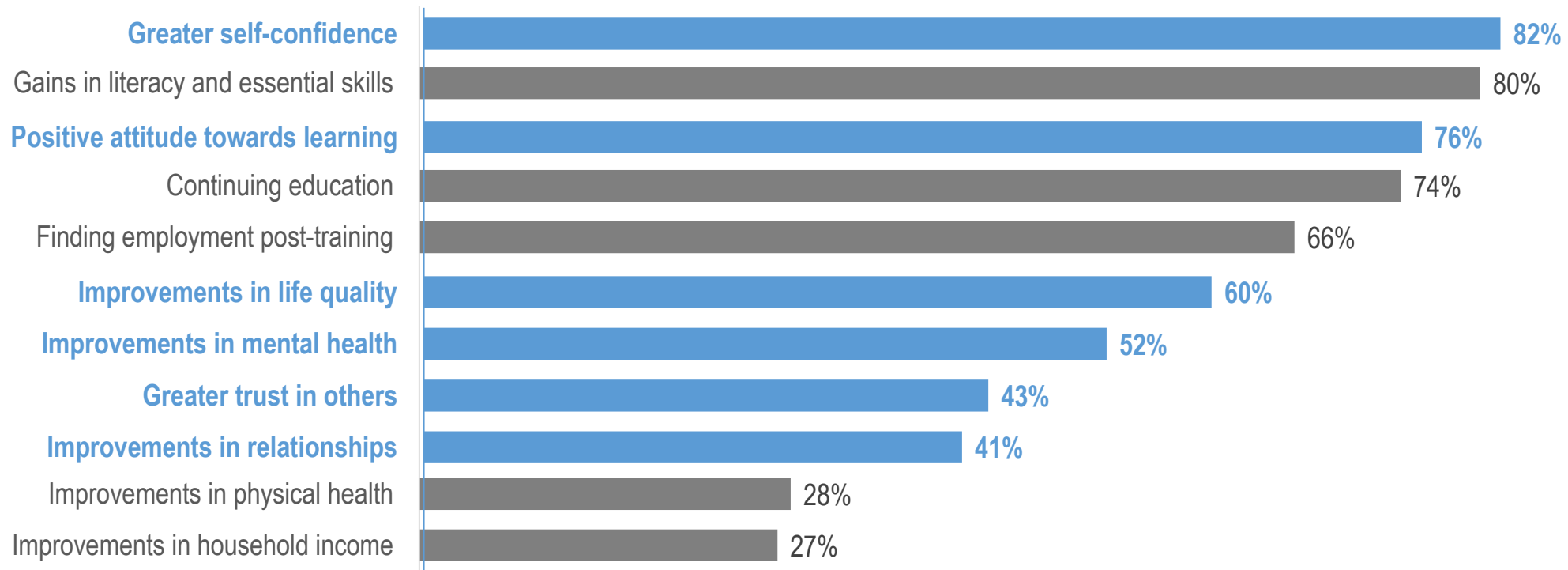
- Many studies have shown a **strong positive relationship** between literacy skills, employment, and earnings.
- Recent evidence shows a **positive causal relationship** between **literacy upgrading** and employment, earnings, and longer-term job retention.

The experience of poverty is about more than a lack of employment; it is about exclusion

- Literacy is a critical step on the pathway to not only employment, but also broader social inclusion
- Basic literacy skills are necessary to ensure the full participation in society and the well-being of all Canadians.

Research Findings

Employment and education related outcomes are commonly tracked instead of short-term milestones related to the personal development of learners, which are better indicators of progress and achievement.



