



# **Employment Strategy for Canadians with Disabilities: First Annual Progress Report (2024-2025)**



December 2025



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## Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Message from the Minister .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Advancing the Employment Strategy together .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Why disability inclusion matters in today's economy: labour market pressures and under-tapped talent .....	3
What we're working toward: building fully inclusive employment programs .....	3
<b>3. Tracking our path to 2040 .....</b>	<b>4</b>
What we're working toward: making sure we can measure what matters .....	4
Tools and data sources for a stronger measurement framework .....	5
<b>4. Advancing inclusion through ESDC programs .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Goal 1: Supporting individuals .....	6
Goal 2: Supporting employers .....	8
Goal 3: Supporting enablers.....	8
<b>5. Provincial and territorial initiatives to advance labour market inclusion .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>6. Looking ahead: sustaining progress and collaboration .....</b>	<b>10</b>

## 1. Message from the Minister

Persons with disabilities strengthen Canada's workforce. They bring immense talent, creativity, and problem-solving skills that help build inclusive and future-ready workplaces. But many still face challenges when looking for work, trying to keep a job, or progressing in their careers.

According to the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD), over 1 million persons with disabilities between the ages of 15 and 64 were not working but could work if they had the right supports.

This number reflects real people and real experiences. As Canada's Minister of Jobs and Families, I've had the honour of meeting Canadians with disabilities, members of disability organizations, employers, and community partners. I've heard how important financial security, stable jobs, health care, and support services are to improving quality of life. I've heard how persons with disabilities are especially impacted by the rising cost of living and affordability challenges and are too often the "last hired and first fired" in times of job market instability and economic shocks.

I've been reminded as well that persons with disabilities are diverse, with different identities, backgrounds, and experiences that affect both the challenges they face and the opportunities they seek. I've also heard many success stories. As key examples, programs like the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities (Opportunities Fund) and our work with provinces and territories through the Labour Market Transfer Agreements are helping persons with disabilities find meaningful work and build careers.

In July 2024, we launched the Employment Strategy for Canadians with Disabilities. This Strategy aims to close the employment gap between people with and without disabilities. At launch, the gap was about 16 percentage points. We are working towards reducing that gap by 2 percentage points before the next CSD in 2027. Our long-term vision is to close the gap completely by 2040. We'll report in detail on our work towards closing the employment gap every five years starting in 2029, and we'll continue to share annual updates on our progress.

Together, we can build a future where Canadians with disabilities are not only included in the workforce but thrive as full participants in Canada's economy and society.

**The Honourable Patty Hajdu**

**Minister of Jobs and Families**

## 2. Advancing the Employment Strategy together

### Why disability inclusion matters in today's economy: labour market pressures and under-tapped talent

Canada's job market is facing real challenges. An aging population and ongoing worker shortages in key sectors are making it harder for employers to find the people they need. In the second quarter of 2025, Statistics Canada reported **505,900 job vacancies**. The sales and service sector had the most openings (150,320), followed by the trades, transport and equipment operating sectors (90,665) and the health care sector (68,890).

Technology, climate change, and sectoral shifts are also reshaping the labour market. New tools like artificial intelligence (AI) are changing the skills employers need. These shifts can make it even harder for persons with disabilities to find and keep jobs, especially when workplaces aren't designed to be inclusive. At the same time, global uncertainty, such as U.S. trade policies and rising protectionism, is adding pressure.

Yet, persons with disabilities represent one of Canada's largest under-tapped talent pools. The 2022 CSD found that only 62% of working-age adults with disabilities are employed, compared to 78% of those without disabilities, representing a gap of 16 percentage points. The latest Labour Force Survey data confirms this gap still exists.

That's why advancing the Employment Strategy for Canadians with Disabilities is more important than ever. In a time of labour shortages, Canada must recognize the skills and talents of persons with disabilities.

### What we're working toward: building fully inclusive employment programs

When we launched the Employment Strategy in July 2024, we committed to making all of Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) workforce programs more inclusive. From July 2024 to July 2025, we made progress in the following ways:

#### Reviewing our programs

ESDC is undertaking a review of existing programs to make sure they include persons with disabilities from the start. This involves using new accessibility tools and considerations early in the design process to identify and remove barriers before programs launch.

#### Leveraging updated accessibility standards

In May 2025, Accessibility Standards Canada released a revised Employment Standard. It includes tools and guidance to help employers create inclusive workplaces, especially for people with lived experiences of disability.

