



Supporting the Development of a Federal Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities: Provincial-Territorial Consultation

Final Report

Inclusion Canada

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Background

Introduced in the 2020 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada is developing the first-ever *Disability Inclusion Action Plan* (DIAP). DIAP has five objectives:

1. Reduce poverty among Canadians with disabilities.
2. Get more persons with disabilities into good quality jobs.
3. Help meet the *Accessible Canada Act* goal of a barrier-free Canada by 2040.
4. Make it easier for persons with disabilities to access federal programs and services.
5. Foster a culture of inclusion.

The Plan focuses on actions grouped under four pillars. The Employment pillar of the *Disability Inclusion Action Plan* includes a commitment to a “robust Employment Strategy for Canadians with Disabilities”.

Using Article 27 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) as the standard for achieving inclusive employment, this project involved collaborative consultation with Inclusion Canada’s provincial-territorial member organizations to identify the essential elements of a robust, comprehensive, employment strategy for people with disabilities, and specifically people with intellectual disabilities and/or autism. The feedback collected during this consultation led to the recommendations presented in this report.

Inclusion Canada will use this information to guide their policy work with the Government of Canada as the Employment Strategy is developed. This report will also provide the Inclusion Canada federation with a valuable tool to strategically focus its future policy reform efforts and assess progress on inclusive employment practices across Canada.

Methodology

This project was guided by a committee of technical experts who informed the development of interview questions, reviewed a summary of findings, and helped shape final recommendations.

The consultation process involved two stages. An initial conversation was held in Kananaskis, Alberta in May 2022 during Inclusion Canada federation meetings. Representatives from provincial-territorial member organizations were asked to reflect on a list of potential elements to be included in a national employment strategy, and to identify other elements that should be explored. Themes from that conversation were used to inform a set of twelve interview questions. During July 2022, group interviews were held with representatives from twelve of Inclusion Canada's thirteen provincial-territorial member organizations. The interviews were recorded and then analyzed to identify themes. With the support of technical experts, these themes were shaped into the recommendations below.

Recommendations

A robust Employment Strategy for people with disabilities in Canada must be grounded in basic principles and commitments.

- A clear definition of inclusive employment.
- Affirmation of the inherent dignity of all people.
- Value and humanity are not tied to work. While opportunity to work should be accessible, not working does not diminish a person's value or worth.
- Employment (and associated supports) are an investment in people, not a social service.
- “Nothing without us” – people with an intellectual disability must co-lead change processes that impact their lives.
- Disability co-exists in all spaces and must be discussed that way. The Employment Strategy must be connected to other federal priorities like immigration, Truth & Reconciliation, and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion initiatives.

The recommendations presented below focus on areas within federal scope where the Government of Canada is expected to have the greatest impact and opportunity for accountability.

Recommendation #1 Hire people with an intellectual disability in the federal civil service

The Government of Canada is one of the largest employers in the country. A robust Employment Strategy includes leadership by example. The Strategy should commit to ensuring that by 2028 *at least* 1%-2% of the federal civil service is

comprised of people with an intellectual disability, a rate proportionate to the occurrence of intellectual disability within the population. Employment within the federal civil service must be consistent with the [principles of inclusive employment](#) described in Appendix 1 of this report.

Recommendation #2 Restrict the use of *Workforce Development Agreement* funding

It's well-established that employment-first initiatives and training-on-the-job are effective approaches to inclusive employment for people with an intellectual disability. Currently, federal transfer dollars are used for a patchwork of pre-employment and employment programs, including some that have contradictory goals, may work in opposition to each other, and keep people with intellectual disabilities trapped in sheltered settings. *Workforce Development Agreement* funding should be restricted to programs and activities that are consistent with the [principles of inclusive employment](#), are evidence-informed, and are proven effective. This must include a focus on youth employment and transitional programs that prioritize connecting people with an intellectual disability to the labour force, and significantly reduce enrollment in sheltered settings and day programs.

Recommendation #3 Reallocate resources to fund sustained employment and growth.

Current metrics and funding structures place such emphasis on securing new employment, that job retention, career advancement, and expanding reach to more people becomes almost impossible. Federal funding and reporting

structures should not contribute to barriers for people with an intellectual disability getting and keeping good jobs.