Research Findings

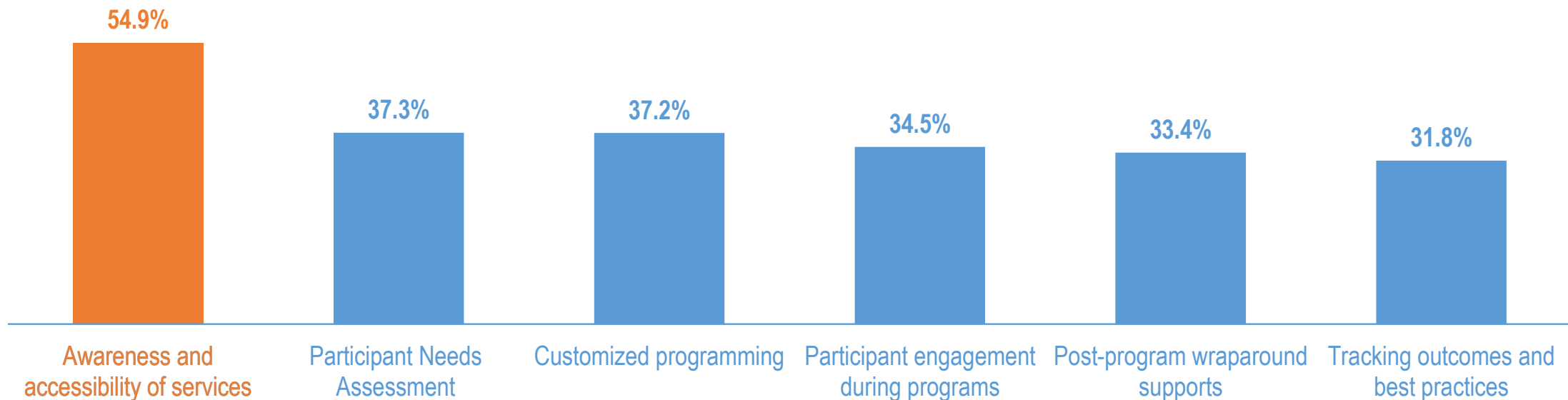
A range of best practices have emerged in recent years in the delivery of literacy upgrading and wrap-around supports to reduce the effects of poverty

- *Learner-centric approaches to instruction*
- *Holistic assessments of learner needs*
- *Contextualizing program content within relevant frameworks (e.g. occupational, cultural)*
- *Customization of learning materials to learner objectives*
- *The importance of wrap-around supports and service provider partnerships*

Research Findings

The most pressing challenge identified by stakeholders is in raising awareness and increasing accessibility of programming

- *Improving awareness and accessibility of services was identified as the most important priority by all stakeholders across all targeted learner groups*
- *Especially necessary for programs serving low-income learners (72%), persons with disabilities (59%), newcomers (56%), and Indigenous Peoples (55%)*



Research Findings

Project-based funding has increased innovation, but imperilled the sustainability of service providers

- Stakeholders emphasized the need for funding arrangements with expanded mandates that:
 - combine **literacy and poverty reduction objectives** (76 %),
 - allow for more expansive **delivery of wrap-around supports** (76 %), and
 - provide more **flexibility in the use of resources** (69 %)

Single-access points with integrated service delivery can make it easier for individuals to find and access needed programs and services

- Siloed approaches to service delivery often limit the kinds of supports that LES providers can provide
- Navigating systems with multiple access points is an additional barrier for adults with low-literacy skills
- The majority of stakeholders (77 per cent) identified **greater intergovernmental coordination** in the delivery of literacy and poverty programming as a crucial priority

11 Key Recommendations - Policy

1. Governments should recognize literacy as a **basic human right**.
2. Literacy should be recognized as a policy priority requiring **cross-departmental and cross-jurisdictional cooperation**.
3. Literacy should be a central pillar within any **comprehensive poverty reduction strategy**.
4. Policies and funding models should encourage **collaboration rather than competition** between service providers.
5. Funding for literacy and essential skills programming should be **sustainable and predictable**, while also fostering **innovation**.
6. Governments should facilitate **partnerships** and support **knowledge translation and exchange (KTE)** among providers of literacy and poverty reduction services.

11 Key Recommendations – Program Delivery

7. **Raising awareness and accessibility** of existing services and programs should be a key priority for improvement.
8. **Learner-centred approaches** should be used to **maximize engagement** in literacy programming.
9. Literacy programs should be **contextualized** to the **goals of learners**.
10. Greater **integration of services** should be a primary objective to improve the quality of literacy and poverty reduction services.
11. **Outcomes frameworks** used to evaluate success should be expanded to include indicators of **life skills and psychological capital**.

Discussion – Q & A

- What are the implications of this research for your work – partnerships, funding, program delivery, other?
- What surprised you or stood out about the research? Anything missing?
- What are known barriers to implementing best practices that this network should focus on?
- Any other comments or observations?

Let's keep the conversation going!

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Thank you!

Coming soon:

- ❖ webinar resources: <https://e-channel.ca/practitioners/pop-pd-resources>
- ❖ webinar evaluation: <https://tinyurl.com/y3po6bfh>
- ❖ registration link for our next webinar:
https://connect.contactnorth.ca/pop_up_2/event/registration.html