



CRWDP Ontario Cluster Meeting on November 9th, 2018

On November 9th, the **2018 Ontario Cluster Meeting for the Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy (CRWDP)** was held in Toronto. The purpose of the **Ontario Cluster Meeting** was to engage experts in the field of work disability policy, including key stakeholders, the public, government and private sector in shaping a strategy to change the future of work for people with disabilities in Ontario.

The meeting started off with a summary of the CRWDP project given by Emile Tompa. Rebecca Gewurtz then gave a brief introduction to the formation of the three policy pods that were organized for the project: Income Support Policy, Right to Work, and Employers Capacity.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- How can employers act to implement business practices that ensure people with disabilities are able to gain secure, full-time and non-precarious employment that contributes to the business objectives in a productive and meaningful way?
- How does income replacement intersect with employment opportunities for people with disabilities?
- What are the systems in place for monitoring employment rights for those experiencing disabilities (“progressive realization”) and how can that be supported and improved (recognizing the Right to Work as found in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ratified by Canada in 2010)?)

The speakers for the meeting were John Stapleton, Monica Ackerman and Susan Hardie. They left us with many ideas about how they could engage in changing policy and practices to improve the employment and income situation of people with disabilities.



John Stapleton, Innovation fellow at the Metcalf Foundation, discussed the idea of Guaranteed Annual Income. Three key points were as follows:



1. Income security programs, with the exception of social assistance and some tax credits, are generally **work triggered**. Guaranteed income would be like old age security and child benefits in that it would not be work dependent.
2. Adequacy – Guaranteed income (or basic income) needs to be adequate. Currently \$55 million per year is spent on income supports for working aged adults between 18 and 65. Provincial social assistance is now worth the equivalent of only 32% of minimum wage, an historical low. ODSP benefits have dropped by 1% per year since 1993.
3. Time Limits – most programs currently have time limits but with guaranteed income there would be no time limit. The duration on income benefits for disability and other programs such as Worker's Compensation and veteran's benefits has also been shortening.

Going forward, the Poverty Reduction Strategy has two targets: 1) Reduce poverty rates by 20% in 2020, and 2) 50% by 2030.

As unemployment has gone down, social assistance has remained high. More people are working lower paying and precarious jobs and pay into EI but can't access it. Highly paid professionals pay into it and do not use it. Employment Insurance will be an issue going forward. It is currently a "sleeping giant" among us. For such a large program, there has been very little conversation about it. To reach the poverty reduction goals, we will need to start paying attention to EI.

Often there are complaints that there are too many people getting benefits or assistance, but we need to be careful about the evidence we provide. It needs to be accurate. Rather than saying the problem with the policy is the recipient, we should be saying the problem with the policy is the policy. We need to be careful in determining what conclusions the evidence leads to. For example, the links between low income rates for people on social assistance and the associated poor health need to be shown; research-based evidence is needed about where people with disabilities can find the new jobs in the wake of AI and other technologies. In addition, in the context of labor shortages in trades-based and other occupations, employer-demand for people with disabilities who are presently long-term unemployed must be stimulated.

Disability organizations and other equality-seeking groups should try to engage in EI reform and ODSP.

Key points:

- There needs to be conversation between the federal and provincial governments.
- There are a host of issues related to EI that need to be addressed.
- We need to ensure we are using relevant evidence.
- We need to track where the new jobs are.



- Governments have responsibilities in lowering the unemployment rate, and reducing low-quality employment and poverty among people with disabilities, which may include more and better job-training initiatives that are fully inclusive.

