



Paid Sick Leave in B.C.



What We Heard Report

Prepared for the B.C. Ministry of Labour

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BACKGROUND

Sick Leave in British Columbia

Currently, employees in B.C. are entitled to up to three days of unpaid, job-protected sick leave per year. This leave is intended to help protect employees from job loss or other repercussions at work in cases where they cannot work due to illness or injury. To be entitled to this leave, an employee must have worked for their employer for at least 90 days. Additionally, employers may require workers provide information to satisfy their employer that they are ill or injured; it is acceptable practice for employers to require a doctor's note to get access to this sick leave.

COVID-19 and Paid Sick Leave

Due to the highly contagious nature of COVID-19, public health orders were put in place requiring individuals to self-isolate if they were diagnosed with COVID-19 and/or if they were exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19. To support these public health orders and reduce the financial incentive to ignore these requirements, the B.C. government introduced legislation that required employers to offer up to three paid sick days if an employee needed to stay home due to COVID-19 related issues (e.g., diagnosed with COVID-19, awaiting COVID-19 test results, needing to self-isolate and monitor due to an exposure, etc.).

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the public good that is served when an ill employee stays home from the workplace: the spread of contagious illness, and thus the burden of disease, is reduced. As a result of this experience, the B.C. government is exploring options to mandate employer-paid sick leave for any illness or injury, not just COVID-19 specific issues.

Purpose of the *Paid Sick Leave Engagement*

To provide a base level of knowledge regarding what types of sick leave are currently available to British Columbians at their workplaces, the B.C. Ministry of Labour undertook a public engagement consisting of a panel survey of employees, and two open online surveys of employees and employers.

This document reports on the findings of the two open online surveys, outlining the reported needs of both employees and employers, and discussing potential options for the implementation of employer-paid sick leave in B.C.

METHODOLOGY

Open Online Surveys

Two survey questionnaires were drafted by the Ministry of Labour, with input from Malatest regarding survey structure, for fielding in an open invitation format via the govTogetherBC portal. The surveys were made available in six languages, including English, Korean, Tagalog, Punjabi, Traditional Chinese and Simplified Chinese. The surveys were available to the public from August 5 through September 14, 2021.

As these surveys recruited participants based on an open invitation and individuals self-selected into the survey, the findings presented here should not be interpreted to be representative of the overall populations of workers, employers, or British Columbians as a whole.

Survey Responses and Demographics

Worker Survey

In total, 26,081 individuals participated in the open worker survey; of these, 22,534 were full survey completions and 3,547 were partial completions.^{1,2} The majority of worker respondents reported that they work primarily in the Mainland / Southwest (52%) region, followed by the Vancouver Island / Coast region (26%) (see **Table 1**). Respondents tended to be between the ages of 20 and 44 years old (see **Figure 1**), and predominately identified as female (63%) (see **Figure 2**). Additionally, 4% of worker respondents identified as Indigenous, 18% identified as a person of colour, 10% identified as LGBTQ2S+, and 6% identified as a person with a disability.

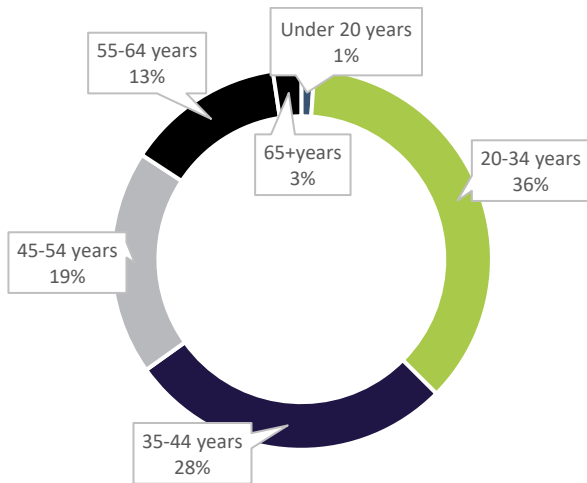
Table 1 Survey Respondents by Region

Region	Count
Mainland / Southwest	12,444 (52%)
Vancouver Island / Coast	6,208 (26%)
Thompson-Okanagan	2,645 (11%)
Kootenay	927 (4%)
Cariboo	692 (3%)
North Coast & Nechako	705 (3%)
Northeast	362 (2%)

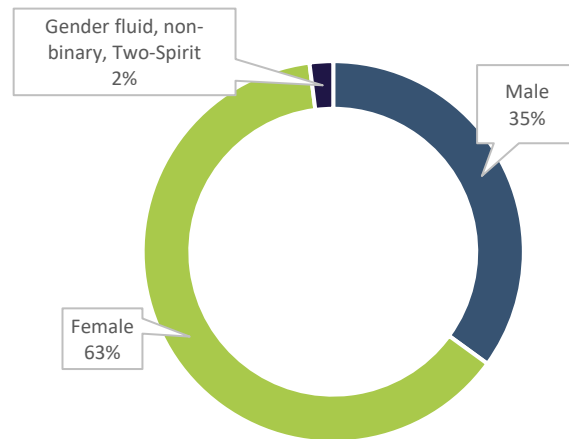
n= 23,983; Source: Open Worker Survey

¹ A full survey completion was defined as having reached the end of the survey and answered all closed-ended items in the survey; a partial completion was defined as having system missing fields for one or more closed-ended items. Partial completion data were included in all analyses in this report, with an analysis-by-analysis approach to list deleting cases with missing data.

² Due to partial completions and skipped questions, valid *ns* for survey items may vary throughout this report.

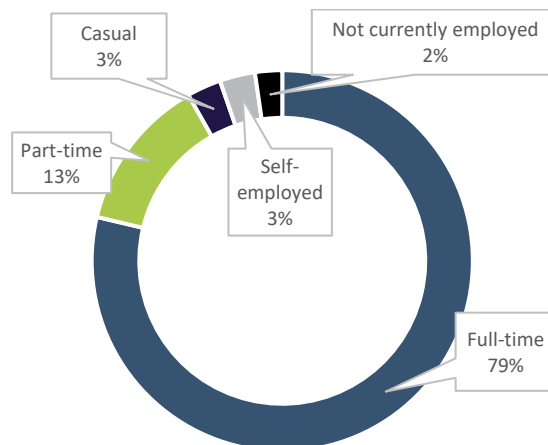
Figure 1 Worker Survey, Age of Respondents


n= 23,829; Source: Open Worker Survey

Figure 2 Worker Survey, Gender of Respondents


n= 23,529; Source: Open Worker Survey

The majority of respondents were employed full-time (79%) (see **Figure 3**). Of those who were employed, most worked for only one employer (90%). Those who did work for more than one employer (10%, n= 2,360), most reported having two employers (85%, n= 2,000) and few respondents reported having three or more employers (15%, n= 344). Workers reported being employed in a variety of industries; most commonly, they reported employment in healthcare and social assistance (17%) and other services (17%) (see **Table 2** and **Table 3**).

Figure 3 Worker Employment Status


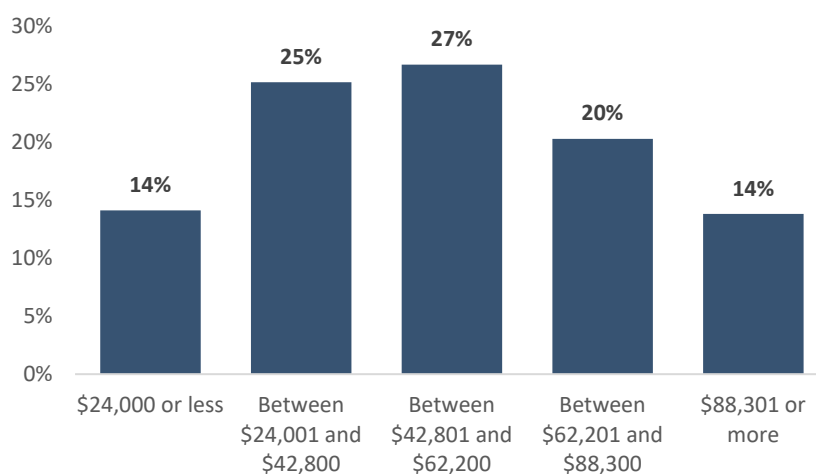
n= 23,860; Source: Open Worker Survey

Table 2 Survey Respondents by Industry

Industry	Count
Health care and social assistance	4,189 (17%)
Other services	4,189 (17%)
Retail and wholesale trade	3,081 (13%)
Professional / technical services	2,202 (9%)
Education services	1,655 (7%)
Accommodation / food services	1,510 (6%)
Transportation and warehousing	1,383 (6%)
Construction	1,331 (6%)
Manufacturing	1,140 (5%)
Finance and related fields	1,026 (4%)
Public administration	1,024 (4%)
Utilities	644 (3%)
Natural resources	471 (2%)
Agriculture	207 (1%)

n= 24,052; Source: Open Worker Survey

Respondents were also asked to report their total personal employment income (i.e., their individual earnings from employment only, not including other sources of income or other household members' incomes). Response options were grouped according to income quintiles, based on Statistics Canada's estimates of B.C.'s income deciles from the annual *Canadian Income Survey*. In the population of British Columbians, each of these quintiles represents 20% of the population. Responses to this question in the survey suggests that worker respondents overrepresented the middle-income categories, and underrepresented the lowest and highest income categories. Please see **Figure 4** for an illustration of responses.

