

# Getting to work with a physical disability and the policies and people that make a difference

**Dana Howse, PhD**  
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# Presentation Outline

- Background and Rationale
- Key Concepts
- Methods and key findings:
  - Phase One: Scoping Review
  - Phase Two: Qualitative Study
- Conclusions



# Background and Rationale

## Work disability

- is a “worldwide major public health problem” (Loisel and Anema, 2013)
- In Canada, people with disabilities
  - Have lower employment rate (59 v 80%)
  - More likely to live in poverty
  - where employed, are more likely to
    - Make less
    - Work part-time
  - Where unemployed, 40% have ‘potential to work’

## Consequences

### For individuals:

- Financial
- Mental health concerns
- Lack of social support
- Loss of control
  
- Worsening health
- Relationship strain
- Chronic disability

### For society:

- cost of income support = \$30+ billion per year

# Travel to and within work

## Work Mobility:

- creates opportunity for employers and job-seekers
- can be extended and complex
- is increasing with growth in precarious work and mobile sectors
- is associated with significant mental and physical strain
- is an integral part of accessing, carrying out and sustaining a job

RQ: How do existing policies and supports related to accessibility and transportation support or impede the work mobility of persons with physical disabilities?

### **Work Mobility**

spectrum from home-based work to cross-country travel, to and within work

### **Physical disability**

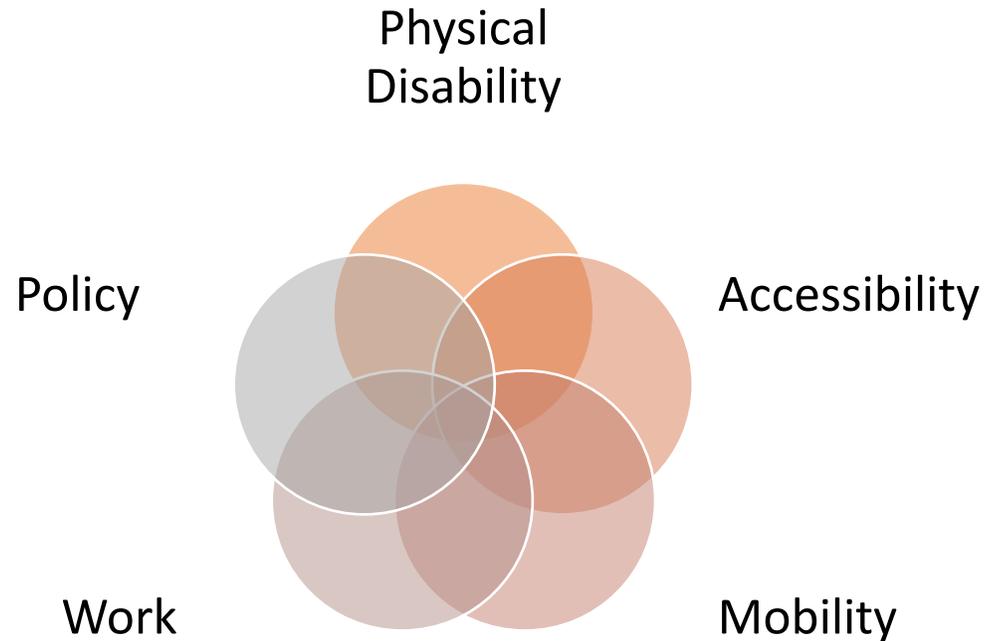
- limit mobility directly or indirectly
- work and non work-related
- continuous, intermittent or episodic

### **Social model of disability**

“the situational outcome of the interaction between an individual with body or functional differences and a specific physical and social environment.”  
(Fougeyrollas, 2002)

