



Dynamics of Disability: New Results from the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability

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by

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INTRODUCTION

- Presentation draws upon findings from recent paper published by Statistics Canada on December 3, 2019.
- It makes use of newly added questions on the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) developed to capture “disability dynamics”.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Because deep-rooted stereotypes view disability as being continuous, unchanging, and permanent; and this view creates biases in assumptions made about people with disabilities.
- These biases, in turn, affect individual and societal attitudes and become embedded in programs, policies, and common practices – particularly those structured around the permanency and unchanging nature of disabilities.



DISABILITY CAN BE QUITE DYNAMIC FOR MANY PEOPLE

- The term “dynamic” is used here as a way to characterize disabilities that are changing or fluctuating in some way with different possible trajectories over time as opposed to those disabilities that tend to be more static and continuous.
- There is evidence going back nearly 30 years which indicates that the experience of disability can actually be quite dynamic for many people.

WHAT KIND OF EVIDENCE?

- This evidence is in the form of a) limited survey data, b) highly focussed studies of specific sub-populations, and c) rich anecdotal evidence.



DISABILITY DYNAMICS BY ANY OTHER NAME

- Over the years, many different approaches and labels have been used to describe those whose disabilities do not conform to the stereotype of being “static and continuous”
- What all these approaches have in common is that they view disability as something more dynamic than commonly thought.
- These dynamics have been described in different ways. Descriptions have often been somewhat vague, and operationalization of data for research has been particularly challenging.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE LABELS USED?

- Terms used to describe this “dynamic” group have included: progressive; degenerative; periodic; sporadic; intermittent; recurrent; fluctuating; and even “invisible”.
- The term that most in the audience will recognize, however, is “**episodic disability**”.

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EPISODIC DISABILITIES AND HUMA 2019

- More recently, the popular term for disabilities that do not conform to the stereotype has been “episodic”. The notion of episodic disability that is often put forth refers to limitations that are experienced in an “on again / off again” pattern.
- The driving force behind this increased focus on “episodic disabilities” has been concern about the unique barriers faced by those who experience dynamics in their limitations and in their often unique support needs over time.

TAKING ACTION: IMPROVING THE LIVES OF CANADIANS LIVING WITH EPISODIC DISABILITIES (HUMA 2019)

This concern culminated in a private member’s bill which led to HUMA 2019 and the March 2019 report: *Taking Action: Improving the Lives of Canadians Living with Episodic Disabilities*.



THERE HAS BEEN A DATA GAP RELATED TO EPISODIC DISABILITY

- A major challenge has been a lack of appropriate data to identify those with episodic disability.
- It takes a lot of time to plan, develop, test, and gather data once a gap has been identified.

EVEN BEFORE HUMA 2019, WE KNEW WE NEEDED BETTER DATA

- During the review of the 2012 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) in preparation for the 2017 cycle, we began developing a module of questions to help fill this gap.
- It was a very rigorous process that involved input from stakeholders and extensive qualitative testing to ensure reliability and validity.

WHAT WE LEARNED DURING TESTING OF THE MODULE

- The term “episodic disability” did not resonate well with the average Canadian with a disability.
- Even when a definition of “episodic disability” was provided and explained, there was a great deal of variation in the interpretation of it.
- The binary grouping of those with “episodic disabilities” vs “non-episodic disabilities” was not a “good fit” for the real world .



MORE COMPLICATED THAN “ON AGAIN / OFF AGAIN” PATTERNS

- For some, there were periods of “on again / off again” patterns, including periods when they did not “appear” to have a disability, putting them at risk of not being eligible for required supports.
- For others, the key patterns did not involve any period of “off again” – but rather revolved around changing levels of severity.
- And, for others still, fluctuations in limitations were compounded by high levels of co-occurrence among disability types—where one or even all types were fluctuating in unpredictable ways, with support needs constantly changing.
- But, for others, longer term trajectories were the change of greatest concern —particularly when limitations were becoming increasingly more severe over time and supports needs were constantly increasing.



OPERATIONALIZING THE NEW DATA TO CAPTURE THESE DYNAMICS

- Based on testing, the literature (both Canadian and international), and the initial analysis of the 2017 CSD data, identified four groups using the two new questions added to the survey.
- Depending on purpose, it is possible to reconfigure the data. The four groups presented here are not intended define those with “episodic disabilities”, but to rather capture a range of key dynamic groups which appear to be associated with different labour market experiences.

