DAVID C. ONLEY INITIATIVE FOR EMPLOYMENT & ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

INITIATIVE DAVID C. ONLEY POUR L'EMPLOI ET L'ENTREPRENEURIAT

EMPLOYERS' GUIDEBOOK

FOR HIRING AND WORKING WITH

Professionals with Disabilities

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Introduction

Are you an employer who wants to strengthen your business and find the talent you need? In Ottawa, 63% of employers reported that they struggle to find and retain the workers they need. As an employer, you can meet your future labour needs by taking an inclusive approach to recruiting and hiring.

According to a report published by the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS), post-secondary students with disabilities graduate with valuable skills and education. But these students do not experience the same meaningful employment outcomes as their peers without disabilities. As an employer, you need to know that hiring persons with disabilities makes good business sense. By developing a strategy to hire persons with disabilities, you will tap into a group of qualified employees, generate more diverse perspectives in your workplace, create a workforce that is reflective of society, increase accessibility, and support the elimination of barriers.

Keep in mind that some people are born with disabilities, some may develop them over time and, for some, disabilities may fluctuate. Anyone could become a person with a disability at any point in their lives due to a variety of factors. Knowing that disability affects us all, we should be designing workplaces that are inclusive and supporting a workforce in which everyone has an equal opportunity to participate fully. As an employer, you can choose to be an example of workplace accessibility and inclusivity.

We recognize these concepts might be new to you. This guide will broaden your awareness and provide you with the information and resources you need to become a more inclusive and accessible employer. The guidebook will enable you to:

- broaden your understanding of disability;

- appreciate the business benefits of hiring persons with disabilities;

- learn about becoming an #AbleTo employer;

- dispel common myths about employing persons with disabilities;

- increase your awareness of disability language and etiquette;

- become more knowledgeable about the accommodation process;

- learn about rights and responsibilities related to employment legislation;

- learn practical ways to increase inclusion and accessibility in your workplace;

- explore a number of employer-related resources and toolkits; and

- identify community organizations that offer support to employers.
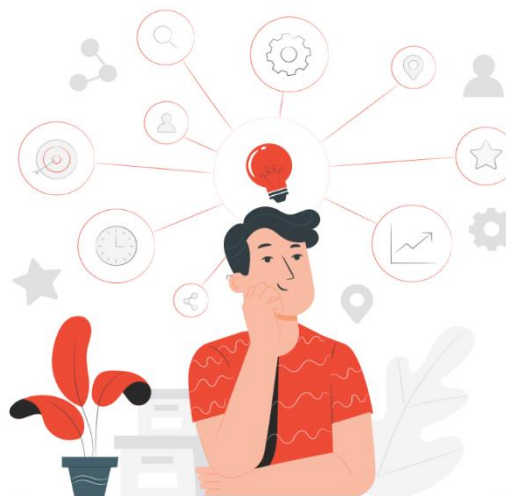
Understanding Disability

The term "disability" is a complex and evolving concept that covers a range of different conditions, and there is no single, all-encompassing definition. "Disability" typically means someone experiences physical, mental or sensory barriers that affect their day-to-day life. Having a disability does not mean that someone cannot do a job. It often refers to the fact that one may do a job or task differently. When we are able to see disability as an opportunity to remove barriers, everyone benefits.

Disability is not a static or linear concept. 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 the disability that is invisible to others (e.g., chronic fatigue syndrome, a mental health condition or a learning disability). Conditions could simply not be apparent to the unknowing eye, or the conditions might remain hidden because they are episodic (e.g., epilepsy or environmental sensitivities). Other disabilities may become apparent only 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).

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

Disability Type	Functional Impact	Examples of Diagnoses
Physical and Mobility	Can affect a person's motor skills and may require the use of a mobility aid.	• cerebral palsy • epilepsy • narcolepsy
Sensory	Can affect a person's senses: vision, hearing, smell, touch, or taste.	• deafness • blindness • chemical sensitivities
Intellectual and 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.	• autism spectrum disorder • Down syndrome • fetal alcohol spectrum disorder
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.	• dyslexia • dysgraphia • auditory processing disorder
Mental Health	Can affect a person's mental alertness, concentration, organization, and anxiety levels.	• anxiety disorders • depression • post-traumatic stress disorder • obsessive-compulsive disorder • bipolar disorder • schizophrenia

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Persons with disabilities represent a significant portion of our population. They include students in our post-secondary institutions and our current and future workforce. It is valuable to learn about visible and non-visible disabilities, challenge any personal biases and improve our understanding of how we can promote an inclusive and accessible future.

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. This finding tells us that students and graduates with disabilities entering the workforce have disabilities that we cannot necessarily see. Employers need to be aware of this fact and learn how to accommodate this need.

References

Discover Ability Network. "Discover Ability Roadmap." Accessed July 6, 2023, discoverability.network/business/roadmap

Ontario Human Rights Commission. "What is disability?" Accessed July 6, 2023, ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability/2-what-disability

Ottawa employers: Start seeing the non-visible

To read this information as text, see Appendix A.

Ottawa employers:

Start seeing the non-visible

10.000 students with disabilities are enrolled at La Cité, Carleton University, Algonquin College and the University of Ottawa.

7,500 of these students have a primary diagnosis that falls into one of three categories:

- **26%** Learning Disability
- **26%** Mental Illness
- **23%** Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

The Challenge

Most students and graduates with disabilities who enter the workforce have disabilities that employers can't see. That means many employers in Ottawa are unlikely to have processes and methods in place to recruit, accommodate and retain these employees.

The Solution

Build Awareness

The answer to this challenge starts with awareness of the fact that most students and graduates with disabilities in Ottawa have disabilities employers cannot see.

Change Attitudes

This awareness enables employers to check their biases and change their attitudes.

Educate and Encourage Employers

Then come conversations to educate and encourage employers to create more inclusive workplaces in our city.

Most students with disabilities in Ottawa's post-secondary schools have disabilities employers cannot see.

