



Moving Forward Together: Disability and Work in Canada (DWC) Initiative

How this Strategy was Developed

Initiatives to Develop Comprehensive Strategies on Disability and Work

By the 1970s, it had become clear to many in the disability community, government and civil society that, despite goodwill and a multitude of programs, many people with disabilities were still not able to enter the workforce. Since the 1970s, attempts have been made at both national and provincial levels to develop broad initiatives and strategies to improve supports, employment levels and sustainable employment among people with disabilities. Although these efforts led to progress, Canada still does not have a comprehensive strategy on disability and work.

An important development over the past two decades has been the growing interest among academic researchers in disability issues. Many issues around disability and work, previously studied very little in Canada, have received significant research attention. With the support of federal funding through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, many of these researchers along with community organizations from across Canada joined together in 2013 to form the Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy (CRWDP). CRWDP goals include providing a forum for within- and cross-provincial and national dialogue on challenges and opportunities for improving the Canadian work disability policy system and building capacity for research and knowledge mobilization on the topic of work disability policy and labour-market engagement of people with disabilities.

Process that Led to Development of this Draft Strategy

In 2017, CRWDP, the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW), Inclusion Newfoundland (InclusionNL) and the Ontario Network of Injured Workers' Groups (ONIWG) came together to support the development of a pan-Canadian strategy for disability and work. We are calling this collaboration the Disability and Work in Canada (DWC) Steering Committee.

The DWC Steering Committee began its work by organizing a conference in Ottawa in November 2017. The conference, titled "[Disability and Work in Canada: Success and Challenges of Canada's First 150 Years, Developing a Vision and Strategy for the Future](#)," gathered together people with disabilities, disability organizations, government representatives, labour/unions, employers and service providers. The main objective of the conference was to lay the foundation for the development of a pan-Canadian strategy.



The conference was an important event, with strong representation from people with disabilities. Discussions among conference participants included an endorsement of the recommendation from keynote speaker Michael Prince, Lansdowne Professor of Social Policy at the University of Victoria, to shift the strategy’s emphasis from “reasonable accommodation” to an approach focused on inclusion. The discussions also identified many elements needed for a holistic and collaborative approach to disability and employment. They included the development, adoption and/or promotion of:

- a holistic approach based on human rights,
- a business case for employment of people with disabilities,
- inclusive public education and supports for children and youth with disabilities,
- transition planning and employment preparation for young adults with disabilities,
- income, benefit and employment supports that are flexible and portable,
- employment income integrated with disability benefits to maximize incentives to work,
- inclusive recruitment, retention and promotion practices,
- on-the-job training and internship opportunities,
- flexible on-the-job supports and accommodations,
- employer tools, training and supports to foster disability confidence,
- modelling of best practices in employment of people with disabilities among key stakeholders in the public and private sectors, and
- champions for disability employment and work to collaboratively build societal awareness and support.

Detailed information from the November 2017 conference, including videos and presentation slides, is available at <https://www.crowdp.ca/en/national-conference-disability-and-work-canada>.

Following the conference, the observations and recommendations of the participants were consolidated into themes, which were then used to help shape the pillars and related key initiatives included in this draft strategy. The DWC Steering Committee also undertook a review of all provincial and territorial strategies around disability and work. The strategies identified in the review that is available as a separate document, provide a rich source of ideas in the development of a pan-Canadian strategy.

The next activity in the strategy’s development was a policy roundtable, including senior federal and provincial government and workers’ compensation officials, held in June 2018 in Gatineau, Quebec. The roundtable focused on the vision and pillars of a pan-Canadian strategy, and on ensuring that the strategy would work for all levels of government. Summary from 2018 Policy Roundtable is available at <https://www.crowdp.ca/en/dwc-past-events>.



The first draft of the strategy was circulated prior to the Disability and Work Conference that took place in Ottawa on December 4-5, 2018. At the conference, panelists commented on the strategy through their lens as a member of one of the following panels: Provincial Strategies, Lived Experience; Employers; Service Providers; Unions; Federal-Provincial Interface; Monitoring and Evaluation, Mental Health and the Workplace; and Small Business and Disability. Conference delegates also discussed and provided feedback on the draft strategy, including the process for moving forward.

Detailed information from the December 2018 conference, including videos and presentation slides, is available at <https://www.crwdp.ca/en/disability-and-work-canada-national-conference-2018>.

On May 28, 2019, DWC Steering Committee held a second Policy Roundtable on Pan-Canadian Strategy for Disability and Work. Policy Roundtable participants discussed three areas of particular relevance to government policy:

- How governments can help support employers
- Fostering a client-friendly, coherent, easy-to-navigate and inclusive array of supports to individuals
- Developing an outcomes framework, a monitoring/tracking system and a repository of resources

Summary from 2019 Policy Roundtable is available at <https://www.crwdp.ca/en/dwc-past-events>.

Following the December 2018 Disability & Work in Canada conference and the Policy Roundtable, the DWC Steering Committee conducted an extensive pan-Canadian engagement and consultation phase in January – June 2019. The main objective for this phase was to engage and consult a broad range of organizations and individuals, especially those not involved in previous engagement, to obtain their input on the current draft strategy. Two main vehicles were used to conduct engagement and consultation: an online survey, and one-on-one and group consultation sessions. Priority was given to consultations with people with diverse lived experiences of disability.

The feedback from the December 2018 conference, the survey and consultation sessions was then consolidated and analysed, and served as a basis for strategy revision prior to the upcoming third annual conference in Ottawa (December 4 & 5, 2019). The current consultation report describes the findings from the consultation and engagement phase of Disability & Work in Canada initiative, and provides details on strategy revisions based on this feedback.