THECIS WEBINAR · OCTOBER 27, 2026

Youth Entrepreneurship in the Prairies

Key findings from the GEM Canada 2025 Survey

Alberta | Saskatchewan | Manitoba

Amanda Williams
Mount Royal University
Presenter

Chad Saunders
University of Calgary
Co-author

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GEM Global Entrepreneurship Monitor

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WEBINAR OVERVIEW

What we'll explore

01

Activity and motivations

How many youth are starting businesses, how they see opportunity, why they start, and whether ventures last.

02

Who Prairie youth entrepreneurs are

Gender gaps, caregiving, education, immigration and diversity.

03

Growth, innovation & emerging issues

Growth ambitions, new products and markets, AI and tariffs.

04

What it all means

Provincial differences, priorities for support, and key takeaways.

Webinar Goal
To look at what's changing for young entrepreneurs in the Prairies, and start a conversation about how to respond.

THEN **A conversation with young Prairie founders** Janine de Castro and Launa Austin

The evidence: GEM Canada's 2025 Adult Population Survey, with trends back to 2019

4,000+
Prairie respondents in 2025

~1,400
youth aged 18–34

4
survey waves: 2019, 2021, 2023, 2025

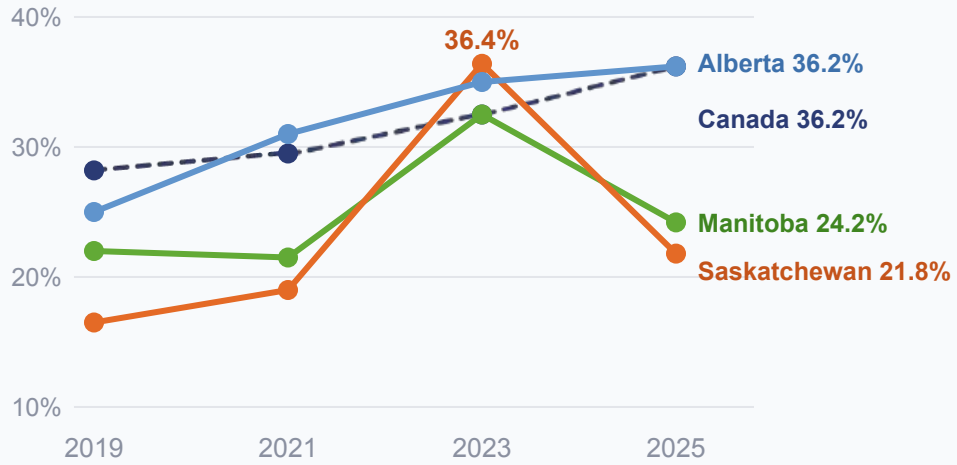
3
provinces, benchmarked against Canada

Key measure: TEA (Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity)

The share of adults who are starting a business, or running one that has paid its owners for 3 to 42 months. Businesses paying owners for more than 42 months count as Established Business ownership (EB).

Data collected May–July 2025, weighted by age and gender. Youth = 18–34; older adults = 35–64. Descriptive results. Oversample in Prairie provinces.

Youth TEA climbed steadily in Alberta but rose and fell back in Saskatchewan and Manitoba