- **1%** Vision Loss
- **2%** Hearing Loss
- **2%** Mobility-Related Impairments
- **3%** Acquired Brain Injury
- **4%** Autism Spectrum Disorder
- **4%** Other
- **9%** Medical/Chronic Illness
- **26%** Mental Health
- **26%** Learning Disability
- **23%** ADHD
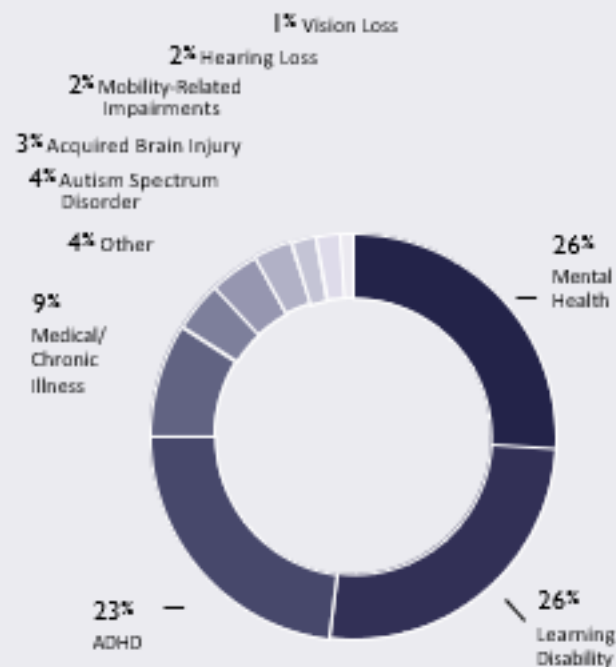
Business Benefits

The business case is strong for hiring and retaining persons with disabilities in your workplace. Employing persons with disabilities will:

- help your business meet consumer demands by having a workforce more reflective of society;

- provide your workplace with more diverse perspectives that lead to creative problem solving and innovative solutions;

- project a positive company brand image and increase business;

- expand your resource and talent pools;

- promote universal access, benefitting all of society;

- prepare you to address the future needs of an aging population;

- improve employee morale, engagement and productivity; and,

- reduce costs associated with turnover, training and safety.

References

Discover Ability Network. "The Benefits Of Hiring." Accessed July 6, 2023, discoverability.network/business/business-resources/the-benefits-of-hiring/

Hire For Talent. "Business Case." Accessed July 6, 2023, hirefortalent.ca/toolkit/business-case
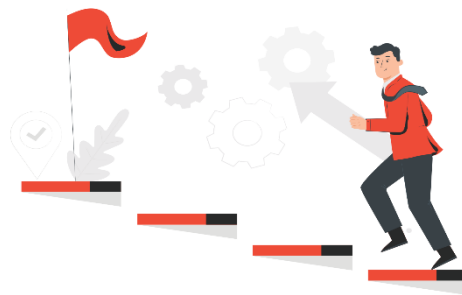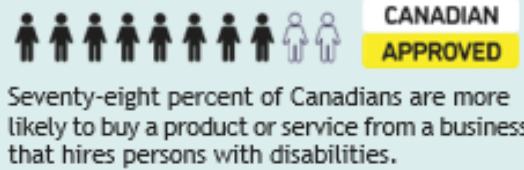
Inclusion is Good for Business

To read this information as text, see Appendix B.

Inclusion is Good for Business

Over 20 percent of the population in Canada will have a disability by 2020. The Conference Board of Canada predicts that by the same year, Canada will be facing a one-million-worker shortfall. As an employer, you can meet future labour needs by taking an inclusive approach to recruitment and hiring.

2020

20% DISABLED

1M WORKER SHORTFALL

63% OF OTTAWA BUSINESSES

Sixty-three percent of Ottawa businesses say recruiting and retaining talent is a challenge. By recruiting and hiring persons with disabilities, these businesses can thrive in a talent crisis.
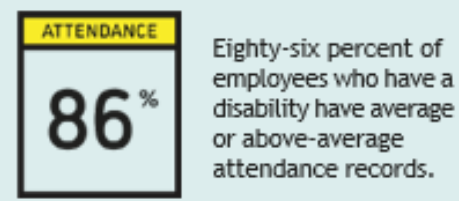
CANADIAN APPROVED

Seventy-eight percent of Canadians are more likely to buy a product or service from a business that hires persons with disabilities.

Retention rates are seventy-two percent higher among people who have a disability. **72%**

EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE

Eighty-eight percent of workers with disabilities earn performance ratings of good or excellent.

Almost half—forty-eight percent—of working-age persons with disabilities have a post-secondary education. **48%**

OF THE MARKETPLACE

53% People who have a disability and their family members comprise fifty-three percent of the marketplace.

Seventy-seven percent of small business owners who have hired persons with a disability say these employees meet or exceed expectations. **77%**

ATTENDANCE

86% Eighty-six percent of employees who have a disability have average or above-average attendance records.

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#AbleTo

Ontario is home to nearly 50,000 post-secondary students with visible and non-visible disabilities—more than 10,000 in Ottawa alone. When these students graduate, they are often at a disadvantage—overshadowed by myth and overlooked by employers and hiring managers. This problem persists even though students and graduates with disabilities are educated, skilled and qualified—just like their peers without disabilities. We call this disconnect "the employment gap."

#AbleTo is a campaign focused on closing the employment gap and helping every student and graduate find meaningful work. The campaign is about strengthening local businesses while supporting students and graduates with disabilities. Join the movement to weave disability awareness and inclusiveness into the fabric of employment in our city. We are #AbleTo.

You can join the #AbleTo movement and support students and graduates living with disabilities. Pledge your commitment to the #AbleTo movement in two ways:

1. Pledge online at AbleTo.ca. Here you can choose and share your commitment to helping close the employment gap for students and graduates with disabilities.

2. Share one of the David C. Onley Initiative's #AbleTo posts on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn.

You can also download the #AbleTo identifier at AbleTo.ca/resources. The identifier is the visual representation of your pledge. It tells the community that you are #AbleTo support the movement and do your part—whatever that may be.

Use the identifier image in your email signature, on your company website and job postings, or in social media posts.

Myths and Facts

To read this information as text, see Appendix C.

#AbleTo bust myths & find talent

63% Sixty-three percent of Ottawa's businesses say that acquiring and retaining talent is a pressing issue. At the same time, many of these businesses overlook job applicants with visible and non-visible disabilities because of common myths. Here are the facts.

Myth
Employees with disabilities are less productive than those without a disability.

Fact
Research shows no difference in job performance between employees with disabilities and those without disabilities.

Myth
Employees with disabilities are harder to dismiss for underperformance than those without disabilities.