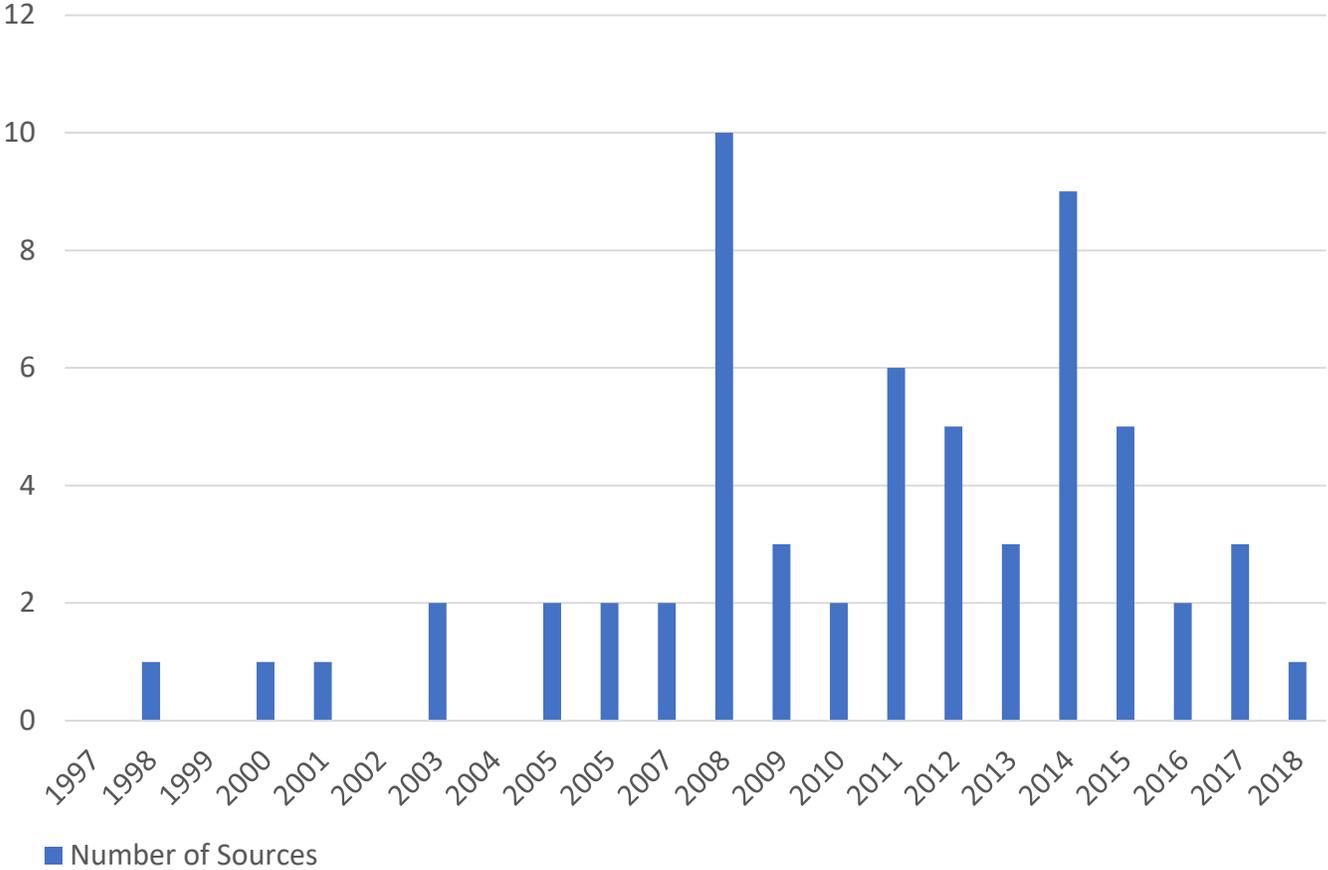
# Phase One: Scoping review

- Map out relevant literature
  - English sources
  - 1997 to early 2018
- Generate inventory of issues

