



Literature Review

Systemic barriers to the full socio-economic participation of persons with disabilities and the benefits realized when such persons are included in the workplace

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

Acronym or abbreviation	Definition
ACA	Accessible Canada Act
ASPSC	Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada
CEWF	Centralized Enabling Workplace Fund
CSD	Canadian Survey on Disability
ICFDH	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
PCH	Department of Canadian Heritage
PRG	Policy Research Group

Executive Summary

In 2019, Canadian Parliament passed the *Accessible Canada Act* with a view to create a barrier-free Canada through the proactive identification, removal and prevention of barriers to accessibility wherever Canadians interact with areas under federal jurisdiction. The *Act* will benefit all Canadians, particularly those living with one or more impairments that limit their daily activities. Statistics Canada's 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) revealed that approximately one in five Canadians aged 15 and older – approximately 6.2 million individuals – identified as having one or more disabilities that limited their daily lives. Only 59% of persons with disabilities participated in the workforce, compared to 80% of Canadians without disabilities. The wide gap in labour force participation between Canadians with disabilities and those without is an indicator of the impact of accessibility barriers on the full socio-economic participation of Canadians with disabilities.

This literature review was conducted to explore questions related to systemic barriers to the full socio-economic participation of persons with disabilities, as well as the benefits realized when persons with disabilities are included in the workplace, with the goal of informing Canadian Heritage as it implements the *Accessible Canada Act*. Ultimately, it seeks to help remove systematic barriers by identifying them and by providing evidence to demonstrate how employing persons with disabilities benefits the individual, the enterprise, and society as a whole.

The methodology for this literature review focused on a content analysis of scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles as well as relevant monograph chapters. Publicly available information on government legislation, policies, and programs complemented the scholarly sources. Because of the inherently complex nature of the subject matter, an interdisciplinary approach was used in terms of disciplines consulted for sources. This includes research in disability studies, health studies, education, communications, legal studies, and urban design, among others.

Barriers addressed in this document include those related to staffing, built work environments, communication modes, use of information and communication technologies, program design and delivery, and procurement. Benefits realized when persons with disabilities are included in the workplace include benefits to the workforce, benefits for an enterprise's performance, and benefits for society at large. Finally, the review provides an overview of legislation and policies from other jurisdictions, including Canadian provinces and international approaches by means of comparison.

The significant underrepresentation of persons with disabilities in Canada's public service underscores the importance of the Government of Canada to lead the way in demonstrating that both real and perceived barriers to employing persons with disabilities can, indeed, be overcome; moreover, that the benefits of hiring persons with a disability far outweigh costs associated with providing appropriate accommodations in the workplace. It is incumbent on the Government of Canada to use the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada to overcome systemic barriers and ensure that persons with a disability find their place working for the public service and throughout Canadian society.

Introduction

The Policy Research Group (PRG) in the Department of Canadian Heritage (PCH) conducted this literature review at the request of the Office of the Departmental Lead for Accessibility at PCH. Following the coming into force of *An Act to Ensure a Barrier-free Canada (Accessible Canada Act)* on July 11, 2019, Canadian Heritage undertook to review published research into the nature of systemic barriers to the full socio-economic participation of persons with disabilities, and into the benefits realized when such persons are included in the workplace. This report presents the key findings of that literature review.

Objectives of the literature review

The findings of this review are intended to inform officials in Canadian Heritage Portfolio institutions in implementing the *Accessible Canada Act* by providing evidence in answer to two research questions.

1) *What is the nature of systemic barriers to the full socio-economic participation of persons with disabilities?* This line of inquiry examines the systemic barriers persons with disabilities face in the following areas:

- staffing (e.g. hiring, retention and promotion);
- the built environments where such persons work and access programs and services;
- communication modes in the workplace and between service providers and clients;
- the use of information and communication technologies;
- program design and delivery; and
- procurement.

These barriers are understood to have wide-ranging repercussions, including in areas related to Canadian Heritage's five core responsibilities, which are:

- 1) Creativity, arts and culture
- 2) Heritage and celebration
- 3) Sport
- 4) Diversity and inclusion
- 5) Official languages

The review therefore provides evidence to support further analysis by the Department of those repercussions and of measures that could lead to the removal of those barriers.

2) *What benefits are realized when persons with disabilities are included in the workplace?*

This second line of inquiry led to a review of research on the social and economic benefits of including persons with disabilities in workplaces. Lessons learned by select national, subnational or local governments in comparable jurisdictions are also documented in this report. The review considered impacts on:

- the workforce (in light of government's role as an employer); this includes both persons with a disability in the workforce and those without;
- the performance of an enterprise (in light of government's role in developing policy and providing programs and services to the public); and
- society more broadly.

Methodology

The methodology employed focused on a content analysis primarily of scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles published in English or in French since 2000. Chapters of a small number of monographs by theorists of the key issues explored in this report were also reviewed. As complements to scholarly sources, the contents of publicly available information on government legislation, policies and programs and briefs submitted to the Parliament of Canada by Canadians individual and organizations were also analyzed.

To ensure proper contextualization of the discussions, sources authored by Canadians, published in Canada or pertaining to Canadian subjects and published since 2010 were given particular (but not exclusive) consideration.

PRG assigned a senior researcher to lead the literature review, with further support from two other PRG researchers. An advisor with the departmental accessibility office and a librarian from the departmental Knowledge Centre further contributed to the research by identifying and obtaining key sources.

