

Five reasons why Canada should consider moving to a four-day work week

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Nine out of 10 Canadians are interested in a four-day work week, [according to a recent survey](#), making it their most desirable benefit ahead of health care, flexible scheduling and additional vacation days.

To be clear, a four-day work week in this context does not refer to a condensed five-day schedule, but rather the 100-80-100 model, where employees work 80% of the time while maintaining 100% of their productivity and pay. This means Canada, [which already struggles with productivity levels](#), won't see a dip if it switches to this model.

Globally, the four-day work week has proven successful. [4 Day Week Global](#), a not-for-profit organization, has run pilot programs in six continents. It reports that 91% of companies that have tried this model chose to continue with it.

Could the four-day work week be Canada's new reality? While we can't predict the future, here are five compelling reasons why a reduced work week makes sense for the country.

1. Declining work hours over time

Over the past 150 years, work hours have been consistently decreasing despite resistance from employers. In the past, Canadian factory workers used to [endure up to 12-hour workdays](#), six days a week, totaling a grueling 72-hour work week.

In 1872, when printers in Toronto requested a nine-hour workday, their demands were dismissed as ["foolish," "absurd," and "unreasonable" by employers](#). This led to the historic Printers' Strike, a part of the [Nine Hour Movement](#) advocating for shorter workdays.

Over the next century, unionized workers continued to fight against employer skepticism and achieve shorter work weeks. The standard work week was progressively reduced until it [reached 40 hours in the 1960s](#).

Throughout history, efforts to reduce work hours have consistently faced

strong resistance from employers. However, these efforts have ultimately prevailed, aligning with evolving societal norms and economic conditions. The five-day work week has been our model for 60 years. It is time to try something different.

2. The outdated five-day work week

The traditional five-day work week, once suitable for single-income families, is now incompatible with today's dual-income households. While the typical work week has remained unchanged for decades, [family dynamics](#) have shifted significantly over the past 60 years.

Decades ago, one salary often sufficed for a family. Today, [most Canadian families have dual incomes](#), working twice as much without a reduction in [family responsibilities](#). This shift has significantly increased the burden of household management, making families more reliant on external support.

In 1979, Canada had 110,000 licensed childcare spaces, covering 7% of children. Today, this has [increased tenfold](#), yet many parents still face wait lists.

[Research also shows that dual-income families](#) experience greater work-family conflict and stress compared to single-income families, with [women shouldering 50% more unpaid housework](#) according to Statistics Canada than men.

A combined 60-hour work week [is more optimal according to research](#), offering parents substantial benefits in job flexibility and family satisfaction.

3. Sustainability benefits of a four-day work week

Canada has an [ambitious plan to reduce CO₂ emissions](#) by 40% to 45% below 2005 levels by 2030, aiming for net-zero emissions by 2050.

Reducing the number of hours worked is one of the [most effective strategies to lower our carbon footprint](#), as it means using less machinery and reducing commuting, both of which cut emissions.

Additionally, a four-day work week could lead to reduced consumption. When people work long hours, [they tend to consume more](#). To encourage people to engage in sustainable activities like cooking food at home, biking and making eco-friendly home improvements, they need more time.

[Research on French families' work and consumption patterns](#) confirms that, to be more sustainable, families need to work less.

4. Success stories from around the world

Many countries around the world have experimented with and implemented shorter work weeks with remarkable success. [In Iceland](#), a large-scale trial of a four-day work week with no reduction in pay led to increased productivity, improved employee well-being and reduced stress levels.

Similarly, [in the United Kingdom](#), various companies have run four-day work week trials, reporting [positive outcomes](#) such as enhanced employee morale, greater retention rates and sustained or improved productivity.

France has maintained a [35-hour work week since 1998](#), with no government reverting to a 40-hour standard.

The rapid dissemination of these [success stories](#) through social media

and news feeds appears to be influencing expectations and might lead more Canadians to advocate for a four-day work week, knowing that others have already obtained it.

5. The four-day work week in Canada

Canadian companies have also been adopting the four-day work week with success, as [seen in Ontario](#), [British Columbia](#) and [Québec](#). These initiatives have been spearheaded by forward-thinking leaders, despite the lack of a nationwide proposal from any political party.

Notably, the [B.C. Green Party called for a four-day work week pilot in 2023](#), highlighting growing political interest in the model.

Historically, unions have played a pivotal role in reducing work hours for employees. Today, although union influence may have waned, the momentum for shorter work weeks continues, driven by regular employee turnover and individual negotiations.

Average yearly work hours [have declined from 1,840 in 1997 to 1,716 in 2022](#), while GDP has continued to rise. This trend indicates that many Canadians are working fewer hours with no detriment to economic performance, providing a compelling case for the broader adoption of the four-day work week.

A shift is underway

While there is no nationwide law mandating reduced work hours and [no major unions have publicly called for it](#), an increasing number of businesses [are adopting four-day work weeks](#). Given the worldwide popularity and positive results of the approach, this trend is likely to continue to grow in Canada.

The four-day work week presents significant opportunities for organizations. Top-performing employees are [drawn to jobs with the best benefits](#), and the four-day work week is quickly becoming the most coveted benefit. Companies that implement this model are well-positioned to attract and retain talented workers.

For the average worker, a four-day work week means improved [work-life balance](#), more time to spend with family and friends, and opportunities to pursue personal interests and hobbies. This shift can lead to increased job satisfaction, better mental health and overall quality of life. As more organizations adopt this model, employees can look forward to a future where the balance between work and personal life is more manageable and enriching.

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