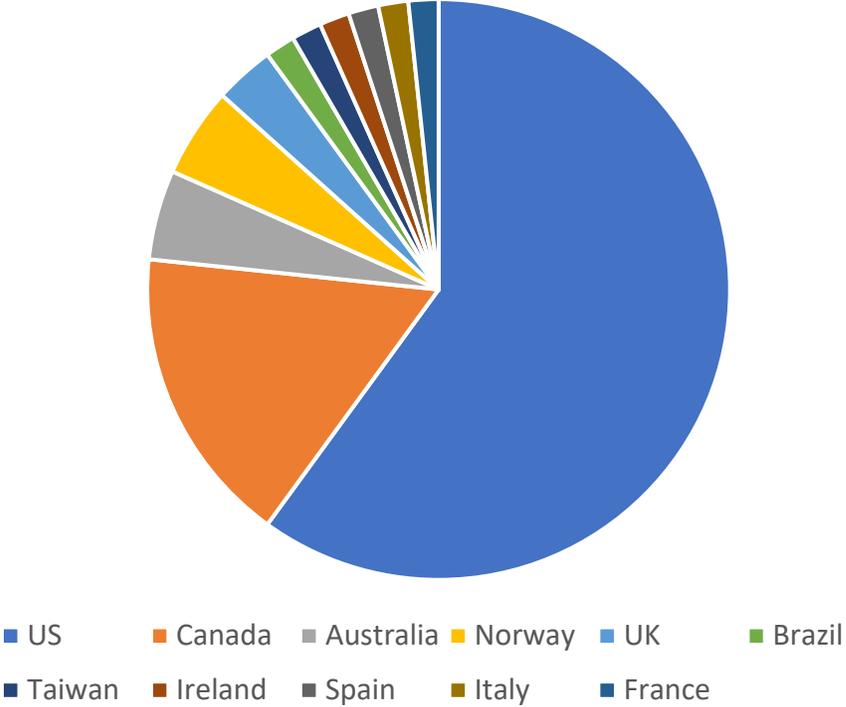


# 60 Sources

Number of Sources by Year



Number of Sources by Country

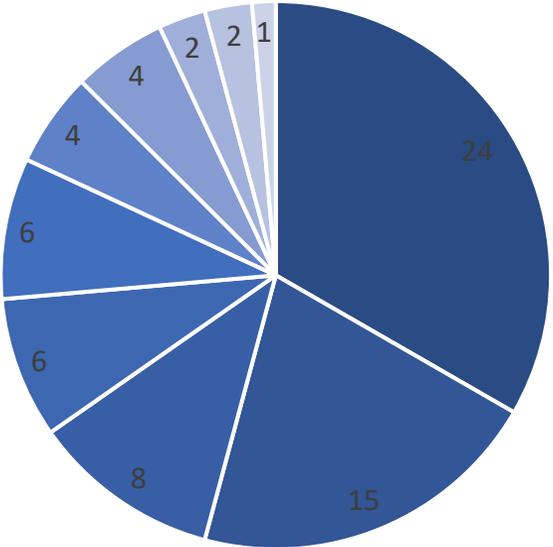


# Disability Categories

- 49 sources referred generally to “physical disabilities” or “mobility limitations”
- Eleven specified type:
  - Mobility device or Assistive Technology users (4)
  - Visually impaired (3)
  - Hearing impaired (1)
  - Multiple Sclerosis (1)
  - Cerebral Palsy (1)
  - Spinal Cord Injury (1)

60 Sources

Number of sources by policy, program or issue



- Workplace Accommodation
- Factors Affecting Work Experience
- Employment Services/Programs
- Universal Design
- Age-Related Transitions
- Claims/Experiences of Discrimination
- Return to Work

# Key topic: Factors affecting work participation

Factors that support labour engagement:

- strong self-advocacy and resilience
- job-specific training
- networking
- supports
- **effective workplace accommodations**

Factors that impede labour engagement:

- **transportation related challenges**
- **difficulties with workplace accommodations**
- stigma and assumptions about what people with disabilities can and cannot do in the workplace
- **employer fears about the costs of accommodation**