−14.6 pts

drop in Saskatchewan youth TEA, 2023 to 2025

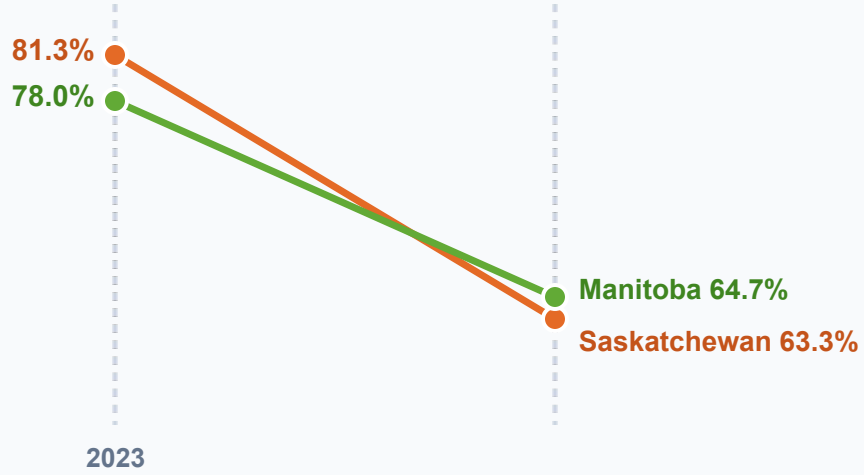
Key Takeaways

- Alberta rose 11.1 pts since 2019
- Manitoba fell 8.1 pts since 2023
- **Youth outpace older adults in every province**

Source: Figure 3.1.2B. Some 2019–2023 values for Alberta, Manitoba and Canada are read from the report's chart.

Some Prairie youth see less opportunities than in 2023, and many fear failure

Youth perceiving good opportunities



Alberta 69.2% · Canada 70.2% in 2025 no real change from 2023

Fear of failure: youth vs older adults

Manitoba	61.4%	vs 53.6% (+7.8)
Saskatchewan	62.0%	vs 56.9% (+5.1)
Alberta	55.4%	vs 53.4% (+2.0)

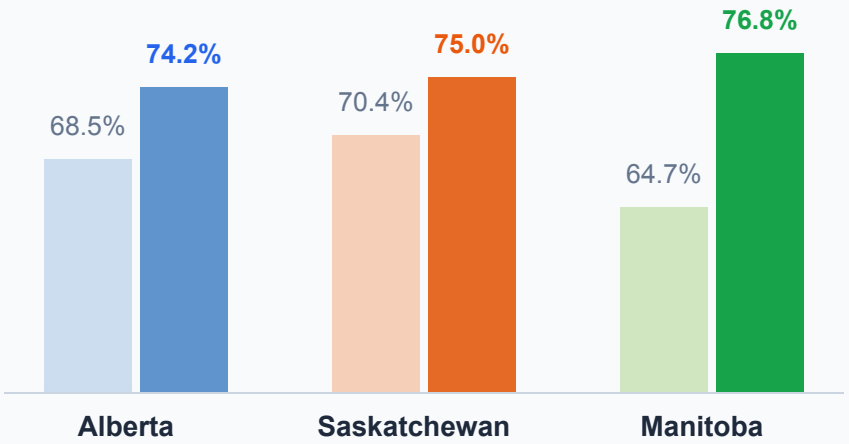
Alberta: youth seeing it as easy to start a business fell from **67.4%** (2019) to **56.6%**

Source: Figures 2.1A, 2.1B, 2.1D. Youth (18–34), 2025 unless noted.

Starting a business because jobs are scarce became more common in all three provinces