Figure 4 Worker Respondents by Income


n= 23,937; Source: Open Worker Survey

Table 3 Survey Respondents by Industry and Income

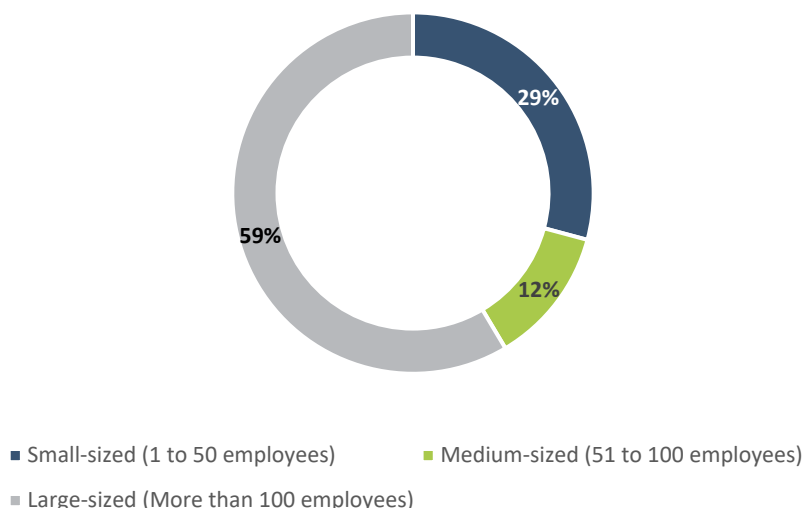
Industry	In 2020, what was your before-tax income from all jobs you worked?					Total
	\$24,000 or less	Between \$24,001 and \$42,800	Between \$42,801 and \$62,200	Between \$62,201 and \$88,300	\$88,301 or more	
Accommodation / food services	529 (35%)	605 (40%)	281 (19%)	64 (4%)	26 (2%)	1,505
Agriculture	31 (15%)	70 (34%)	40 (20%)	36 (18%)	28 (14%)	205
Construction	63 (5%)	253 (19%)	412 (31%)	370 (28%)	225 (17%)	1,323
Educational services	237 (14%)	462 (28%)	411 (25%)	300 (18%)	235 (14%)	1,645
Finance & related fields	71 (7%)	238 (23%)	350 (34%)	202 (20%)	159 (16%)	1,020
Health care and social assistance	480 (12%)	1,091 (26%)	1,177 (28%)	914 (22%)	501 (12%)	4,163
Manufacturing	76 (7%)	219 (19%)	313 (28%)	294 (26%)	233 (21%)	1,135
Natural resources	28 (5%)	47 (10%)	66 (14%)	125 (27%)	200 (43%)	466
Professional / technical services	148 (7%)	325 (15%)	499 (23%)	588 (27%)	632 (29%)	2,192
Public administration	46 (5%)	146 (14%)	332 (33%)	349 (34%)	148 (14%)	1,021
Retail & wholesale trade	882 (29%)	1,109 (36%)	728 (24%)	228 (7%)	113 (4%)	3,060
Transportation & warehousing	92 (7%)	265 (19%)	394 (29%)	438 (32%)	188 (14%)	1,377
Utilities	24 (4%)	75 (12%)	213 (33%)	183 (29%)	144 (23%)	639
Other services	665 (15%)	1,105 (27%)	1,162 (28%)	758 (18%)	468 (11%)	4,158
Total	3,372 (14%)	6,010 (25%)	6,378 (27%)	4,849 (20%)	3,300 (14%)	23,909

Source: Open Worker Survey

Note: Percentages refer to percent of row total.

The majority of respondents reported working for large-sized (more than 100 employees) employers (59%), followed by small-sized (1-50 employees) employers (30%), then medium sized employers (12%) (see **Figure 5**).

Figure 5 Workers Survey Respondents, by Employer Size



n=22,698; Source: Open Worker Survey

Most worker respondents reporting working in the private sector (60%) or public sector (32%) while few reported working in the non-profit sector (7%). Finally, 44% of respondents indicated that their job is covered by a collective agreement, while 56% of respondents indicated that their job was not.

Employer Survey

Over the course of the survey period, 5,482 employers participated in the open employer survey; there were 3,191 fully complete surveys, and an additional 2,291 partial completions.³ Employers who responded to the survey represented a range of industries, most often retail and wholesale trade (18%), other services (17%), health care and social assistance (14%), or professional / technical services (14%) (see **Table 4**). Respondents operated businesses throughout B.C. (see **Table 5**).

³ Due to partial completions and skipped questions, valid *ns* for survey items may vary throughout this report.

Table 4 Employer Survey Respondents by Industry

Industry	Count
Retail and wholesale trade	792 (18%)
Other services	776 (17%)
Health care and social assistance	630 (14%)
Professional / technical services	617 (14%)
Construction	586 (13%)
Accommodation / food services	524 (12%)
Manufacturing	418 (9%)
Agriculture	308 (7%)
Transportation and warehousing	194 (4%)
Education services	191 (4%)
Finance and related fields	157 (4%)
Natural resources	105 (2%)
Public administration	60 (1%)
Utilities	37 (1%)

n= 4,513; Source: Open Employer Survey

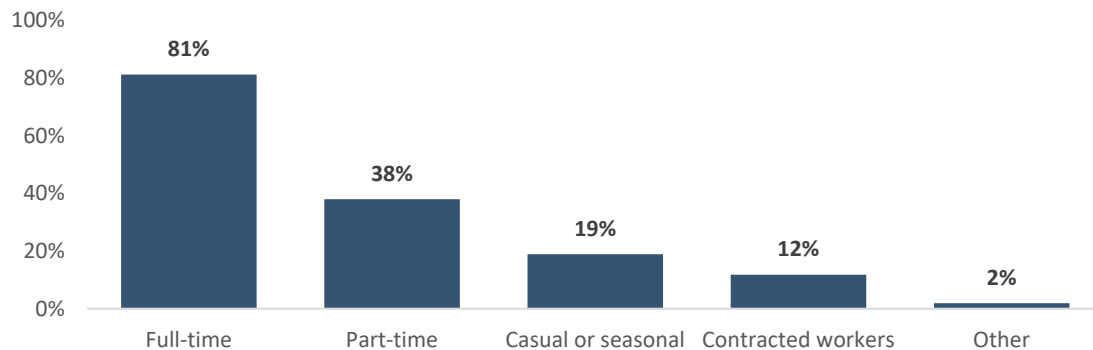
Table 5 Employer Survey Respondents by Region

Region	Count
Vancouver Island / Coast	2,162 (46%)
Mainland / Southwest	1,342 (29%)
Thompson-Okanagan	920 (20%)
Kootenay	393 (11%)
Cariboo	282 (6%)
Northeast	308 (7%)
North Coast & Nechako	212 (5%)

n= 4,670; Source: Open Employer Survey

Note: Participants could select all regions that they operate a business in, therefore percentages may add up to more than 100%.

Employers who responded to the survey described their workforce as primarily composed of full-time workers (see **Figure 6**). The majority of employers described their organization as private sector (82%). Some respondents described their organization as public sector (10%), and a few respondents represented non-profit organizations (8%). Employers who responded to the survey represented organizations that ranged in size from small to large: 78% of respondents were from small organizations that employed fewer than 50 people; 7% were from medium organizations that employed 51 to 100 people; and 12% were from large organizations that employed more than 100 people. A small proportion (5%) of respondents reported having no employees (see **Table 6**).

Figure 6 Employer-Reported Breakdown of Workforce


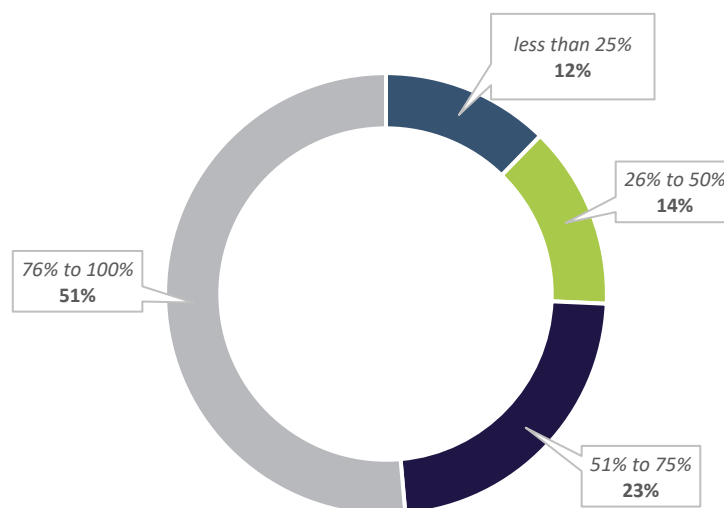
n= 4,670; Source: Open Employer Survey. Respondents could select as many options as applied to their workforce, therefore responses may add to more than 100%.

