



The Disability and Work Canada 2023 Conference – a major step forward for inclusive employment

The 2023 Disability and Work in Canada (DWC) Conference in Ottawa was our first time in person since the beginning of the COVID19 pandemic. DWC welcomed over 300 participants (200+ in person and 120+ virtually). It was a rich event, with 40 presentations, over 90 presenters, and broad participation from persons with lived experience, disability organizations, employers, unions, researchers and government.

Conference theme:

The 2023 conference theme was **Livelihoods and influencing the future of work for people with disabilities: A focus on rights, and quality of life**. This theme was chosen because of the widespread support for moving beyond initial employment of persons with disabilities towards ensuring full inclusion in the workplace, support for career advancement and a good quality of life.

Our conference MCs were two key leaders in the disability community:

- Ingrid Palmer, IDEAL Chief Officer at Realize Canada
- Heather Walkus, National Chair, Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD)

Ingrid and Heather played a major role in ensuring that the voices of persons with lived experience were heard throughout the conference. This included a powerful closing statement by Ingrid which contributed to the commitment of everyone at the conference to take action together, as we went back to our workplaces and organizations.

Keynote speakers:

We had an outstanding list of keynote speakers, including:

- Hon. Kamal Khera, Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities
- Stéphanie Cadieux, Chief Accessibility Officer
- Michael Gottheil, Accessibility Commissioner

- Philip Rizcallah Chief Executive Officer, Accessibility Standards Canada
- Sara Minkara, Special Advisor for the Office of International Disability Rights in the US State Department

Highlights of the conference presentations:

The conference featured a combination of frontline and policy oriented presentations. The full conference program is available at these links:

<https://ccrw.org/dwcevent/2023-conference-livelihoods-and-influencing-the-future-of-work-for-people-with-disabilities-a-focus-on-rights-and-quality-of-life/>

<https://www.crdp.ca/en/annual-conference-2023-disability-and-work-canada>

Highlights included:

- **Addressing Barriers and Facilitators to Participation in the Labour Force for Canadians Living with Sight Loss**
- **Evaluating an Immersive Learning Pilot on Living and Working with Episodic Disabilities**
- **The School to Work Transition and Career Success: Current Practices and Future Directions**
- **A Pan-Canadian Approach to the Recruitment, Hiring, and Advancement of People with Intellectual Disabilities and Autistic Persons in the Public Service Workforce**
- **From barriers to possibilities: Rethinking conventional assumptions about career pathways for workers with disabilities**
- **Using Research Partnerships for Change: The Research Action Alliance on the Consequences of Work Injury**
- **Progressing in Your Career: From Pre- Employment to Career Advancement**
- **How Unions Are Taking Action to Address Violence and Harassment Facing Persons with Disabilities at Work**

There were also a number of lightning sessions which featured cutting edge strategies often at an early stage of implementation.

Overall there was a major emphasis on measurement and evaluation, to answer the question - how can we know whether we are truly making progress?

What we heard:

- Community organizations and service providers:

- using an intersectional framework in all practices and supporting intersectional needs and unique barriers
- working towards universal design and proactive accessibility
- paying special attention to sector-specific barriers
- collaboratively integrating provincial and territorial services.
- a strong call for the involvement and leadership of persons with disabilities
- Government
 - strong support from governments for inclusive employment and a desire for government programs to make a major contribution
- Employers:
 - continuing to encourage open conversations about accessibility.
 - implementing actionable commitments and reflecting on those commitments
 - using inclusive language and encouraging career development
- Unions
 - in unionized workplaces, unions are a major player in disability justice and solutions development
- Researchers
 - Commitment by researchers to deepen engagement with frontline change, including measurement and evaluation

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this outstanding event. And please join us for our virtual conference, taking place on November 27th, 28th and December 4th and 5th 2024. More details coming soon!