### Supporting research and sharing best practices

ESDC's Future Skills Centre is funding research projects on topics such as how to support mid-career workers with disabilities and promote inclusive hiring practices in manufacturing. Accessibility Standards Canada is funding over 30 research projects on building inclusive workplaces and programs. The Canadian Disability Inclusion Business Council's *2024 Bridging the Gap Report on Disability Inclusion in Canadian Workplaces* also offers valuable insight.

### Exploring inclusive uses of AI

Accessibility Standards Canada's Technical Guide on Accessible and Equitable Artificial Intelligence highlights the need for developing inclusive hiring platforms. ESDC is funding projects through the Opportunities Fund that use AI to help job seekers explore new career paths and access training in areas like digital marketing. Job Bank Canada is using a statistical algorithm with machine learning to suggest job matches. It also uses AI to help job seekers identify transferable skills.

### Collaborating across the federal government

ESDC works with other federal departments through initiatives like Canada's Autism Strategy, the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, the National Veterans Employment Strategy, and the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy. This helps ensure disability inclusion is part of broader federal priorities.

### Promoting inclusion globally

Canada is supporting international efforts to improve employment for persons with disabilities. In 2024, we signed the G7 Solfagnano Charter, committing to coordinated action on inclusive employment. We're also working with countries like the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand to share lessons and best practices on closing the employment gap between persons with and without disabilities.

## 3. Tracking our path to 2040

### What we're working toward: making sure we can measure what matters

Closing the employment gap takes more than updated programs and policies. It requires tracking real progress. From the start, the Employment Strategy for Canadians with Disabilities committed to reporting progress every year, with deeper reviews every five years. This helps Canadians to observe meaningful change over time.

In 2025, the Chief Accessibility Officer released a report titled *Getting to Work: Accessible Employment in Canada*, which called for stronger indicators to track aspects such as promotion, retention, and access to equipment. ESDC has developed new tools to measure

progress and is creating ways to compare outcomes with overall labour market trends. We're also working directly with persons with disabilities to make sure our reporting reflects lived experiences, following the principle of "Nothing Without Us."

## Tools and data sources for a stronger measurement framework

We are expanding the Employment Strategy's framework to measure our progress towards achieving our 2040 vision. Our framework's new indicators will help give us a clearer picture of what is working, where we need to improve, and how we can close the employment gap between persons with and without disabilities in a meaningful and measurable way. To create these indicators, we are drawing from the following:

### ESDC's employment indicators for accessibility data

ESDC's Performance Indicator Framework for Accessibility Data: Employment was updated in June 2025. Examples of this framework's core employment indicators include:

- the percentage of persons with disabilities working full-time
- the number of individuals who are overqualified for their jobs
- barriers to onboarding or promotion
- challenges related to transportation that prevent people from working

### Indicators for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The report on Canadian Indicators for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, prepared by ESDC in March 2025, includes **13 indicators** related to **Article 27, Work and Employment**. These indicators are based on data collected by Statistics Canada, including the Canadian Survey on Disability.

### Surveys of Canadians

The Employment Strategy also draws on data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey, which provides annual reporting on persons with disabilities through a Disability Supplement, the Indigenous Peoples Survey, and other national surveys.

## 4. Advancing inclusion through ESDC programs

As the lead department for the Employment Strategy for Canadians with Disabilities, ESDC is delivering programs and making investments that respond to today's economic challenges. These include skills shortages and the need for inclusive hiring in high-demand sectors.

From helping individuals prepare for and succeed in work, to supporting employers and strengthening organizations to promote inclusion, ESDC's programs are driving real progress.

## Goal 1: Supporting individuals

In line with the Employment Strategy's first goal, ESDC has achieved the following to help Canadians with disabilities enter and stay in the workforce:

### Introduced new income support for persons with disabilities

- launched the Canada Disability Benefit in June 2025, which allows eligible persons with disabilities to continue working or re-enter the workforce and earn up to a certain level of income before their monthly benefit amount begins to be gradually reduced

### Increased reach and impact of employment and skills development supports directly targeting Canadians with disabilities

- supported **114 community projects** through the Opportunities Fund program with an investment of **\$94.6 million** in fiscal year 2024 to 2025, with approximately 60% of funding dedicated to helping Canadians with disabilities find and keep jobs, progress in their careers, or become entrepreneurs. The last Opportunities Fund program evaluation showed the average annual earnings of participants increased by 38% over 5 years. Overall, a \$1 investment in the program yields \$1.7 in return over 10 years.
- supported over **200,000 persons with disabilities** in fiscal year 2024 to 2025 through Workforce Development Agreements and Labour Market Development Agreements, which provide provinces and territories with funding to deliver skills training and employment services