Table 6 Employer Survey, Number of Employees / Size of Business

	Count
No employees	166 (5%)
Small (1-50 employees)	3,506 (78%)
Medium (51-100 employees)	324 (7%)
Large (More than 100 employees)	518 (12%)

n= 4,514; Source: Open Employer Survey

Most employer respondents reported that their employees are not covered by a collective agreement (90%). Among employers who had unions in their workplaces, approximately one half (51%) reported that the large majority of their workforces – between 76% and 100% of their workers – were unionized (see **Figure 7**).

Figure 7 Proportion of Workforce Covered by Collective Agreement among Workplaces with a Unionized Workforce


n= 424; Source: Open Employer Survey

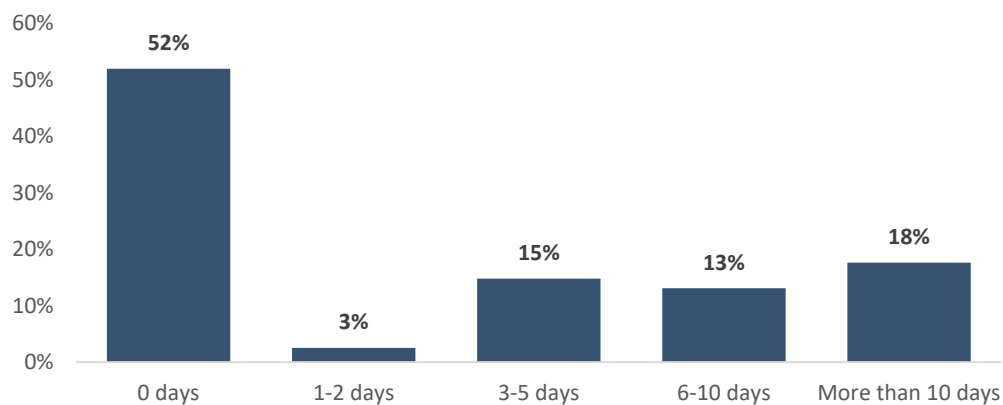
WHAT WE HEARD

Current State of Paid Sick Leave in B.C.

Access to Paid Sick Leave Among Workers

Approximately one-half of workers who responded to the survey reported having access to paid sick leave if illness was related to COVID-19 (51%). For illnesses unrelated to COVID-19, slightly more than one-half (52%) reported that they had zero days of paid sick leave. Few workers reported receiving one to two days of paid sick leave annually, while paid sick leave of other lengths was relatively evenly distributed among the remainder of respondents (see **Figure 8**).

Figure 8 Worker Reported Number of Paid Sick Days for Non-COVID Reasons

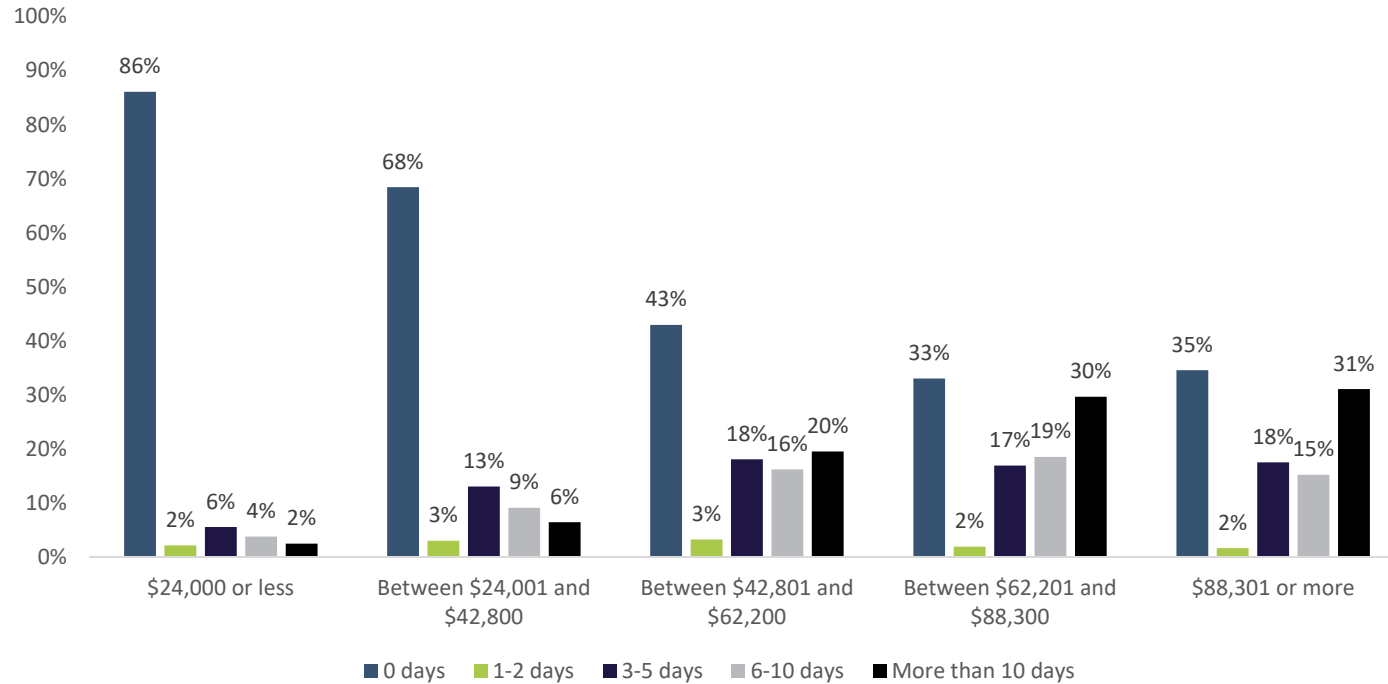


n = 20,771; Source: Open Worker Survey. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Among workers with access to paid sick leave, most (81%) received full pay for all sick days taken, while 11% received only partial pay for all sick days taken. Eight percent of workers with access to paid sick leave reported that they received full pay for some sick days taken, and partial pay for others.

Paid sick leave allowance varied by reported income level and industry. Those with higher incomes tended to report access to a greater number of paid sick days compared to those with lower incomes (see **Figure 9**).

Figure 9 Paid Sick Leave Allowance by Income Quintile



Source: Open Worker Survey.

Note: Percentages refer to percent of row total.

Worker respondents from Public Administration, Utilities, and Educational Services were most likely to have access to any paid sick days at all and, on average, also reported the highest number of paid sick days. Respondents from Retail and Wholesale Trade, Construction, Accommodation / food services, and Manufacturing reported, were least likely to have access to any paid sick leave at all (see **Table 7**).

Table 7 Paid Sick Leave Allowance by Industry

	0 days	1-2 days	3-5 days	6-10 days	More than 10 days	Total n
Public administration	18.5%	1.5%	9.4%	19.8%	50.9%	820
Utilities	20.9%	*	16.2%	15.5%	46.0%	511
Educational services	31.3%	1.4%	10.8%	17.0%	39.5%	1,409
Finance & related fields	33.1%	3.4%	23.4%	14.6%	25.5%	876
Health care and social assistance	42.0%	1.9%	10.1%	15.8%	30.2%	3,481
Professional / technical services	42.8%	2.9%	24.0%	18.0%	12.2%	1,943
Transportation & warehousing	44.4%	3.6%	22.2%	20.3%	9.6%	1,214
Other services	52.0%	2.7%	15.8%	13.9%	15.6%	3,641
Retail & wholesale trade	65.8%	3.6%	16.3%	10.4%	3.9%	2,635
Agriculture	66.3%	*	20.7%	*	6.5%	184
Manufacturing	69.0%	2.7%	17.8%	6.0%	4.5%	1,056
Natural resources	70.4%	2.5%	11.1%	5.4%	10.6%	405
Construction	84.3%	1.9%	8.7%	3.2%	1.8%	1,236
Accommodation / food services	85.8%	2.3%	6.2%	3.7%	2.0%	1,337
Total n	11,792	565	3,302	2,804	3,746	22209

Source: Open Worker Survey

Note: Percentages refer to percent of row total.

*Cells with fewer than 10 cases have not been reported.

