Applying a neuroinclusive lens to standards development

Start Here – Understand neuroinclusivity

Neurodivergent Canadians face a wide range of barriers in education, employment and daily life. Yet, since neurodivergent disabilities and identities are largely invisible, these barriers can be overlooked in the standards development process.

This document serves as an introduction to our project on applying a neuroinclusive lens to standards development. Our material will help you consider neuroinclusivity when developing standards, through checklists, factsheets and links to useful external resources.

WHAT IS NEURODIVERGENCE?

Many understandings of neurodiversity, neurodivergence, neuroinclusivity and neurotypical exist. Organizations, experts and people explain them differently depending on academic research, professional input and lived experience. These terms may mean specific things to different people. They may mean something entirely different to you. We welcome and encourage this diversity in perceptions. To help you consider neuroinclusivity when developing standards, read how we understand these terms and how other people describe them:

Neurodivergence

A descriptive term that typically includes, but is not limited to, neurotypes like autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other neurodevelopmental differences.

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Neurodivergent, sometimes abbreviated as ND, means having a mind that functions in ways which diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of 'normal'.

Walker, N. (2012) Throw away the master's tools: Liberating ourselves from the pathology paradigm. In Loud Hands: Autistic people, Speaking (pp. 225–237). Autistic Self Advocacy Network.

Neurodiversity is a concept that recognizes and celebrates the diversity of neurological differences across humanity.

Dark, J. (2024) Eight principles of neuro-inclusion; an autistic perspective on innovating inclusive research methods. Frontiers in Psychology Vol. 15.

Neurodiversity

Describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways. There is no one "right" way of thinking, learning and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits.

Baumer, N. & Frueh, J. (2021) What is neurodiversity? Harvard Health Publishing.

Neuroinclusivity

Involves creating environments and processes that take neurodiversity into account.

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Neuro-inclusion is a term that refers to creating environments, practices and processes that are inclusive of all people's cognitive processing requirements. Neuro-inclusion is also the act of listening to and valuing the views and support requirements of people whose thinking and behaviour significantly diverge from prominent expressions.

Dark, J. (2024) Eight principles of neuro-inclusion; an autistic perspective on innovating inclusive research methods. Frontiers in Psychology Vol. 15.

Neurotypical, often abbreviated as NT, means having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards of 'normal'.

Walker, N. (2012) Throw away the master's tools: Liberating ourselves from the pathology paradigm. In Loud Hands: Autistic people, Speaking (pp. 225–237). Autistic Self Advocacy Network.

Neurotypical

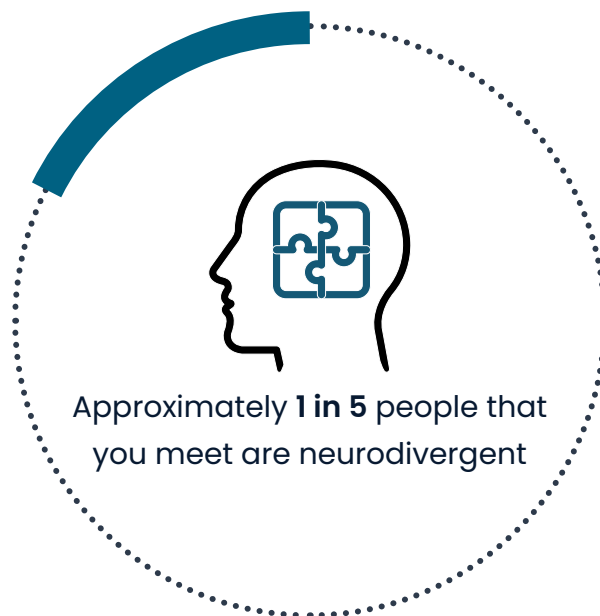Refers to having a neurocognitive style that is typical of a majority of people.

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WHY SHOULD NEUROINCLUSIVITY BE IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Our society was largely built upon neurotypical assumptions that overlook roughly 20% of the population. The stigma around neurodivergence isn't always rooted in ill intentions, but in a lack of awareness, knowledge and training. Learning about neuroinclusivity is the first step you can take to help all people have more equal opportunities and participation in society.

By embracing neuroinclusive considerations in your standards development process, you're thinking about the needs of not just neurodivergent people, but also everyone else. You're also enabling as many people as possible to contribute their voices, ideas, work and value to our society. You're establishing the guidelines that will ensure public spaces, workplaces, schools and digital environments are accessible, flexible, and easy and comfortable to navigate for everyone. In short, you're in a unique position to help dismantle barriers that have excluded many people from full and equal participation.

Approximately **1 in 5** people that you meet are neurodivergent