The primary tool employed in identifying sources for the literature review was EBSCO Discovery Service, an online research database for peer-reviewed academic literature. Internet searches focusing on the websites of key industry stakeholders were also conducted to locate reports, position papers and media articles. Research activities were constrained by the closure of library branches during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the practical result of limiting the sources consulted to those available in electronic format via the departmental Knowledge Centre or internet sites.

The body of scholarly literature examined comes from a variety of fields. Chief among these is vocational rehabilitation, reflecting a long history of considering disability from a clinical or medical perspective. This body of literature complements this review's focus on employment and integration in the workplace. Disability studies, legal studies and management studies also yielded important sources. Works from scholars in education studies, public health, communications and urban design were also analyzed. They were fewer in number, perhaps because issues related to impairment and disability only starting receiving attention relatively recently. This methodology ensured the analysis of a focused yet diverse set of sources that addressed both research questions in light of the objectives of the literature review.

Background

A statistical portrait of disability in Canada

Statistics Canada's Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD), most recently carried out in 2017, is the main source of data on disabilities for Canadians aged 15 years and over. Understanding population data is critical for understanding the scope of efforts to remove barriers to accessibility, in particular for persons with disabilities.

The 2017 CSD found that approximately one in five Canadians – some 6.2 million – aged 15 years and over “had one or more disabilities that limited them in their daily activities.”¹ It also found that among Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 29% had one type of disability, 38% had two or three types of disability, and 33% had four or more. Furthermore, 43% of Canadians with disabilities considered that these disabilities were severe or very severe.²

Women (24%) were also more likely to have one or more disabilities than men (20%), across all age groups.³ Combining accessibility and gender-based analyses is important to improved understanding of the challenges and barriers persons with disabilities encounter in their daily activities. For instance, the CSD finding that women aged 25 to 64 years with milder disabilities had median after-tax personal income that was 24% less than their male counterparts and 13% less than women without disabilities, underscores how the gender wage gap and disability can combine to create inequitable outcomes.⁴

The 2017 CSD also found that the prevalence of disability tends to increase with age: it was 13% among youths aged 15 to 24 years, 20% among working age adults aged 20 to 64, and 38% among seniors aged 65 and over. The prevalence of disability types also varies between those three age groups. Among seniors, pain, mobility, and flexibility – often in combination – were the most common disability types. Among working-age adults, pain, mental health, flexibility and mobility were the most prevalent. Among youth, mental health, learning, and pain-related disabilities were the most prevalent.⁵

The workforce participation of Canadians with disabilities was markedly lower (59%) than that of Canadians without disabilities (approximately 80%) in 2017. It also varied by severity of disability: workforce participation was significantly lower for Canadians with very severe disabilities (31%) as compared to those with mild disabilities (76%).⁶

Severity of disability was also strongly related to personal income. Among Canadians aged 25 to 64, those with no disabilities had a median after-tax personal income of \$39,000, as compared to \$34,300 for those with mild disabilities and \$19,200 for adults with severe disabilities. Among the latter group, 28% were living below Canada's official poverty line as compared to 14% of those with milder disabilities and 10% of those without disabilities.⁷

The impetus for change

Population data undoubtedly tells an important part of the story, providing quantitative evidence of the unequal distribution of resources between Canadians with disabilities and those without, but it does not recount the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities. This data alone cannot be the basis for decision-making. As Treviranus argued:

The only characteristic people who are labelled as ‘disabled’ have in common is difference from the average. Decisions based on population data will not serve the relevant needs of people experiencing disabilities. People experiencing disabilities are also very different from each other. In many data sets, individuals with disabilities will each be a minority of one. Therefore, disability, from a data perspective, is often synonymous with edge requirements, outliers or minorities at the margins of the data set.⁸

Consequently, it is important to draw upon descriptive qualitative research that explores the socio-economic and political experiences of persons with disabilities in Canada and to address issues of inequity. Doing so, for example, illustrates Canadian disability scholar Michael J. Prince’s argument that Canadians with disabilities, collectively, are “absent citizens” owing to the significant cultural, material, and political disadvantages they experience compared to persons without disabilities.⁹ He argued that most persons with disabilities in Canada do not experience “full, substantive citizenship,”¹⁰ encountering obstacles including “their non-recognition as full persons in prevailing cultural value patterns; the mal-distribution of resources in the form of income, employment, housing, and other material resources; and their misrepresentation or marginal voice in elections, policy development, and decision-making processes.”¹¹

As will be demonstrated in this literature review, ample evidence lays bare the inequality (such as different outcomes) and inequity (such as different opportunities) that differentiate the experiences of persons with and those without disabilities, corroborating Prince’s position. This is the situation that the *Accessible Canada Act*, the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada, and the Canadian Heritage Accessibility Framework, seek to change.

a) The Accessible Canada Act

The *Accessible Canada Act* (ACA), which came into force on July 11, 2019, is intended to foster the full and equal participation of *all* persons in Canadian society, especially persons with disabilities, by setting out requirements for proactively identifying, removing and preventing barriers to accessibility “wherever Canadians interact with areas under federal jurisdiction.” The principal goals of the ACA are to establish the Canadian Accessibility Standards Development Organization, with a mandate to:

- Establish the federal government’s authority to work with stakeholders and persons with disabilities to create new accessibility regulations that will apply to sectors within federal jurisdiction;
- Establish compliance and enforcement measures, including an annual report of the Accessibility

Commissioner to Parliament; and

- Establish an accessibility complaints mechanism that includes the awarding of compensation to individuals found to have suffered harm property damage or economic loss resulting from contravention of the accessibility regulations.^{12 13}

This new legislative framework, in conjunction with other laws including the *Employment Equity Act* and the *Public Service Employment Act*, is the foundation upon which the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada (ASPSC) is built.

b) The Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada

The Office of Public Service Accessibility, a part of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, was established to prepare the public service to meet or exceed the requirements of the ACA. One of its three mandate commitments is to develop and launch the *Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada* (ASPSC). Starting with a vision of Canada's public service becoming the most accessible and inclusive in the world, the ASPSC sets out five goals:

1. Improve recruitment, retention and promotion of persons with disabilities;
2. Enhance the accessibility of the built environment;
3. Make information and communications technology usable by all;
4. Equip public servants to design and deliver accessible programs and services; and
5. Build an accessibility-confident public service.

c) The Canadian Heritage Accessibility Framework, Action Plans and Progress Reports

At the departmental level, Canadian Heritage has adopted an accessibility framework as a tool for providing guidance in responding to the ACA and becoming a fully accessible environment by 2040. The framework will serve to establish three-year action plans and annual progress reports, and will itself be updated every three to reflect changes in the environment and to address results from the reports. The Department has established that the initial 2022-2025 action plan must identify the barriers faced by persons with disabilities under each of the five pillars of the ASPSC, outline activities to address those barriers and establish performance measures to track progress. In support of that work, the first substantive section of this literature review is focused on describing the nature of systemic barriers to the full socio-economic participation of persons with disabilities. The second substantive section examines benefits realized when persons with disabilities are included in the workplace, with a view to supporting the development of indicators of success. The summary results of this literature review will seek to inform the Department's action plan by clearly identifying these barriers and benefits and their effects on employers, employees, and society as a whole.

Nature of systemic barriers to the full socio-economic participation of persons with disabilities

This section addresses the first research question that guided the literature review: *What is the nature of the systemic barriers to the full socio-economic participation of persons with disabilities?* The review revealed that both a large number and a wide array of systemic barriers are extensively documented in the literature, although some barriers have been studied much more than others. The following subsections explore six activity areas in which persons with disabilities encounter barriers to their full socio-economic participation: employment; built environments; communication modes; the use of information and communication technologies; program design and delivery; and government procurement. In this section, findings from the literature on each of those six activity areas are summarized, followed by discussion of how the findings relate to the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service.

1) Barriers to employment

a) Social stratification

In *The Vertical Mosaic*, Porter observed that “ranking of individuals or groups in an order of inferiority or superiority is a universal feature of social life.”¹⁴ In effect, according to Prince, a structure of inequality results from this ranking, with ramifications on education, employment, property ownership and positions of power. The resulting social stratification directly affects conceptions of community and notions of who belongs, who does not, and on what terms and conditions.¹⁵

By way of example, a landmark public opinion research report presented to the Government of Canada by Environics Research Group in 2004 revealed prevailing attitudes held by respondents that are indicative of social stratification at play. For instance, for most respondents, awareness of disabilities and disability-related issues was not top-of-mind. Respondents were generally of the view that families should be the first resource for persons with disabilities (i.e. disability is a private matter), along with support from provincial health care systems (i.e. disability is a medical issue) and non-profit agencies (i.e. disability is a charitable cause).¹⁶ Such attitudes reveal a degree of marginalization of persons with disabilities, cast as individuals with needs rather than as actors and full participants in society. However, respondents also recognized that persons with disabilities faced discrimination in schools, workplaces and social settings and expressed the belief that persons with disabilities “deserve the same opportunities as other citizens to participate in social, economic and public affairs to the fullest.”¹⁷

b) Socialization in the workplace

For some individuals, the workplace may be the environment with the greatest potential for building relationships and countering social isolation. An unwelcoming work environment may however trigger feelings

of being stigmatized, under-valued and segregated from co-workers, particularly in individuals with a visible condition.¹⁸ Significantly, Vornholt, Uitdewilligen and Nijhuis' found that "a lack of social acceptance by nondisabled co-workers is often the reason why employees with disabilities fail to stay in regular organizations for sustained periods."¹⁹ In a 1994 literature review, Colella suggested that socialization is undermined by factors including:

- too little interaction between workers with impairments and coworkers;
- some workers with disabilities may have unrealistic expectations which may lead to frustrations; and
- persons with disabilities may not be able to participate in informal or off-the-job socialization activities, thus missing opportunities "to learn about rituals, roles, and how they fit into the organizational picture."²⁰

Other studies have found that workers with disabilities are less likely to be involved in joking and teasing at work than coworkers without disabilities, and that they are less likely to take part in non-job-related interactions during breaks.²¹ Research has shown that people have psychological discomfort when dealing with persons with disabilities and that social interaction tends to be avoided by both sides.²² Boyle observed that people may erroneously assume lack of competence in such interactions or they may fear the unknown, which may then result in exclusionary social barriers.²³

