

# **Disability & Work in Canada: Framing a bolder vision**

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# Questions for policy, practice and research

- What kinds of inclusion and interactions do people with disabilities encounter in workplace settings?
- Why, over the last 30 years, have efforts at higher levels of labour force participation for people with disabilities resulted overall in marginal change?
- Why do labour market disadvantages and widespread experiences of workplace discrimination persist against men and women with disabilities?
- How might we improve the distribution of quality labour force attachments for people with disabilities?
- What is, or should be, the future role of *work disability policy* in Canada?

# Three Propositions

- **Far-reaching changes are needed** in attitudes, in community and economic organizations, and in public investments, policies and practices
- Developing a **bold vision requires reframing** and deepening our aspirations, collective attention and cooperative actions
- The changing future of work is interconnected to **transforming the many worlds of employment for people with and without disabilities**

# Employment worlds for people with disabilities

1. Not in the labour force: never employed, in school, discouraged, retired
2. Unemployed: temporary or long-standing
3. Employment preparation: adult day programs and activity centres
4. Sheltered workshops and other segregated employment
5. Training programs – some people “career clients”
6. Work-experience placements
7. Supported employment in integrated workplaces
8. Affirmative action/equity employment
9. Competitive employment in open labour market
10. On leave from work (short-term or long-term)

# Some promising trends and developments

- ✓ Annual poverty rate for disabled persons in Canada fell from 21.7 percent in 1993 to 12.7 percent in 2010 (Fang and Gunderson 2014)
- ✓ *Rethinking disAbility in the Private Sector* (2013): federal report making a business case for employing people with disabilities
- ✓ National employer forum (2014/15) to advance employment by private sector
- ✓ “Employment First” policies for disabled clients in certain provinces
- ✓ “Ready, Willing and Able” initiative by Canadian Association for Community Living and the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance (2015-2018)
- ✓ Canadian Human Rights Commission’s recent work on mental health and employment
- ✓ Planned federal accessibility law (2018) to eliminate systemic barriers and advance equality of opportunity

# However, ongoing challenges

- ❑ Under-resourced schools and teacher shortages for children with special needs and inclusive public education, along with parental stress and fear of criticizing
- ❑ Patchwork of transition planning and employment preparation for youth with disabilities
- ❑ Complex maze of disability supports and services with irregular access, affordability and responsiveness (Torjman 2015)
- ❑ Uneven and limited capacity of many community-based employment service agencies on issues of disabilities and job accommodations
- ❑ Federal government investments on labour market measures for persons with disabilities declined in real terms over the last decade (Prince 2016)
- ❑ Lack of evaluations and information sharing on employment program practices

# Developing a vision means addressing actual policy issues and making specific choices

## Labour market measures

- Sheltered workshops
- Supported employment
- Reasonable accommodation
- Employment standards
- Public sectors as model employers
- Employment equity

## Income support programs

- Workers' compensation
- Employment Insurance
- CPP and QPP
- Social assistance
- Veterans' benefits
- Tax credits
- Occupational disability plans

## Wage income

- Training wages
- Wage subsidies
- Minimum wage rates
- Working income tax benefit
- Citizen's wage



## A bold vision requires a larger frame

To transform employment opportunities and outcomes for all people with disabilities, **we need to widen our frames of reference** – our focus of aspirations, attention and actions

# Reframing work disability policy

We need to shift emphasis from:

- The unemployed disabled person and their circumstances
- Labour market agreements as guiding documents
- Sheltered workshops and segregated employment
- Labour force supply or demand measures
- Reasonable accommodation
- Anti-discrimination

*Toward* committed attention on:

- Ability-disability relations and social contexts
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Supported employment and integrated social enterprises
- Supply & demand and economic and social organizations and networks
- Progressive transformation to inclusion
- Systemic accessibility

# References

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# Thank you

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