A Neurodivergent Lens: Recommended Practices for Neuroinclusivity

Executive Summary

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The Accessibility Institute at Carleton University conducted the project, *A Neurodivergent Lens: Recommended Practices for Neuroinclusivity,* with funding from Accessibility Standards Canada. The project's goal was to create recommendations to help standards developers consider the needs of neurodivergent people when designing standards. By doing this, we aim to improve accessibility for people with different ways of thinking and processing information, such as those with autism, ADHD, or learning disabilities.

Why This Project Matters

Many environments are built for people who are considered "neurotypical." This means that individuals with different cognitive styles often face barriers. By considering neurodivergence, we can create more inclusive standards that benefit everyone.

Our Approach

We worked with neurodivergent individuals and professionals who develop standards. Together, we aimed to:

- **Hear about barriers and supports** that impact neurodivergent Canadians.

- **Consult with the community** to develop practical solutions.

- **Guide standards developers** on how to be more inclusive in their work.

What We Did

The project included a review of existing research and engaging community through focus groups, interviews, and surveys. We gathered input from neurodivergent participants and professionals working in standards development.

Key Findings

a) Barriers to Inclusion

- **Too much sensory input in a space can be overwhelming** can make it hard to participate.

- **Overly complicated systems, unclear language, and different communication styles** can make it hard for people to understand and fully participate

- **Not having enough support, flexibility, and clear information** on what is expected, makes it harder for people to get what they need**.**

- **Prioritizing neurotypical ways of doing things, along with stigma, assumptions and prejudice** leads to excluding neurodivergent people.

b) Facilitators to Inclusion

- **Sensory-accessible spaces and gatherings that let people know what to expect and offer tools or adjustments to help with sensory needs** are helpful.

- **Clear Communicatio**n and simple and direct messages can reduce stress.

- **Options to make individual choice** in spaces and gatherings can increase comfort and independence.

- **Providing supports such as** assistive tools, social supports, and other accommodations encourage inclusion.

- **Awareness and education** about neurodivergence can support people in learning how to create more positive and inclusive spaces and meetings.

- **Letting people use their own strategies** that work for them makes things more accessible.

c) Neurodivergent Community Recommendations for Standards Developers

- **Raise Awareness** by teaching people about neurodivergence to change attitudes.

- **Simplify Standards** by making standards clear and easy to follow. Make the standards development process clear and easy to participate in.

- **Actively involve neurodivergent people** in creating standards. This includes leading and participating in research used to develop the standards as well as being part of standards committees to share what they know.

Next Steps: Our Recommendations

We created five main recommendations to improve neuroinclusivity in standards development.

1. **Use education to raise awareness,** reduce stigma and adjust neurotypical attitudes, so that everyone is included and feels they belong.

2. **Include neurodivergent voices** by engaging a range of neurodivergent researchers and subject matter experts in standards development processes.

3. **Simplify communications, processes, and guidelines** to make them clear and understandable.

4. **Recognize and accommodate sensory needs** by creating environments that are flexible can change to meet a variety of sensory needs.

5. **Plan ahead** by thinking about how neurodivergent people experience and interact in the world so that they can be included in new standards that are created.

This report also includes links to resources and a guide to help apply these recommendations throughout the standards development process.