Policy Roundtable on Disability and Work in Canada

Developing a Vision and Strategy for the Future

Summary of the Roundtable

Held June 26th, 2018

Prepared by: Ron Saunders, Alec Farquhar, Maureen Haan, Kathy Hawkins, Steve Mantis, Kathy Padkapayeva, Emile Tompa, Monica Winkler

Introduction

In November 2017 a consortium[1] 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." From this conference, high level observations were solidified into six themes, which shaped the pillars for discussion going forward. Subsequently, the consortium convened a policy roundtable on June 26th in Gatineau, Quebec to continue development of the vision and strategy for increasing employment of people with disabilities, and ensure the strategy would work for all levels of government. Senior federal and provincial policy officials participated. There will be further engagement with a broad range of stakeholders over the next several months, leading up to a conference in December 2018 that will focus on a discussion of a draft vision and strategy, and on the process for moving forward.

The goals of the policy roundtable were as follows:

- To identify key elements for the vision and strategy and how to frame these to maximize buy-in from all levels of government.
- To provide a forum for dialogue about challenges and opportunities for moving forward on the vision and strategy.
- To advise on the process of further engagement with stakeholders.

To ensure a common understanding of key terms and concepts, roundtable participants were provided with the following definitions:

>*Vision*: What we want the world to look like in the coming years. Typically framed as a high-level outcome.

>*Strategy*: High level overview of initiatives planned to achieve the vision.

>*Pillars*: Key areas to be covered in the strategy.

>*Activities*: Specific initiatives under each pillar of the strategy.

Background presentations

There were several presentations by members of the steering committee of the consortium to help set the stage for the discussion.

Emile Tompa**,** Co-Director of the Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy, provided a **recap of key ideas from the November 2017 Disability and Work in Canada conference**. Highlights of Emile's presentation included:

---

[1] The Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy (CRWDP), the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW), the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups (ONIWG) and InclusionNL.

- Drawing on the presentation of Michael Prince at the conference, we need to shift emphasis from "reasonable accommodation" to an approach focused on inclusion.
- A holistic and collaborative approach was promoted by virtually all speakers at the conference.
  - 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
  - Inclusive recruitment, retention and promotion practices
  - On-the-job training and internship opportunities
  - Flexible on-the-job supports and accommodations
  - Employer supports and training
  - Key stakeholders (public sector, service providers, champions) setting examples of good practice
- Insights from the breakout groups at the conference included:
  - Adopt a holistic approach based on human rights.
  - Develop an income supplement strategy that protects benefits for workers when they can and want to work.
  - Unbundle income, benefits and employment supports to have these services available separately rather than only in a package. This will assist people with disabilities in qualifying for programs, that when combined, can provide better quality of life and work supports.
  - Identify champions: people and employers who set good examples.
  - Develop and promote "the business case" and tools related to recruitment, retention, and career advancement.
  - Develop a toolbox of supports for employers.

Steve Mantis (Chair, Research Action Committee, Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups) and Maureen Haan (CEO, Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work) presented two **preliminary options for a vision statement**:

Option 1: Three-part vision (at the individual, workplace and societal levels)

People with disabilities have the supports they need to participate fully in the workforce, and employers are equally supported to include them.

A culture of inclusion of people with disabilities is the norm in both public and private organizations across Canada.

There is a societal expectation that people with disabilities have the opportunity to realize their potential to contribute.

Option 2: One vision statement to encompass everything

> People with disabilities have fair opportunities for meaningful careers, grounded in an inclusive culture in workplaces and a comprehensive, co-ordinated system of social protections.

Feedback on the vision statement is outlined in the next section of this summary.

Ron Saunders (Adjunct Scientist, Institute for Work & Health) outlined a proposed set of **key pillars for a strategy to achieve the vision,** recognizing that they are all inter-connected. These key pillars were identified from the Disability and Work Conference in 2017.