Youth citing scarce jobs as a motivation

Light bar = 2023 · dark bar = 2025



Axis starts at 50%

+12.1 pts

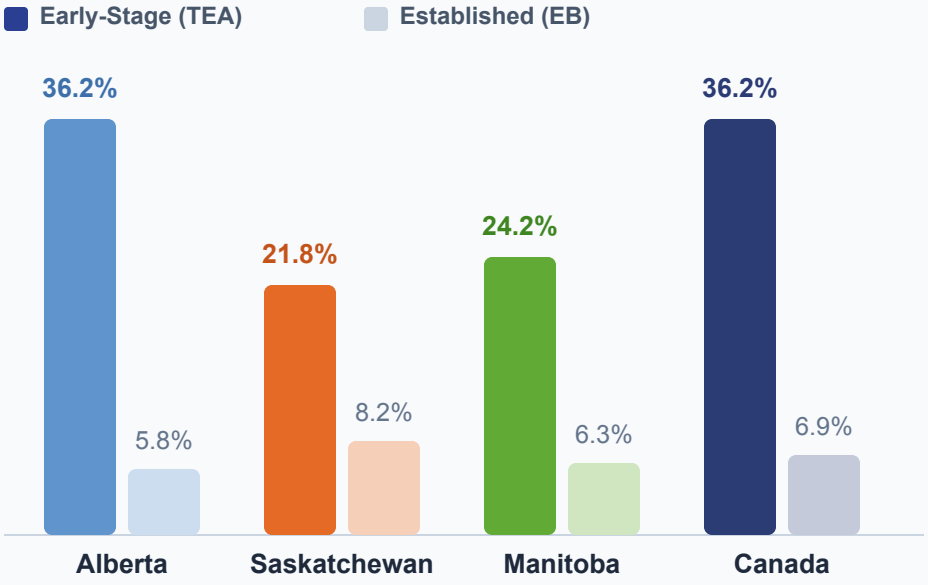
in Manitoba, the largest increase

- Top motivation in Alberta; building wealth still leads in SK (76.9%) and MB (80.0%)
- Saskatchewan: 89.3% of young women vs 66.0% of young men cite scarce jobs

Source: Figures 2.3A–B and section 2.3. Youth (18–34) engaged in TEA.

Starting is not staying: youth early-stage activity far exceeds established ownership

Early-Stage Activity (TEA) vs. Established Ownership (EB)



Leading reason youth leave a business

Alberta
Financing **23.9%**

Saskatchewan
Unprofitability or family (tie) **18.9%**

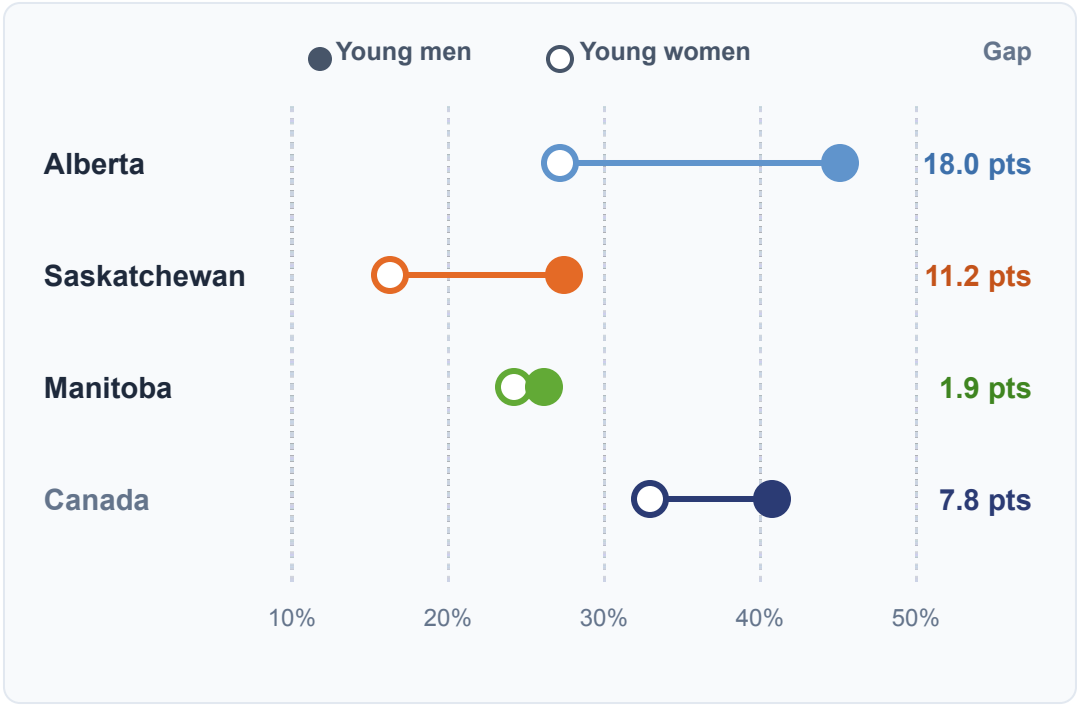
Manitoba
Opportunity to sell **30.2%**

Canada
Unprofitability **26.4%**

Youth discontinue and exit businesses at higher rates than older adults in every Prairie province

Source: Figures 3.1.2A, 3.1.3; Table 3.1. Leading reason = most common among youth who left a business. Not a survival rate.