Fact
Employees with disabilities fall under the same legislation and provisions as employees without disabilities and are no more difficult to dismiss.

Myth
Candidates with disabilities don't have the skills, training or education required for many jobs.

Fact
33% Over thirty-three percent of adults with a disability have completed post-secondary educational programs.

Myth
Employees with disabilities will be a burden to their coworkers.

Fact
Research shows that inclusive workplaces are better places to work for everyone and are more profitable over the long term.

Myth
Accommodating employees with disabilities is expensive.

Fact
65% Sixty-five percent of employees with disabilities do not require accommodation. The average cost for those who require accommodation is $500.

Myth
Workers' compensation rates will increase if employers hire more persons with disabilities.

Fact
Organizations' insurance rates are based exclusively on the comparative risks associated with their accident histories, as opposed to whether or not some of their employees have a disability.

Myth
Employees with disabilities have a high absentee rate.

Fact
Employees with disabilities do not miss any more work than their colleagues without disabilities and tend to have better attendance records than their non-disabled co-workers.

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Language

As an employer, you can help build a stronger, more inclusive team by learning how to interact effectively and respectfully with your diverse colleagues. You also can help dispel the negative attitudes and stubborn stereotypes by educating yourself about what is the appropriate language to use when speaking with and writing about persons with disabilities. Attitudes and stereotypes often stem from the language we use, and can be some of the most challenging barriers persons with disabilities face. Education starts by examining how we use language.

First, consider the following:

- **Terminology is always evolving.** Not everyone will agree on every term or word used (and that is okay). Language does not always deliver a "one-size-fits-all" solution, but we can do our best to use disability-positive language and promote inclusion by being aware of what we say and how we say it. Note that preferred language can also differ by country, region, or individual.

- **Do not let fear stop you.** You may have noticed at times that you are hesitant to say something, and fear using the wrong word or term when interacting with a person with a disability. This can be a normal feeling. Be aware that this discomfort may create barriers when communicating with others and may result in the absence of important conversations with your employees. Building your awareness of this fear is the first step.

- **Disability is not a taboo.** Disability is not a forbidden subject anymore. In fact, when we shy away from using words like "disability" and "disabled," we can create shame around it. When we talk about disability without discomfort, we reduce any stigma associated with disability.

> If you are not sure how someone self-identifies, the best thing to do is ask! Saying, "how would you like to be referred to?" is an effective way to ensure you are using the person's preferred language. Do not be afraid to ask questions when you are unsure of what to say or how to say it.

Second, here are some guidelines that will help your interactions be respectful and inclusive:

- Avoid using terms that suggest persons with disabilities are their conditions. Identify the person first, such as "persons with disabilities" or "a person with a disability."

- Avoid using terms that categorize, such as "the disabled" or "the blind," as they imply that persons with disabilities are a uniform group.

- Avoid words that suggest heroism, such as "brave" and "inspirational." The majority of persons with disabilities have similar goals as the rest of the population. The words we use should be non-judgmental, non-emotional and reflect the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society.

- Avoid using subjective words that equate disability with illness. Avoid terms such as "suffers from," "afflicted by," "patient," "disease" or "sick."

- Avoid using words that suggest persons with disabilities are inferior and should be excluded from activities generally available to others, such as "incompetent."

- Many persons with disabilities consider using commonly accepted phrases such as "see you later" or "got to run" appropriate.

Below are some recommendations to guide your language. Remember that persons with disabilities may still have their own preferences. When in doubt, ask the person!

Not Recommended	Recommended
challenged, handicapped	person with a disability
confined to a wheelchair	person who uses a wheelchair
the blind, the visually impaired	person who is blind or living with vision loss
deaf people who sign	the Deaf (upper case d)
deaf people who do not sign	the deaf (lower case d) or people who are deaf
mental patient, psychotic, neurotic	person with a mental health disability
learning disabled, learning disorder	person with a learning disability

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The Mental Health Commission of Canada published a document called "Language Matters," which focuses on using safer language when talking about mental health. Here are some of their recommendations:

Language That Stigmatizes	Safer Language
person suffering from mental illness	person living with/experiencing a mental illness
an addict, junkie, substance abuser	person living with a substance use disorder/problem
someone who committed suicide	someone who died by suicide
he is schizophrenic	he lives with schizophrenia
she is insane	she has lived experience with a mental health condition
person suffering from mental illness	person living with/experiencing a mental illness

Be mindful of the terms you many have learned a long time ago and ensure you are using the most up-to-date language. For example:

Not Recommended	Recommended
handicapped parking/permit	accessible parking/permit
handicapped bathrooms/stall	accessible bathrooms/stall
handicapped door opener	accessible door opener

References

#AbleTo. "Resources." Accessed July 6, 2023. ableto.ca/resources

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Employment and Social Development Canada, Accessibility resource centre. "A Way with Words and Images: Suggestions for the portrayal of people with disabilities." Modified December 16, 2022, canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/words-images.html

Humber College. "Inclusive Language Guide." March 2022, humber.ca/brand/inclusive-language-guide

Mental Health Commission of Canada. "Language Matters." August 13, 2020, mentalhealthcommission.ca/resource/language-matters

Etiquette

Building disability etiquette in the workplace is an important step in creating an accessible and inclusive workplace. Here are some general suggestions to follow to ensure mindful and respectful interactions with employees with disabilities:

- Speak directly to the person with a disability, even when an interpreter or support person accompanies them.

- Offer your assistance, but wait until your offer is accepted before you help.

- Always listen and follow the instructions the person has given you.

- If a service animal is present, refrain from interacting with it, unless you've been given permission.

- Do not make assumptions; always ask questions when you are unsure.

- Be mindful of the language you use.

- Respect personal space.

- Things may not always go as planned. If you make a mistake, apologize and take the opportunity to learn about that person's preferences or needs.

The following chart outlines some key suggestions for your interactions with people who have different types of disabilities.

