

Policy Discussion Primer in Recognition of Disability Employment Awareness Month (DEAM): Opportunities and Policy Levers in Inclusive Employment

Inclusive Employment – An Important Opportunity for Albertans

A 2018, [Business Development Bank of Canada](#) report warned of a long-term trend of labour shortages which the pandemic has exacerbated. [CBC](#) recently reported that 55% of business owners across Canada cannot find enough workers, leading to delays and limiting growth. Recent analysis by [RBC Economics](#) concluded that “Canada will increasingly need to rely on immigration and other sources for labour force growth”. **Inclusive employment is an attractive proposition for businesses in Alberta and employing persons with disabilities is an important component of an inclusive employment strategy.**

The business case for inclusive employment is well established. A diverse workforce can directly affect productivity and improve a company’s bottom line. Yet, [Statistics Canada](#) consistently indicates that persons with disabilities are less likely to be employed than those without disabilities.

The most recent [Canadian Survey on Disability](#) found that two in five (39%) persons with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years who were not currently employed and not currently in school had work potential. This represents nearly 645,000 persons with disabilities having potential for paid employment. An inclusive labour market without discrimination, with full accessibility and accommodation, would help employers to attract this needed talent.

Disability Employment Awareness Month helps raise awareness about the potential of this untapped labour source and celebrates inclusive employers who are leading the way.

Disability and Employment in Alberta

[The United Nations](#) describes persons with disabilities as including those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Albertans with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed than Albertans without disabilities. Although data is not yet available on the impact of the pandemic on rates of employment for persons with disabilities, historically economic downturns have serious and lasting impacts on employment rates for underrepresented groups.

Based on the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability an estimated 22% of Canadians age 15 years and over have one or more disabilities. In Alberta that translates into more than 395,000 individuals age 15 and older with disabilities. Disability program caseloads are increasing in Alberta, including the Assured Income for Severely Handicapped (AISH) program that provides financial assistance for those whose condition substantially limits earning a living. Inclusive employment could reverse this trend. Employment provides value, a sense of well-being and connection to community. Economic benefits include increased income for individuals and potentially reduced AISH program costs for the province.

Opportunities and Policy Levers

The community is keen to update and action Alberta’s Employment First Strategy (introduced in 2013). The strategy centred around the underlying principle that employment is the preferred outcome for adult Albertans with disabilities and an important experience for working age youth. It recognized that the key to success lies in ensuring that both youth and adults with disabilities have the appropriate post-secondary education, training and skills development to help them meet their career goals. There is opportunity to enhance the new [Jobs Now](#) program with a renewed Employment First Strategy in Alberta. **Alberta’s Employment First Strategy identified the following outcomes and strategic directions:**

Outcomes

More persons with disabilities are employed → More workplaces are inclusive → Enhanced collaborative partnerships

Strategic Directions

Support Albertans with disabilities to obtain, maintain and advance in employment → Work with employers to create more inclusive workplaces → Enhance service provider partnerships and networks