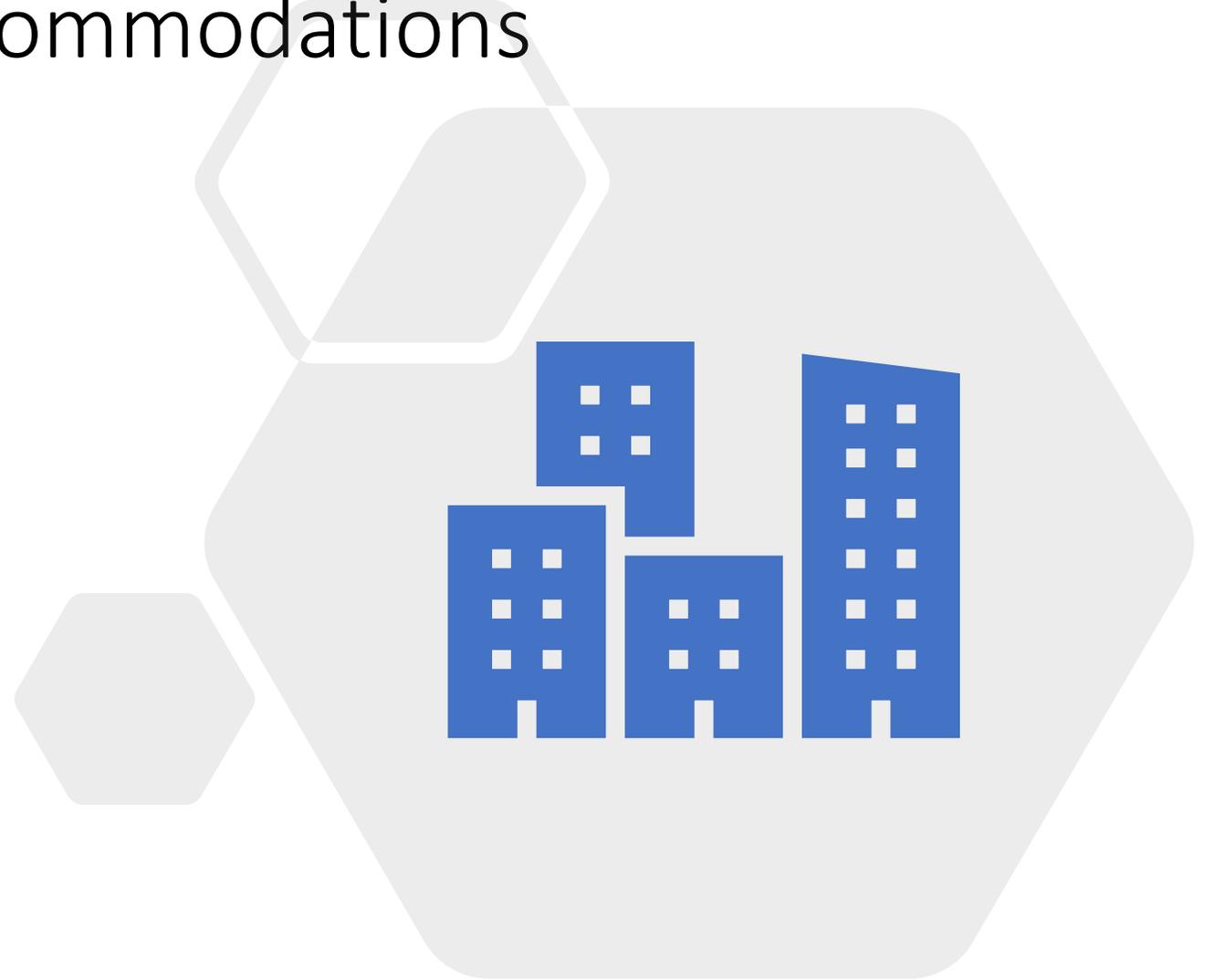
# Key topic: Workplace Accommodations

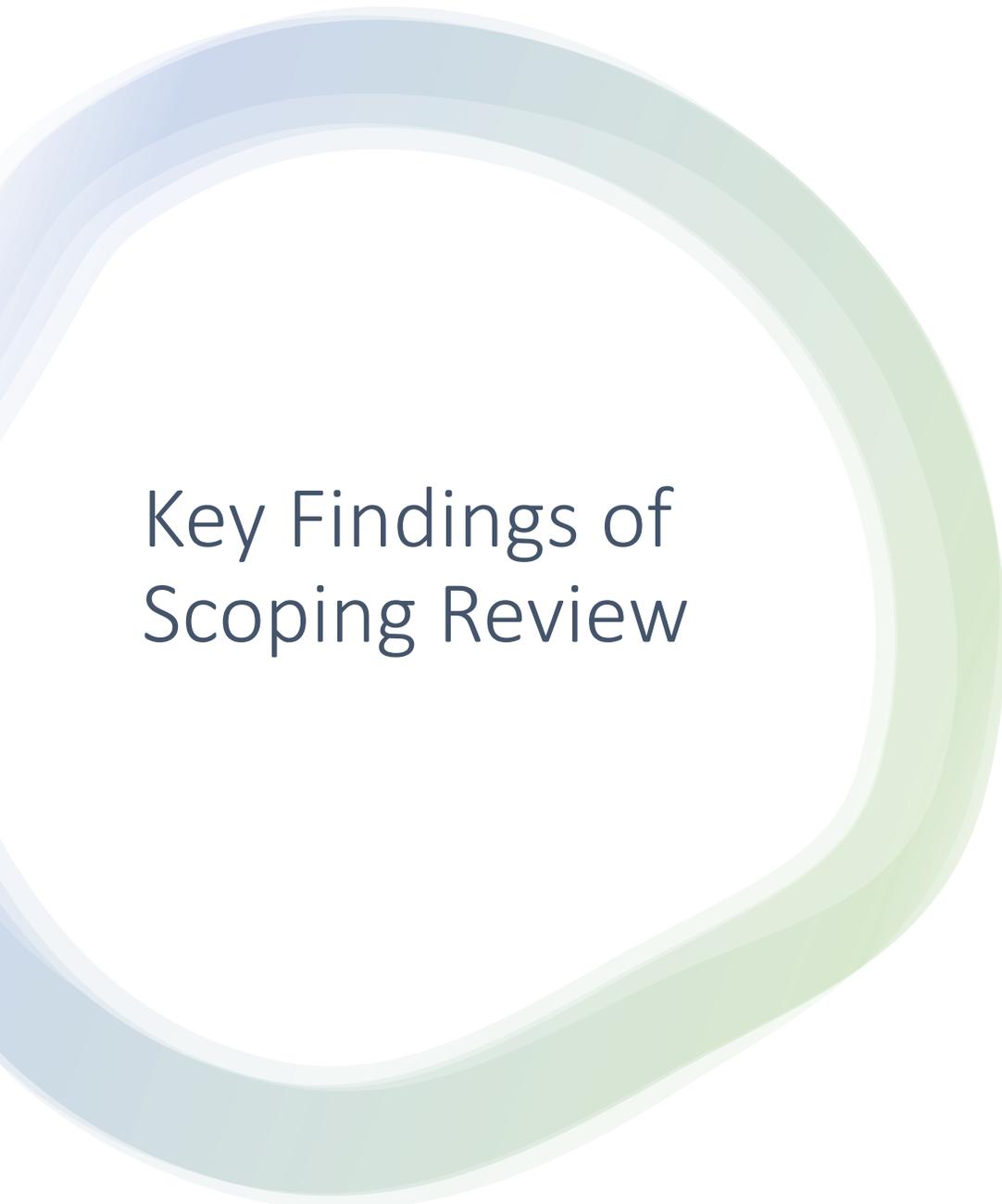
Relevant to work mobility:

- work scheduling
- work from home and telework
- supported commutes (paid, carpool)

BUT

- focus on barriers inside the workplace
- transportation-related accommodations are least likely to be granted
  - personal responsibility
  - unreasonable, undue hardship for employers





## Key Findings of Scoping Review

- Limited research explicitly examining work mobility of people with disabilities
- Most research on workplace accommodations, which focuses on barriers inside the workplace
- Transportation-related issues framed as a matter of personal responsibility