Among workers with access to paid sick leave, most reported “use it or lose it” policies at their workplaces. Only 30% reported being able to carry over any of their unused sick days to the next year (25% carrying over all sick days, 5% carrying over only a portion). Twelve percent of respondents reported that they were able to get paid out for unused sick days when their work contract ends.

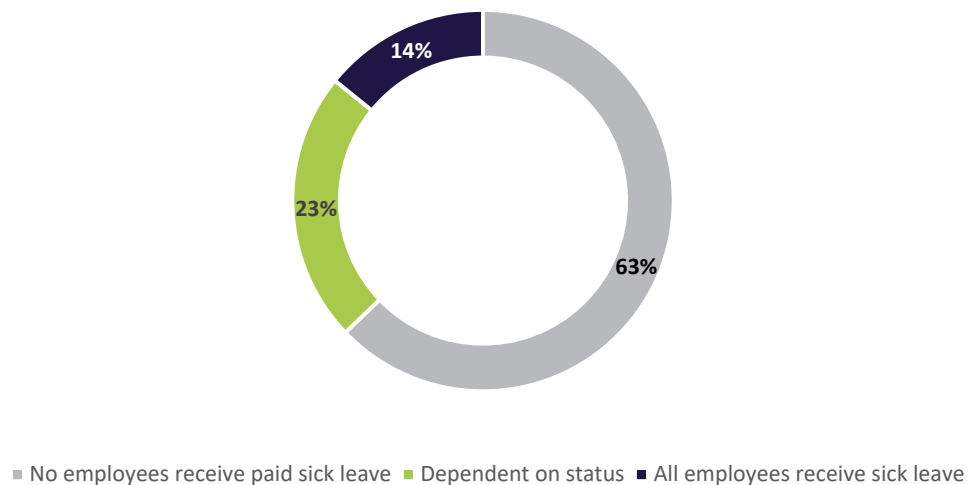
Allowance of Paid Sick Leave Among Employers

Approximately one-half of employer respondents (53%) reported that none of their employees receive paid sick leave for COVID-related reasons, while one-third (32%) reported that all employees receive this leave. Fifteen percent of employers reported that some of their employees have access to COVID-related paid leave, while other employees do not.

An even higher proportion of employer respondents – 62% – indicated that none of their employees have access to non-COVID related paid sick leave (see **Figure 10**). Among the remaining 38% of employers, 23% indicated that paid sick leave was available depending on employee status (e.g., full-time versus part-time, union versus non-union), while 14% reported that they offered paid sick leave to all employees regardless of their work status.⁴

⁴ Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

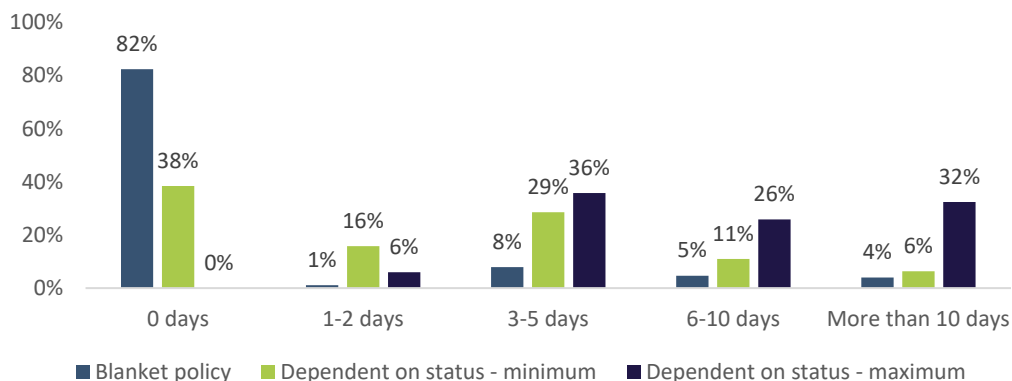
Figure 10 Employer Reported Provision of Paid Sick Leave for Non-COVID Illness



n= 4,082; Source: Open Employer Survey

Among employers who provided a blanket paid sick leave policy (i.e., not reliant on status of employee), the most common response was that employees received zero paid sick days (82% of employers), while 13% reported providing paid sick leaves of three to ten days for all workers. Among employers who indicated that their paid sick leave policy provided different benefits to workers of different status, the most common response for a minimum number of days was zero (38% of these employers indicated that they provided zero paid sick days to at least some of their staff). The most common response for maximum number of paid sick days among these employers was three to five days – 36% reported this being a maximum paid sick leave allowance at their workplace. Please refer to **Figure 11** below for an illustration of employer responses to these questions.

Figure 11 Employer Reported Paid Sick Leave Allowance



Source: Open Employer Survey; n=4,053

Most employers (81%) reported that their employees were generally not able to carry over unused paid sick days from one year to the next; though, 19% of employers reported that some (6%) or all (14%) of

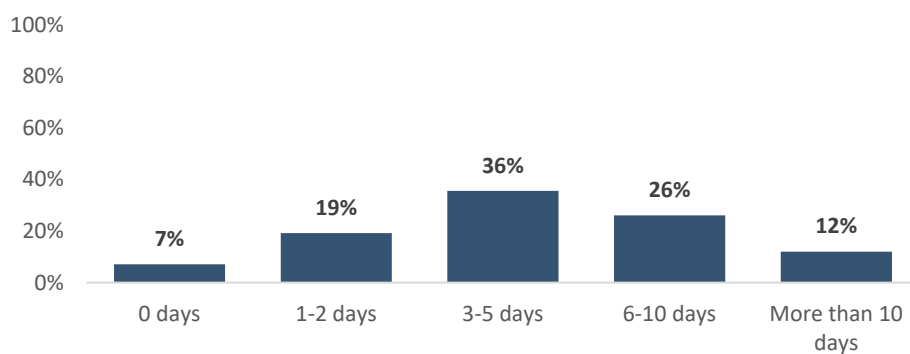
their employees were able to carry over unused sick days from one year to the next.⁵ Similarly, 88% of employer respondents reported that no employees were paid out for unused sick days when their employment or work contract ends. Small proportions of employers reported that some employees (5%) or all employees (7%) were paid out for unused sick days when their employment or work contract ends.

Need for Paid Sick Leave in B.C.

Incidence of Illness Among Workers

Respondents to the Worker Survey were asked to report, in a typical year, the number of days they were sick enough that they felt they should not work. Respondents most often reported feeling this ill three to five days (36%), or six to 10 days (26%) per year (see **Figure 12**).

Figure 12 Worker Reported Number of Days per Year they Felt Sick Enough They Should Not Work



n= 22,923; Source: Open Worker Survey

Employers who responded to the survey were asked questions about the impact of sickness on their operation/business. Employers who provided paid sick leave tended to estimate that 50% or less of their employees use all of their allotted paid sick days in a typical year, and that employees typically used between one and five sick days per year (see **Table 8** and **Figure 13**).

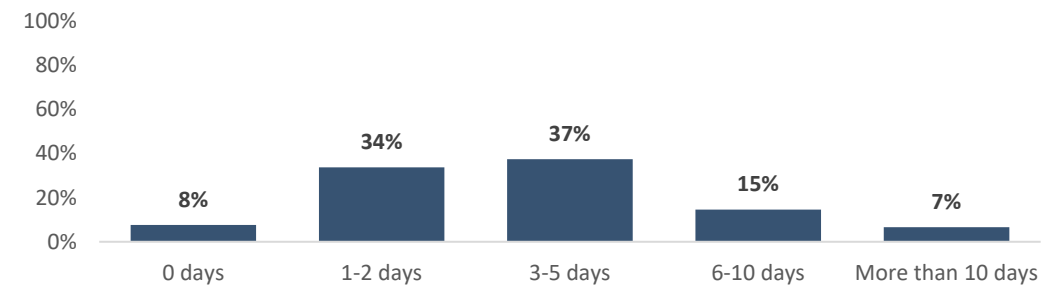
Table 8 Employer Estimated Percentage of Employees who use All Allotted Paid Sick Days

Portion of Employees Using All Paid Sick Days	Count (%)
0-25%	638 (44%)
25-50%	298 (21%)
51-75%	236 (16%)
76-100%	267 (19%)

n=1,439; Source: Open Employer Survey

⁵ Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Figure 13 Employer Estimate Days per Year Employees Typically Miss Work Due to Sickness (Paid or Unpaid Days Off)



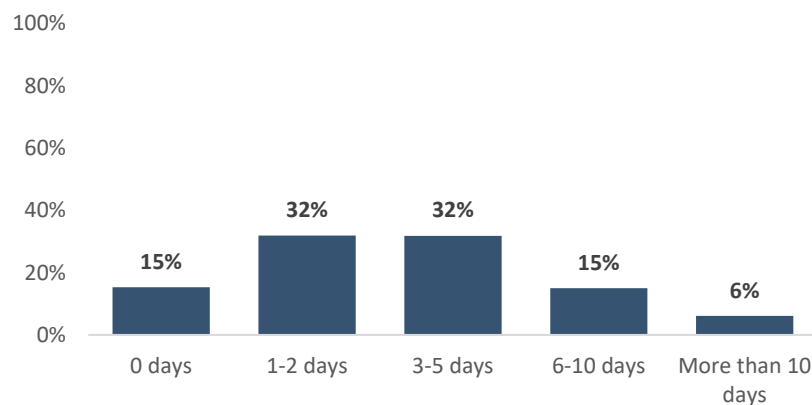
n=3,916; Source: Open Employer Survey

In contrast, nearly three-quarters of respondents to the worker survey (73%) reported that they typically do not use all their allotted paid sick days each year. Those with shorter paid leaves were more likely to report using all paid sick days available to them: 51% of workers with access to one to two days of paid sick leave reported that they usually use all paid sick days available to them in a year, while just 10% of workers with access to more than 10 paid days of sick leave per year said the same. The discrepancy between worker and employer-reported figures may be due to the imbalance of workers and employers (e.g., one employer may employ 100 workers), as well as discrepancies in motivation to self-select into this survey.