THE FOUR GROUPS

- Continuous limitations
- Progressive limitations
- Recurrent limitations
- Fluctuating limitations

THE FOUR GROUPS

CONTINUOUS:

Limitations are fairly constant and ability to perform activities is remaining about the same. Corresponds closely to “stereotype”.

PROGRESSIVE:

Limitations are worsening over time. While the person may or may not experience some fluctuations of varying lengths, the progressive nature of the limitations are key.

RECURRENT:

Limitations follow on again/off again pattern where the person may experience up to a month or more without feeling limited; however, the limitation always returns.

FLUCTUATING:

Never go as long as a month without limitation, but do experience shorter term fluctuations where the person is able to do more activities during some periods and fewer at other times.

RESULTS—MOST PEOPLE DO NOT FIT THE STEREOTYPE

6.2 million adults have disabilities

2.4 MILLION

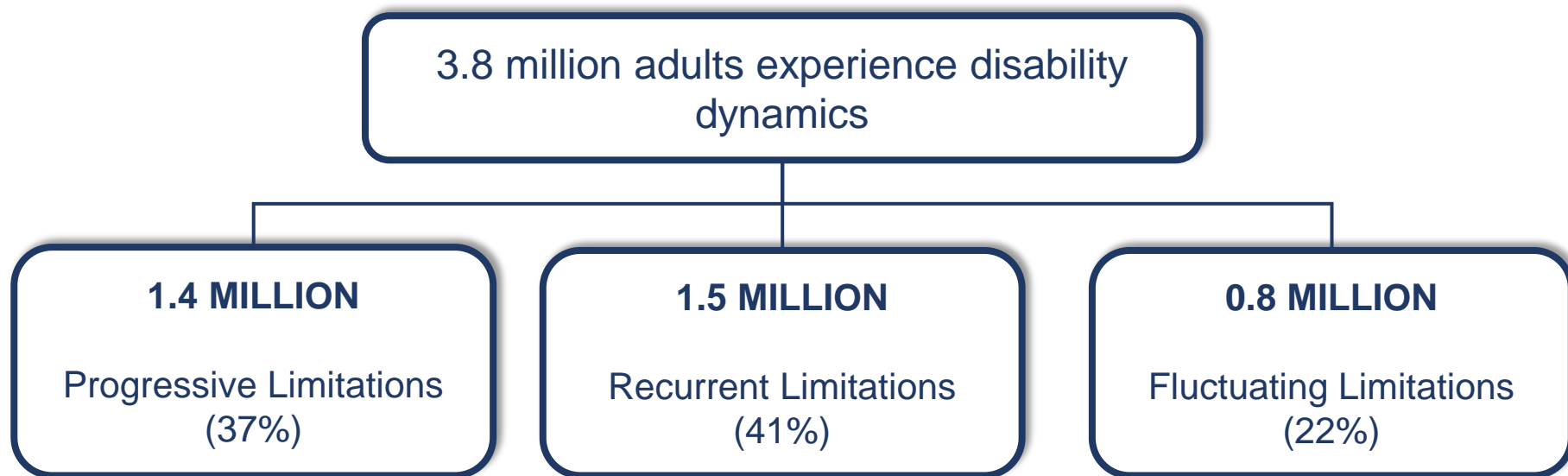
Experience continuous limitations
“STEREOTYPE”
(39%)

3.8 MILLION

Experience some type of disability
dynamic pattern
(61%)

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017
Note: Numbers rounded for ease of reference

WHAT TYPE OF DYNAMICS DO THOSE 3.8 MILLION PEOPLE EXPERIENCE?



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017
Note: Numbers rounded for ease of reference



OVERALL CAVEATS ABOUT THE RESULTS

- It is important to remember that people can experience their disability differently over time—moving through different dynamics over the life course and under different circumstances.
- It is also important to note that people who have the same underlying condition may experience different kinds of dynamics, facing different barriers, and needing very different supports.
- These four groups are not categories of people, but rather categories of how people are experiencing their disability at a particular point in time.