# Phase Two: Qualitative Study



## Theory

- Grounded in structural interactionist perspective

## Methods: Critical interpretive and classic legal analysis

- 12 interviews: 5 people with disabilities; 6 key informants
- Document analysis of relevant Human Rights and Workers' Compensation Policy, Legislation and Case Law
- Analysis: iterative, multiple interpretive techniques



# Key Finding #1

Work-related travel is taken for granted, not adequately accounted for in policy and practice for:

1. Injured Workers
2. People with non work-related disabilities

# 1. Injured workers: Compensation Policy and Practice

- I. Lack of support for transportation to work through RTW process
- II. Travel challenges related to RTW process

# I. Lack of support for transportation to work

Transportation costs covered for medical, rehabilitation, and LMR

But, little to no support beyond ESRTW though still disabled

Does not account for cost and effort of travel to work

## WC transportation support

What transportation supports are provided under workers compensation to support return to work?

*“P: very very little. Um, the board kind of, like at the end of a work transition plan and then the deeming, the board sees itself as out of it. And any kind of accommodations around transportation or even like modifications to workplace that are needed to support somebody’s mobility needs, that’s the employer’s responsibility, the employer’s duty to accommodate. Where the board sees their responsibility is ensuring that worker can make it to the work transition program. Say there’s somebody in the north living in a little town and they have actually got a community college program but its two hours away, they can’t commute every day, the board will pay for their accommodation and transportation expenses while they’re attending that program, but once um the program is over, the board is out of there” (K104)*

## Cost and effort of travel to work

*“ But the accommodations and the difficulty and the fatigue that may be occurring during transportation is completely ignored. Um, because that’s not compensable you see? So, their [WC] mindset is what is compensable? And what is compensable is the hours at work. But, in terms of real working ability, in terms of a holistic point of view, the transportation to work is part of your daily fatigue. That’s not considered at all. It should be.” (KI03)*

# Cost and effort of travel to work

*“say for single parents, they got multiple drop-offs and they don’t consider that...I think they forget that sometimes that the injured worker is injured. So, to get everybody packed up and get them out of the house and to make that first stop, they’re wore out, right?” (K102)*



The trouble with covering  
*some* transportation

Supported travel to assessment appointments

vs

Self-managed travel to work



## II. Travel challenges related to RTW process

- Modified work requiring extended travel
- RTW arrangements conflict with transportation
- Travel implications of deeming and associated labour market boundaries

# Travel trouble with modified work

*“...Like I was pretty well stranded, I could get a ride there and then be told that I would have to wait eight hours to come home and I am only supposed to do two hours work.” (PWD05)*

## Travel trouble with modified work

*“ It’s hard to put numbers on this stuff but I mean it’s very frequent that transportation is the main barrier to return to work. Because both workers, the employer will ask them to go back to a place farther, the other work station, farther away. But also just workers aren’t able to use the means they used to use to get to work or there’s a new shift required or something right so they no longer, their son won’t take them anymore because...or they can’t take the bus with the injury because they have to do this and they can’t do that and they don’t want to ask for a seat and the board’s like “that’s not our fault”, like “if you can, if you can do this you know you should be able to take the bus, like there’s no reason...” So transportation is huge.” (K105)*

# Deeming and labour market boundaries

*“So they deem me to have a job I do not have, you know. They base their calculations based on work that I haven’t and I will not have, which is ridiculous...there’s no way I can work a 40-hour a week job. I know it, right? Uh, I have to be careful not to crash.” (PWD01)*

# Deeming and labour market boundaries

In terms of deeming, are there limits around the length of commute a worker would be expected to take on?