Behavioural Impact of Paid Sick Leave

Workers were asked to report how many days per year they typically miss work because they were sick. Respondents most often reported missing work due to illness one to two days (32%) or three to five days (32%) in a typical year (see **Figure 14**). Taken together with the responses to the previous question, it appears that many respondents regularly go into work even on days when they feel sick enough that they believe they should not work – for example, despite only 7% of respondents saying they never feel too sick to go in to work, more than twice that figure (15%) report never missing a day of work due to illness in a typical year.

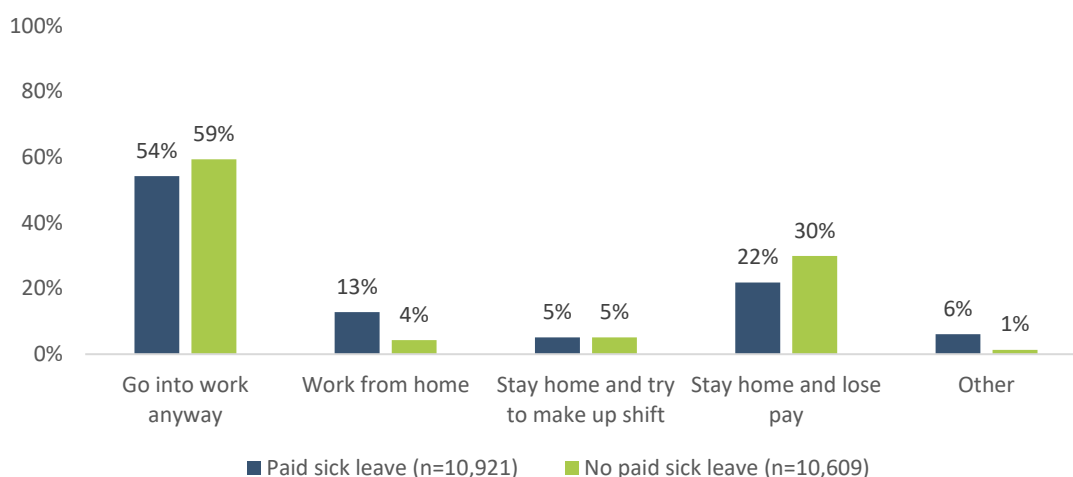
Figure 14 Worker Report, Typical Days of Work Missed Due to Sickness



n= 22,290; Source: Open Worker Survey

When asked, most respondents indicated that if they were sick but did not have any paid sick days available, they would typically go into work anyway (57%). Some respondents reported that they would typically stay home and lose pay (26%), and a small proportion reported that they would typically work from home if they were sick but did not have access to paid sick days (9%). Workers without paid sick leave compared to those with paid sick leave were significantly more likely to lose pay due to being sick (30% compared to 22%), were significantly less likely to have the option to work from home (4% compared to 13%), and were significantly more likely to go into work while sick (59% compared to 54%).⁶ **Figure 15** below illustrates these differences.

Figure 15 Worker Report, Typical Behaviour if Sick with no Access to Paid Sick Leave



Source: Open Worker Survey

Respondents were also able to provide further information or other ways they accommodate being sick without paid sick leave (whether they were without paid sick leave due to not having any in the first place, or having run out of available paid sick days under their workplace's policies) in an open-ended comment field. Four hundred and twenty-six respondents provided valid (i.e., on-topic and understandable) responses to this question. Other ways workers reported dealing with illness without sick pay included the following:

- Using vacation days (45% of valid comments reported this approach);
- Use short-term or long-term disability insurance programs (11% of valid comments reported this approach); and
- Using banked time from other sources, such as overtime or stat holidays (10% of valid comments reported this approach).⁷

Most employers noted that if multiple employees were off sick, the impact to their operations was extreme; on a scale from one to five, where five indicates a larger impact, the majority of respondents rate the impact of multiple employees being off sick with a 4 (18%) or 5 (65%) (see **Table 9**).

⁶ Z tests of proportion were used to test for significance. Bonferroni corrections were made when comparing more than two proportions.

⁷ These responses represent the most-commonly reported approaches included in valid comments, not all responses. Therefore, these percentages do not add up to 100%.

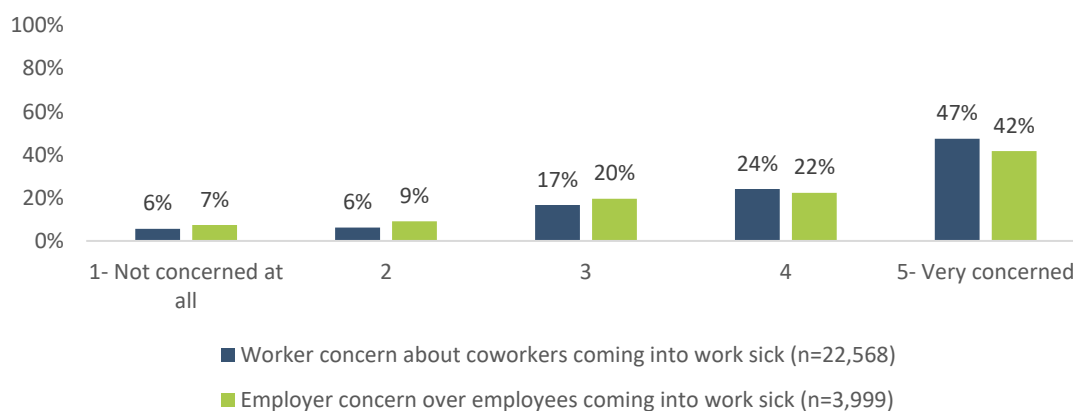
Table 9 Employer Reported Impact of Multiple Employees off Sick

Portion of Employees Using All Paid Sick Days	Count (%)
1 - Not at all impactful	85 (2%)
2	127 (3%)
3	445 (11%)
4	732 (18%)
5 - Extremely impactful	2,610 (65%)

n=3,999; Source: Open Employer Survey

Illness in the Workplace

Respondents to both surveys were asked how concerned they were about people coming into work sick. Both workers and employers were similarly concerned about people coming into work sick (see **Figure 16**).

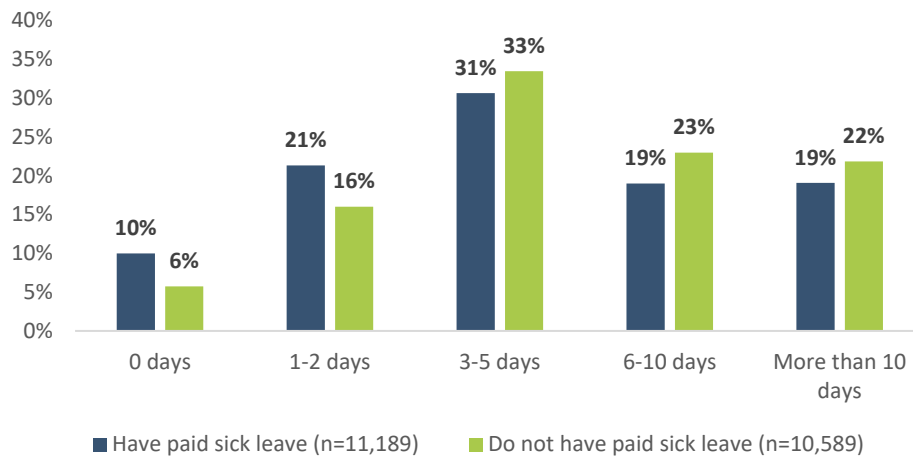
Figure 16 Worker and Employer Concern Over People Coming into Work Sick


Source: Open Worker Survey & Open Employer Survey

Similarly, employers were asked how important to their operation it was to avoid workplace transmission of illness. Most employers felt it extremely important, rating the importance with a four (17%) or five (65%) on a five-point scale, where five indicates “extremely important” and one indicates “not at all important”.

