

The Disability Confidence Gap

Five Critical Workplace Accessibility Gaps
Employers Need to Address



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Executive Summary

In 2026, Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW) marks its 50th anniversary. To celebrate this milestone and accelerate progress, CCRW is launching a national campaign to engage 50 employers to take the pledge to become Disability Confident Employers. The pledge is a practical commitment to remove barriers, strengthen workplace accessibility, and create consistent, respectful experiences for candidates and employees with disabilities. This white paper summarizes what business leaders told us about current practices, and where the largest gaps remain.



Key Findings



The findings point to a clear conclusion: disability confidence is built through straightforward systems that leaders can own and measure, including clear adjustment pathways, a formal process to surface and resolve barriers, accessibility reviews across the employment lifecycle, manager training, and regular consultation with people with disabilities that leads to public commitments.

- 1 The 49% gap in workplace adjustments:** Nearly half of leaders reported adjustments are not actively promoted or consistently provided¹. This creates avoidable performance and retention risk, and it signals that employees may not know what supports are available or how to request them.
- 2 The 64% gap in barrier removal processes:** Nearly two-thirds reported they do not have a formal process to identify, address, and remove barriers.¹ Without a clear route and ownership, barriers are missed, concerns go unreported, and accountability becomes unclear.
- 3 The 70% gap in lifecycle accessibility reviews:** Seven in ten reported they have not reviewed accessibility across the phases of employment.¹ This end-to-end blind spot can limit talent pipelines, affect advancement, and weaken inclusion commitments.
- 4 The 70% gap in leadership training:** Seven in ten indicated leaders do not receive training to address disability-related myths, misconceptions, and bias.¹ Because managers shape hiring and day-to-day experience, this gap shows up as inconsistent practices and preventable friction.
- 5 The 86% gap in feedback and public commitments:** Only 14% reported gathering feedback from people with disabilities and then publicly committing to actions with clear owners and timelines.¹ Without consultation and visible follow-through, trust declines and progress is difficult to measure.



These findings show that disability confidence is not built through one-time actions. It requires clear systems, defined ownership, and consistent leadership behaviours that make accessibility part of everyday work. As CCRW marks its 50th anniversary, the invitation to 50 employers is simple: move from intent to action. By taking the Disability Confident Employer pledge, organizations signal not just commitment, but readiness to implement, measure, and improve accessibility across the full employee experience.



The 49% Gap in Workplace Adjustments— And How Employers Can Close It



Nearly half of business leaders (49%) say their organizations do not actively promote workplace adjustments or consistently provide them.¹ For HR and executives, that number is more than a statistic, it signals an avoidable performance and retention risk, and a missed opportunity to build a workplace where more people can do their best work.

Barriers begin early in the employment lifecycle: 68% of candidates with disabilities reported an accessibility barrier in the hiring process; and among those, 32% identified accommodation-related issues (e.g., unmet requests, not knowing how to request, or being unaware accommodations were available).²

Why the hesitancy from employers?

Cost is a common, and often overstated, concern. An evidence review of 47 studies found one of the most frequently cited employer barriers was the perception that accommodating workers with disabilities would be expensive.³ In practice, many adjustments are low-cost or no-cost: nearly two-thirds of workers with disabilities require no workplace adjustments, and many of the most requested supports have no direct cost.⁴ Based on CCRW's experience supporting employers and job seekers, the average one-time cost of paid accommodations is about \$375, often less than the cost of replacing a valued employee or leaving a role unfilled.⁵

What needs to be done?

Employers can act now by making accessibility supports easy to request, straightforward to deliver, and consistently communicated. We recommend they partner with an employment support provider who specializes in workplace accommodations.

A practical starting point for HR and leaders:



- **Document the process:** Maintain a clear, plain-language policy and procedure for requesting workplace adjustments (including who to contact, expected timelines, and privacy considerations).
- **Make it visible:** Publish the process where employees and candidates will actually see it (career site, offer letter package, onboarding materials, intranet).
- **Train for consistency:** Equip managers and HR partners to respond confidently—what to say, what not to ask, and how to move requests forward quickly.
- **Remove friction:** Offer multiple ways to request (form, email, conversation) and confirm receipt with next steps.
- **Measure and improve:** Track requests, time-to-implement, outcomes, and employee feedback to identify bottlenecks and build trust.

Use key calendar moments (e.g., National AccessAbility Week, National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities) to move from awareness to action: highlight the process, share real examples of adjustments (including low- or no-cost options), and reinforce leadership commitment. As a part of your commitment to becoming a Disability Confident Employer, plan to leverage these strategies.