Disability Type	Suggested Etiquette
Mobility	• Try to place yourself at eye level when speaking with a person in a wheelchair. • Be mindful that some wheelchair users may prefer to transfer into a chair. • Never lean on or hold a person's mobility device; this is their personal space. • Refrain from physical contact, gripping or leaning on someone. This could impair their balance. • Allow space for mobility aids to remain within reach.
Vision	• As you approach, state your name and who you are. • In a group, identify yourself and the person you are speaking to. • Always ask before leading someone. If they accept, allow the person to hold your arm so they are in control of their own movements. • Give descriptive directions. • Inform the person if you move, if someone leaves or enters the room or if you need to end the conversation. • Orient the person when entering a space, especially if barriers are present or there have been changes to the physical environment.
Speech	• Do not try to finish someone's sentences or find their words. • If you have trouble understanding someone's speech, ask for them to repeat what they've said or verify that you've understood them correctly.

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Hearing	• Do not shout, this may distort the sound in a hearing device. • Ensure you have the person's attention before speaking, maintain eye contact. • When there is no interpreter available, you may communicate in writing or by text. • If the person lip-reads, look directly at them, do not cover your face or mouth, and speak clearly at a regular pace.
Mental Health	• Refrain from pointing out physical signs of someone with a suspected or known mental health concern. • Always be flexible, patient and open-minded. • Provide support and assistance, as appropriate.
Learning	• Ask the person how they prefer to receive information (e.g., verbal or written). • Treat the person as an adult, but use language that matches their level of communication and understanding. • Allow the individual time to think about their response.
Neurodiversity	• Use clear and simple language. • Avoid using metaphors, euphemisms, or sarcasm as they may cause confusion. If you do, be prepared to explain what you mean. • Ask one question at a time. • Give clear instructions. • Don't assume that their body language (e.g., less eye contact) equates to disinterest.

Seek advice from organizations that serve and support persons with disabilities if you have questions or want to learn more about disability etiquette. Refer to the "Community Disability-Employment Resources" section for contact details for these organizations.

References

Canadian Association of Broadcasters. "Recommended Guidelines on Language and Terminology – Persons with Disabilities." Accessed July 6, 2023, disability-hub.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Recommended-Guidelines-on-Language-and-Terminology-Persons-with-Disabilities_A-Manual-for-News-Professionals.pdf

Humber College. "Inclusive Language Guide." March 2022, humber.ca/brand/inclusive-language-guide

Job Accommodation Network. "Accommodation and Compliance: Disability Etiquette." Accessed July 6, 2023, askjan.org/topics/disetiq.cfm

Inclusive Workplace Practices

Offering an inclusive workplace does not have to mean implementing big changes. You can take many small and simple steps to move toward a more inclusive and accessible workplace beneficial for all employees:

- Welcome diversity and inclusion in your workplace, starting from the top down. For example, review policies to assess potential barriers.

- Use language that focuses on people, not their disabilities.

- Treat all individuals equally, including those with disabilities. For example, ensure that company events, such as holiday parties, are accessible for employees with and without disabilities.

- Examine your environment for any potential barriers someone with a disability may face or conduct an accessibility audit in your office.

- Demonstrate openness and comfort in discussing and providing accommodations.

- Respect the confidentiality of applicants and employees.

- Provide diversity education and accessibility awareness for staff at all levels.

- Involve those with disabilities in discussions about their workplace needs; do not assume what is needed.

- Listen, be flexible, and ask questions if you do not fully understand.

- Promote and adhere to your organization's diversity and inclusion policy (or create one, if you do not already have one!). For inspiration, Carleton University states:
  - "Carleton University is committed to fostering diversity within its community as a source of excellence, cultural enrichment, and social strength. We welcome those who would contribute to the further diversification of our university including, but not limited to, women; racialized persons; First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples; persons with disabilities; and persons of any sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression."

The following subsections provide practical advice on how you can infuse inclusivity into recruiting, interviewing, hiring and retention.

Recruiting

Recruiting talent continues to be a pressing issue for many employers. Below are inclusive recruitment strategies that will assist you in increasing access to skilled and qualified applicants with disabilities:

- Advertise jobs through community disability employment agencies, campus career offices and co-op offices.

- Offer alternate formats (e.g., large print, HTML, plain language) of job postings.

- Provide ways to receive applicants' applications, other than through your website.

- Include details about the interview/workplace location and highlight accessible features.

- Identify availability of flexible working conditions, if possible.

- Create inclusive job postings, only including qualifications that are required for the job.

- Promote your organization as an equal opportunity employer.

- Use plain language, simple typeface, and large font.

- Include testimonials that support and showcase diversity and inclusion.

- Ensure any information you request for interview testing (e.g., physical test) is relevant to the job.

- Prepare alternate formats for candidates to choose from, if an interview has a written component.

- Provide contact information of someone who can answer questions about the job requirements, and who is aware of the organization's inclusion and diversity policy.

Hire for Talent offers great resources in their Employer Toolkit. Visit the following sites for more information and templates on:

- [How to Write Inclusive Job Descriptions](#).
- [How to Write an Inclusive Job Posting](#).

Interviewing

The purpose of an interview is for an employer to gather information to determine the best person for the job. This process involves determining which applicant is the closest match with respect to the requirements of the job and the organizational culture.

When interviewing a candidate, all efforts should be made to ensure accessibility. Consider employing the following strategies:

Before the Interview

- Ensure the interview location is accessible for candidates with disabilities.
- Provide information on accessible parking options, and clear directions to the interview location.
- When scheduling an interview, provide a description of the location.
- Inform all candidates that accommodation requests are available and provide instructions on how to make a request (e.g., who to send the request to and the deadline for the request).
- Provide information on the interview style.
- Ensure staff members are aware of proper etiquette and language to use when interacting with persons with disabilities.
- Provide clear information and instructions about the selection process.
- Assemble an interview panel to reduce individual bias and, when possible, ensure diverse representation on the panel.

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During the Interview

- Ask all candidates the same questions. The questions should focus on the person's ability to perform the essential duties of the job.

- Do not ask questions that would require someone to disclose their disability, either directly or indirectly.

- If an applicant discloses their disability, or a disability-related need, be prepared to inform the individual they have the right to be accommodated to the point of undue hardship (see the "Accommodations" section for more information).

- Be aware of your own biases; your personal and cultural assumptions could create an unfair hiring process.

- Assess each candidate against the essential requirements of the job and use the same ranking system for each candidate.

If an individual chooses to disclose their disability during an interview, an employer can ask about their accommodation needs and their ability to perform the essential duties of the job with accommodation. For example, you could ask, "Do you require any accommodations to perform the job functions?"