A study of workers on the Autism Disorder Spectrum found that some persons with autism considered social interactions at work to be a hindrance to their performance and job satisfaction. Small talk or casual encounters in the hallway can make some persons with ASD very uncomfortable and unexpected reactions in others can be a source of significant stress.²⁴

c) Stigma, prejudice and discrimination

Persons with disabilities may encounter prejudice that undermines their employability long before their search for employment begins. Prince argued in a 2016 study for the Institute for Research on Public Policy that:

Aspirations and expectations for gainful employment are not always promoted within school systems, or by families, who see few feasible opportunities in the labour market or post-secondary education for their sons or daughters with disabilities. Work co-op experiences are often not available. Parents may be too busy or too worried to see the employment potential of their teenage child with a disability. Teachers or school administrators may unintentionally focus on what the young person cannot do because of his or her impairment, rather than on what the person might be able to do in a setting with appropriate services and support.²⁵

Much of the literature found in the course of this review that addresses issues of stigma, prejudice or discrimination focuses on employers' perceptions of and assumptions about persons with disabilities, which can create barriers to the latter's full participation in the workforce. Several studies have documented challenges identified by employers with regard to employing persons with disabilities. A 2011 study based on a survey of employers in the United States found that the top reasons given by respondents for not hiring or retaining workers with disabilities were:

- Concerns with respect to the resulting costs, particularly of accommodations;
- Lack of awareness as to how to manage workers with a disability and their accommodation needs;
- Fear of ending up with a worker who cannot be disciplined or fired because of the possibility of a lawsuit;
- Difficulty assessing an applicant's ability to perform job tasks and concerns over their ability to perform as well as workers without a disability;
- Concerns over extra supervisory time that may be required;
- A lack of applicants with disabilities.²⁶

The findings of this study are consistent with those of several others.²⁷ For instance, the Conference Board of Canada found in 2014 that the main barriers to making employment practices more accessible in Canada included perceptions that accommodations are complex and expensive; that employers say that persons with disabilities don't apply for jobs and that they don't know how to recruit them differently; and that negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities persist.²⁸ Deloitte had found in 2010 that employers who participated in their study had identified the main challenges in soliciting applications from candidates with disabilities were that traditional means for posting jobs may not be accessible to such candidates; some candidates choose not to self-identify as disabled; and concerns related to lack of work experience in a business environment. Deloitte observed that this challenge is compounded by the reality that "many people with disabilities who are entering the workforce have not had the benefit of summer employment or part-time jobs during school months for a variety of reasons."²⁹ Furthermore, still according to the Deloitte study, there is a perception among employers that hiring a person with a disability would require managers to provide more effort and training into onboarding, without necessarily having sufficient resources to do so.³⁰

A recent review by Sprong et al. similarly found that numerous studies have revealed that employers' concerns with a worker's inability to effectively perform the nature of the work required, a perceived lack of supply of qualified workers with disabilities, and discomfort evaluating or disciplining workers with disabilities all act as barriers.³¹ Sprong et al. also found that:

A number of studies have indicated that employers or supervisors with experience hiring workers with disabilities considered the job performance of "qualified" workers with disabilities were similar to work performance of employees without disabilities; that front-line supervisors of employees with disabilities who interacted on a daily basis reported satisfaction with the work performance of those employees, and that employers of smaller companies hold more positive attitudes towards employees with severe disabilities because they considered the latter to be dependable, productive workers who encouraged positive workplace morale.³²

This suggests strongly that myths and misconceptions held by employers about persons with disabilities act as a significant attitudinal barrier to their full integration into the workforce, as demonstrated repeatedly in the literature. For example, Tompa, Samosh and Boucher recently suggested that employers' fears of "legal ramifications should they decide to dismiss that candidate in the future due to poor job fit or performance issues unrelated to their disability" may create a disincentive to hiring a candidate with a disability.³³ A second

example is found in a study conducted in the United States in 2009, which identified a number of similar misconceptions held by employers, including:

- People with disabilities often require extra time to learn new work tasks.
- People with disabilities often require some sort of job accommodations (e.g., specialised equipment, facility modifications, adjustments to work schedules or job duties) to do the job.
- People with disabilities have trouble getting their work done on time and often need others to help them finish the job.
- Co-workers are not very comfortable working with people with disabilities.
- People with disabilities tend to call in sick more often than other workers due to health or personal problems.
- People with disabilities have trouble getting along with others on the job.³⁴

Several studies have also found that workers with disabilities believed their employers “questioned their work ethic and career aspirations, often thinking they were prone to absenteeism and less committed to work,” resulting in few if any learning opportunities and being overlooked for promotions.³⁵ For example, a study by Evans et al. found that employees with development motor disabilities such as spina bifida and cerebral palsy “were rarely offered challenging job assignments or job training that would have helped them transition to higher paying positions.”³⁶

Quebec’s advisory committee on persons with disabilities observed in a 2019 report that when employers perceive persons with disabilities not as workers who happen to have disabilities but rather as persons defined by their limitations, they might adopt patronizing postures, believing that they are acting charitably or being obliging when they hire persons with disabilities.³⁷ Rusciano similarly argued that generally, the work performed by persons with disabilities is not equally valued because in Canada, as elsewhere, a person’s value is “tied to his or her productive capacity and income” and therefore persons with disabilities are “reduced to being a member of the surplus population.”³⁸

