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Nearly Half of Survey Respondents Carrying More Debt as Everyday Living Costs Squeeze Household Budgets

New Spergel research finds 50% have delayed a bill to afford groceries or other necessities, while groceries remain the leading source of financial pressure

TORONTO, ON - August 21, 2026 - Rising everyday expenses are pushing many Canadian households beyond simply cutting back, according to new findings from Spergel's *2026 Cost of Getting By Survey*. Among the 325 people surveyed, **50% said they are carrying more debt than they were 12 months ago because of everyday living expenses**. The same proportion said they had **delayed paying a bill because they needed the money for groceries or other necessities**, while 48% said their household at least occasionally struggles to cover all of its regular monthly expenses.

"The most concerning finding isn't simply that everyday expenses cost more, it's what people are being forced to do to keep up," said **Gillian Goldblatt, Partner and Licensed Insolvency Trustee at Spergel**. "When households are taking on more debt, drawing down savings or delaying one bill so they can pay for groceries and other necessities, an affordability problem can very quickly become a debt problem."

Groceries remain the greatest household pressure

More than three-quarters of respondents (**76%**) said groceries have become harder to afford over the past 12 months, making food the most commonly reported source of increased financial pressure. Transportation followed at 46%, while 38% cited rent or mortgage payments and 37% cited utilities. When respondents were asked to identify the **single expense placing the greatest pressure on their household budget**, groceries again ranked first at 38%, followed by rent or mortgage payments at 22%.

Higher grocery prices are also changing how people shop and eat.

Among respondents:

- **61%** switched to lower-cost brands
- **46%** buy more products only when they are on sale
- **33%** buy less meat
- **23%** buy fewer fresh fruits or vegetables
- **19%** have skipped meals
- **17%** have reduced portion sizes

Overall, **70% said higher grocery prices had sometimes or frequently caused them to compromise the nutritional quality or variety of the food they buy**. Another 52% said they had often or sometimes worried that their household would run out of food before they had enough money to buy more.

“Choosing a cheaper brand or shopping around for sales is one thing,” Goldblatt said. “Skipping meals, reducing portions or worrying that there may not be enough money for food is something very different. Those are signs that some household budgets have very little room left to absorb higher costs or an unexpected expense.”

Savings are being sacrificed to pay today’s expenses

The survey also found that rising living costs are affecting respondents’ ability to build and maintain financial reserves.

During the previous six months:

- **45%** reduced or stopped contributing to general savings
- **34%** reduced or stopped contributing to emergency savings
- **31%** used savings to cover regular household expenses
- **28%** used credit to pay for everyday expenses
- **25%** borrowed money from family or friends
- **23%** delayed paying a bill

Financial vulnerability was also evident when respondents were asked how they would handle an unexpected **$500 expense**.

Only 14% said they could pay it from regular income without difficulty, while another 18% would use savings.

By comparison, **51% would need to finance the expense, borrow money or be unable to pay it**, including through a credit card repaid over time, a line of credit or overdraft, short-term borrowing or help from family and friends. More than one in five respondents said they would be unable to cover the expense at all.

Financial pressure extends beyond household budgets

The effects of higher living costs are also showing up in other areas of respondents’ lives.
More than half (**54%**) said financial pressure had negatively affected their mental health or mood, while 52% reported an impact on sleep. Respondents also reported effects on their physical health, social lives and relationships with partners and family members.

Nearly half of respondents had already sought, seriously considered or thought about seeking professional help with their debt or finances.

Spergel advises Canadians who are regularly relying on credit for necessities, carrying balances from month to month, using savings to cover routine expenses or delaying bills to seek advice before the situation becomes more difficult to manage.

About the survey

Spergel's *2026 Cost of Getting By Survey* included **325 respondents across Canada's 10 provinces**. Current and former Spergel clients were excluded from the research. Paid research-panel recruitment was used as part of the survey methodology.

The survey is descriptive of the people who participated and is not presented as a probability estimate of the Canadian population.

About Spergel

Spergel is a Canadian Licensed Insolvency Trustee firm helping individuals and families understand and resolve financial difficulty. Its Licensed Insolvency Trustees provide confidential guidance on debt-relief options, including consumer proposals, bankruptcy and other financial solutions.

For more information about the *2026 Cost of Getting By Survey*, visit https://www.spergel.ca/learning-centre/cost-of-getting-by-canada-survey/

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