- Income support
- Employment supports for people with disabilities and employers
- Navigation/coordination of supports
- Workplace design
- Recruitment
- Culture change

Alec Farquhar (Chair, Engagement, Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy) outlined a preliminary **process for engaging stakeholders on the development of the vision and strategy.** Elements of the proposed process include:

- Draft a high-level strategy document following the policy roundtable (summer 2018).
- Gather feedback from key stakeholders (fall 2018).
- Complete draft of strategy document to be prepared for discussion at national conference to be held in early December 2018.
- From 2019 and beyond, ongoing work in support of the strategy, including research, development of tools for employers, and policy development

Lori Sterling, the Deputy Minister of Labour, outlined the **recently introduced federal accessibility legislation**, Bill C-81, and spoke about UN meetings ahead of the UN Global Disability Summit.

Brainstorming ideas for the vision statement and the pillars

Participants shared their thoughts on and suggestions for the draft vision statement. Highlights of these ideas are as follows:
- Inclusion should be a key aspect of the vision—idea of equity in opportunity.
- Vision statement should be short, powerful, aspirational, ambitious, pithy and meaningful to a lay person.
- Incorporate the idea that everyone benefits when people with disabilities are included.
- Use language that will resonate with employers.

- Key focus should be on the workplace—for workplaces to be inclusive—instead of focusing on how to accommodate the individual employee.
- Consider adding a rationale (which could be separate from the vision statement). The "why" is important. Could also add objectives, i.e., keep vision statement short but could add supplementary text with more detail.
- Be clear about the meaning of terms used in the vision statement, e.g., what is meant by "culture"?
- Keep in mind the idea of pathways to employment and career development.

Suggested vision statements included:
- Canadians with disabilities are fully included in work.
- Canadian workplaces are fully inclusive, where people with disabilities have the same opportunities and choices as others.

Brainstorming ideas for the pillars of the strategy

Ideas for the framing of the key pillars of the strategy included the following:

- Consider reducing the number of pillars to three or four.
- Health benefits are linked to income supports. People sometimes stay on supports in order to maintain access to health benefits.
- People need to get information from a trusted source when they make decisions about employment, but often find it complicated to locate this information. Many people get their information from others in the community versus "official" sources.
- Recruitment, retention and advancement are all important. Employment supports often focus on just getting a job. What happens afterwards is also very important.
- We need to talk about the combined impact of supports/benefits. Access to needed supports is not just a matter of improving navigability/coordination of the array of support programs (though that is important), but also about re-examining the system to simplify it and ensure that the different programs relate to each other in a coherent way. Need a more client-friendly system.
- Consider including supports for employers as a separate pillar, or at least giving this explicit attention in the pillars.
- Supports should be individualized, flexible, portable within lifespan, portable among provinces. Technology can be a vital enabler and needs to be portable.
- Strategy should incorporate the idea of designing workplaces to be inclusive.
- Partnerships are vital (beyond just coordination of programs). Could have a pillar, "strengthening networks and partnerships."
- Getting to employment is often a path that involves several steps including adequate housing, social support and skill development, and accessible education.
- Strategy should focus on how to achieve desired outcomes rather than how to address problems. Then can think about how to measure progress/success.
- Strategy should incorporate principles of transparency, accountability and flexibility.

- Could structure pillars along the lines of the three-part option for the vision. That is, keep the vision short and integrated by having pillars at the level of the individual, the workplace, and society.
- Two specific proposals for pillars were as follows:
  - **Attitude** (cultural change, perceptions, inclusiveness);
    Inclusive workplaces (design, technologies,…);
    Access to supports for the individual (dignity, respect, coordination, portability, health; also recognized need for supports to employers);
    Partnerships.

  - **Enabling environment/factors;**
    Tackling the disincentives (to work and to hire);
    Capacity building (individuals, employers, communities, training, etc.).

Lessons from past and current government initiatives

Roundtable participants shared examples of successes and challenges that might inform the development of the strategy. Some of the concepts/principles that emerged from this discussion were as follows:

- Moving away from a medical model of disability.
- Considering how supports to people with disabilities relate to the broader social support system.
- Helping people navigate the support system so that they can access available supports.
- Including people with lived experience in the design of programs.
- Including employers.
- Addressing systemic disincentives to participate in the workforce or return to work.
- Providing supports that are portable and sustainable.
- Fostering partnerships across stakeholders and service providers.
- Providing evidence based incentives/supports to employers to enhance the business case for employment of people with disabilities.

