



Group member mindsets, motivations and metrics

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An in-depth research study of member attitudes, behaviours and actual plan data from 1,900+ Sun Life workplace plan members

Our [Designed for Savings](#) benchmarking report series has given us an unparalleled view of member actions across 1.5 million participants in more than 8,600 group plans through our proprietary Capital Accumulation Plan database.

To understand what sponsors and members can do to close this savings gap we explored the “why” behind member behaviour— uncovering the perceptions, realities, intentions and motivations that drive patterns observed in plan data. We surveyed 1,981 plan members across Canada and combined member attitudes, behaviours and actual plan data to learn more.

We uncovered significant differences across key member segments, particularly gender and investor confidence profiles.

Key findings

1. **Surveyed plan members overestimate savings by \$23,000 or 14%:** Survey respondents believed they held \$159,000 in their Sun Life workplace plans, but actual balances averaged \$136,000, highlighting a significant disconnect between perceived and real retirement readiness that could derail financial planning.
2. **The research identified four distinct investor profiles:** Sophisticated Investors, Overconfident Investors, Cautious Experts, and Cautious Investors.
3. **Investor profiles reveal confidence drives 64% higher savings—knowledge adds just 12%:** Confidence proves more powerful than financial literacy alone, with high-confidence investors accumulating nearly twice as much relative to income compared to cautious experts. This puts women who often report lower confidence at a significant disadvantage.
4. **36% of women avoid financial advice due to insufficient savings:** This perpetuates a cycle where women who most need help avoid professional advice due to the very financial constraints that such guidance could resolve, undermining long-term wealth building and retirement readiness.

These findings reveal multiple critical gaps—from the 14% difference between perceived and actual savings balances to the confidence barriers that prevent women from making the most of workplace plans.

Group retirement plans: An essential foundation for Canadian workers

More than half (52%) of plan members surveyed count their workplace plan as a main source of retirement income—and for good reason. On average, survey respondents stated their group plans hold 36% of their total investable assets.

While survey respondents reported holding an average of \$159,000 in their Sun Life workplace plans, actual observed balances show room for growth—with average balances of \$136,000, representing 14% less than survey expectations.

Plan balances: perception vs. reality



The gap between perception and reality isn't the same for everyone. Men tend to overestimate more significantly, thinking they have \$184,000 when their actual average is \$155,000—a 16% difference. Women have a smaller gap, perceiving \$118,000 against an actual average of \$104,000, a 12% overestimation. Men overestimate their balances by about 4 percentage points more than women. Improving member visibility into their actual savings levels represents one element of enhancing overall plan understanding, alongside education about critical plan features like employer matching formulas and contribution strategies.

This connection between awareness and engagement highlights the value of simple and clear communication.

By helping members better understand both their current position and available plan features, we strengthen the foundation these plans provide for retirement security and work towards removing behavioural barriers and inertia across all member segments.



The confidence advantage: why belief beats knowledge

The most striking discovery challenges conventional wisdom about financial education.

While all investor groups share similar demographics, their savings outcomes reveal a dramatic truth: confidence matters more than competence.

The data tells a compelling story: Sophisticated Investors (high confidence, high literacy) accumulate 3.9 times their annual income in savings. Cautious Experts (low confidence, high literacy) accumulate only 2.1 times their income—an 86% difference despite similar knowledge levels.

This confidence premium extends across all investor types. Surveyed members with high confidence accumulate 64% more in savings relative to income compared to those with low confidence. In contrast, high financial literacy produces only a 12% savings advantage over low literacy. The implications are clear: while financial education remains important, building member confidence may be the more powerful lever for improving retirement readiness.

Savings accumulation comparison

Investable assets to household income ratio



The confidence paradox becomes even more pronounced when viewed through a gender lens.

Our data reveals that confidence varies much more dramatically by gender than financial knowledge does—while men and women score similarly on actual financial literacy, their self-assessed confidence levels show stark differences.

Men are heavily overrepresented in the high-confidence investor categories (Sophisticated Investors and Overconfident Investors), and women are overrepresented in the low-confidence groups (Cautious Experts and Cautious Investors), leading them to prioritize stability and long-term security while preferring personalized guidance over self-directed approaches.