### Embedded greater focus on youth with disabilities in youth and student programming

- maintained a **40% increase** to Canada Student Grant for Students with Disabilities and introduced **up to \$3,500 per year** in reimbursements for disability verification related costs in fiscal year 2024 to 2025, to improve the post-secondary education participation of students with persistent or permanent disabilities
- provided at least **10,500 learners with disabilities** with tutoring, mentoring, scholarships and other supports, including better access to digital skills, to improve foundational and transferable skills in a rapidly changing labour market through the Supports for Student Learning Program in fiscal year 2024 to 2025
- recently launched a programming stream focused on youth with disabilities, which accounts for almost 30% of ESDC's Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) Program's projects
- between 2023 and 2025, delivered projects through ESDC's YESS program that offered tailored supports and improved outcomes and career paths to over **5,600 youth with disabilities** entering the labour market

**Provided support for unemployed Indigenous workers with disabilities to gain skills and find and secure employment**

- supported over **6,300 new Indigenous workers with disabilities** in fiscal year 2024 to 2025 through the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program, with over **1,900 individuals securing jobs**

**Enhanced supports for workers, including those with learning challenges, to improve their foundational and transferable skills**

- in partnership with employers and service providers, trained at least **1,870 individuals with disabilities** with an investment of **\$4.8 million** through the Skills for Success Program (SFS) in fiscal year 2024 to 2025
- under the SFS, supported **615 apprentices**, including those with learning challenges, to progress in their apprenticeship training, as well as successfully pass their certification or Red Seal exam, through an initiative in partnership with the New Brunswick Government

**Increased support for workers who need income support during illness**

- with the extension of Employment Insurance Sickness Benefits from 15 to 26 weeks introduced in 2022, the EI program supported more Canadians facing a work interruption due to illness to stay connected to the labour force, providing **\$2.7 billion** in support to **429,800 claims** in fiscal year 2023 to 2024

**Helped match job seekers with disabilities with inclusive employers**

- logged **34,593 visits** to the Job Bank landing page for persons with disabilities in fiscal year 2024 to 2025, with **3,580 site users with disabilities matched to a job profile**, and **21,690 jobs posted** by employers who offer disability-related workplace supports

**Advanced research to support disability inclusion in Canada's labour market**

- invested **\$5.4 million** in disability-focused research through the Future Skills Centre in fiscal year 2024 to 2025

**Outside of ESDC, the Government of Canada has also continued to make progress on related initiatives that are aligned with this Employment Strategy goal:**

- surpassed the federal goal of hiring **5,000 employees with disabilities** by 2025, with nearly **7,000 net new hires** since 2019
- continued implementation of the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada
- introduced the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport to **simplify workplace accommodations** in the federal public service

- advanced efforts, through the National Veterans Employment Strategy, to strengthen and increase awareness of career transition supports for **veterans with service-related disabilities**

### Goal 2: Supporting employers

Under the Employment Strategy's second goal, we are also helping employers become more inclusive. Our initiatives have accomplished the following:

- supported employer-focused projects through the Opportunities Fund program that have engaged thousands of employers, representing around **30% of the \$94.6 million** in funding provided in fiscal year 2024 to 2025
- helped **employers hire over 6,000 youth with disabilities** through the Canada Summer Jobs Program from 2023 to 2025
- logged the creation of **3,881 new employer profiles** on Job Bank in fiscal year 2024 to 2025, which indicated workplaces with supports for persons with disabilities
- increased accessibility upgrades in local infrastructure projects across the country with an investment of **\$29.6 million** in fiscal year 2024 to 2025, which includes funding for **43 workplace projects** with employers valued at approximately \$1.8 million, through the Enabling Accessibility Fund
- supported **4,542 employers** through the Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program in fiscal year 2024 to 2025, with **\$7.35 million** in funding that also benefited individuals with disabilities and others

### Goal 3: Supporting enablers

As part of the Employment Strategy's third goal, we are also investing in the people and organizations that make inclusion possible. Through ESDC initiatives, we have achieved the following in support of enablers:

