Disability and Work in Canada (DWC) Virtual Policy Roundtable

Roundtable Report

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Planning Committee (listed alphabetically by last name)**:** Alec Farquhar, Erika Del Carmen Fuchs, Maureen Haan, Steve Mantis, Kathy Padkapayeva, Ron Saunders, Emile Tompa

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Executive Summary

In 2017, the Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy (CRWDP), the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW), Inclusion Newfoundland (InclusionNL) and the Ontario Network of Injured Workers' Groups (ONIWG) came together to support the development of a pan-Canadian strategy for disability and work. We are calling this collaboration the Disability and Work in Canada (DWC) Initiative.

After two years of consultations with persons with disabilities, injured workers, disability organizations, government representatives, labour/unions, employers and service providers from across the country – through national conferences, provincial/territorial-based focus groups, roundtable sessions with policy officials, and an online survey that garnered more than 440 responses – the DWC Steering Committee published its Pan-Canadian Strategy for Disability and Work in November 2019.

Through these activities and continued collaboration, the momentum to implement the strategy across the country is growing. The DWC Policy Roundtable 2020 was held to further discuss strategy implementation as well as share ideas about addressing the implications of COVID-19 for persons with disabilities. The objectives of the DWC Virtual Policy Roundtable were as follows:

- To share information about how governments are addressing the implications of COVID-19 for persons with disabilities.
- To share information about important work underway that is relevant to the Pan-Canadian Strategy for Disability and Work ("the Strategy"), including government initiatives, research initiatives (e.g., financial incentives for the recruitment, retention and promotion of persons with disabilities), best practice guidance (e.g., CSA Z1011 Work Disability Management System Standard), societal benefits of inclusion, and efforts to improve measurement and accountability.
- To share ideas on promising programs and practices that complement the strategy.
- To identify opportunities for collaboration.
- To share ideas on how to ensure that people with lived experience are involved throughout the process (per the first item in the Strategy section on "Effective partnerships").

Policy Roundtable participants provided their updates, shared ideas and discussed opportunities for collaboration, as well as provided advice on the conference that will be held over four days on November 25-26 and December 1-2, 2020.

Highlights of the current work of the DWC Initiative

- The implementation working groups have been on hold for several months, due to COVID-19 pandemic. As Canada emerges from the worst of COVID19, we are reaching out again to constitute these groups.

- We have been reaching out to key stakeholder groups, to identify which elements of the strategy are most important to them.

- We have also learned that different sectors and stakeholders face a wide range of situations. They tend to focus on some strategy initiatives more than on others. This has made a strong case for sectoral approaches to implementation.

- We also identified some promising initiatives in various sectors. One key way to build momentum and collaboration will be to highlight these initiatives and other success stories at the November/December 2020 DWC conference.

Overview of the important work underway

- The Canadian Standards Association [Work Disability Prevention Management System Standard (CSA Z1011:20)](#) was launched this spring. This standard provides a consensus-based framework for Canadian workplaces to improve their performance around disability management and employment.

- Financial incentives to promote employment of persons with disabilities: When and how do they work best?
    - This is a multiphase research initiative funded by the Ontario Human Capital Research and Innovation Fund (OHCRIF) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).
    - Two OHCRIF Funded Reports are available: Scoping Review http://www.crwdp.ca/sites/default/files/documentuploader/irvin_ohcrif_phase1_final.pdf; Field Knowledge and Case Studies http://www.crwdp.ca/sites/default/files/documentuploader/fisd_year_2_funding_report.pdf

- Research report on the Societal and Financial Benefits of an Accessible and Inclusive Canada.
    - This project aimed to answer the following key question: What would be the benefits to Canadian society in reference year 2017, if Canada was accessible and inclusive in all domains relevant to full participation? The research findings provide a compelling business case for an increased focus on disability and employment.
    - Full and abbreviated versions of the report are available on the CRWDP website: http://www.crwdp.ca/sites/default/files/cost_of_exclusion_final_report_full_version_etompa_et_al._final_submission_v2

.1_clean.pdf; http://www.crwdp.ca/sites/default/files/cost_of_exclusion_final_report_abbreviated_version_etompa_et_al._final_submission_v2.1_clean.pdf

- Disability CoalitionLeadership Group https://www.include-me.ca/node/228

    - This emerging Disability Coalition Leadership Group includes 27 organizations across Canada.

    - Its goal is to provide the mechanisms for community involvement in developing, implementing, enforcing and monitoring issues related to persons with disabilities.

- COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2020/04/backgrounder--covid-19-disability-advisory-group.html

    - The COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group (CDAG) provides advice to the federal Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion.