The 64% Gap: Building a Formal Process to Identify and Remove Barriers



Nearly two-thirds of business leaders (64%) report they do not have a formal process to identify, address, and remove barriers for people with disabilities.¹ For executives and HR leaders, this is a solvable governance gap: without a clear process, barriers are missed, concerns go unreported, and accountability becomes unclear. A simple, well-communicated approach helps you respond faster, manage risk, and demonstrate the kind of leadership that defines a Disability Confident Employer.

When organizations don't have a consistent way to surface and resolve barriers, employees carry the burden. Nearly 7 in 10 (69%) employed persons with disabilities or long-term conditions report at least one accessibility barrier at work.² A formal process turns these from recurring issues into actionable improvements.

Capacity of Employers

Many employers want to do the right thing but aren't sure where to start. Research commonly points to a lack of knowledge about accessibility supports and how to manage disability-related needs as a key barrier to building disability-inclusive workplaces. That makes the absence of a formal barrier-removal process less a lack of intent—and more a capacity challenge that can be addressed with clear guidance, simple tools, and leadership commitment.

This is especially true for small (1–99 employees) and medium (100–499 employees) enterprises (SMEs), which comprise 99.8% of businesses in Canada.⁶ Many SMEs do not have dedicated HR staff or formal HR policies, so setting up and maintaining a process can feel daunting. The goal of the pledge is to make this doable: start with a simple, scalable process now—then strengthen it over time.

What Needs to Be Done



What a Disability Confident process looks like in practice:

- **Name an owner and a route:** Identify who receives barrier reports (HR, operations, a DEI lead) and how employees/candidates can submit them (email, form, conversation).
- **Set expectations:** Acknowledge submissions, clarify timelines, and explain how confidentiality will be respected.
- **Act and communicate:** Triage issues (quick fixes vs. longer-term changes), document decisions, and close the loop with the person who raised the barrier.
- **Look for patterns:** Review barrier reports regularly to prevent repeat issues and prioritize improvements (facilities, tech, communications, hiring practices).
- **Use expert support when needed:** Employment support organizations can help you design and implement a right-sized process—reducing the workload on internal teams while building capability.

For smaller employers (under 99 employees), keeping this simple is the point. Start by appointing a trusted point person—often an HR generalist, office manager, or operations lead—who can receive accessibility concerns confidentially, coordinate follow-up, and track what was resolved. When employees know who to go to and what will happen next, barriers get addressed earlier, and your commitment to being a Disability Confident Employer becomes real in day-to-day practice.

Taking the pledge to become a Disability Confident Employer is a practical way to formalize this commitment: it signals to employees and candidates that your organization has a clear path to raise barriers, a method to respond, and a leadership team accountable for continuous improvement.

The 70% Gap: Review Accessibility Across the Employment Lifecycle



Seven in ten business leaders (70%) report they have not reviewed the accessibility of each phase of the employment lifecycle

(recruitment, hiring, onboarding, performance management, career development, and more).¹ For executives and HR leaders, this is an addressable blind spot: if accessibility hasn't been assessed end-to-end, barriers can persist unnoticed, limiting talent pipelines, increasing turnover risk, and undermining inclusion commitments.

This finding aligns with what employees report experiencing on the ground. Common workplace barriers include the physical environment (49%), communication (41%), transportation (35%), and technology (35%).² In today's workplace, communication and technology are core to productivity—so when these systems aren't accessible, employees can't contribute on equal footing. A lifecycle review helps you pinpoint where barriers show up (and where they don't), prioritize fixes, and make accessibility part of “how we work,” not an exception.

What is Happening

According to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, more than 30% of persons with disabilities have reported being at a disadvantage in their careers due to disability-related barriers.⁷ The organizational cost of this shows up as underutilized skills, lower engagement, and avoidable attrition. Employees with disabilities are also nearly twice as likely to be in roles with low autonomy and low job satisfaction—often clustered in entry-level work and less likely to see a pathway to advancement.⁸ When talent cannot fully participate, organizations lose capability they've already hired.

What Needs to Happen



HR teams, executives, and business owners can close this gap by completing an accessibility review across the employment lifecycle—and then acting on what they find. As part of the commitment to becoming a Disability Confident Employer, we support employers with a self-directed assessment of accessibility throughout employment. It provides a clear baseline and helps pinpoint where targeted improvements will have the greatest impact (from recruitment practices and interview formats to onboarding, workplace tools, and career development).

To keep progress practical and measurable, build in regular feedback opportunities across the employee journey (e.g., onboarding check-ins, periodic pulse surveys, and a clear channel to raise accessibility barriers). Use what you learn to track a small set of indicators—such as time-to-resolve barriers, employee experience scores, retention, and advancement—so leaders can see what’s improving and where additional attention is needed.

