

# Disability and Work in Canada (DWC) Virtual Policy Roundtable

## Executive Summary

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## Introduction

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 call 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, 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.

Since this time, through the annual conferences, policy roundtables and other forms of consultation and collaboration, we have been working to encourage and support implementation of the Strategy as well as to help identify the implications of COVID-19 for persons with disabilities in relation to employment. This DWC Policy Roundtable in 2021 was the fourth one. The goals of this roundtable were:

- To identify ways to measure and document progress towards the objectives outlined in the Pan-Canadian Strategy on Disability and Work (“disability-confident and inclusive workplaces;” “comprehensive supports for persons with disabilities”)
- To provide an opportunity for participants to share information on important new initiatives relevant to the Strategy

## Brief summaries of presentations

### Federal employment strategy for persons with disabilities

One of the commitments the federal government made in the 2020 Speech from the Throne was that the government would bring forward a Disability Inclusion Plan which will have the following elements:

- A new Canadian Disability Benefit modelled after the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors;
- A robust employment strategy for Canadians with disabilities;
- And a better process to determine eligibility for Government disability programs and benefits.”<sup>1</sup>

Developing the robust employment strategy for Canadians with Disabilities is an important part of this commitment.

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<sup>1</sup> A Stronger and More Resilient Canada. Speech from the Throne to open the Second Session of the Forty-Third Parliament of Canada. September 23, 2020. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/Kathy/Desktop/SFT\\_2020\\_EN\\_WEB.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Kathy/Desktop/SFT_2020_EN_WEB.pdf)

The employment strategy will draw on past disability community engagement, including the work by the Disability and Work in Canada Steering Committee who developed the Pan-Canadian Strategy on Disability and Work, as well as new engagement activities with the disability community, employers, labour representatives, community organizations, experts and academics.

### **Accessible Canada Act and Accessibility Standards Canada**

The purpose of the Accessible Canada Act is to benefit everyone, particularly persons with disabilities, through realization of a barrier-free Canada by 2040. Accessibility Standards Canada (ASC) has a mandate to contribute to the barrier-free Canada through developing and revising accessibility standards, promoting research on barriers, and sharing information and best practices related to disability. Seven priorities, as identified in the Accessible Canada Act, guide this work: employment, the built environment, information and communication technologies, communication (other than information and communication technologies), the procurement of goods, services and facilities, the design and delivery of programs and services, transportation. Other federal departments and agencies are implicated in these priority areas.

The standards that ASC creates are voluntary. However, once a standard is developed, ASC may make a recommendation to the Minister for their consideration to adopt it into a regulation. At that point, the standard becomes mandatory for federally regulated organizations.

Many areas of accessibility are under provincial and/or municipal jurisdiction. ASC has begun to reach out to provincial governments to identify opportunities for collaboration.

A standard on employment is being developed to encourage active and inclusive participation of persons with disabilities at every phase of the employment life cycle. Some of the stages of that cycle include, but are not limited to: recruitment, hiring, onboarding, retention, accommodations, return to work, disability management, fair pay, career and professional development or advancement, and job exit.

### **An Accessible Nova Scotia by 2030**

Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act was passed in September 2017. It recognizes accessibility as a human right and sets a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. The Act aims to prevent and remove barriers with respect to built environment, education, information and communications, employment, delivery and receipt of goods and services, transportation and transportation infrastructure. Standards will be developed in each of these areas. Woven throughout the Accessibility Act and based on the premise of "nothing about us without us" is involving persons with disabilities, the public sector and other stakeholders in the development of Accessibility Standards.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bill No 59. An Act Respecting Accessibility in Nova Scotia. Chapter 2, Acts of 2017. Available from: <https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/PDFs/annual%20statutes/2017%20Spring/c002.pdf>

Access by Design 2030 was released in September 2018. It provides a framework for how the province will achieve the goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030.<sup>3</sup>

Nova Scotia has developed the Well-being Index for Persons with Disabilities, based on the Canadian Index of Well-being. It includes eight well-being domains: community vitality, democratic engagement, education, environment, healthy populations, leisure and culture, living standards and time use. Preliminary results suggest that persons with disabilities fare worse than Nova Scotians without disabilities in all aspects of well-being.

### **Updates from Manitoba**

The Manitoba Accessibility Office develops resources for persons with disabilities, consulting with disability communities and other stakeholders. The website <http://www.accessibilitymb.ca/> includes links to resources, such as:

- An online learning portal which is a free training for organizations to meet their employee accessibility training requirements, with certificates provided to employers
- Resources from Manitoba Access Awareness Week
- Minister's Annual Plan 2021/22 & 2022/23
- Manitoba Accessibility Fund (MAF) information
- Resources related to accessibility during COVID-19
- Workplace Emergency Response Toolkit
- Employers' Handbook & Sample Accessible Employment Policy
- Guide to Create an Individualized Accommodation Plan Process and Policy
- Videos on customer service and on Accessibility in the Workplace
- Sign up for Accessibility News (subscriptions also a measure of engagement) to receive updates on new opportunities, accessibility fund, opportunities for consultation.

