



Moving Forward Together: A Canadian Strategy for Disability and Work

DRAFT for discussion at the Disability and Work in Canada conference,
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Our Vision

Employment throughout Canada is inclusive; people with and without disabilities have the same opportunities and choices in careers, jobs and work.

Prepared by the Disability and Work in Canada (DWC) Steering Committee in conjunction with our partners across Canada

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This draft document is based on discussions at the Disability and Work in Canada conference held in November 2017, discussions at a federal-provincial policy roundtable held in June 2018, and ongoing dialogue with partners and stakeholders across Canada.

Executive Summary

Summary of the Case for a New Strategy

Employment and Social Development Canada reports that only 49% of Canadians with disabilities, aged 25 to 64, are employed, compared to 79% of Canadians without disabilities. As well, Canadians with disabilities earn 44% less than Canadians without disabilities and are more likely to live in poverty. Recent developments in government and civil society indicate that the time is right for a Canadian strategy to guide stakeholders in improving this situation.

Summary of How this Strategy was Developed

In November 2017, a collaboration of work disability community and research organizations hosted a conference in Ottawa entitled “Disability and Work in Canada: Success and Challenges of Canada’s First 150 Years, Developing a Vision and Strategy for the Future.” The conference gave rise to themes and pillars for discussion going forward. The collaboration then convened a policy roundtable in June 2018 in Gatineau, Quebec, to continue developing the vision and strategy and to ensure it would work for all levels of government. This draft strategy was then prepared for discussion at the second Disability and Work in Canada conference in December 2018.

Summary of What We have Accomplished in Canada

Since the two World Wars (when the return of injured soldiers brought attention to the employment challenges facing people with disabilities), an array of programs and policies to support the employment of people with disabilities has developed at both federal and provincial levels. As well, human rights and accessibility legislation has strengthened employment rights for people with disabilities.

Summary of Key Challenges and Barriers

To ensure pan-Canadian strategy accomplishes targeted outcomes, it is imperative to be aware of key challenges and barriers to be addressed. These include: the importance of applying an intersectional lens; recognizing the balance of authority between provincial/territorial and federal jurisdiction; ensuring employment does not jeopardize access to income support and benefits; building the capacity and coordination among service agencies; paying more attention to the school-to-work transition; addressing the fear of many businesses about their lack of knowledge about employing people with disabilities and the cost of accommodations; and the need to offer practical support and advice to businesses.

Summary of the Strategy

The **vision** for the national strategy—what we want the world to look like in the coming years—is this: *Employment throughout Canada is inclusive; people with and without disabilities have the same opportunities and choices in careers, jobs and work.* To achieve this vision, the strategy is built on initiatives undertaken within **four pillars**:

- Disability-confident and inclusive workplaces
- Comprehensive supports
- Effective partnerships
- Measurement and accountability

Summary of Key Proposed Initiatives

The strategy proposes high-level initiatives under each of the pillars, which organizations can tailor according to their own role and specific context.

- **Disability-confident and inclusive workplaces:** Initiatives address workplace design, accessibility, supports for employers and culture change.
- **Comprehensive supports:** Initiatives focus on supports for individuals with a disability, the navigability and alignment of support programs, and education-to-work transitions.
- **Effective partnerships:** Initiatives focus on building the partnerships necessary among governments, workplace parties, educational institutions, researchers and people with disabilities to realize substantial gains.
- **Measurement and accountability:** Initiatives address baseline measures, setting goals, identifying indicators of progress, developing data sets, and monitoring and reporting by objective third parties.

Summary of Ideas for an Implementation Process

The strategy makes a number of recommendations with respect to implementation:

- The strategy should not be finalized until at least one further round of consultation has taken place.
- Implementation of the strategy should proceed on a voluntary basis by key stakeholders and by various levels of governments so that formal federal/provincial agreement is not required before implementation can begin.
- New or expanded partnerships should be encouraged around specific initiatives in the strategy.
- The current state of employment for people with disabilities should be benchmarked, with validated performance indicators that can be monitored and reported over time. Although the strategy will be voluntary, it will be vital to know how well we are doing in terms of achieving target.
- Implementation progress should be documented in annual reports that are presented at annual conferences of key stakeholder and government representatives.