*“P: Um...at the tribunal there certainly is. Yeah. And that’s ill-defined. But if it is a big centre and if it’s like a job like customer service rep which is such a broad category, the tribunal would also say well I’m sure there’s customer service rep jobs closer to your home in a city the size of Toronto. You can just go here and that would be an hour’s commute and that’s normal Toronto commute. They do look at commuting patterns prior to the injury to sort of assess what’s normal. So if you were commuting an hour or two prior to your injury, they would say then you’re used to that, that’s normal for you.” (K104)*

# 1. Persons with disabilities

- I. Accessible transit may be available but with restrictions and challenges
- II. Supports affected by income

# Accessible Transit



## Variation in Availability

“in [home town], they don’t have an accessible taxi so when I was living at home, my mom and I were getting very frustrated with each other cause she didn’t want to bring me everywhere and I didn’t want to stay home so I would be like “mom I needs to go to a job interview” or something” (PWD02)

“I was offered a job in [adjacent community], but [accessible bus] did not go out there and I could not afford a taxi to and from work.” (PWD02)



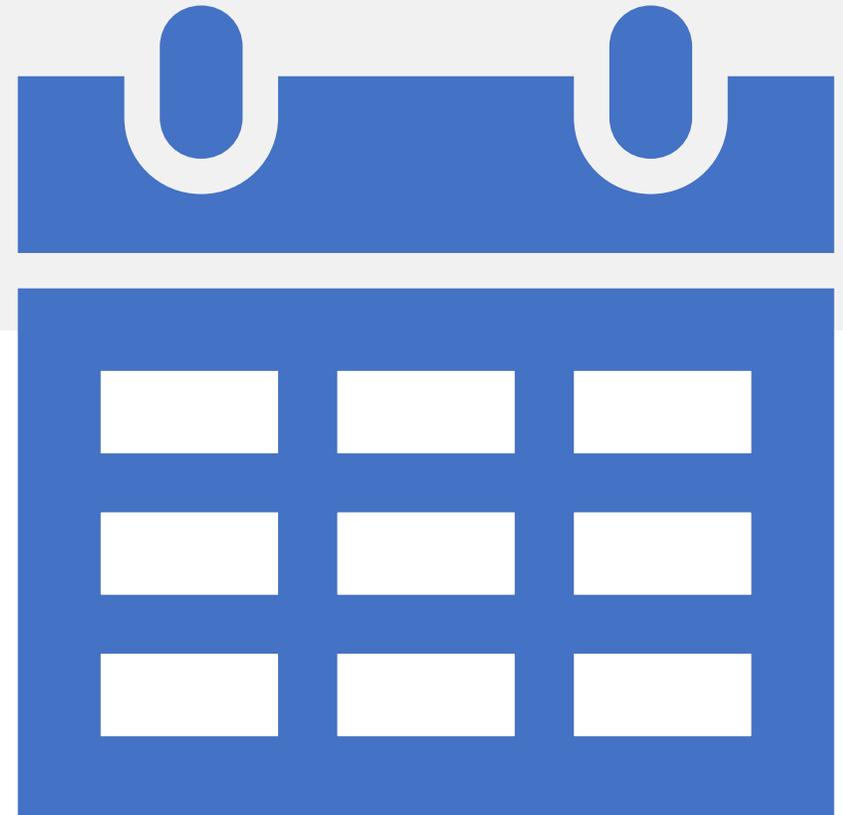
# Accessible Transit

Scheduling requirements, inflexibility, and unreliability

*“P: It used to be 90 minutes cancellation notice, now it’s 45. But, once you call to book it, I spose you gotta go. That’s the problem with it. I make the booking and then I am forced to go cause I don’t have the energy to cancel. You always have to be planning. Like I have to be looking into my fridge and figuring out when I am going to run out of milk.”*

*“Snow days are the worst. If you get a snow day I’m texting my boss like “can you tell me if it’s a snow day because I have like 45 minutes to tell someone”.*

*“I had the bus booked for 8:30 today and they didn’t come till 9 o’clock. I guess it’s reliable most of the time, but sometimes they’re terribly slow. Like I had my [therapy] appointment at 2:30, and I didn’t get in till 4:05 and my pick up was for 4:30. When the doctor finished he’s like “any questions?” and I was like no, I really have to go, and I ran out. Ended up the bus was running an hour behind. I was so stressed about being no-showed.” (PWOD2)*