The 70% Gap in Leadership Training: Equipping Managers to Lead Disability-Inclusive Teams



Seven in ten business leaders (70%) indicated in our survey that their leaders do not receive training to address disability-related myths, misconceptions, and bias.¹ For HR and executives, this is a practical capability gap: managers make day-to-day decisions that shape candidate experience, performance conversations, and whether employees feel safe requesting support. Building disability confidence at the leadership level helps reduce friction in hiring, strengthens retention, and turns inclusion commitments into consistent practice.

This gap is reflected in candidate experience. Alongside the 32% of candidates with disabilities who reported accommodation-related barriers in hiring, other commonly reported barriers included difficulty disclosing disability to a potential employer (54%) and a lack of support or respect from hiring staff or managers (41%).² Training helps leaders understand what to say, how to respond to disclosure appropriately, and how to keep the focus on skills and job requirements.

Why Leadership Training Often Gets Missed

Earlier sections highlighted that many employers cite a lack of knowledge as a barrier to building disability-inclusive workplaces. In practice, leadership training is often deferred because teams are balancing competing priorities, uncertainty about what training should cover, and limited internal expertise to design it well. The opportunity is significant: research suggests that improving understanding of disability-related abilities and challenges can empower employers, especially small and medium-sized businesses, to recruit and retain more persons with disabilities.

To be effective, learning should reflect the entire employment lifecycle, so leaders are prepared to apply accessibility and inclusion principles in interviews, onboarding, day-to-day management, performance discussions, and career development.

Practical Next Steps for Employers



For larger organizations, consider building or procuring a structured disability-inclusion learning program for leaders. Aim for content that is practical and role-based (e.g., responding to disclosure, handling accommodation requests, accessible communication, interviewing practices, and managing performance fairly). This content should be developed and validated in partnership with people with disabilities and / or disability organizations. Businesses should also leverage internal expertise such as employee resource groups to ensure relevance and credibility.

For small and mid-sized employers, partnering with an employment support organization can be the fastest path to high-quality training without adding heavy internal workload. To help make the commitment actionable, [employers who take the pledge to become a Disability Confident Employer](#) receive access to our [Disability Confidence Training](#), which covers accessibility across the employment lifecycle and reinforces consistent, manager-ready practices.

The 86% Gap: Gathering Feedback and Making Public Commitments



Only 14% of business leaders reported that, in the last 12 months, their organization directly gathered feedback from people with disabilities and then publicly committed to actions with clear owners and timelines.¹ For HR and executives, this is the largest and most addressable gap: without direct feedback and visible follow-through, accessibility efforts can miss real barriers, employee trust declines, and progress becomes difficult to measure.

Feedback becomes meaningful when it leads to accountability. If accessibility is a priority, it should show up as commitments leaders can track, including what will change, who owns it, and when it will be delivered. For federally regulated employers, the Accessible Canada Act framework includes requirements to consult people with disabilities and disability organizations when developing accessibility plans. These plans also include an employment component, which helps employees see what their employer is committing to do to remove barriers.

The Benefits to Workplace Culture

Organizations that include people with disabilities and invest in accessibility often report stronger team effectiveness, higher discretionary effort, and improved customer service. Accenture reports that companies that prioritize disability inclusion are 25% more likely to outperform their peers on productivity, and they also report higher revenue per employee (\$845 per employee compared to \$781).⁹

International findings point in a similar direction. In Spain, a survey of HR professionals across 57 companies found that hiring employees with disabilities was associated with reported benefits such as improved teamwork (74%) and a stronger internal culture (88%).¹⁰

What Employers Can Do Next



A practical starting point for HR and leaders:

- **Ask directly and safely:** Use an anonymous survey, interviews, focus groups, or a mix, designed with accessibility in mind. Invite employees with disabilities to share what is working and what creates barriers.
- **Include candidates as well as employees:** Gather feedback on recruitment, interviews, and onboarding, since barriers often begin before day one.
- **Commit publicly to action:** Summarize what you heard and publish a short set of commitments with owners and timelines so progress can be tracked.
- **Close the loop:** Report back on what changed and what is still in progress. This is where trust is built.
- **Use the pledge to formalize the commitment:** [Taking the pledge to become a Disability Confident Employer as a part of CCRW's 50th anniversary signals to employees and prospective employees that accessibility is a business priority, supported by clear actions and accountability.](#)
- **Get support if needed:** If internal capacity is limited, service providers, like Untapped Talent, can help you design inclusive surveys or facilitated discussions and translate findings into a practical action plan.

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