Monica Ackerman (Digital Accessibility Lead at Scotia Bank) provided a corporate perspective on employment and people with disabilities. She focused on three topics:

- *Foundations- The focus here is on building a foundation of inclusion through policy, practice, and action. Importantly, are there cracks in the foundation? Are people with disabilities not getting hired even though companies want to hire people with disabilities?*

There is a need within the corporate sector for companies to consider not only policy, but also the implications of policy for practice. For example, many companies outsource job accommodations. So an outsider will make recommendations for accommodations without understanding the work environment. A company may be committed to accommodating workers with disabilities, but they also need to ensure that the outsourced partner organization understands the company's ethos. A company must also understand its own "friction points" and how disability fits within a wider intersectionality frame. There may be cases where an accommodation recommendation comes into a company but then they are not able to implement it because it doesn't work with the systems in place. What needs to happen then is the company needs to think about the accommodation in the context of what is in place and how to make it work. In other words, the company needs to consider how to achieve systemic *and* attitudinal change while implementing policy. A beginning point is for companies to adopt a common language for fostering a rights-based mindset and for supporting an inclusive, accessible workplace for everyone.

- *Transitions- Several transitions need attention, such as the transition into the workplace, e.g., hiring and onboarding, and transitions within the workplace, e.g., retention and career development.*

People need to feel safe and free to disclose their need for accommodations from the beginning of their involvement with the company. For example, if individuals need to disclose their need for an accommodation so the company can take appropriate actions, there is also a need for accountability in the performance management of leaders, so they will create safe and inclusive workplaces. These kinds of expectations need to be made clear for all stakeholders. Accordingly, there may be several answers for why people do not disclose their need for accommodations. Most policy talks about accommodation as opposed to inclusion. You can provide an accommodation, but you have to make it work with the systems and processes in order to have successful outcomes.



- *Moving from intention to action*- It is helpful for the company to be involved in building a “talent pipeline” so talent can be brought to the attention of recruiters and managers who generally *are* looking for talent.

This process involves maximizing partnerships between businesses and disability organizations. For their part, the organizations need to understand business priorities and come to a common language in their dealings with businesses. One helpful strategy in this connection is sharing stories about successful employment, about how relevant and timely support has been put in place, and about what effective leadership looks like.

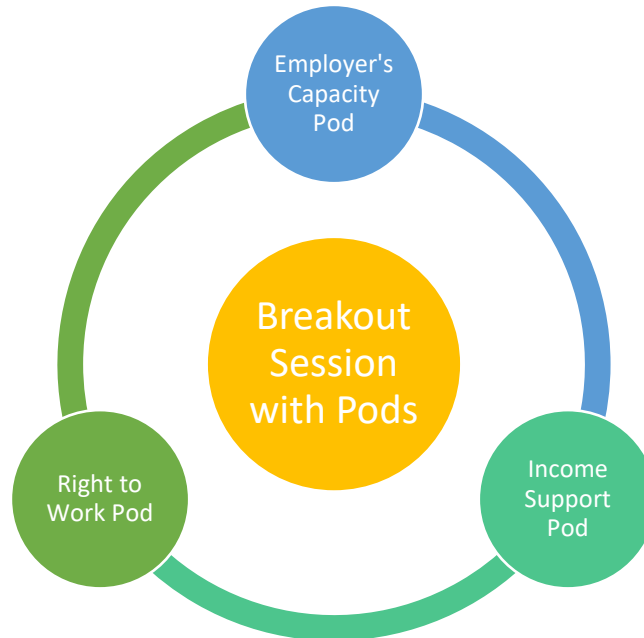
Susan Hardie is with the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies. She highlights that inclusive policy and practices are everyone’s responsibility and are about co-creating a more inclusive, supportive society for all. Susan asked participants to consider flexible workplace policies and practices, broader-level systemic interventions, and how the participants at the session might use their power to affect interventions for the more meaningful participation of persons with episodic disabilities in the labour market. Susan explored several dimensions of intersectionality and how systems and processes of domination and oppression interact with social categories to create experiences of discrimination and privilege based on gender, race, class, culture, age, ability and sexuality. Susan highlighted intersectionality principles articulated by Hankivsky (2014) to inform analyses and develop policy and practices.

These principles can assist in revealing the lived experiences of persons with disabilities inclusive of discrimination/oppression and opportunities to co-create system interventions with, and for, people with episodic disabilities. Two key actions discussed were:

- (1) Policies and practices need to establish the context that both informs society about episodic disabilities, and minimizes or eliminates barriers that people with episodic disability experience.
- (2) The importance of attending to how experiences of oppression and discrimination may be differentially experience depending on one’s social location. (i.e , sub-populations).