Youth gender gaps range from 18 points in Alberta to under 2 points in Manitoba



Narrowing gaps are not good news on their own

- SK and MB gaps narrowed mainly because young men's TEA fell
- Alberta's gap widened from 16.3 to 18.0 pts
- Since 2019, Alberta men +21.7 pts; women +0.9 pts

Source: Figure 3.2.2 and Table 3.2. Youth TEA by gender, 2025; change in gap since 2023.

WHO PRAIRIE YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS ARE

Youth engaged in TEA a look at the numbers

31–44%

provide unpaid care

vs 24–30% of youth nationally

52.6%

minority respondents, Manitoba

up from 29.7% in 2023

1 in 3

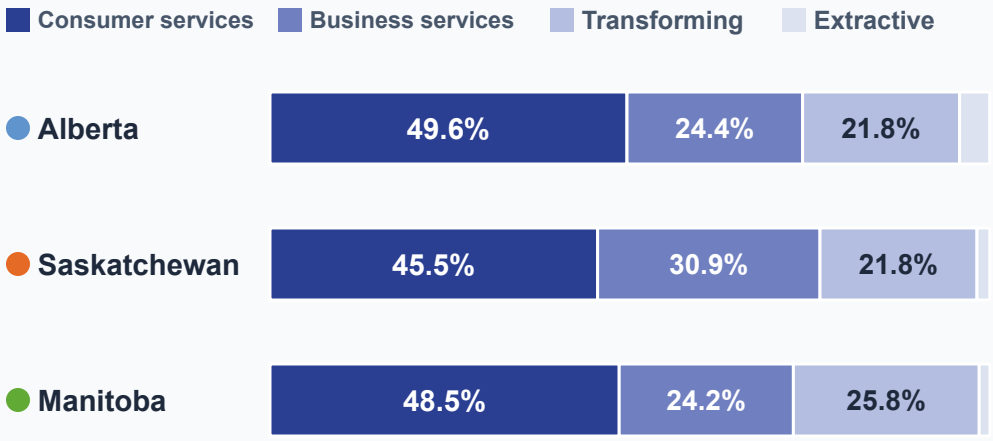
immigrants, Alberta and Manitoba

35.8% in AB and 33.7% in MB

	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Manitoba	Canada
Unpaid care, young women	36.7%	39.3%	36.4%	30.1%
Unpaid care, young men	31.4%	43.8%	34.0%	24.4%
Post-secondary or graduate experience	54.7%	57.9%	53.7%	62.1%
Immigrants	35.8%	23.4%	33.7%	33.8%
Minority respondents	42.3%	33.8%	52.6%	39.0%
Respondents with disabilities	19.9%	29.9%	15.8%	15.4%

Source: Figures 3.2.1A–D, 3.2.3A–B, 3.2.5. Shares of youth (18–34) engaged in TEA, 2025. Some small subgroups: interpret with caution.

Consumer services lead youth ventures, but business services are growing in Alberta and Saskatchewan



Shares of youth TEA, 2025. Extractive: 4.2% AB, 1.5% MB, about 2% SK (remainder).

SINCE 2023

Consumer services

- Alberta **56.3% → 49.6%**
- Saskatchewan **61.0% → 45.5%**

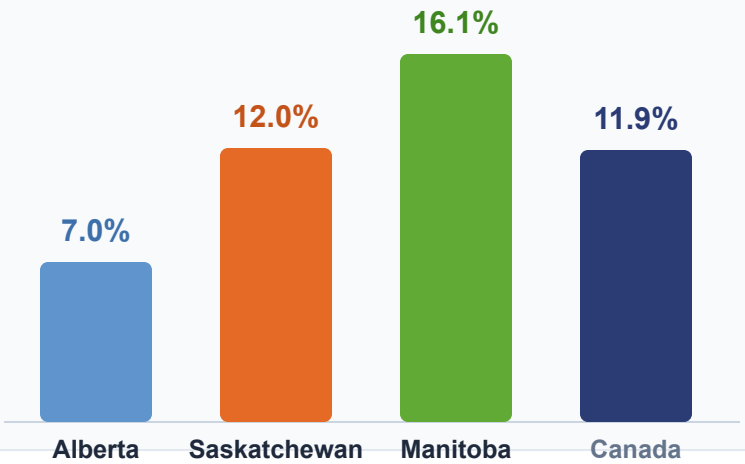
Business services

- Alberta **14.6% → 24.4%**
- Saskatchewan **20.3% → 30.9%**

Source: Figure 3.3.1 and section 3.3.1. Youth (18–34) engaged in TEA, 2025; 2023 values as reported. Canada: 54.4% consumer, 19.8% transforming.