Workers were asked how often they have worked while sick or returned to the workplace before fully recovering from sickness. Over 90% of respondents reported typically working at least one day even though they were feeling sick, and 89% reported returning to work before they were fully recovered from an illness. Workers with access to paid sick leave were slightly more likely to report not working when they were feeling sick (10%) compared to those without sick leave (6%). They were also slightly less likely to report returning to work before being fully recovered (87%) compared to those without paid sick leave (92%).

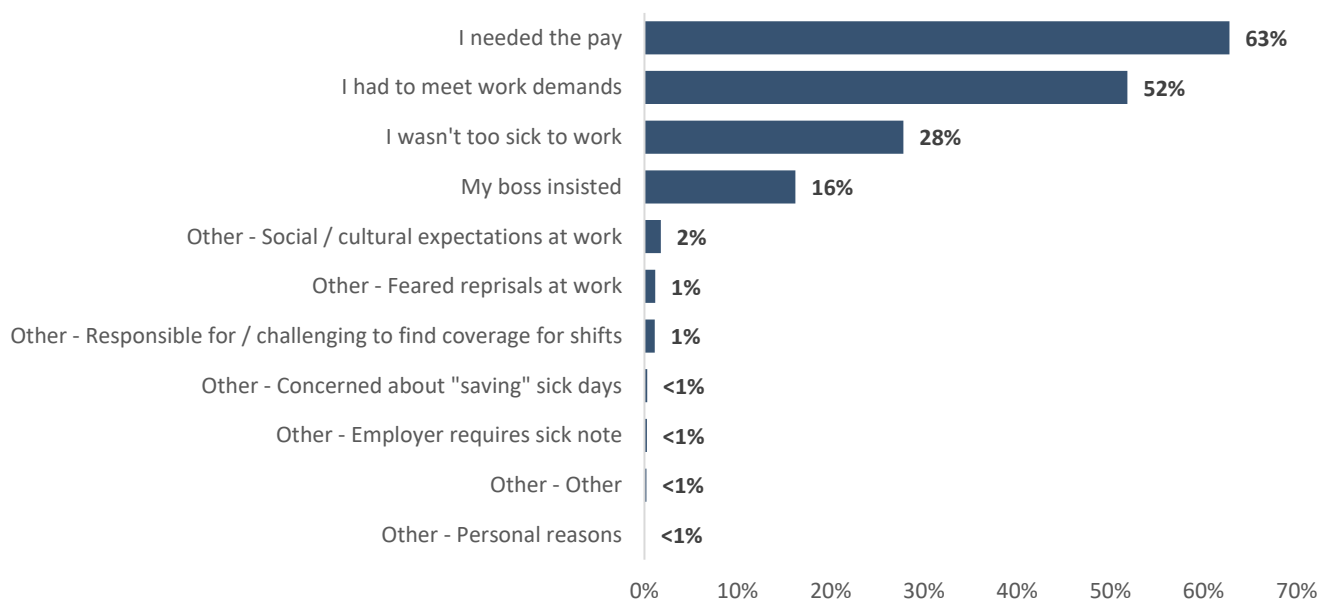
Figure 17 Worker-Reported Frequency of Working while Sick, by Access to Paid Leave



Source: Open Worker Survey & Open Employer Survey

Workers reported working while sick for a number of reasons, most commonly because they needed the pay (63%) or needed to meet work demands (52%) (see **Figure 18**). Among respondents who selected “Other” and then wrote in a comment, the most common themes were social or cultural expectations at work discouraging them from taking time off, fearing reprisals at work for taking time off, and being responsible for finding shift coverage which was not possible or a high barrier to taking sick time.

Figure 18 Worker Reported Reasons for Working While Sick



n=22,715; Source: Open Worker Survey.

Note: respondents could select multiple responses therefore percentages do not add up to more than 100%.

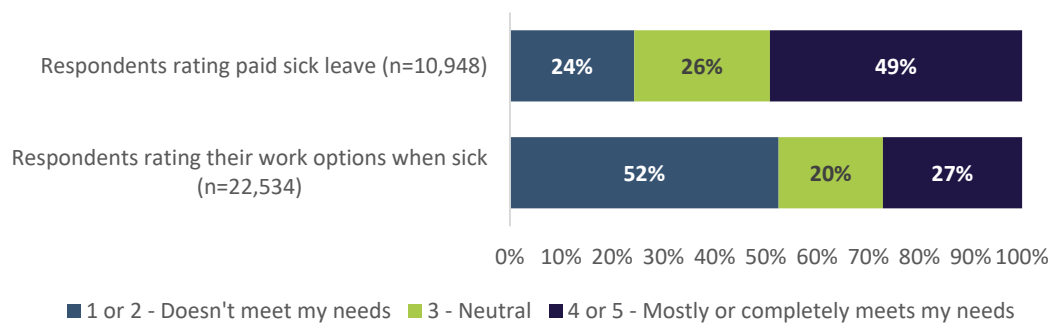
Options for Staying Home when Sick

The majority of workers who responded to the survey reported that they did not have the ability to work from home when sick (70%). Similarly, employers tended to report that their employees did not have the option to work from home when sick (63%), though some did report that their employees sometimes (26%) or always (11%) had the option to work from home when sick. Only 10% of employers reported that they provide other options (i.e., options aside from not working or working from home) for employees when they are sick; an additional 13% reported that they *sometimes* provide these other options.

The majority of workers (57%) felt their current sick leave provided enough pay that they could choose to stay home when sick, and 60% felt that the options they have for when they are sick help them to choose to stay home from work when sick. This means that approximately 40% of workers feel their sick leave did not provide them with sufficient pay to stay home from work when sick, and that the options they have available for when they are sick do not help them to stay home from work.

Overall, one-half (49%) of workers who responded to the survey felt that their paid sick leave met their needs and 27% felt that the overall options available to them (i.e., stay home without pay, work from home, take paid sick time) when sick met their needs (see **Figure 19**). The discrepancy between satisfaction with paid sick leave, and satisfaction with overall work options available to them, suggests that workers without access to paid sick leave are in need of more supports to meet their needs when sick.

Figure 19 Overall Ability of Leave to Meet Workers' Needs



Source: Open Worker Survey

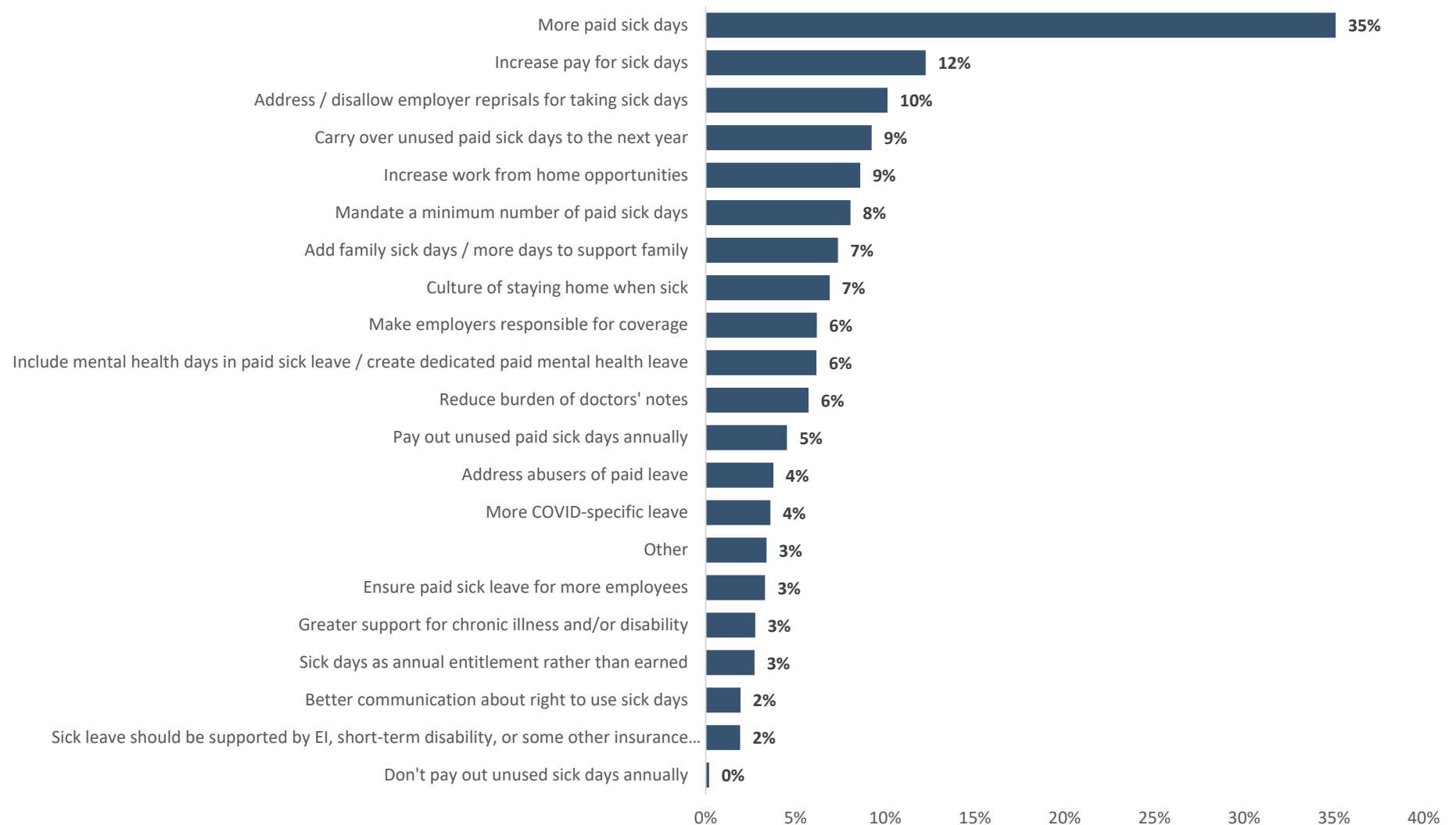
Options for Improving Paid Sick Leave in B.C.