Break Out Policy Pods Session: Concerns & Suggestions for Action Strategy



Employer's Capacity Pod

- The business sections needs support to be on board with hiring Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) For example: job coaches who work with young adults with neurological disabilities. Thus, providing a way to give security to employers that the jobs will get completed. This can fulfill 2 needs- support employees, and ensure work done for employers.
 - Also need to talk the language of the business, understand the specific business, the ecosystem and level of business. They will ask “what’s in it for me”; cannot just tell them that people will stay longer or be more loyal.If you don’t understand the needs of business, it won’t work. This shifts from company to company and depending on industry. We have to start with why are trying to hire and retain employee’s w/disability.
 - These initiatives have to come from the top-down. Not effective to deal with HR or middle management alone as it will require pushing up hill.
- We really need to change government level policy to incentivize employers. Currently, employers can outsource for cheap labor. We need to incentivize in a way that is attractive for small businesses as well. Additionally, we need an accommodation funds for small businesses, as mandated by bill C81 thus, which doesn’t protect small businesses. Small business are the ones that can claim undue hardship.



- Horizontal training is needed to examine what employers need for talent.
 - For instance, . "I need someone with a business management degree", but see what qualifications they need that come in that degree, setup training for those skills, train employees or persons with disabilities to match those role requirements.
 - We need government partnerships so we have everyone at the table to give knowledge to horizontal training. This training should be contextual. But do we have the information to do the skills training/matching.
- Accommodations differ in every sector the reasons to accommodate students is different than reason for accommodating employees.
 - If we can identify needs of individuals, understand abilities, then we can work towards more flexible work. We also need to change our language and find out what employer needs.
- We shouldn't be focusing on creating new jobs for people with disabilities, but rather confront the realities that people face in the current jobs

Furthermore, we need a policy that mandates that one size does not fit all!

Income Support Pod

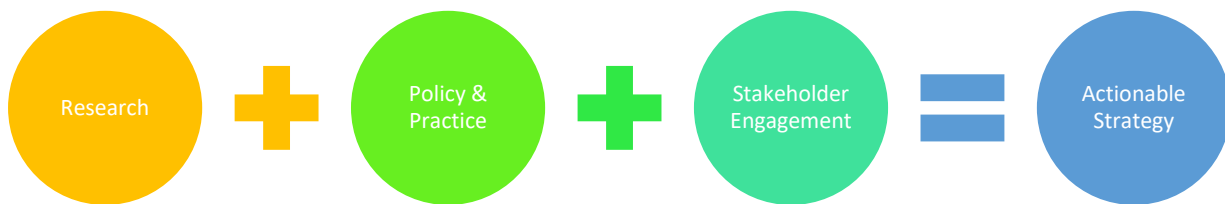
- Better coordination between poverty and basic income support
 - Pharmacare is important.
 - A key barrier to people getting off income support and getting employed is access to pharma and health services they need which is covered under provincial disability support programs.
- Do we actively prevent people from transitioning to employment from social assistance?
 - Being on social assistance can make you unable to work.
 - Possible solutions: Stable childcare, transportation, health benefits, and creating universal non-stigmatizing income security
 - Similar to OAS GIS and CBI.
 - Coordination between social assistance, employment insurance (EI), and Canada Worker's program. We need to consider worker benefits accessed through tax system is less stigmatizing but more complex.
 - Education and training need to be accessible, if we want secure and sustainable jobs for people
- Some Basic income needed for people w/disabilities who cannot work.
- Income security
 - The best social program is not a job - wages and demands, etc.
 - Move towards de-linking income support from employment.



The Right to Work Pod

- Working toward progressive realization
- Focus on employment experience: (1) Quality of work; (2) employer actions and inaction; (3) What is working and not working? Why?
- Pathways to unemployment and poverty
- Strategy/system needs to be simple, easy to do and inexpensive, that community believes in and sees the value of, and that helps engage employers more than currently.

How We Achieved Our Coordinated Strategy



Our Actionable Coordinated Strategy