Growth ambitions vary: Manitoba youth are the most optimistic, Alberta youth the least

Youth expecting much higher growth, 2025



Youth expecting 20+ jobs in five years

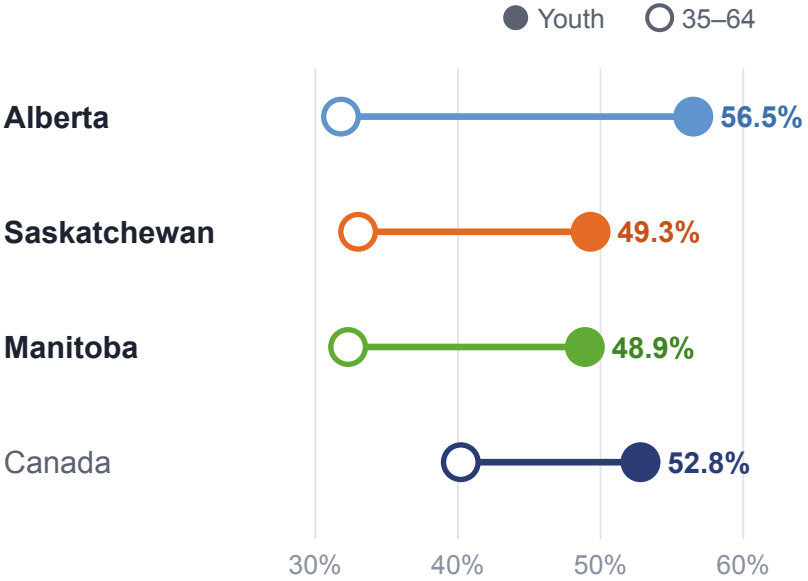
2023 → 2025

Alberta	46.2% → 37.3%	down
Saskatchewan	59.8% → 44.9%	down
Manitoba	43.8% → 40.4%	down
Canada	38.0% → 45.0%	up

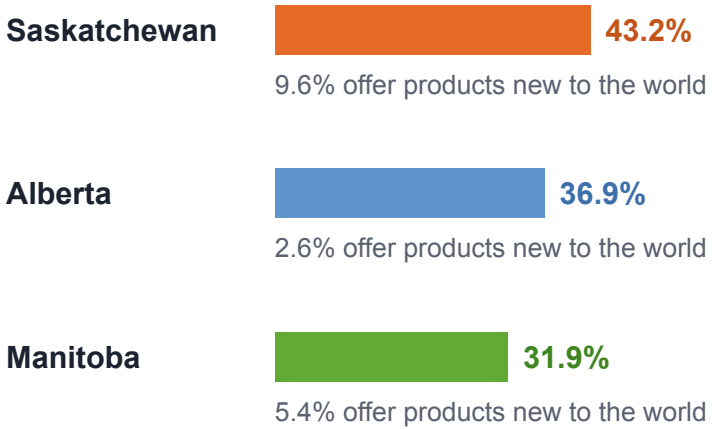
Source: Figures 4.1A and 4.1C. Youth (18–34) engaged in TEA.

About half of Prairie youth entrepreneurs offer something new, far more than older adults

Offering a new product or service



Youth ventures with any customers outside Canada



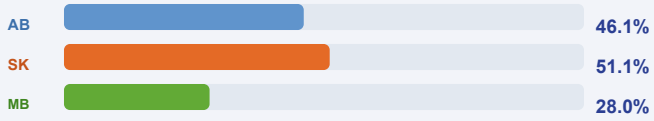
Source: Figures 3.3.2 and 3.3.3A. People (18–64) engaged in TEA, 2025.