Research has also revealed that disability types affect employers’ perspectives on persons with disabilities. Several studies have found that employers are more likely to hire individuals with sensory or physical impairments than persons with intellectual or psychological impairments.³⁹ Furthermore, employers have been found to “display more negative attitudes toward hiring people with intellectual disability and mental illness than for physical and sensory disability.”⁴⁰ This is at partly attributable to the fact that employers are more familiar with accommodation practices for workers with physical impairments than they are for workers with emotional or communication impairments or mental illness.⁴¹ Another factor, observed in a study by Louvet, is that employers’ fear of eliciting discomfort and social avoidance in potential customers results in greater job discrimination for positions “involving a high degree of interpersonal contact and, in particular, towards individuals with highly visible disabilities (e.g. wheelchair need).”⁴² Furthermore, Environics Research Associates had found in its landmark 2004 study of Canadian attitudes towards disability that respondents had expressed feeling “almost ‘shamed’ of themselves for not knowing how to respond or how to behave in the presence of someone with behaviour that is out of their ‘normal’ experience.”⁴³

Furthermore, Ozama et al found in 2016 that prejudice and fear towards psychiatric impairments are strong predictors of hiring practice discrimination.⁴⁴ This finding complements an earlier study that examined the relationship between job complexity and type of type of impairment (i.e. physical impairment, intellectual impairment and mental illness), which had found that “applicants with chronic mental illness were significantly less likely to be hired than other applicants, even for a low-complexity task (e.g. janitor).”⁴⁵

In a literature review on workplace prejudice and discrimination towards individuals with mental illness, Russinova et al similarly found that:

Surveys of employers’ attitudes have provided consistent evidence that employers hold a range of negative attitudes toward persons with mental illnesses. Employers tend to perceive individuals with mental illnesses as aggressive, dangerous, unpredictable, unintelligent, unreasonable, unreliable, lacking self-control, and frightening, and as a result question their work performance, quality of work, work attendance and tenure, and need for excessive and expensive accommodations. Employers are also less confident about their work skills, their ability to socialize with others, and their capacity to handle stress at work. Given such concerns, employers tend to be less willing to hire individuals with mental illnesses compared to individuals with physical disabilities.⁴⁶

An additional attitudinal barrier that persons with mental illness may face in the labour market is beliefs held by some service providers and family members that employment may create undue stress and negative effects and should be avoided.⁴⁷

d) Disclosure and workplace accommodations

For workers with invisible impairments, obtaining workplace accommodations can often result only from full disclosure of the nature of their impairment to their employer. For some individuals, disclosure may even be necessary to ensure accurate performance evaluations.⁴⁸

However, research by Colella and Stone suggest that only a very small percentage of employees with non-apparent impairments actually disclose their disability to their employer, and other researchers have found that accommodation requests are particularly unlikely from young workers or those who have recently acquired their disability.⁴⁹ In reviewing literature on the workplace experiences of persons with invisible impairments, Santuzzi et al. have argued that:

In addition to the stigma of having a disability, the invisible quality of the disability may bring its own set of stigmatizing experiences. When workers disclose a disability, especially in combination with a request for accommodation, their case might be viewed as suspicious or illegitimate when the disability is not visible. For example, others in the work environment might assume someone is falsely claiming the disability to acquire special privileges [...] or doubt that the disclosed condition is really a legitimate disability. The complexity of the stigma that may result from being seen as trying to claim an illegitimate disability, compounded with the work-related stigma of having a disability, is an experience that is unique to workers with invisible disabilities.⁵⁰

A number of studies have found other, related reasons for which employees with invisible impairments choose not to disclose their disability, including concerns that disclosure would result in lowered expectations, lessened responsibilities, a lack of respect, isolation from co-workers, not being offered a promotion or increased likelihood of being terminated.⁵¹ Research has shown both that the anticipation of prejudice and discrimination affects decisions to disclose one's psychiatric disability in the workplace⁵² and that these concerns are well-founded since disclosure can disadvantage both job applicants and existing employees.^{53 54}

As was previously noted, employers may be more reluctant to provide accommodations for employees with mental illness than for physical impairments, owing to limited knowledge of the range of possible supports and the less tangible nature thereof compared to special equipment for employees with certain physical impairments.⁵⁵

The 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) provides data on accommodations in the workplace that is indicative of the scale of the challenges in the Canadian labour market:

- Of employees with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years, more than 1 in 3 (37%) required at least one workplace accommodation to be able to work. This represented just over 772,000 Canadians
- The most commonly required type of workplace accommodations were flexible work arrangements (27%), workstation modifications (15%), and human or technical supports (6%)
- Of those who required workplace accommodations: 59% had all of their needs met, 19% had some of their needs met, and 21% had none of their needs met.
- The more workplace accommodations are required, the less likely all needs were to be met. Of those workers who required only one accommodation, 75% had their need met; however, this drops to 36% when they required three or more.⁵⁶

e) Barriers created by conventions and practices

A number of further barriers in staffing are the result of conventions and practices commonly used in the labour market. A 1997 study by Stone and Williams outlined how steps in the selection process can erect barriers to hiring persons with disabilities, including:

- conflating essential requirements and ideal candidate profiles;
- recruiting from sources that yield fewer candidates with disabilities;
- overlooking sources that would yield more candidates with disabilities (e.g. schools for the deaf);
- screening resumes to shrink the pool of applicants in a way that penalizes mention of a disability or functional limitation; and
- using inaccessible formats for testing or interviewing.⁵⁷