Improvements Suggested by Workers

All respondents to the open Workers Survey were asked how they believe their workplace's sick leave could be improved; 5,525 respondents provided comments. A wide variety of themes were identified in the responses to this question, as illustrated in **Figure 20** below.

The top three concerns or suggestions for improvement among worker respondents were: increasing the number of paid sick days available; increasing the rate of pay they are provided on paid sick days; and addressing or disallowing employer retaliation for taking sick days (whether formal, such as policies of giving people written warnings if they take a certain number of sick days, or informal such as being perceived as less committed and thus passed over for job opportunities).

Figure 20 Workers' Suggestions for Improving Paid Sick Leave

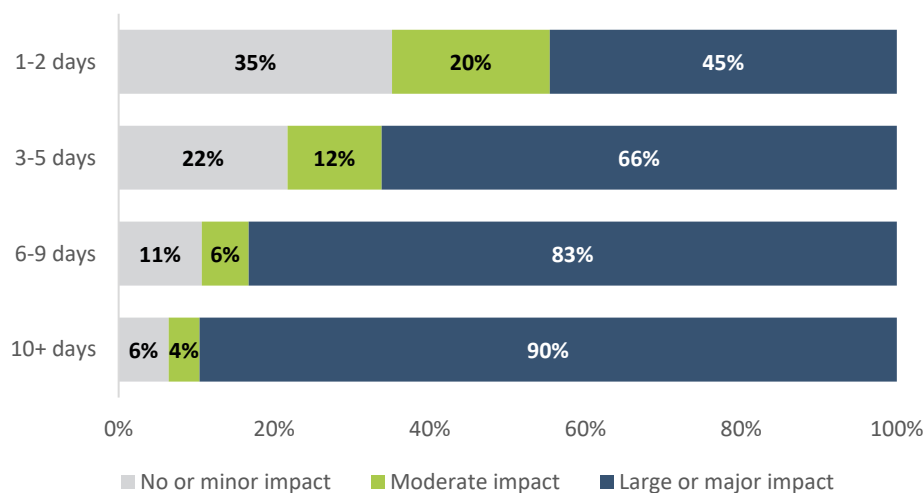


n=4,751. Source: Open Workers' Survey. Multiple codes could be applied to each comment, therefore percentages do not add up to 100%.

Employers' Perspectives

Employers were asked what the maximum number of paid sick days is that they could offer employees without having a significant impact on their organization. The majority of respondents indicated that one to two days was the maximum they could offer (60%). Some respondents could offer three to five days (24%) or six to ten days (10%) without significant impact. Only a small portion of respondents felt they could offer more than ten paid sick days without significant impact (6%). A large majority of employers (between 66% and 90%, depending on proposed length) indicated that mandatory paid sick leaves of more than one to two days would have major impacts on their organizations. Please see **Figure 21** below for an illustration of responses to this question.

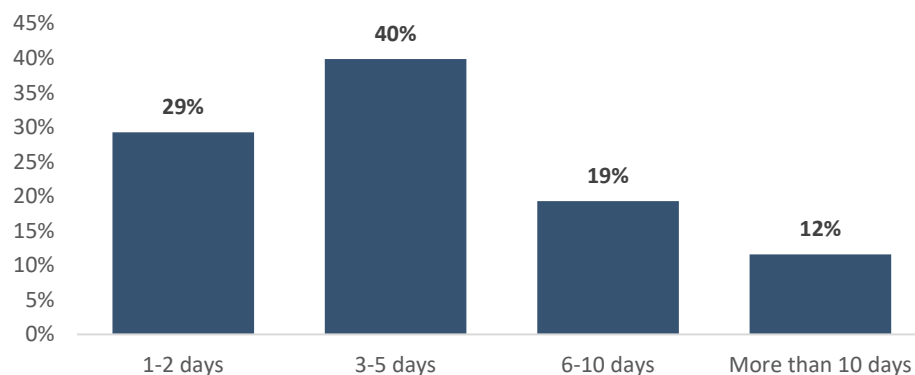
Figure 21 Employers' Expected Impact of Mandatory Paid Sick Leave on Business



n= 3,961-3,997; Source: Open Employer Survey

The Employer Survey also asked a hypothetical question: if you as an employer were not responsible for paying for it, how many days of paid sick leave would you support? Respondents most often indicated that they would support up to five days of paid sick leave that they were not responsible for paying; see **Figure 22** for details.

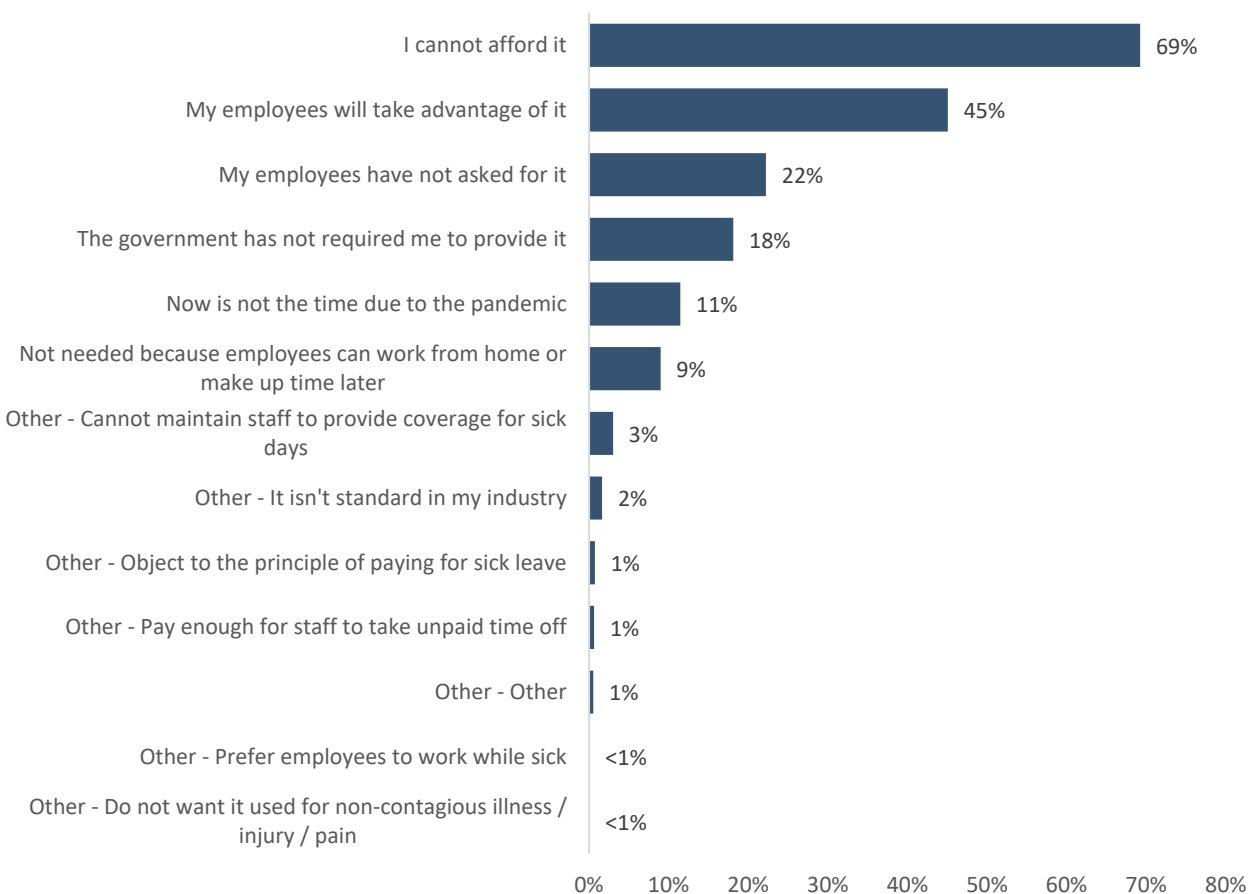
Figure 22 Employers' Support for Paid Sick Leave if Not Paid by Employers