Significant federal funds are currently used to pay for wage subsidies through *Workforce Development Agreements*. Wage subsidies should only exist as short-term programs that are broadly available to everyone (for example: summer employment for students). Disability-focused wage subsidies do not lead to the long-term employment of people with an intellectual disability and perpetuate stereotypes about disability and employment. This budget should be converted to fund youth employment initiatives, sustained on-the-job support, and assist employment organizations to focus on job retention and career advancement for people with an intellectual disability. It would also allow these organizations to expand their reach to more people. The role of supported employment agencies must be reviewed, and support provided to help these agencies develop their capacity in the area of career advancement and demonstrate success in this area.

[Recommendation #4 Review and restructure Government of Canada jobs to create inclusive employment opportunities](#)

Flexible, accommodating, and secure employment opportunities are in demand. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly shifted the nature of work and the way employees and employers approach jobs. Work from home arrangements, re-envisioned of job descriptions, and job sharing (splitting what was previously a full-time job into multiple part-time positions) has become the norm. These more customized and supportive work arrangements are excellent ways to provide more accessible, inclusive employment opportunities to many people, including candidates with an intellectual disability. As an employer, the Government of

Canada should review existing job requirements, job descriptions, and application processes, with a goal of restructuring to welcome a more diverse labour force and eliminate barriers to hiring and career advancement within the federal civil service.

Recommendation #5 Partner with organized labour (unions)

Given the highly unionized nature of the federal civil service, restructuring of Government of Canada jobs must include partnerships with organized labour. The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) is one of Canada's largest unions. Their nearly 230,000 members include workers in federal government departments and agencies. Relationships with unions like PSAC provide excellent opportunities to work together to eliminate barriers and develop collective agreements that allow for variations in job descriptions and proactively promote a commitment to inclusive employment.

Recommendation #6 Prioritize vendors who demonstrate a commitment to inclusive employment in federal procurement contracts.

Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) manages the procurement of approximately \$15 billion worth of goods and services each year. Their *Supplier Diversity Action Plan* aims to increase participation of businesses from underrepresented groups in government procurement. This should include a commitment to prioritizing vendors who demonstrate a commitment to the inclusive employment of people with an intellectual disability. Quality of employment and inclusion, and quantity of people employed, are both important markers in assessing this commitment. The Government of Canada should not

hold contracts, nor procure goods or services, from any enterprise that does not align with the [principles of inclusive employment](#).

Appendix 1 – Principles of Inclusive Employment

Stage one of the consultation process revealed a desire for the Employment Strategy to include a clear definition of *inclusive employment*. A definition was seen as necessary to ensure everyone is working towards a common goal. A definition would also allow funding to be directed to programs and services whose activities align with this goal.

When asked to define what does and does not constitute inclusive employment, federation members identified a variety of elements. Common traits included:

- Location – employment in typical work locations, not in sheltered or segregated environments.
- Employee makeup – people with disabilities work alongside employees without disabilities. People with disabilities are not congregated together within or outside the job site.
- Compensation – people are paid appropriately for their work and receive the same wage as other employees performing the same work (fair market wage). This applies to contract work as well as hourly and salaried positions. Sub-minimum wage is never appropriate compensation. Training stipends or ‘volunteering’ for work that others are paid for is seen as exploitation.
- Support – personalized accommodations are available to all employees. People with disabilities are provided with the support they need to succeed and advance at work. Paid supporters facilitate natural connections in the workplace and do not interfere with inclusion at work.

- Social inclusion – people with disabilities are included in the lunchroom, at staff meetings, and during social and recreational gatherings with their coworkers (holiday parties, beer & wing night). People with disabilities hold diverse types of jobs, are present in all levels of the organization, and are part of decision-making processes.
- Attitude – the workplace is accommodating, open-minded, flexible, and willing to learn. All employees are treated with respect and dignity and valued for their contributions. Inclusive employment is seen as an ongoing pursuit rather than something that can be completed (for example by installing a ramp or hiring one person with a disability). These attitudes are reflected in policies and practices.