Quebec's *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* similarly identified undue eligibility requirements and a mismatch of worker profiles and job descriptions as organizational barriers. It also pointed to word-of-mouth recruiting (particularly among small and medium-sized businesses) and ignorance of alternative methods as barriers to recruitment. The Commission also identified the practice of considering accommodation requests through the lens of seniority as a further barrier to recruitment and retention of workers with impairments.⁵⁸

As Jones and Sloane observed, individuals with impairments may find their job searches constrained in various fashions, which may be geographical (e.g. tied to transportation and mobility considerations) but also related to the physical or emotional demands of a position, the hours of work and the accessibility of the workplace.⁵⁹ By way of example, a worker with impaired mobility may have far fewer options to align transportation possibilities and hours of work than would a peer without a mobility impairment. Constraints may also be greater in rural and remote communities than in larger centres.⁶⁰

A lesser studied barrier for persons with physical impairments – one little addressed in the literature – is workplace attire.⁶¹ In their 2018 study, McBee-Black and Ha-Brookshire stated that:

Clothing is both an external cue used by individuals to project a desired image to society and an internal cue which allows an individual to express self-identity and accommodate self-efficacy in the roles in which he or she engages. For PLWD, these considerations are even more personal. They must consider whether or not the clothing required for the job will allow them to remain independent or if they will need additional assistance.⁶²

The difficulty in obtaining acceptable and appropriate clothing for a worker with a disability can accentuate stigmatization by drawing attention to their disability while also making them feel excluded and not taken seriously. Conversely, appropriate and acceptable clothing can protect persons living with a disability from stigma and enhance their self-efficacy through positive interaction and social feedback in the workplace.⁶³

Further, a study focusing on the employability of young adults with impairments highlighted a lack of work experience, sporadic early employment histories, and limited access to education and training as particularly important barriers to their workforce participation.⁶⁴ Tompa, Samosh and Boucher similarly found that Canadian students with impairments have access to fewer formative employment opportunities, such as internships and co-op placements, than their peers without impairments. This situation contributes to “a skills gap that reduces the probability of successful labour-market outcomes.”⁶⁵

Research has also identified barriers to career advancement for work workers with impairments. Work automation may disproportionately affect workers with impairments,⁶⁶ who are over-represented in entry-level jobs⁶⁷ and significantly more likely to experience a skills mismatch in the labour market.⁶⁸

For persons with intellectual impairments, the “movement towards job enrichment, incorporating such features as job rotation, information sharing, and shared responsibility for work across a team” have created expectations that “demand a level of flexibility and new task acquisition that is in contrast with the typical behavioral skills and aptitudes of workers with intellectual disabilities.”⁶⁹ Zribi’s comments with respect to service sector jobs are in the same vein:

Ce secteur d’activité a adopté des modes d’organisation très exigeants. Ainsi, l’élévation très sensible des qualifications, des savoir-faire et des savoir-être (relationnels, comportementaux), réclamée à leurs employés par les entreprises de services (par exemple, blanchisseries, cafétérias, cafés, entreprises de nettoyage et d’espaces verts, hôtellerie...), rend très difficile l’intégration professionnelle en milieu ordinaire [des travailleurs handicapés, notamment mentaux et psychiques], même dans des domaines créateurs d’emplois.⁷⁰

A recent study in Quebec on the obstacles and contributors to inclusion and social participation of workers with intellectual impairments who had participated in discussion groups had identified instability and unpredictability, including changes of routine and staff turnover, as significant obstacles to their inclusion and full participation in the workplace. Conversely, they had identified workplaces in which they felt respected and listened to, coworkers with a sense of humour and receiving small courtesies such as being greeted in the morning or occasionally being congratulated for an accomplishment as facilitating factors.⁷¹

Furthermore, a strict interpretation of collective agreements can create barriers for workers with impairments, particularly with respect to workplace accommodations and flexible working arrangements. Quebec's *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* has observed that inflexible applications of collective agreements can prevent new solutions from being developed, preventing individuals who develop a disability once in the workforce or those who experience episodes of disability from fully reintegrating their position. Employers or unions may refuse to consider certain adaptations not explicitly covered in the collective agreement. Such positions and omissions can penalize vulnerable workers such as those with impairments.⁷² In addition, a recent study in the Netherlands by Bosma et al. found that for workers with chronic conditions, the lack of a clear policy for managing employees with chronic (i.e. episodic) conditions can be a barrier to retention in the workplace.⁷³

Finally, it is noteworthy that a study by Bayle found that the structure of an organization is an important factor in its ability to include workers with impairments. Bayle had found that a low degree of formalization may be less protective for employees and, at the same time, allow decision-makers to exert greater influence and discretion, potentially leaving more room for initiatives for the employment of people with impairments. A high degree of formalization – as is found in the public service – may be more protective for employees and, at the same time, may constrain relations between individuals and allow integration of individuals only if their health and capabilities allow them to meet social norms.⁷⁴

How these findings relate to the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada

The first pillar of the Strategy concerns employment, including recruitment, retention and promotion of persons with disabilities. The two desired outcomes for the federal public service in relation to employment are that:

- job seekers with disabilities see the Government of Canada as an employer of choice; and
- job seekers and public servants with disabilities have access to employment opportunities and can contribute at their full potential.⁷⁵

