



## Moving Forward Together: Disability and Work in Canada (DWC) Initiative

### The Case for a New Strategy

The need for a pan-Canadian strategy on disability and work is urgent.

Persons with disabilities are under-employed. According to Statistics Canada's Canadian Survey on Disability (2017), 59 per cent of working-age adults with disabilities are employed, compared with 80 per cent of adults without disabilities. Among working-age adults with disabilities who are neither employed nor at school, two in five (39 per cent) have the potential to work. This represents nearly 645,000 individuals with disabilities who have the potential to work and are not working.

Persons with disabilities also have lower incomes. Working-age adults with more severe disabilities have a median after-tax annual income (from all sources, including work earnings and benefits from support programs) of \$19,200, compared to \$34,300 for those with milder disabilities and \$39,000 for those without disabilities.

And persons with disabilities are also more likely to live in poverty. Among working-age adults, 28 per cent of those with more severe disabilities live below Canada's official poverty line, compared to 14 per cent of those with milder disabilities and 10 per cent of those without disabilities.

Canada cannot achieve its full potential as an inclusive and productive society until these inequalities are address, and recent developments in government and civil society indicate a growing collective desire to improve this situation.

Federal legislations introduced in June 2019—[Bill C-81, the Accessible Canada Act](#)—begins to address Canada's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ratified by Canada in 2010. The legislation provides a framework for proactively identifying, removing and preventing barriers to accessibility in areas under federal jurisdiction, including barriers to employment with respect to job opportunities and employment policies and practices. In the meantime, many provinces have already developed their own strategies to increase inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market. All of this is taking place in the context of increasing recognition of the legal framework for addressing disability, especially under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and federal and provincial human rights legislation. The legal context imposes obligations on both employers and unions, setting the stage for more effective collaboration.



In civil society, general awareness and support for people with disabilities has never been higher. Numerous champions for the inclusion and employment of people with disabilities have emerged, from both within and outside the disability community. These champions have helped deepen understanding and empathy among Canadians. Societal progress has included advances in understanding and supporting all types of disabilities in the labour force, including mental health conditions. The stigma around disclosing disability to an employer, while still in play, has declined to some extent, thus opening the door to dialogue and mutual problem-solving.

The time is right to come together and make positive change. This strategy is intended to support the broad and deep societal collaboration necessary to make that change together.