n= 3,961; Source: Open Employer Survey

Employers who currently don't offer paid sick leave were asked to provide their reasons for not doing so; there were closed-ended response options (select all that apply) as well as an open-ended comment field for respondents to provide additional comments if they chose. The most common reason for not providing paid sick leave was that they believed they could not afford it (69% of those who do not provide sick leave), followed by believing that their employees would take advantage of the leave (45% of respondents). More common themes that were identified among written comments included not being able to maintain the additional staff needed to cover sick days (3% of all respondents, 29% of written comments) and the practice simply not being standard in their industry or a perk they need to offer to be competitive in hiring (2% of all respondents, 16% of written comments). Please see **Figure 23** below for more details on responses to this question.

Figure 23 Employers' Reasons for Not Offering Sick Leave



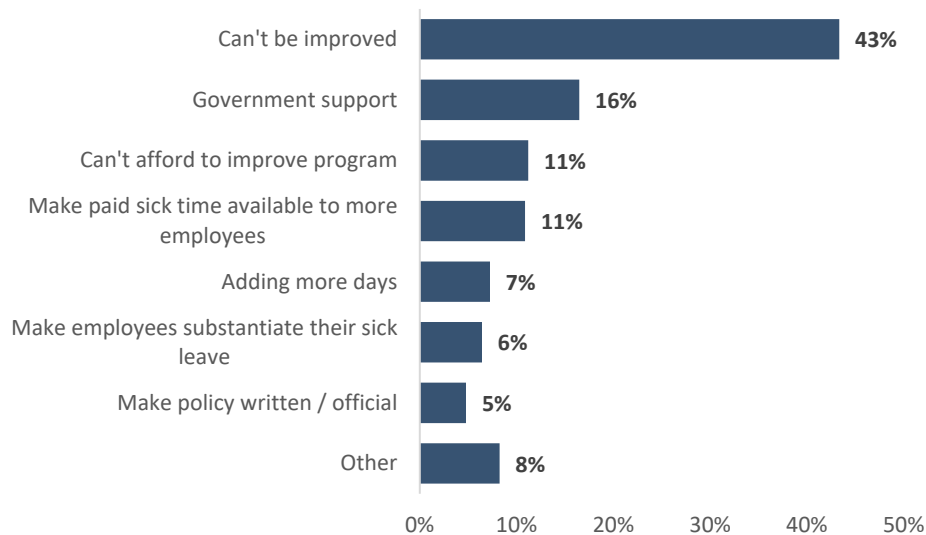
n=3,191; Source: Open Employer Survey

Note: Comments may have contained more than one theme, therefore the total proportion of responses adds to more than 100%.

Employers were asked to provide their suggestions for how the current sick leave program could be improved. Respondents who provided on-topic comments most often felt that the program could not be improved (43%), followed by suggesting government support should be made available to businesses to

offer such leave (16%), and stating that they can't afford to improve sick leave at their business (11%). Relatively small proportions of employer respondents identified substantive ways to improve their own business's sick leave policies such as through making paid sick leave available to more employees (11% of valid comments) or adding more days to their policy (7% of valid respondents). Please see **Figure 24** for more details on responses.

Figure 24 Employer Reported Suggestions for Improving Sick Leave Program



n=607; Source: Open Employer Survey

Note: Comments may have contained more than one theme, therefore the total proportion of responses column adds to more than 100%.

Note: Themes with fewer than 20 responses coded to the theme have been omitted from the above chart.

SUMMARY

What does paid sick leave look like for British Columbians currently?

Approximately one-half of workers who responded to the survey reported having access to paid sick leave regardless of whether their illness was related or unrelated to COVID-19. An even higher proportion of respondents to the employer survey – 62% – reported that they did not offer any non-COVID paid sick leave to their employees.

Among employers and workers where paid sick leave is available, most reported receiving a full day's pay for paid sick time. Those with higher incomes tended to report a greater number of paid sick days compared to those with lower incomes. Respondents from Public Administration, Utilities, and Educational Services reported, on average, the highest number of paid sick days. Respondents from Retails and Wholesale Trade, Construction, Accommodation / Food Services, and Manufacturing reported, on average, the fewest number of paid sick days.

Both surveys indicated that employees are generally not paid out for sick days when their employment or work contract ends and are not able to carry over unused sick days from one year to the next. Employers estimated that 50% or less of their employees used all their allotted paid sick days in a typical year, while only about one-quarter of workers reported that they use all their paid sick days in a typical year.

To what extent is illness in the workplace a concern in B.C.?

Both workers and employers were concerned about people coming into work while sick. Most employers felt it extremely important to avoid the transmission of illness in their workplace. While workers were concerned about their co-workers coming into work sick, 90% of workers reported typically working at least one day while sick and 89% reported returning to work before they were fully recovered.

To what extent does paid sick leave reduce illness in the workplace?

There were modest, but statistically significant, impacts of having access to paid sick leave on workers' behaviour when sick. Workers with access to paid sick leave were less likely to report having gone to work sick, or having returned to work before being fully recovered. That said, the vast majority of respondents, regardless of whether they had access to paid sick leave, reported that they have either worked while sick (90%) or returned to work before being fully recovered (89%).

Some reasons for going in to work while sick, such as needing the pay, were reported more often among workers without access to paid sick leave. Other reasons for working while sick, however, were equally likely to be reported among workers with and without access to paid sick leave, such as needing to meet workload demands or cultural and social expectations in their workplace. This suggests that while access to paid sick leave is a barrier to people taking sick leave, there are other important factors that encourage people to work while sick.

While employers were concerned about their employees coming into work sick and felt it extremely important to avoid workplace transmission of illness, most reported that their employees were not able to work from home while sick. Additionally, most employers reported that they do not offer other

options to their employees when they are sick. While many employers allow for “shift swapping” or other arrangements to ensure coverage so an employee can take time off for illness without losing pay on their overall pay cheque or for the month, many workers reported being responsible for finding this coverage themselves. This responsibility to find coverage can be a barrier to taking the time off they need. A lack of options may be contributing to employees’ decisions to work while sick or return to work before being fully recovered.

What concerns do employers have about expanding paid sick leave?

When asked how many days of paid sick leave employers would support if they were not responsible for covering the cost, 70% indicated they would support five days or more of paid sick leave. However, when asked how impactful leaves of varying length would be on their business if they were responsible for covering the cost, only paid leaves of one to two days were considered to be mildly or moderately impactful (55% rated it as a three or lower on a five-point scale). Leaves of greater length were considered to be extremely impactful on their businesses.

Beyond the cost implications of paid sick leave, some other concerns about making paid sick leave available were raised by employers. Among those who currently do not offer paid sick leave to their employees, nearly one half (45%) cited concern about their employees abusing the program as a reason for not offering it. Among employers who provided written comments about the challenges of providing paid sick leave, a major barrier noted was the challenge of maintaining sufficient staff to ensure coverage of sick days. While in theory, this challenge would exist for businesses regardless of whether sick leave was paid (under consideration) or unpaid (the current status quo), losing pay is a significant disincentive to taking a sick day if it is not paid, therefore employers may anticipate more of their workers using these days and therefore increasing staffing challenges if sick days were mandated to be paid.

How could paid sick leave be improved in B.C.?

Respondents to the workers’ survey provided a wide variety of suggestions on how to improve their sick leave, ranging from making paid sick leave more available, to including allowances for mental health days, to building a culture of staying home when sick at their workplaces. The top three priorities identified, however, were:

- Making more paid sick days available to them (including any at all, as many respondents who answered this question did not have access to paid sick days);
- Increasing the rate of pay for sick days; and
- Addressing and disallowing workplace retaliation or punishment for taking sick days, whether formal or informal.

Employers provided few suggestions for improving paid sick leave in B.C. When asked for suggestions, the most common response from those who provided a comment was that sick leave could not be improved, that they required government support to offer improvements, or that they could not afford to offer paid sick leave at all. Small proportions of employers did suggest that additional government support and/or increasing the number of workers who have access to paid sick leave could help to improve the program.