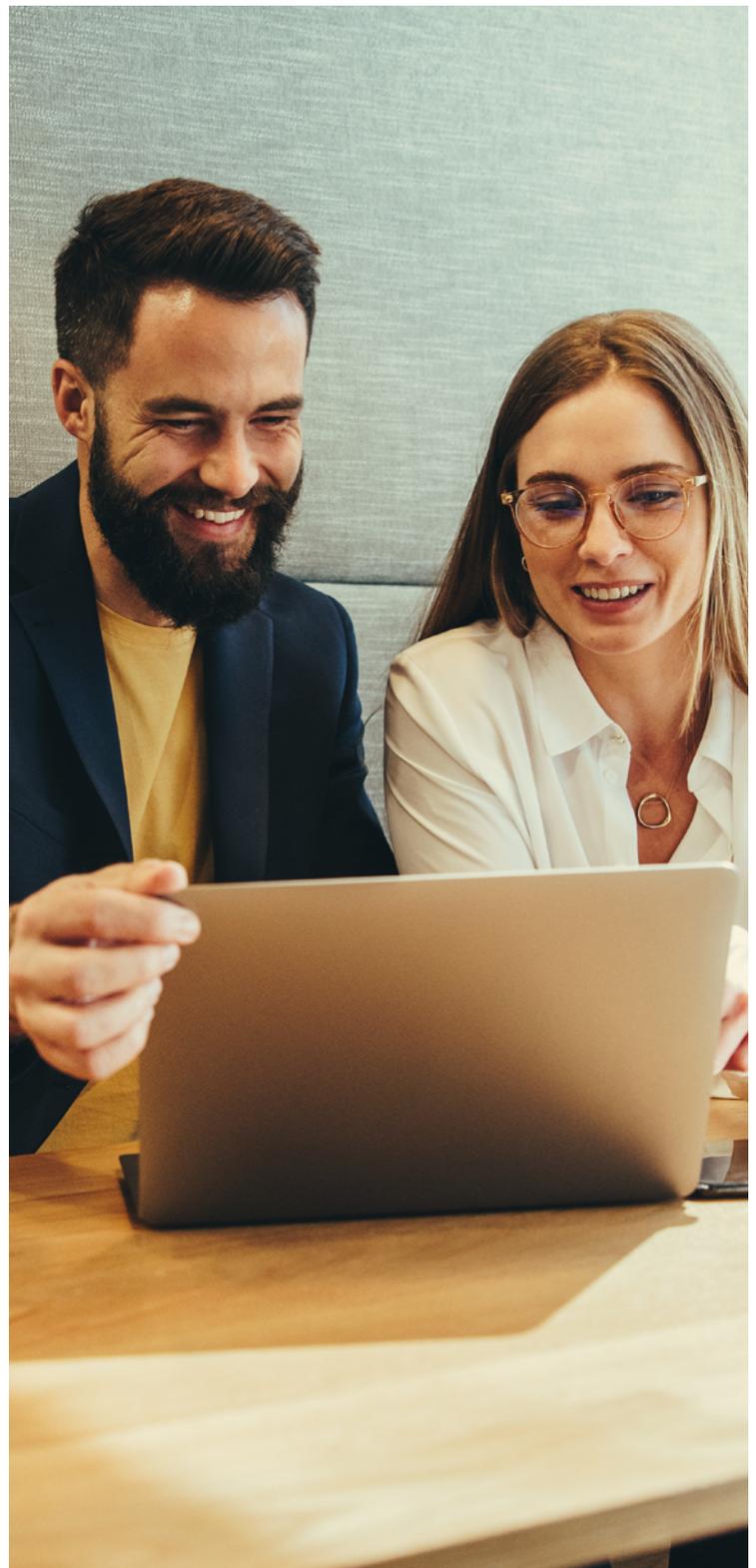
For group plans, this gender divide represents a clear intervention opportunity

Accessible educational formats and decision-making tools that build confidence while connecting women to professional guidance when they're ready.

We're here to help

This research reveals clear opportunities to boost retirement outcomes for all members.

1. **Maximize existing benefits:** Start by ensuring members maximize the benefits they have through automatic features like auto-enrolment and auto-escalation, which 79% of surveyed members want. Couple this with clear communications about matching requirements, which can dramatically increase retirement savings.
2. **Address the confidence gap:** Bridge the confidence divide by connecting members to professional guidance and planning tools - such as Sun Life's 360 Plan Advice and Sun Life One Plan - that build financial confidence and competence, particularly important for supporting women's retirement success.
3. **Enhance plan clarity:** Simplify plan complexity by clarifying matching formulas and clearly explaining product differences (RRSP, DCP, TFSA, etc.) to ensure plan design helps employees pick the right options for their needs. Nearly half of members surveyed describe having a neutral view of their plan's complexity, representing significant room for improvement in both communication and product selection guidance.
4. **Close perception/reality gap:** Encourage members to maximize employer matches, take advantage of auto features, and update their financial plans regularly to ensure they are on track for retirement. Support these actions with clear, simple communications that address knowledge gaps and provide timely, relevant information about plan features and available options.
5. **Monitor plan performance:** Continuously improve member outcomes through analytics-backed decision-making using Sun Life's reporting tools to track progress, optimize plan performance, and identify opportunities to enhance retirement readiness.



Read our [full report](#) on member mindsets, motivations and metrics