AI and tariffs: privacy and input costs top youth concerns in all three provinces

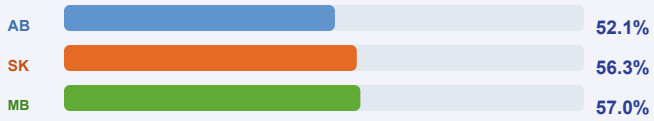
Alberta Saskatchewan Manitoba

AI ADOPTION & CONCERNS

Important to business model in 3 years



Data security & privacy as a barrier

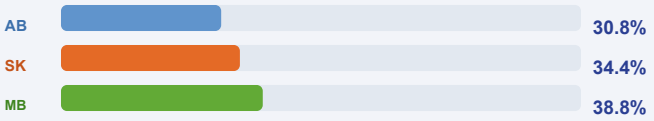


TARIFF IMPACTS & STRATEGY

Expect higher imported material/input costs



Expect more domestic sourcing / Made in Canada



Source: Figures 4.4.2A–B; Tables 4.2 and 4.3. Youth startup entrepreneurs (18–34), 2025.

WHAT IT ALL MEANS

Each province calls for a different emphasis

Alberta

WHAT WE SEE

- Highest, rising youth TEA
- Largest gender gap (18 pts)
- Lowest growth expectations

WHERE TO FOCUS

Financing, finding customers and growth planning; reach young women

Saskatchewan

WHAT WE SEE

- Youth TEA and perceived opportunities fell
- Highest international reach (43.2%)

WHERE TO FOCUS

Mentorship and peer networks; help entering international markets

Manitoba

WHAT WE SEE

- Youth TEA fell to 24.2%
- Most expect much higher growth (16.1%)
- Largest minority and Indigenous shares

WHERE TO FOCUS

Support growth-oriented and diverse founders

Source: Section 5.3, Tailor approaches to provincial contexts. Starting points for discussion rather than fixed prescriptions.

WHAT IT ALL MEANS

Five priorities for supporting Prairie youth entrepreneurs

1 Extend support beyond startup

Financing, mentorship, market development, growth planning, sale and succession

2 Make support accessible

Online, part-time, asynchronous and community-based options for caregivers and job seekers

3 Tailor to provincial contexts

Provincial and community approaches, linked through shared Prairie networks

4 Strengthen capital and networks

Connect youth founders with investors, mentors and business-development experts

5 Build AI and trade capacity

Fold AI, data privacy and tariff guidance into existing business support

Source: Chapter 5, Recommendations and Future Research.

WHAT IT ALL MEANS

Key takeaways

#	KEY TAKEAWAY	DETAILS & FINDINGS
1	**Youth lead, but paths diverge**	Youth out-start older adults everywhere; Alberta rose while SK and MB fell back
2	**Necessity is rising**	Starting because jobs are scarce grew in all three provinces since 2023
3	**Starting is not staying**	Youth early-stage activity is roughly 3 to 6 times established ownership
4	**Support must fit people's lives**	Many young founders are caregivers; gender gaps range from 1.9 to 18 points
5	**Innovative, with new pressures**	About half offer something new; AI and tariffs add uncertainty

Source: Williams & Saunders (2026), Youth Entrepreneurship in the Prairies: Results from the GEM Canada 2025 Survey.

Up next: hearing from young Prairie founders

PANELIST

JD

Janine de Castro

Founder, Echelon Fragrances

An independently owned fragrance brand offering a curated collection of unisex perfumes, designed to make luxurious fragrances accessible and affordable

PANELIST

LA

Launa Austin

Founder, Husky Jocks

A Canadian, female-owned athletic apparel company creating inclusive, thoughtfully designed baseball pants for young athletes of all shapes and sizes

FOR DISCUSSION

Questions for our panel and audience

1. What would help more young ventures grow and last beyond the startup stage?
2. How can support reach young women, caregivers and necessity-driven founders?
3. What role can governments, funders, educators and investors each play?
4. Where would shared Prairie networks add most value alongside local and provincial efforts?

With support from

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Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada / Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

Full report: Williams, A., & Saunders, C. (2026). Youth Entrepreneurship in the Prairies: Results from the GEM Canada 2025 Survey. THECIS. thecis.ca/reports-and-papers