Manitoba's Accessibility Standard for Employment, enacted on May 1, 2019, is the second standard under the Accessibility for Manitobans Act. Its purpose is to remove and prevent barriers that affect current and potential members of Manitoba's labour force.<sup>4</sup>

A recent survey of small businesses (less than 50 employees) found that 46% were aware of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act.

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<sup>3</sup> Access by Design 2030. Achieving an Accessible Nova Scotia. Available from: <https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/access-by-design/access-by-design-2030.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Accessibility Standard for Employment. Available from: <http://accessibilitymb.ca/employment-standards.html>

## **Workforce Development Agreements**

The Workforce Development Agreements (WDAs) came in place in 2017, a consolidation of previous agreements with provinces and territories, to serve underrepresented groups in the labour market. WDAs represent the government of Canada's largest source of targeted employment supports for persons with disabilities. There is a requirement under WDAs that a certain portion of the funding is spent on persons with disabilities.

Evaluation of WDAs includes working closely with the provinces and territories as well as service providers. The evaluation will draw on both administrative and survey data.

## **Measuring Progress on Labour Market Indicators for Persons with Disabilities**

With the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increase in the demand for disaggregated data (statistics broken down by age, gender, immigrant status, etc.), to better measure the impacts of the pandemic on more vulnerable populations. The Disaggregated Data Action Plan of Statistics Canada comes with new funding from the 2021 budget (\$172 million over five years, with \$36.3 million ongoing). Persons with disabilities are among the key groups targeted by the action plan.

The Disability Screening Questions module is the official instrument to measure disability at Statistics Canada. It follows a social model of disability. In addition to the Canadian Survey on Disability, the Disability Screening Questions module is included on surveys such as the General Social Survey (GSS), Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS), National Graduates Survey (NGS) and Canadian Income Survey (CIS).

The Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) is the main survey that collects information on disability. It is conducted every five years in the year that follows the Census.

## **Measuring Progress in Removing Barriers to Accessibility in the Federal Jurisdiction**

The purpose of the Accessible Canada Act (ACA) is to realize a Canada without barriers, on or before January 1, 2040. The Data and Measurement Strategy aims to measure the impact of the ACA, particularly with respect to identifying, preventing and removing barriers to accessibility in the federal jurisdiction, but also in advancing accessibility more broadly.

## **Performance measurement under the Opportunities Fund**

The Opportunities Fund for persons with disabilities is the federal program that is specifically targeted to providing labour market and skills training supports for persons with disabilities. Under the program, a number of outcomes for persons with disabilities is being tracked. Work is ongoing to get a better sense of the types of supports that employers need for their employees and what the outcomes will be in terms of hiring and retention of persons with disabilities.

The results of the latest evaluation were recently released. Some of the key findings from those results include:

- Over the five-year post participation period, the average earnings of participants increased by 38% due to participation in the program, which translates to on average \$1,100 higher than non-participants who have similar characteristics
- The two types of interventions that were most successful at improving participants' employment opportunities were first, skills for employment, and second, wage subsidies
- One dollar investment in the Opportunities Fund yields a \$1.7 return over a ten-year period following the intervention.<sup>5</sup>

Policy Roundtable participants discussed the importance of comparability of the indicators and measures across Canada and the opportunity for collaboration across jurisdictions in this regard.

### **Reflections from Disability and Work in Canada Steering Committee**

- Many of the policy and programmatic pieces are now in place for a breakthrough on disability and employment, and for inclusion and quality of life overall.
- There are a lot of opportunities for connections and collaboration that emerge from this meeting, and potentially even harmonization of some standards across jurisdictions. It is noteworthy that several participants talked about making connections with others after this roundtable.
- There is impressive progress across Canada in involving and engaging persons with disabilities and following the “Nothing without us” principle.
- The need for disaggregated data is beginning to be addressed. There are a lot of promising data collection and data linkage activities. This will improve our ability to measure progress.
- It is important to set marker targets we want to achieve in the different indicator areas.
  - The targets should include not only employment rates or earnings, but also measures of job quality, well-being, and the quality and sustainability of employment.
- The COVID-19 pandemic, while being extremely challenging for some persons with disabilities, has in some cases opened up opportunities.
- Many jurisdictions are working with stakeholder champions and leveraging their role in making a greater impact.

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<sup>5</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada. Evaluation of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities – Phase 2. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/reports/evaluations/opportunities-fund-persons-disabilities-phase2.html>

- It is important to link the human rights case with the business and economic case for employment of persons with disabilities. A lot of programs still operate in silos (e.g., economic development and disability programs). Disability programs can be seen as human-rights oriented, and there is insufficient appreciation of the cost of exclusion and benefits of inclusion. Making this connection will be important.
  - We need disability to be seen as relevant to training, skills development, economic development and employment in general, and also as part of diversity strategies.
- Standards, both voluntary and mandatory, play an important role, and can help raise awareness, change culture and provide a framework for making progress systemically and at the frontline.
- All persons with disabilities living in Canada should be able to access the same level of barrier-free services, products, and employment opportunities across the country. Inclusive workplaces and inclusive environments benefit all of us.