SOME KEY DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

- **Age:** Prevalence of progressive limitations increases with age; conversely, the prevalence of recurrent and fluctuating limitations decreases with age.
- **Sex:** Among those with disabilities, women are more likely than men to experience fluctuating limitations; men more likely to experience continuous limitations. Equally likely to experience progressive limitations.
- **Severity:** Persons with more severe disabilities are more likely to experience progressive limitations than are those with less severe disabilities.
- **Types:** Those with progressive and fluctuating limitations tend to have a higher number of disability types than other groups. Three in five of those with progressive limitations had four or more types of disabilities compared with one in five among those with recurrent limitations.



EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS

Opportunity to gain employment as well as having access to all required workplace accommodations is key to creating an accessible and inclusive work environment for all persons with disabilities.

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

- Can be particularly challenging for those with certain disability dynamics.
- Disability dynamics takes many form - each with unique set of barriers for entering and remaining in labour market.
- Changes in either intensity or frequency of limitations can lead to changes in employment requirements and supports for different persons or even the same person over time.
- Creates challenges to both employees and employers since main underlying condition remains the same

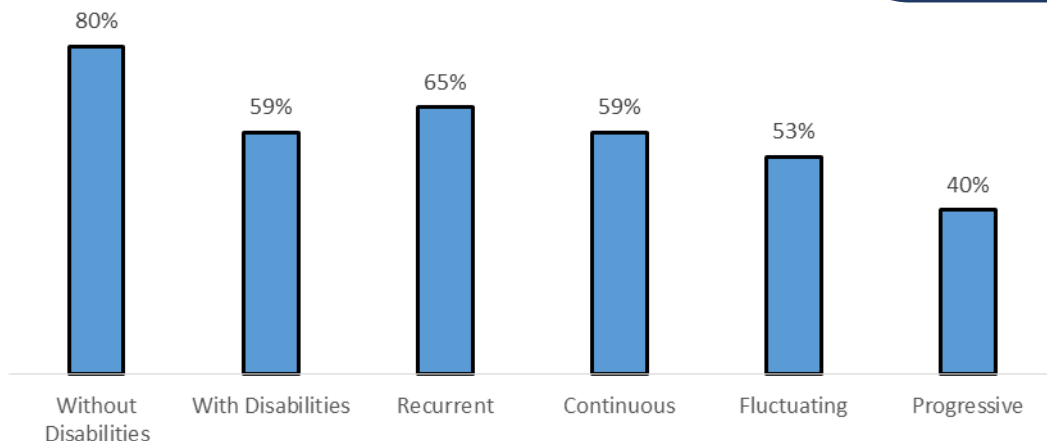
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EMPLOYMENT RATES

- Employment rate highest among Recurrent and lowest among Progressive
- **Sex** No differences between men and women within disability dynamic group
- **Age** Regardless of age, employment rates tend to be lowest for Progressive

Employment Rates

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017



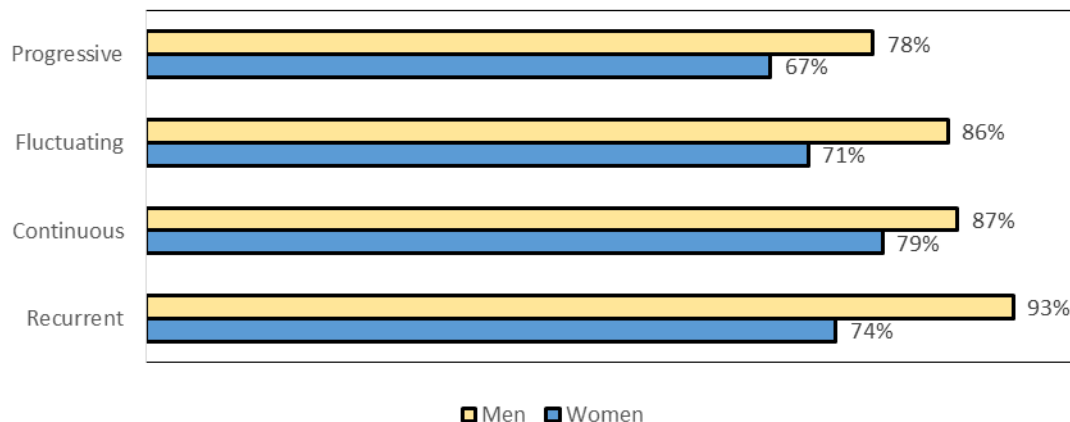
% based on total population aged 25–64 yrs.

FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

- **Employed Men:** Recurrent (highest) vs Progressive (lowest)
- **Employed Women:** Continuous (highest) vs Progressive (lowest)
- Highest full-time employment for women (Continuous) same as lowest for men (Progressive)

Percent with Full-Time Employment

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017



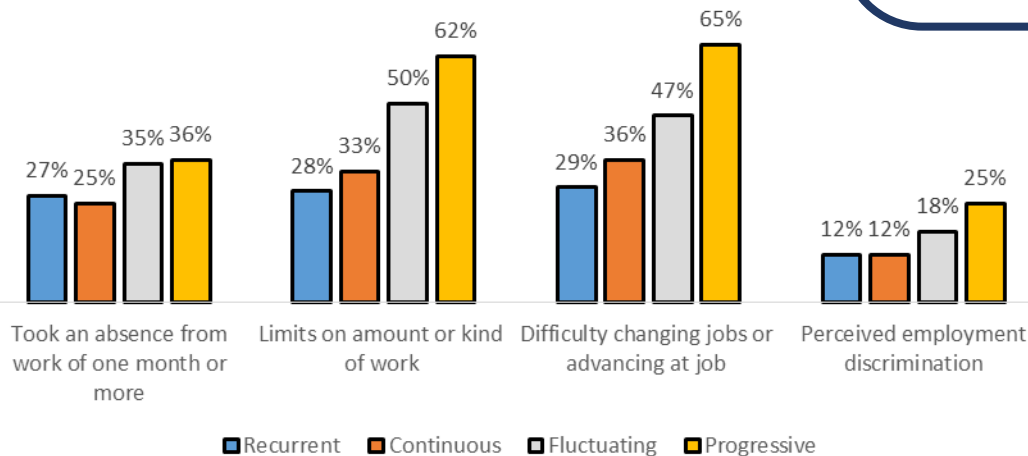
% based on total employed population aged 25–64 yrs.

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES

- Progressive most likely to report condition impacts on employment experiences
- Recurrent or Continuous around half as likely to report same impacts on employment experiences
- Progressive or Fluctuating around **twice as likely** to report **employment discrimination*** in the past five years

Employment Experiences

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017



Difficulty changing jobs or advancing at job, excludes persons who are self-employed.

*These experiences of discrimination could include being refused a job interview, a job, and/or a promotion.

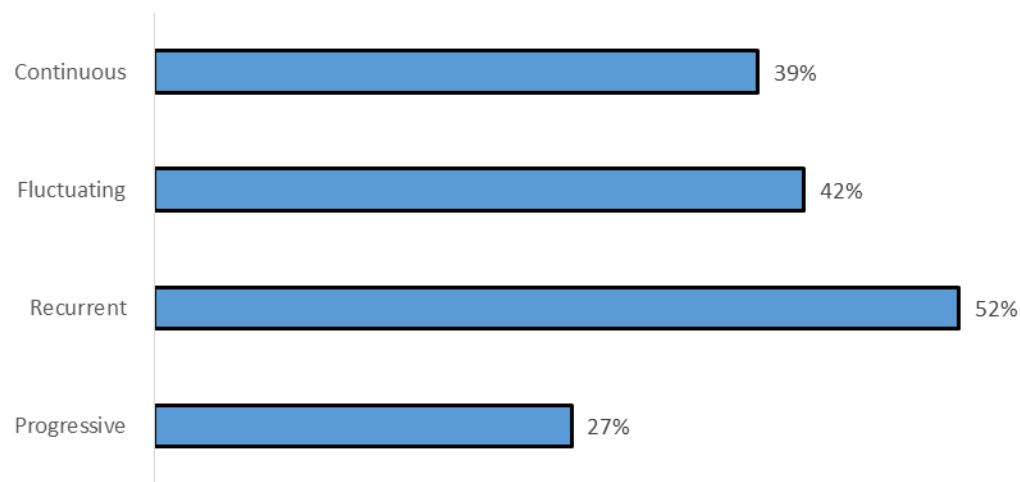
% based on total employed population aged 25-64 yrs.