Interview Questions

The law in Ontario prohibits discrimination on the basis of age, marital status, children, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability and more. The Ontario Human Rights Commission protects job seekers against unlawful questions. An employer's interview questions must be related to the skills and abilities needed to perform the job. Here are examples of questions that employers are and are not permitted to ask:

Questions you can ask:

- How would you perform this particular task?
- Are you able to work full-time hours?
- Are you able to perform the requirements of this position?
- Is the lighting okay? Does this desk meet your needs?

Questions you cannot ask:

- Do you have any disabilities or medical conditions? What are they?
- How did you become disabled? What is your diagnosis?
- How often do you miss work for doctor appointments?

Learn to reframe your interview questions to be more accessible. Refer to this interview questions chart from the Discover Ability Network for some examples.

Onboarding

Once the successful candidate has been hired, there are a few more steps to follow while your new employee adjusts to their workplace:

- Ensure that any accommodations that were discussed and agreed upon are implemented in a timely manner.

- Complete an Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP).

- Discuss whether the employee requires assistance in the case of an emergency, discuss and record a plan.

- Reiterate that any personal information disclosed will be kept confidential.

- Confirm that any new employee information being provided is in an accessible format, if necessary.

- Consider assigning a mentor or point of contact as an added support.

- Check in regularly to see whether accommodations are appropriate or if changes are required.

Check out these resources from Accessible Employers for comprehensive checklists on recruitment and onboarding:

- Accessible Recruitment Checklist.

- Inclusive Orientation & Onboarding Checklist.

- Inclusive Interview Checklist.

Retaining

After successfully recruiting, interviewing and onboarding your new employee, make sure you have measures in place to retain them. When you reduce the risk of staff turnover, your whole team will benefit. Managing an employee who has a disability is no different than managing anyone else. Some suggestions for increasing retention include:

- Ensure new employees feel welcome. Include them in decisions and social activities.
- Provide training on their position, organizational culture and workplace safety.
- Ensure each employee understands the requirements of their jobs.
- Make performance standards clear and hold employees to these standards.
- Provide regular feedback about employee performance.
- Identify staff that new employees can approach when they need help or have questions.
- Observe changes in behaviour that may be associated with personal or job-related challenges. Then offer and provide support as needed.
- Arrange regular meeting times for ongoing evaluation.
- Adjust workplace accommodations and communication style, as required.
- Address problems as they arise, as you would with any other employee.

If you see behaviour or performance signs that suggest an employee has a mental health concern, take a look at "How can I approach an employee?" from Mental Health Works.

References

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Mental Health Works. "How can I approach hiring to include people with disabilities, including those with mental health problems?" Accessed July 6, 2023, mentalhealthworks.ca/resources/how-do-i-hire-someone-with-a-mental-health-problem

Accommodations

In the interview process and the workplace itself, persons with disabilities are entitled to access the same opportunities and benefits as those who do not have disabilities. For some persons with disabilities, this right means certain adjustments may need to be made for the individual to perform the duties of their job. Any such adjustment is known as an accommodation. The accommodation process is a shared responsibility. Each person involved is expected to collaborate, share appropriate information, and consider possible solutions—all in a sensitive, confidential, and timely manner.

Employers have a legal duty to accommodate. This obligation ensures that those who are otherwise fit to work are not unjustly excluded when workplace adjustments can be made. Employees will be most productive when given the tools needed to do their jobs.

Consider the following facts on making workplace accommodations:

- Accommodation needs vary widely from person to person. These needs may be related to the individual, the environment, and the tasks or tools needed to perform a task/job.

- An employer is not obligated to provide the exact accommodation preferred by the individual. Consultation with the individual must take place before accommodations are implemented.

- The need for accommodations cannot be a factor in considering an applicant's merits.

- An accommodation may be needed at any stage in the employment relationship, including pre-employment (e.g., testing, interviews), establishing a work environment, training, employment, and evaluating for promotion.

- The probationary period should start after the employee has been accommodated.

Examples of Common Accommodations

Most accommodations are easy to introduce and cost very little. Some persons with disabilities may even be able to provide their own accommodation. Workplace accommodations can come in many different forms. Here are some examples:

Accommodation Form	Accommodation Examples
Change workplace facilities to be more accessible.	Install an accessible door opener and improved lighting.
Create flexible or modified work schedules.	Put in place flexible work hours, frequent breaks, and self-paced workload.
Restructure work or daily tasks.	Divide larger tasks into smaller ones.
Acquire or modify equipment, software or devices needed to do a job.	Provide computer screen magnifier, voice input or speech recognition aids, and ergonomic chair.
Provide assistance through a support service or person.	Use an ASL interpreter.
Change work locations.	Provide quiet workspace and option to work from home.
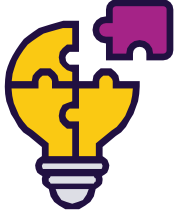
Some students may have had academic accommodations while completing their schooling, but these same students might not understand their needs in the workplace. Take a look at the University of Guelph's resource on Academic Accommodations Translated into Employment Settings for more information.

Shared Responsibilities

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, employers and employees have specific roles and responsibilities throughout this process.

Employee Responsibilities

A person with a disability is not required to disclose their disability if they can perform their work without an accommodation, and they do not pose a danger at work to themselves or others.

An employee who requests a workplace accommodation is required to:

- make their accommodation needs known to the employer, preferably in writing;
- answer questions or provide information to the employer on their limitations, which may include information or documentation from a health care provider;
- discuss potential accommodation solutions with the employer;
- collaborate with experts when assistance is needed to manage the accommodation process;
- work with the employer on an ongoing basis to manage the accommodation process;
- meet performance standards and job requirements once accommodations are put in place; and
- discuss disability and associated needs only with those who need to know.

Employer Responsibilities

An employer may ask questions about an employee's ability to perform the functions of the job, but does not have the right to ask for specific information about the disability, such as the diagnosis.

Whenever possible, an employer must attempt to provide accommodations without requesting information that is not absolutely necessary. Typically, the employer does not have the right to an employee's confidential information, unless the information clearly relates to the accommodation being requested or more information is required to make a proper assessment.

