

## **Employers' Guide to Understanding Disability**

Persons with disabilities represent a significant portion of our population, including students in our post-secondary institutions entering our current and future workforce.

According to research conducted by the David C. Onley Initiative in 2019, more than 50% of students registered with disability service offices across Ottawa's four post-secondary schools had a primary diagnosis of either a learning disability or a mental illness.

The term "disability" is a complex and continually evolving concept that covers a range of different conditions, and there is no single, all-encompassing definition. "Disability" is not a static or linear concept, rather it can be:

- visible or non-visible;
- mild, moderate, or severe;
- permanent, long-term, short-term, or episodic; and
- present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time.

A **Visible Disability** describes the nature or degree of disability that is visible to others (e.g., mobility-related impairments).



A **Non-Visible Disability** describes the nature or degree of disability that is invisible to others (e.g., chronic fatigue syndrome, a mental health condition or a learning disability). Conditions could simply be non-visible or might remain hidden because they are episodic (e.g., epilepsy, environmental sensitivities). Other disabilities may only become apparent through interacting with an individual and could take multiple interactions to notice (e.g., hearing loss or learning disabilities). Still others may never be apparent (e.g., mental health diagnoses).



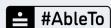












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Common types of disabilities and their associated impacts on the job include:

| Disability<br>Type                   | Functional Impact  | Examples of<br>Diagnoses  |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Physical and<br>Mobility             | Can affect a person's motor skills and may require the use of a mobility aid.  | <ul><li>cerebral palsy</li><li>epilepsy</li><li>narcolepsy</li></ul>  |
| Sensory                              | Can affect a person's senses: vision, hearing, smell, touch or taste.  | <ul><li>deafness</li><li>blindness</li><li>chemical sensitivities</li></ul>   |
| Intellectual<br>and<br>Developmental | Can affect a person's ability to learn and use information, creating limitations in reasoning, learning and problem solving, as well as social and practical skill building, known as adaptive behaviours. | <ul><li>autism spectrum disorder</li><li>Down syndrome</li><li>fetal alcohol spectrum disorder</li></ul>  |
| Learning                             | Can affect the way a person takes in, stores, or uses information as well as a person's oral and written language skills, reading skills, mathematics skills, organization, and social skills.             | <ul><li>dyslexia</li><li>dysgraphia</li><li>auditory processing disorder</li></ul>  |
| Mental Health                        | Can affect a person's mental alertness, concentration, organization, and anxiety levels.   | <ul> <li>anxiety disorders</li> <li>depression</li> <li>post-traumatic stress disorder</li> <li>obsessive-compulsive disorder</li> <li>bipolar disorder</li> <li>schizophrenia</li> </ul> |















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