Updates from participating jurisdictions

Representatives from nine provinces and from federal government provided their updates. Issues or strategies that received repeated mention included the following:

- The importance of ongoing forums for consultation with persons with disabilities and community organizations serving them,
- Examining and addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities,
- Use or active consideration of a centralized fund within government to support costs of providing accommodations to public sector employees,
- Coordination of programs/services across multiple departments within a jurisdiction, and
- Consideration of the idea of a one-stop-shop or "no wrong door" to facilitate access to programs.

Resources shared by participants

- New Brunswick's Premier's Council on Disabilities resources: https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/pcsdp/publications.html

- The Accessibility for Manitobans Act website http://www.accessibilitymb.ca/ has COVID-19 messaging including the information about a variety of services relevant for persons with disabilities, employers and other stakeholders.

- Accessible Employment Standard in Manitoba video. Manitoba business owners and human resource professionals and people who identity as having a disability share their stories on accommodations being made in workplaces across Manitoba: https://

- www.youtube.com/watch?
  v=1mx5aXYUZpc&list=PLvqXTqcYDg_dDn01kc0cVfpK_riHKGg_3
- Website yukon.ca has information about programs such as tax exemptions, business supports, etc.
- Labour Market Information portal in Yukon is a one-stop place to go where all the labour-market market information is available: http://www.yukoniehp.ca/labourmarketinfo.php
- "Monitoring the CRPD" survey: https://surveys.chrc2020-ccdp2020.ca/s3/-EN-FR
- Nothing without us: An accessibility strategy for the Public Service of Canada: https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/accessibility-public-service.html
- Benchmarking Study of Workplace Accommodations by the Office of Public Service Accessibility at the Treasury Board Secretariat: https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/accessibility-public-service/benchmarking-study-workplace-accommodations.html
- Action plan for all of Nova Scotia, Access by Design 2030: https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/access-by-design/
- Government of Nova Scotia accessibility plan: https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/plan/

Discussion: remote work and online services during COVID-19

Policy Roundtable participants discussed the needs and opportunities for persons with disabilities related to working from home and bringing services online:

- The increase in remote work presents both opportunities and challenges for persons with disabilities.
  - For some persons with disabilities, accommodation of their needs may be easier with remote work.
  - Remote work inherently avoids the barriers, which can be considerable, that some people face in physically getting to work.
  - However, some people, including people with cognitive, behavioural, or emotional disabilities, may not benefit as much from remote work and may experience negative impacts from isolation.
  - Some people with disabilities lack access to high-speed internet and technology, which is important to be able to work remotely.

The discussants concluded that it is important not to treat people with disabilities as a homogeneous group, rather, the needs should be addressed on an individualized basis.

Opportunities for collaboration across and/or within jurisdictions

Another topic that was discussed at the Policy Roundtable was how to make the system more navigable, and the pros and cons of efforts to improve navigation:

- When we try to improve navigation, there is a risk of turning it into a more complex system by adding one more layer on top of other layers. We need to do something more fundamental. Can we collaborate on genuinely simplifying the array of programs? We can look at actually just having one stop.
- There are many perspectives on simplifying programs. Some specific disability organizations (e.g., vision and hearing impairment) are not supporting it, fearing that they will lose specificity in the services provided.
- The reason why the systems are hard to navigate is because we have so many "doors" and so many definitions (eligibility rules).
  - Ideas were discussed to collaborate across jurisdictions on finding ways to remove some of those doors and simplify criteria for programs and collection of data.
- In cases where it is unavoidable, there will be more than one destination. It is important to make sure there is no wrong starting point.

Ideas for the conference

Participants then discussed ideas for conference panels and issues the conference could focus on:

- How the COVID-19 recovery is affecting employment for persons with disabilities.
- Leadership tables and disability councils/champions.
- Community partnerships.
- Collaboration among multiple disability programs.
- Ensuring all key stakeholders are involved and that we have the voice of marginalized groups.
- De-stigmatizing disability.
  - There are two different aspects: 1) everybody has a right to be at the table; 2) everybody has a right *not* to talk about their disability.
  - Protecting both rights at the same time may be challenging. Creating an environment where someone can feel comfortable talking about their needs (but not necessarily disclosing the specifics of their condition) may be a way forward, normalizing this conversation.
- The future of work

- COVID-19 is accelerating the thinking about the future of work – this is a vital area for our thinking about disability.

  - Considering how the increase in remote work and other changes to the workplace as a result of public health measures affect persons with disabilities;

  - Ensuring that people in precarious work are being supported;

  - Ensuring access to training, which can be a challenge for persons with disabilities;

  - Has COVID opened up opportunities for new areas of work for persons with disabilities?

- There is a second report on CRPD, which will be coming soon. Among the issues are the following: 1) Closing sheltered workshops and finding alternatives; 2) Affirmative measures and how effective they are.

- Basic income – there are various experiments on the international level. The Emergency Response Benefit is in many ways similar.

The DWC Planning Committee will follow up with roundtable participants about coordinating a special session at the conference.