Employers are also required to:

- be aware that a person may need an accommodation even if they have not requested one;

- accept a person's request in good faith;

- obtain the opinion of an expert or further advice, if needed;

- only request information related to the nature of the limitations disclosed;

- examine alternative approaches and possible accommodation solutions;

- keep a record of accommodation requests and documenting what actions were taken;

- maintain confidentiality and respect the dignity of the person requesting accommodation;

- process and implementing accommodation requests in a timely manner; and

- cover the cost of any medical information or documentation being requested.

Undue Hardship

The Ontario Human Rights Commission states that "the needs of persons with disabilities must be accommodated in the manner that most respects their dignity, to the point of undue hardship." An employer has an obligation to accommodate all disabilities up to the point of undue hardship. There are three considerations that are used to determine whether an accommodation would cause undue hardship: cost, outside sources of funding (if any), and health and safety regulations (if any). Let's look at these three considerations a little more closely.

Cost

An employer may experience undue hardship if the cost of the accommodation need is so great that it affects the sustainability of the business or changes its essential nature. Therefore, if the accommodation requires the business to fundamentally change what it does, this could be considered undue hardship. The cost must relate to the accommodation and it must be quantifiable. The sizes and financial resources of each business will be different; therefore, an undue cost is assessed differently in a small business than a larger one.

Outside Sources of Funding

If an organization was looking to offset the costs of a potential accommodation, it would have an obligation to consider outside sources of funding. Before being able to claim undue hardship, the organization would have to demonstrate that it took advantage of any available sources of funding, which may be accessed through government programs. A person seeking accommodation is also expected to avail themselves of any outside sources of funding to assist with expenses related to their accommodation. If the cost is too much for the employer to cover at once, there may be options to spread it out over time or create a reserve fund.

Health and Safety

As part of the legal requirements of Ontario's health and safety laws, employers have an obligation to protect the health and safety of all their employees, which includes persons with disabilities. Therefore, if a requested accommodation poses a significant health and safety risk, this could be considered undue hardship. In this scenario, the right to be free of discrimination must be balanced with health and safety concerns.

For more information on strategies for minimizing the chances of undue hardship in your organization, please explore the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Policy on ableism and discrimination based on disability.

- The Job Accommodation Network provides a comprehensive database of accommodation examples by disability type.

- Accessible Employers offers a helpful Workplace Accommodation Guide.

- Mental Health Works provides information on accommodations for mental health.

References

Accessible Employers. "Workplace Accommodation Guide." August 19, 2021, accessibleemployers.ca/resource/workplace-accommodation-guide/

Government of Canada. "Duty to Accommodate: A General Process For Managers." Modified February 17, 2023, canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/working-government-canada-duty-accommodate-right-non-discrimination/duty-accommodate-general-process-managers.html

Job Accommodation Network. "Accommodation Examples." Accessed July 6, 2023, askjan.org/soar.cfm

Mental Health Works. "What are mental health accommodations?" Accessed July 6, 2023, mentalhealthworks.ca/resources/what-are-mental-health-accommodations

Ontario Human Rights Commission. "Duty to accommodate." Accessed July 6, 2023, ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-based-mental-health-disabilities-and-addictions/13-duty-accommodate

Ontario Human Rights Commission. "Policy on ableism and discrimination based on disability." Revised June 27, 2016, ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability

Ontario Human Rights Commission. "Undue hardship." Accessed July 6, 2023, ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability/9-undue-hardship

University of Guelph, Co-operative Education & Career Services "Academic Accommodations Translated into Employment Settings," Accommodations. Updated February 2019, recruitguelph.ca/cecs/students-alumni/students-disabilities/accommodations

Resources

Web-Based Toolkits and Resources

AbleTo: [Downloadable Information Sheets](#)
ableto.ca/resources

Accessible Employers: [Resources](#)
accessibleemployers.ca/resource

Canadian Mental Health Association: [Mental Health in the Workplace: An Accommodation Guide for Managers and Staff](#)
ontario.cmha.ca/programs-services/mental-health-works/mental-health-in-the-workplace-an-accommodation-guide-for-managers-and-staff/

Canadian Mental Health Association: [Takeaways Toolkit](#)
cmha.ca/takeaways

DiscoverAbility Network: [Tip Sheets for Employers](#)
discoverability.network/business/tip-sheets

Forward Motion Coaching: [The Employer's Guide to Asperger's Syndrome](#)
forwardmotion.info/wp/employers

Hire For Talent: [Employer Toolkit](#)
hirefortalent.ca/toolkit

Job Accommodation Network: [JAN's Workplace Accommodation Toolkit](#) (*use discretion; U.S. resource)
askjan.org/toolkit/The-JAN-Workplace-Accommodation-Toolkit.cfm

March of Dimes: Accessibility Awareness Toolkit

marchofdimes.ca/en-ca/programs/businesstraining/Pages/Accessibility-Awareness-Resources.aspx

Mental Health Commission of Canada: A Practical Toolkit to Help Employers Build an Inclusive Workforce

mentalhealthcommission.ca/resource/a-practical-toolkit-to-help-employers-build-an-inclusive-workforce/

Society for Treatment of Autism: Supporting Inclusion in the Workplace

inclusion-sta.com/#0

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health: A tool to support employee success

workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/a-tool-to-support-employee-success

Legislation

The Government of Ontario's About accessibility laws offers free tools and resources to help organizations meet the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

ontario.ca/page/about-accessibility-laws

Reports

A Clear Business Case for Hiring Aspiring Workers from the Mental Health Commission of Canada offers findings from a research project that looked at costs and benefits of recruiting and retaining people living with mental illness.

mentalhealthcommission.ca/resource/a-clear-business-case-for-hiring-aspiring-workers/

[Business Benefits of Accessible Workplaces](#) offers a comprehensive business case in support of accessible workplaces. The report focuses on the business benefits of accessibility by outlining various returns that organizations can gain when investing in accessible employment practices for persons with disabilities.

earn-paire.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Business-Benefits-of-Accessible-Workplaces.pdf

[Rethinking DisAbility in the Private Sector](#) from the Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities provides a mix of overarching and specific considerations for employers who want to create more inclusive and accessible workplaces.

https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/consultations/rethinking-disabilities.html

[Why Hire People with Disabilities](#) provides employers with practical ideas and guidelines to hire persons with disabilities. It also supplies a business case for hiring persons with disabilities, tools to train persons with disabilities, strategies to create inclusive workplaces, and guides to accommodate persons with disabilities in workplaces.