WORK POTENTIAL AMONG NON-EMPLOYED PERSONS

- Among non-employed, Progressive lowest likelihood of work potential
- Among Recurrent, 60% (men) and 47% (women) had work potential. No other sex-based differences significant
- Progressive, regardless of severity, consistently lower likelihood of work potential

Work Potential of Non-Employed Persons

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017



Non-employed population is not the same as “unemployed”.

It excludes employed, student, completely retired, or completely prevented from working.

The concept of “work potential” is an attempt to provide an indication of the total size of the potential labour force with disabilities under the best-case scenario—an inclusive labour market without discrimination, with full accessibility, and accommodation.

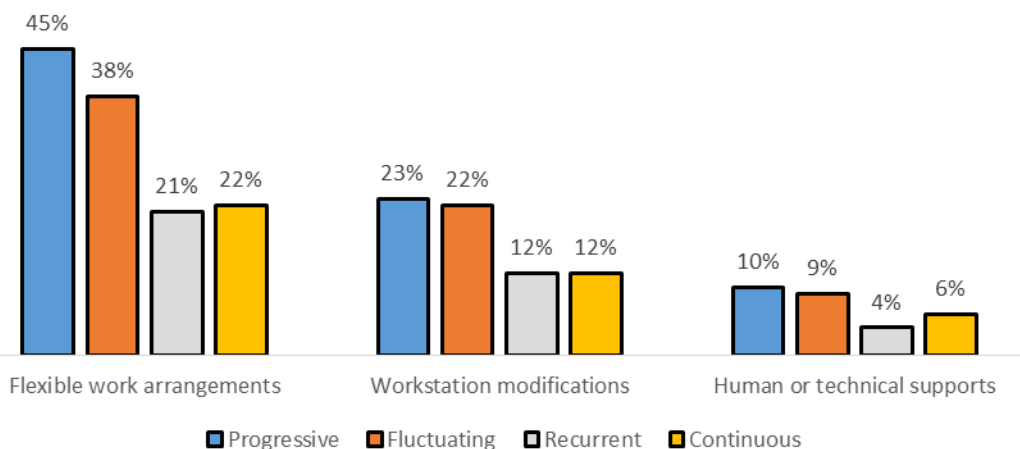
% is calculated as those with work potential / (those with work potential + those without work potential) aged 25–64 yrs.

REQUIREMENTS FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS

- Half of employed Progressive (56%) or Fluctuating (49%) required WPA
- Third (31%) of employed Recurrent or Continuous required WPA

Requirements for Workplace Accommodations

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017



% based on total employed population aged 25–64 yrs.

LEVEL OF NEEDS MET FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS

Workplace accommodations	Level of Needs Met		
	All	Some	None
Flexible work arrangements			
Progressive	69%	9%	22%
Recurrent	73%	8%	20%
Fluctuating	71%	8%	21%
Continuous	66%	7%	26%
Workstation modifications			
Progressive	48%	7%	44%
Recurrent	60%	F	36%
Fluctuating	50%	F	38%
Continuous	65%	F	32%
Human or technical supports			
Progressive	46%	F	50%
Recurrent	43%	F	49%
Fluctuating	41%	F	53%
Continuous	57%	F	35%

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017

*Highlighted boxes indicate significant differences

- No differences in level of needs met for either flexible work arrangements or human or technical supports
- Continuous more likely to have all needs met relative to progressive for workstation modifications

% based on employed population aged 25–64 yrs. and required at least one WPA

WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS: BY SEX

Workplace accommodations

		Level of Needs Met		
Sex	Require	All	Some	None
Progressive				
Men	52%	60%	20%	20%
Women	61%	56%	24%	20%
Recurrent				
Men	24%	74%	13%	13%
Women	37%	57%	17%	27%
Fluctuating				
Men	38%	63%	21%	16%
Women	55%	53%	29%	18%
Continuous				
Men	28%	59%	11%	29%
Women	35%	60%	21%	17%

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017

*Highlighted boxes indicate significant differences

- With exception of Progressive, women more likely than men to require WPA
- **Recurrent:** Men more likely than women to have all needs met and less likely to have no needs met
- **Continuous:** Women more likely than men to have at least some needs met