Small group discussions on the strategy: ideas for key activities to achieve the vision

Three small groups were convened and each assigned to suggest high-level initiatives for two of the six pillars in the preliminary list of pillars outlined on page 3, above (recognizing that the pillars may be framed differently after the roundtable and through further consultation with stakeholders). Highlights of those suggestions are outlined below. Each group was also asked for ideas on how to measure success and to suggest which stakeholders need to be involved in the development of the strategy. Highlights of those ideas are grouped together.

Employment supports; recruitment, retention

- Create a repository/database of initiatives that have worked well under headings such as recruitment, accommodation, workplace design, technology.
- Provide supports for people with disabilities to disclose needs.
- Provide a portable "passport" of employment supports for people with disabilities.
- Promote inclusive job/career fairs, with a resource centre for people with disabilities, and education/support to employers before the fair.
- Provide evidence-based incentives for employers for hiring and retention.
- Leverage disability-confident employers as champions.
- Tailor programs and supports to the size and sector of the employer.
- Build on pre-existing talents of workers.

Income supports (including health benefits); navigation/coordination/client-centred system
- Ensure that income support is sufficient to keep people out of poverty. Keep in mind that employment income will fluctuate over time.
- Address the stigma associated with disability and the mindset of some program officials that they need to guard against being overly generous to avoid growth in caseload.
- Need the political will to address fragmentation of the system.
- Address issue of disincentives and ensure employment is a viable option, e.g., avoid high marginal tax rates; increase earnings exemptions to encourage work.
- Look at eligibility rules of the different programs and promote an inclusive approach to eligibility.
- Consider idea of a basic income for people with disabilities.
- Provide more portable benefits, e.g., if a person with a disability goes to work, they lose their home supports because cannot transfer your home supports to work.
- Provide help to people to plan their paths and navigate the system based on where they want to go next.
- Look at what is working well in existing programs.

Culture change; workplace design
- Study how people "see" disability.
- Have policies and procedures in workplaces that allow the direct supervisor to quickly respond to needs for accommodation/adjustments.
- Build inclusion/responsiveness into performance management for supervisors.
- Promote the concept that disability is based on the environment, not the person.
- Communicate how everyone benefits from universal design. Able-bodied is a temporary condition.
- Identify/communicate the business case for employers.
- Providing a pharma-care program would reduce risks for employers to hire people with disabilities.
- Create a centre of experts on the built environment to foster inclusive design.
- Recognize that "rights" may collide and consider how to address competing rights/interests.

Who needs to be involved in developing the strategy?
All stakeholders need to be involved. These include:

- People with lived experience;
- Employers;
- Unions;
- Community organizations;
- Research organizations;
- Employer associations (E.g., Chamber of Commerce, Canadian Council of Chief Executives);
- Governments – federal, provincial and municipal; departments/agencies responsible for income support, health, industry/economic development, finance, housing, education, statistics; forums that bring together representatives of different levels of government;
- Insurers;
- Support groups for people with specific disabilities;
- Health-care providers; associations promoting health;
- Faith communities; and
- Education/training institutions/providers.

How to measure success?
- Develop an outcomes framework and an outcomes-based tracking system. This should include system-level indicators and both quantitative and qualitative indicators.
- Collect data in a way that facilitates research, including baseline data on the indicators.
- Identify politically-saleable outcomes to measure that maximize buy-in and engagement.
- Tell stories of success.
- Possible measures include:
  - Percentage who are employed;
  - Job satisfaction;
  - Duration of work;
  - Percentage of people with disabilities above the poverty line;
  - Marginal effective tax rates; and
  - Perceptions of clients about adequacy of income supports and other supports.

Closing remarks

Steve Mantis (Chair, Research Action Committee, Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups) provided **closing thoughts based on key themes** of the roundtable:

- Start from inclusion, not from the individual.
- Ensure that indicators of success are identified at the outset and data are collected. We need to make sure initiatives are evidence-based.
- Measures of success must be robust and meaningful, for example, percentage of people with disabilities who rise above the poverty line; what happens after people leave support programs; are people moving forward in their careers; do people have more choice and more ability to live productive lives.
- There are issues and concerns about our income support systems.
- Changes are taking place in policies and programs.

- Trust has built up between the disability community and the policy community.
- Policy officials and governments want to listen and learn.
- All of society benefits from the inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Need to be innovative in adapting programs to be more client-centred.