earn-paire.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Why-Hire-People-with-Disabilities.pdf

Community Disability-Employment Resources

Many organizations provide education and support to employers. Connect with the following organizations to access industry experts and information about available resources:

[Acclaim Ability](#) offers a wide range of tailor-made programs and services designed to assist individuals with disabilities in their efforts to return to work and activities of daily living.

acclaimability.com

[Canadian Hearing Services](#) specializes in the unique needs of adults aged 16 and over who are Deaf or hard of hearing. The organization assists in finding jobs and succeeding at work.

chs.ca/employment-services-chs

[Canadian National Institute for the Blind](#) "Come to Work" program connects job seekers who are blind or partially sighted with employers who want to discover the full potential of Canada's talent.

cnib.ca/en/programs-and-services/work/im-looking-employment-come-work?region=on

[Causeway Work Centre](#) is an approved Ontario Disability Support Program service provider. It helps persons with mental illness and other challenges find rewarding work and live more independently.

causewayworkcentre.org/find-work

[CVE Inc.](#) works with Ontario Disability Support Program recipients and Opportunities Fund recipients to identify skills and abilities, and develop the tools required to confidently enter the workforce.

cve.ca

[Distinct Programmes Inc.](#) is an approved Ontario Disability Support Program service provider. Specializing in psychiatric health issues, it helps persons with disabilities find and keep satisfying jobs.

distinctprogrammes.com

[LiveWorkPlay](#) is an approved Ontario Disability Support Program service provider. It supports persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, autistic persons and individuals with dual diagnosis with many facets of their lives, including employment.

liveworkplay.ca

[March of Dimes](#) is an approved Ontario Disability Support Program service provider. It helps persons with disabilities achieve greater independence by providing them with job training and finding employment.

marchofdimes.ca/en-ca/programs/es

Neil Squire Society provides opportunities to persons with disabilities to develop computer skills, build their employment skills and enter or re-enter the workforce.

neilsquire.ca

Performance Plus Rehabilitative Care Inc. is an approved Ontario Disability Support Program service provider. It specializes in providing personal employment counselling services to persons with physical, psychological or developmental disabilities looking to enter the workforce.

pprc.ca

Selected Disability Organizations

Canadian Association of Professionals with Disabilities is a federally incorporated non-profit dedicated to maximizing the inclusion, job retention, and advancement of current and future professionals with disabilities.

canadianprofessionals.org

Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work is a Canada-wide network of organizations and individuals whose mission is to promote and support equitable employment of persons with disabilities.

ccrw.org

Employment Accessibility Resource Network in Ottawa is a United Way-led initiative that brings together employers and service providers to increase opportunities for meaningful employment for persons with disabilities.

earn-paire.ca

Glossary

Accessibility is a general term used to describe the degree to which a product, device, service or environment is available to be used by all intended audiences. According to the Government of Ontario, there are five identified barriers to accessibility for persons with disabilities. These barriers are attitudinal, organizational or systemic, architectural or physical, information or communications, and technological.

References

Council of Ontario Universities, Accessible Campus. "Understanding Barriers to Accessibility." Accessed July 6, 2023, accessiblecampus.ca/understanding-accessibility/what-are-the-%20barriers/

Government of Ontario. "OPS Inclusion & Diversity Blueprint." Updated June 20, 2022, ontario.ca/page/ops-inclusion-diversity-blueprint

Disability is a complex phenomenon that reflects the interaction between features of a person's body and mind and features of the society in which they live. A disability can occur at any time in a person's life. Some people are born with a disability. Still others develop a disability later in life. It can be permanent, temporary or episodic. Disability can worsen steadily, remain the same, or improve. It can be very mild to very severe. It can be the cause of, as well as the result of, disease, illness, injury or substance abuse.

Reference

Government of Canada. "Federal Disability Reference Guide." Modified December 16, 2022, canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/reference-guide.html

Diversity is the presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization or society. These can be identities, experiences, and visible and invisible qualities that shape who we are, how we think, how we engage with the world, and how we are perceived by the world. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation and socio-economic status.

References

Council of Ontario Directors of Education. "Equity and Inclusive Education: Going Deeper." 2014, ontariodirectors.ca/downloads/EIE-2014/Equity_and_Inclusive_Education_Eng_Final.pdf

Government of Canada. "Employment Equity Act." Modified June 23, 2023, laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-5.401/FullText.html

Government of Ontario. "OPS Inclusion & Diversity Blueprint." Updated June 20, 2022, ontario.ca/page/ops-inclusion-diversity-blueprint

Employment Equity is the process of achieving equality in the workplace so that no person is denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability. In the fulfilment of that goal, employment equity strives to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, Aboriginal Peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities. As such, employment equity is meant to give effect to the principle that equality means more than treating persons in the same way; it also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences.

Reference

Council of Ontario Directors of Education. "Equity and Inclusive Education: Going Deeper." 2014, ontariodirectors.ca/downloads/EIE-2014/Equity_and_Inclusive_Education_Eng_Final.pdf

Equity is a condition or state of fair, inclusive and respectful treatment of all people. This state means making sure everyone has what they need to succeed, as well as removing barriers that disadvantage some groups over others. As such, equity is different than treating people equally.

References

Council of Ontario Directors of Education. "Equity and Inclusive Education: Going Deeper." 2014, ontariodirectors.ca/downloads/EIE-2014/Equity_and_Inclusive_Education_Eng_Final.pdf

Government of Ontario. "OPS Inclusion & Diversity Blueprint." Updated June 20, 2022, ontario.ca/page/ops-inclusion-diversity-blueprint

Inclusion is about creating a culture that strives for equity and that embraces, respects, accepts and values difference.

Reference

Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion. "Diversity Defined." Accessed July 6, 2023, ccdi.ca/our-story/diversity-defined

Workplace Inclusion is an environment that accepts each individual's differences, embraces their strengths, and provides opportunities for all people in the workplace to achieve their full potential. Inclusion should be reflected in an organization's culture, practices and relationships. More broadly, workplace inclusion is about creating a sense of belonging, a sense in each employee of feeling valued for who they are, and of feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so they can do their best work.