Public service data demonstrates inequitable outcomes in the hiring, promotion and retention of persons with disabilities, with significant gaps between the workforce availability of persons with disabilities and results for the federal public service. Statistics Canada's 2017 Canadian Study on Disability found that 15.6% of the Canadian workforce between 25 and 64 years of age is composed of persons with disabilities, whereas data compiled by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat for fiscal year 2017-2018 reveals that:

- 5.3% of public servants self-identified as persons with a disability;
- 2.9% of applicants for a position with the federal public servants self-identified as persons with a disability;
- 3.6% of new hires into the federal public service self-identified as persons with a disability;
- 4.1% of employees who obtained a promotion self-identified as persons with a disability; and
- 7.7% of employees with disabilities left the federal public service, which is higher than the rate of representation in the public service (5.3%).⁷⁶

The significant underrepresentation of persons with disabilities among applicants, new recruits, employees who received a promotion, and public service employees and the higher rate of overrepresentation of persons with a disability among individuals who leave the public service relative to those who remain provide evidence of systemic barriers at play. It is upon such evidence that the Strategy was developed with interventions designed to overcome some of the key barriers identified both by scholars and by public servants.

For instance, the Centralized Enabling Workplace Fund (CEWF) is designed to help dismantle some of the known barriers to employment. One of its key activities between 2019 and 2024 is to develop and implement an “employee passport that documents needs, facilitates conversations with managers and corporate services, tracks actions [and] travels with employees when they change positions.”⁷⁷ This new approach to managing accommodations or adjustments effectively creates a voluntary process of disclosure of an impairment to management, which may alleviate some of the fears and concerns surrounding that process. It may also help manage respective expectations by facilitating conversations between employer and employees with disabilities. Furthermore, the passport initiative aims to address the lack of awareness among managers generally as to how to manage disability in the workplace by normalizing such conversations.⁷⁸

In addition to the passport, the CEWF is also mandated to create a “library” of adaptive devices and services to make them readily and quickly available to new employees. This initiative is also intended to address uncertainty around how to manage disability in the workplace in addition to solving the barrier of adaptive devices and services not being readily available, affordable, and familiar to the employer.⁷⁹

The CEWF is also tasked with conducting research, assessing best practices from other jurisdictions, experimenting with new approaches to workplace adjustments, and implementing training and tools to support a culture change within the federal public services.⁸⁰ As such, it can be expected to serve as a centre of expertise on barriers to employment in the public service and on means for removing them.

2) Barriers in built environments

A wide range of features and characteristics of built environments can be disabling for individuals, either physically, cognitively or emotionally, or in combination. As Lid and Solvang observed: “Person–environment interactions are difficult to express in simple terms, as they are multidimensional and because of the difficulties associated with isolating the numerous factors in such complex interactions.”⁸¹ Indeed, it is difficult to identify all of the features and characteristics of built environments that can be disabling. This section offers an overview of the barriers identified in the literature in order to describe their nature, rather than attempting to create a comprehensive list.

Much of the literature on the accessibility of built environments focuses on urban design and community life in an urban context. One example that highlights the sometimes subtle ways in which conditions in the urban environment can act as barriers for persons with disabilities is a study conducted using data from Chicago.⁸² Among its key findings was that traffic volume was inversely associated with the use of preventive health care among persons with visual impairment and that the odds were equivalent among adults with and without visual impairment in neighborhoods with light traffic volume. Another key finding was that “residing in an area with a high proportion of streets in poor condition was associated with 60% lower odds of voting among adults with difficulty with mobility activities.”⁸³ Another example is a study of the use of power mobility devices by older Canadian adults living in British Columbia’s Lower Mainland.⁸⁴ It found that while the use of such devices was enabling insofar as it led to greater autonomy and opportunities to engage in meaningful activities, it could also be disabling in built environments that are not accessible and amenable to the requirements of power wheelchairs and scooters (e.g., environments with soft or uneven surfaces, insufficient free space to allow for turns, or items out of reach or sight when in a seated position).⁸⁵ Some studies based on interviews also provide anecdotal evidence of ways in which purportedly accessible environments can create other kinds of barriers for persons with impairments. For instance, one study noted that creating designated spaces or services can result in socially isolating persons with impairments.⁸⁶ It related that:

‘handicapped’ sections of theatres or stadiums are often separate and assume that non-disabled and disabled people will not attend an event together. Accessible vans that have a policy of only picking up disabled passengers make it difficult for users to go on a date with or go to a party with friends who are not disabled.⁸⁷

Another body of work focuses on architecture and interior design, which is more directly relevant to the scope of this literature review. UNNATI, an Indian non-governmental organization for development education, published a design manual for eliminating barriers in the built environment, which provides an instructive overview of features and characteristics of the built environment that can be disabling. These include, but are not limited to:

- Signage (e.g., font characteristics, finish and contrast, positioning and illumination);
- Anthropometric considerations (e.g., variations in reach ranges, heights, body sizes);
- Space allowances (e.g., passage widths for mobility devices, turning space, absence of obstacles);
- Accessible routes through a property, indoors and out (including use of appropriate surfaces for paths of travel);
- Entrances and exits;
- Windows;

- Washrooms;
- Kitchens;
- Storage areas;
- Equipment areas (e.g., telephones, photocopiers, printers, automated teller machines);
- Alarms;
- Controls and operating mechanisms (e.g., electrical and communication systems).⁸⁸