# Threat of losing means-tested supports

## Threat of losing supports impedes labour engagement

*“I only took the receptionist job because I thought it would be a good entry level job but like you could be there forever cause you already have everything worked out and then when you do get a job, that impacts your finances which impacts your supports. I had a job interview and it was for 6 months for half of like \$50,000. But where I was living at the time, they said if you make more than \$33,000 annually you gotta move out. And I was like move out for a 6 month job? That’s a bit stressful.”*

*“I had a work term and I made \$18 an hour for 13 weeks and lost all my supports - my walker getting fixed, my wheelchair and I had someone coming in to help me clean my room and get my laundry done and help me get my groceries. All through the community support program. I lost it all. And it wasn’t like, oh it’ll end in a month. It was like, yeah, you lost your supports, now you gotta set up payroll and pay for the 20 hours you already used.” (PWD02)*

# Key Finding #2

Critical role of informal supports

System expectations of 'family' support

Workers' reliance on 'family' support

# System expectations of informal supports

## Workers' compensation supports

*“For LMR, like for retraining and for medical appointments, for a while, they just like hated giving out things like taxi chits. So I had these fights with this case manager who was like “he’s the bread winner, his wife should drive him, what’s the problem.” Cause they didn’t want to pay taxis and they wanted his wife to change her shifts to take him to his training.” (KI05)*

*“It’s not like, you know, they’re giving this [transportation support]. Like, if an injured worker can’t make it there say, they’re a one car household, see it all the time, the wife goes off with the car and the husband’s home and he can’t get to his physio, uh, we have to, we have to fight for that support. Like this should be a given.” (KI02)*

# System expectations of informal supports

## Supports for persons with disabilities

“ Home support services include the provision of personal and behavioural supports, household management and respite at the minimum level to maintain individual independence. **Home support services are intended to supplement, not replace, service provided by the individual family and/or support network.**” (Health and Community Services, Government of NL)

*“the social worker is like, “do you have any informal supports who can help you?” They use that to reduce your home support hours so you gotta be like, “I got nobody.” They’ll ask about my biological family, and then they turned to my roommate, who I just met. And they they’ll turn to my co-worker and I was like “You can’t ask your boss to help you put your orthotic on!” When the social worker comes you got to take down all your pictures!” (PWD02)*

## Workers' reliance on family supports

*“P: with my van and everything it’s fine, previous to that I was using [early accessible transit] and at that time there was no accessible motorbus or accessible cabs. So there were a lot more challenges then obviously. Like having my own van opens up so much more.*

*DH: How did you come to get your van?*

*P: I found out about the um government grant that would cover up to \$25,000 of modifying a vehicle, and my dad at the time had a van, because this is how I would get home. He had a van so he had manual ramps and he’d come to town, he’d pick me up. When I found out about this grant, I approached dad. So I got the grant and he gave me his van and we got it modified. It was a couple thousand dollars more than the grant, which we had to cover off. And the van we already had, so.” (PWD04)*

## Workers' reliance on 'family' supports

*Like, me and my current supervisor, I've known her for two years and I try to think about the one moment when we became really close and I can't think of any cause it just happened so quickly. It was like one moment I knew her and I was volunteering with her. Next moment I was employed with her and a moment after that we were going to the farmer's market. I guess when you got a disability you get good at networking cause if there's people who can help you survive...(PWD02)*



## Conclusions

- Work mobility is taken for granted
- Transportation to work is largely considered a personal responsibility
- Work disability policies and supports overlook work mobility needs and challenges
- 'Family' plays a critical role in work mobility of persons with disabilities



# What's next?

Work to develop and foster understanding of:

- What it takes (effort, resources, family) for workers with mobility impairments to get to work
- How these workers can be better supported through supported commutes, scheduling accommodations, work-from-home
- How transportation and related supports complement or conflict with one another and with the workers' circumstances and informal supports
- Transportation to work as a necessary part of doing one's work

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Questions or comments?

[dhowse@mun.ca](mailto:dhowse@mun.ca)