References

Law Society of Ontario. "Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Definitions." Accessed July 6, 2023, lso.ca/about-lso/initiatives/edi/definitions

Royal Bank of Canada. "Diversity & Inclusion at RBC." Accessed July 6, 2023, rbc.com/diversity-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-at-rbc.html

The Government of Canada has created an accessibility glossary. It contains definitions of 342 concepts, including terminology in the fields of the sociology of work and technical aids for persons with disabilities.
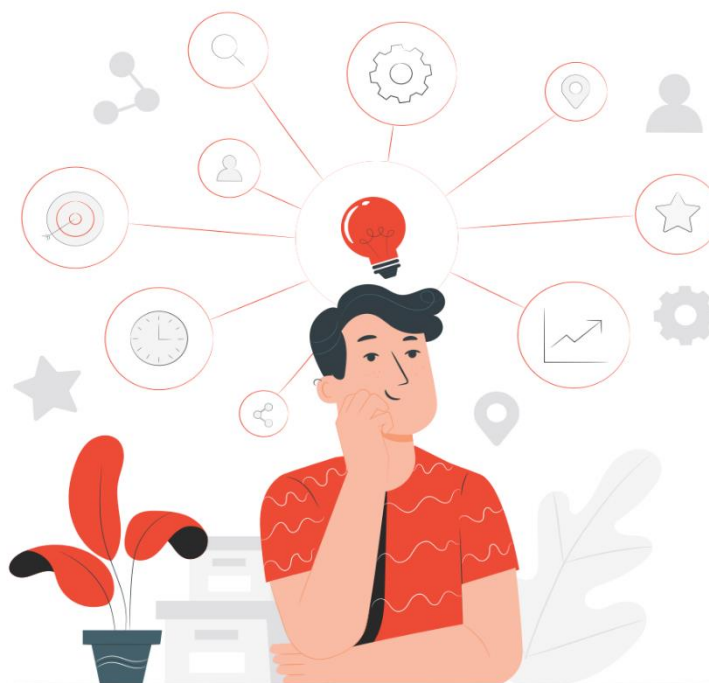
Appendices

Appendix A: Ottawa Employers: Start Seeing the Non-Visible

Quick Facts

- 10,000 students with disabilities are enrolled at La Cité, Carleton University, Algonquin College and the University of Ottawa.

- 7,500 of these students have a primary diagnosis that falls into one of three categories:
  - 26% Learning Disability
  - 26% Mental Illness
  - 23% Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- Most students with disabilities in Ottawa's post-secondary schools have disabilities employers cannot see.
  - 26% Learning Disability
  - 26% Mental Health
  - 23% ADHD
  - 9% Medical/Chronic Illness
  - 4% Other
  - 4% Autism Spectrum Disorder
  - 3% Acquired Brain Injury
  - 2% Mobility-Related Impairments
  - 2% Hearing Loss
  - 1% Vision Loss

The Challenge

Most students and graduates with disabilities who enter the workforce have disabilities that employers can't see. That means many employers in Ottawa are unlikely to have processes and methods in place to recruit, accommodate, and retain these employees.

The Solution

- **Build Awareness.** The answer to this challenge starts with awareness of the fact that most students and graduates with disabilities in Ottawa have disabilities employers cannot see.

- **Change Attitudes.** This awareness enables employers to check their biases and change their attitudes.

- **Educate and Encourage Employers.** Then come conversations to educate and encourage employers to create more inclusive workplaces in our city.

To leave the appendix and continue to the next section, click on .

Appendix B: Inclusion is Good for Business

Over 20% of the population in Canada will have a disability by 2020. The Conference Board of Canada predicts that by the same year, Canada will be facing a one-million-worker shortfall. As an employer, you can meet future labour needs by taking an inclusive approach to recruitment and hiring.

Consider the following statistics:

- 63% of Ottawa businesses say recruiting and retaining talent is a challenge. By recruiting and hiring persons with disabilities, these businesses can thrive in a talent crisis.

- 78% of Canadians are more likely to buy a product or service from a business that hires persons with disabilities.

- 88% of workers with disabilities earn performance ratings of good or excellent.

- People who have a disability and their family members comprise 53% of the marketplace.

- 86% of employees who have a disability have average or above-average attendance records.

- Retention rates are 72% higher among people who have a disability.

- Almost half–48%–of working-age persons with disabilities have a post-secondary education.

- 77% of small business owners who have hired persons with a disability say these employees meet or exceed expectations.

To leave the appendix and continue to the next section, click on #AbleTo.

Appendix C: Myths and Facts: #AbleTo Bust Myths and Find Talent

Sixty-three percent of Ottawa's businesses say that acquiring and retaining talent is a pressing issue. At the same time, many of these businesses overlook job applicants with visible and non-visible disabilities because of common myths.

Read the statements below to dispel some common myths and find out the facts about employees with disabilities.

Myth	Fact
Employees with disabilities are less productive than those without a disability.	Research shows no difference in job performance between employees with disabilities and those without disabilities.
Employees with disabilities are harder to dismiss for underperformance than those without disabilities.	Employees with disabilities fall under the same legislation and provisions as employees without disabilities and are no more difficult to dismiss.
Candidates with disabilities don't have the skills, training or education required for many jobs.	Over 33% of adults with a disability have completed post-secondary educational programs.
Employees with disabilities will be a burden to their co-workers.	Research shows that inclusive workplaces are better places to work for everyone and are more profitable over the long term.
Accommodating employees with disabilities is expensive.	65% of employees with disabilities do not require accommodation. The average cost for those who require accommodation is $500.

Workers' compensation rates will increase if employers hire more persons with disabilities.	Organizations' insurance rates are based exclusively on the comparative risks associated with their accident histories, as opposed to whether or not some of their employees have a disability.
Employees with disabilities have a high absentee rate.	Employees with disabilities do not miss any more work than their colleagues without disabilities and tend to have better attendance records than their non-disabled co-workers.

To leave the appendix and continue to the next section, click on Language.

This document has been prepared through The David C. Onley Initiative for Employment and Enterprise Development (DCOI), led by the Accessibility Institute at Carleton University, and funded by the Government of Ontario. DCOI is a partnership of Algonquin College, Carleton University, La Cité and the University of Ottawa. This document footer includes the #AbleTo identifier, demonstrating the DCOI's commitment to helping every student and graduate find meaningful work. For more information, visit AbleTo.ca.