- supported individuals and organizations that build capacity for disability inclusion through the Opportunities Fund program, dedicating approximately **10% of the \$94.6 million** in funding provided in fiscal year 2024 to 2025
- invested **\$1 million** in the Enhancing Access to Professional Sign Language Interpretation initiative under the Opportunities Fund program in fiscal year 2024 to 2025 in response to a rising demand for sign language interpretation resulting from *Accessible Canada Act* requirements

- funded initiatives for enablers through the Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program to provide over **1,500 individuals with disabilities** with the training and tools needed to support their labour market participation in fiscal year 2024 to 2025
- provided **\$16 million** to organizations in fiscal year 2024 to 2025 through the Social Development Partnerships Program - Disability component

## 5. Provincial and territorial initiatives to advance labour market inclusion

Provinces and territories play a key role in promoting disability inclusion in the workforce. They help address shared challenges like labour shortages and support growing sectors by tailoring programs to local needs. Many of these initiatives are co-funded by the federal government through the Workforce Development Agreements and Labour Market Development Agreements. These efforts reflect our shared priority of closing the disability employment gap between persons with and without disabilities.

- **Alberta's** Workforce Development Program provided persons with disabilities with training courses, work placements, and career planning services
- **British Columbia** invested in technology and adaptive equipment to help persons with disabilities fully participate in a wide range of workplaces
- **Manitoba** supported job seekers and employers through the Supported Employment Program, which helps persons with disabilities find and keep meaningful jobs
- **New Brunswick** helped case-managed individuals access adaptive equipment and assistive technology, with live technical support from a help desk
- **Newfoundland and Labrador** helped people with developmental disabilities find paid jobs in their communities through the Supported Employment Program
- **Northwest Territories** expanded Inclusion NWT's programs, including EmployABILITY, which assesses the needs of adult and high school students for employment supports
- **Nova Scotia's** Move to Work Program offered classroom-based learning and employer exposure to help participants with disabilities build skills and confidence
- **Nunavut** delivered pre-employment training rooted in Inuit culture, with some programs led by Elders
- **Ontario** supported students with disabilities through the **Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities**, which helps colleges and universities provide academic accommodations

- **Prince Edward Island** supported youth with intellectual disabilities or autism through Project SEARCH PEI, a 10-month school-to-work transition program focused on building transferable job skills for competitive employment
- In March 2025, Canada and **Quebec** signed a **3-year, \$27 million agreement** to support Quebec measures and initiatives that promote the integration and retention of persons with disabilities, including support for employers to help them make workplaces more accessible and inclusive for employees with disabilities
- **Saskatchewan** delivered employer-focused programs that promote inclusive hiring and workforce development, aligning with the Saskatchewan Disability Strategy's goals of accessibility and economic inclusion
- **Yukon's AURORA Workshops** project delivered employment skills workshops across the territory to persons with learning disabilities, and also trained employers, government departments, and training organizations in inclusive employment practices

## 6. Looking ahead: sustaining progress and collaboration

We will keep working closely with persons with disabilities, the disability community, other federal departments, Indigenous Peoples, and our provincial, territorial and international partners. We will continue to share public updates every year. These updates will grow and improve as new data and indicators become available, helping us track progress in a clear and meaningful way. Starting in 2029, we will publish a detailed update every five years. These updates will follow the release of the Canadian Survey on Disability, which is also completed every five years.

The following are areas of focus for the coming year.

### Opportunities Fund project amendments

The Opportunities Fund program is **extending over 100 projects** until **March 2027**, with a focus on job-matching. This represents an investment of **over \$90 million**.

### Digital accessibility

ESDC is reviewing feedback from consultations on the proposed **Accessible Canada Act digital accessibility regulations** to improve access to jobs, programs, and services offered by federally regulated organizations.

ESDC is working with Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) to help advance disability inclusion in Canada's AI landscape.

### **Workforce reintegration**

ESDC is currently completing and evaluating its **Return-to-Work Pilot project**, which is testing new ways to support **Canada Pension Plan - Disability clients** who want to re-enter the workforce.

### **Reflecting Indigenous voices**

ESDC is maintaining open dialogue with **Indigenous local governments** and service organizations to ensure ESDC programs are reflecting the specific and evolving needs of **Indigenous persons with disabilities**.

### **Global leadership**

Canada is also focusing on **strengthening international collaboration**, sharing best practices on disability-inclusive employment, aligning policies where possible, and contributing to **global efforts to close the disability employment gap** between persons with and without disabilities.

With continued commitment and strong collaboration, we can build a Canada where persons with disabilities have every opportunity to succeed in the job market and use their talents to strengthen our nation's economy.