

Footprint

The wholesale industry contributes around 5.3% to the Canadian GDP. Small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs, 1 to 499 employees) and self-employed individuals account for about 56% of the sector’s GDP, make up the large majority of businesses (99.9%), and employ 60% of the workforce.

Table 4 – Wholesale, Canada

	GDP ^{1,2}	Businesses ³	Workforce ⁴
Total	\$120B	96,700	688,000
Sector’s share of the economy	5.30%	2.0%	3.4%
SMEs’ share of the sector	55.7%	99.9%	60.0%

The **wholesale** sector⁵ includes businesses that are engaged in wholesaling merchandise, generally without transformation, and rendering services incidental to the sale of merchandise. The sector also includes sales of capital goods or durable non-consumer goods used in the production of goods and services.

Wholesaling is an intermediate step in the distribution of goods, where merchandise is sold in large quantities to retailers, other businesses and institutional clients. Some wholesalers (mostly those supplying non-consumer capital goods) sell merchandise in single units to final users.

This sector comprises two main types: merchant wholesalers that sell goods on their own account and wholesale electronic markets, agents, and brokers that arrange sales and purchases for others, generally for a commission or fee.

Our analysis is focused only on private small and mid-sized businesses.

Sources

(1) Statistics Canada, Table 36-10-0434-03.
(2) Innovation, Science and Econ. Dev. Canada, Key Small Business Statistics 2024. Table 11.
(3) Statistics Canada. Table 33-10-0765-01 and Table 33-10-0764-01.
(4) Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey data, custom tabulations.
(5) Statistics Canada, North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Canada 2022 Version 1.0.
(6) CFIB, Your Business Outlook Survey, January 2015 to June 2025, cfib.ca/barometer.

Fitness

Long-term quarterly confidence for all businesses reached its lowest level in the past 10 years. The wholesale industry’s confidence is plunging even lower, below pandemic-level optimism (Figure 6). Compared to 2024 Q2, the indicator dropped from 57.7 to 33.3 for wholesale and from 53.3 to 40.5 for all industries.

The lack of optimism in the industry reflects the significant decrease in the number of wholesale businesses with employees (-15%) as well as the steep decline in self-employed individuals (-49%) over the past decade (Figure 7).

Figure 6 – 2025 Q2 U.S. tariff announcements trigger sharp drop in long-term optimism, especially in wholesale (index: 0–100)⁶

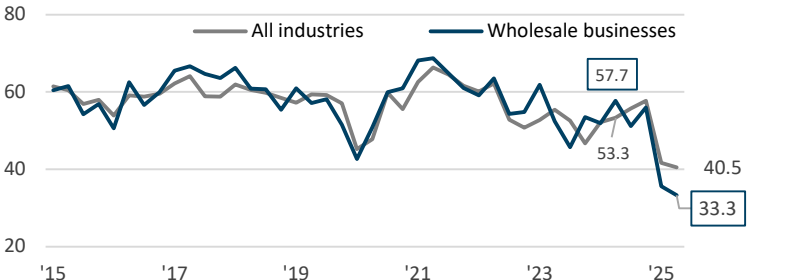
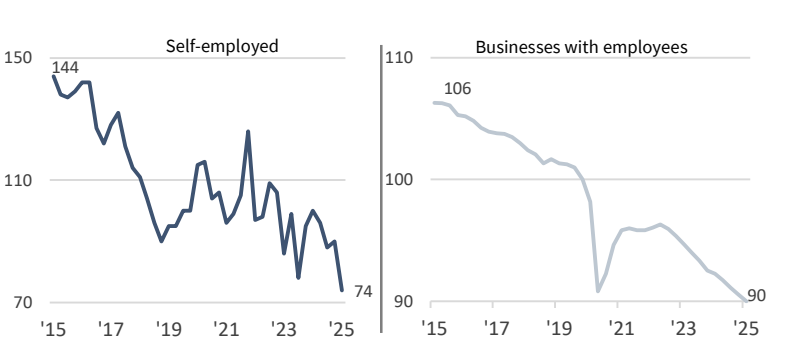


Figure 7 – The number of self-employed and employer businesses in wholesale has decreased over the past decade (index: 2019 Q4 = 100)



Challenges

After a period of relief in 2023 and 2024, supply chain disruptions are again intensifying for wholesale small businesses due to the recent introduction of U.S. tariffs on Canadian goods. In 2025 Q2, about one third of wholesale businesses (37%) were concerned about the supply chain (compared to 17% nationally) (Figure 8).

As one of the first links in the production chain, wholesale firms are particularly exposed to external shocks in global trade and logistics. About half (49%) report that rising product input costs are currently causing difficulties (compared to 42% nationally).

In response to these challenges, wholesale businesses are adjusting their pricing strategies. The average planned price increase over the next 12 months has climbed to 3.9%, notably higher than the national indicator of 3.0%.⁶ This shows that the sector is starting to pass rising cost pressures down the supply chain.

Figure 8 - Short-lived relief: Input cost difficulties and supply chain disruptions return for wholesale businesses post-pandemic