Require: % based on employed persons aged 25-64 yrs.
Needs Met: % based on employed persons and required at least one WPA

WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS: BY AGE

Workplace accommodations

		Level of Needs Met		
Age	Require	All	Some	None
Progressive				
25 to 44 years	64%	45%	26%	29%
45 to 64 years	53%	64%	20%	16%
Recurrent				
25 to 44 years	30%	66%	17%	17%
45 to 64 years	31%	60%	13%	27%
Fluctuating				
25 to 44 years	49%	64%	23%	13%
45 to 64 years	48%	47%	31%	22%
Continuous				
25 to 44 years	33%	61%	13%	26%
45 to 64 years	30%	59%	19%	19%

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017

*Highlighted boxes indicate significant differences

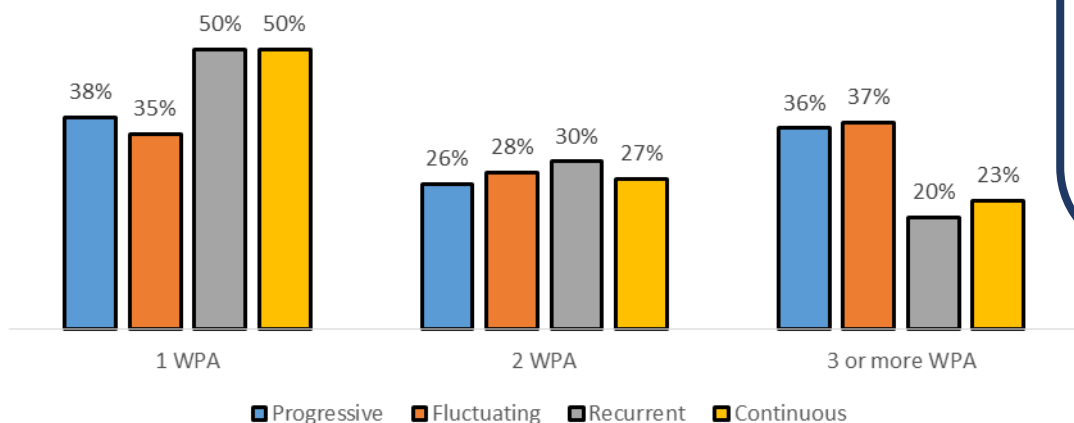
- **Progressive:** Younger more likely to require WPA than older
- However, older with Progressive more likely to have all needs met and less likely to have no needs met
- No age differences in WPA requirements for any of the other disability dynamic groups
- **Fluctuating:** Younger more likely to have all needs met than older

Require: % based on employed persons aged 25–64 yrs.
Needs Met: % based on employed persons and required at least one WPA

NUMBER OF WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS

Number of Workplace Accommodations Required

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017



- Progressive/Fluctuating (around 36%) most likely to require at least three or more WPA
- Recurrent/Continuous (around 20%) required at least three or more WPA
- Half of Recurrent/Continuous required one WPA vs one-third of Progressive/Fluctuating

% based on employed persons aged 25–64 yrs.
and required at least one WPA



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS (1/2)

- Three in five persons with disabilities do not fit the conventional view of disability as continuous and unchanging.
- The findings highlight the importance of considering disability dynamics when looking at the demographic and employment profiles of persons with disabilities.
- Disability dynamic groups have different age and sex distributions.
- Progressive limitations were more commonly experienced among seniors compared to youth; whereas, recurrent limitations were more commonly experienced by youth compared to seniors.
- Women were more likely to experience fluctuating limitations; whereas, men were more likely to experience continuous limitations.





SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS (2/2)

- Certain disability dynamics are consistently associated with better employment experiences than others.
- Relative to the other three disability dynamic groups, persons with progressive limitations were less likely to be employed, and when employed, they experienced greater employment discrimination and impacts on their employment.
- Among non-employed persons, those with progressive limitations were the least likely to be potential workers compared to the other three dynamic groups; while, those with recurrent limitations were the most likely.
- Persons with recurrent limitations were the least likely of the four disability dynamic groups to report that their disability impacted their employment experiences.
- Disability dynamic groups have different levels of severity; however, severity of disability is important even within groups.