While accessibility in the built environment is often thought about in relation to mobility, persons with other types of impairments may also encounter a range of disabling elements in built environments. For instance, poor acoustics and background noise can be disabling for individuals with hearing impairments, as can poor lighting if they rely on speech reading or sign language. Poor lighting can also be disabling for individuals with visual impairments, along with insufficient use of contrasting colours and textural surfaces and physical obstacles. They too risk being disabled by poor acoustics and background noise if they rely primarily on hearing for sensory input. Individuals with cognitive impairments may find overly bright environments confusing and distracting. Persons with language impairments may find signage that is difficult to read or understand disabling. Those with emotional impairments may have heightened safety concerns in environments they find triggering.⁸⁹

Studies of persons on the Autism Disorder Spectrum have found that sensory stimuli is a major stressor to such individuals, who perceive external stimuli very differently than neurotypical individuals. Some persons on the spectrum can feel overwhelmed and overloaded by sensory stimuli in the environment and disabled if adaptations are not available to them. For instance, in one study, nearly all respondents had issues with fluorescent lighting, many had issues with workplace temperature, and most preferred small, quiet spaces sheltered from noise and visual distractions.⁹⁰

One of the key contributing factors to the creation of inaccessible built environments is that design professionals have limited knowledge of the needs of disabled people and rarely engage with them in the design process. Architecture is a practice that tends to prioritize professional and technical knowledge over user or experiential perspectives. In general, access is taken into consideration to comply with legislative and regulatory requirements, without being considered a fundamental value associated with building quality.⁹¹

Writing in 2000, Imrie observed that in property development, most processes and products are standardized to reduce costs,

resulting in a range of fixtures and fittings in similar sizes and dimensions, but which are generally insensitive to bodily variations or capabilities. Developers also perceive access features as contributing little or nothing to a building's valuation or marketability and argue that tenants express few demands for accessible buildings. [...] Many developers regard access as an additional cost factor in consuming commercial floor space, without providing demonstrable benefits to their clients. Some companies, particularly providers of speculative office space, consider access features a factor which reduced property values.⁹²

It is not clear from the literature whether the property development industry has changed its outlook from what Imrie described 20 years ago.

How these findings relate to the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada

The built environment is a second pillar of the Strategy, with the stated aim that “clients and employees of the Government of Canada have barrier-free access to and use of the federally owned and leased built environment.”⁹³ As such, its focus is on addressing the types of architectural and design barriers highlighted in the literature.

The Strategy outlines several measures, planned or underway, to address intentional barriers (e.g. safety and security) and unintentional barriers (e.g. poor signage and way-finding, insufficient turning space for mobility device users) within the federal government real property portfolio. For instance, Public Services and Procurement Canada, the department responsible for managing and providing property and accommodation services to government institutions and Parliament, is undertaking an evaluation of the physical accessibility of a portion of federal buildings. Furthermore, this work is being done in consultation with persons with disabilities, which had not been the case during the previous evaluation exercise, completed in 2010. Public Services and Procurement Canada is also examining ways to adapt built environments by working with partners including CNIB BlindSquare on pilot projects designed to identify cost-effective solutions to identified barriers.⁹⁴

3) Barriers in communication modes

Communication modes can create barriers both for persons with sensory impairments and for persons with intellectual or language-related impairments. The body of literature on the integration of persons with communication disorders in the workplace has mostly examined survivors of brain injuries, such as stroke, head trauma or brain tumors.⁹⁵ As a result, it often concerns the reintegration of injured workers. It is however important to highlight that not all communication disorders result from physical trauma or injury. All persons with communication disorders may face barriers in the labour market affecting hiring decisions, performance on the job, and job retention decisions. As Garci, Laroche and Barrette observed:

As more and more jobs are being created in the service areas, good communication skills are becoming a prerequisite for many employers. Hence, persons experiencing communication disorders (CD) may be at a disadvantage when seeking or maintaining employment. It may be difficult, for instance, for a person who has suffered a stroke and become aphasic to re-enter a job where one is required to communicate effectively with peers in group situations. Likewise, a teacher may have difficulty maintaining a job after voice loss. A person who stutters may be discriminated against in an interview setting because of negative biases towards perceived personality characteristics.⁹⁶

Persons with communication disorders may come up against various environmental barriers, commonly involving noise, having to speak over the telephone or having to speak to groups. These may be compounded by expectations around communications in the workplace as well as productivity and speed of work.⁹⁷ Further, personal barriers such as loss of self-esteem and confidence, difficulty dealing with stress and increased fatigue after a brain injury may also come into play.⁹⁸

How these findings relate to the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada

The barriers highlighted above are acknowledged in the Strategy in a few ways. The Culture (i.e. organizational culture) pillar identifies awareness-raising as a key method of dismantling myths and combating stigma regarding disability. It also speaks to the need to create inclusive environments to reduce the need for accommodations and adaptations when barriers become apparent.⁹⁹ More pointedly, the Services pillar explicitly acknowledges that “service staff do not always know how to serve persons with disabilities” and that “people who have difficulty speaking or who use a communication device are often not understood.”¹⁰⁰

The strategy identifies several actions to address these issues, including: a review of Treasury Board Secretariat policies with an accessibility lens; developing tools and training on creating inclusive environments; raising awareness among public servants about disability to combat myths and remove stigma; and providing guidance to federal institutions on how to review their programs and services for accessibility.¹⁰¹

4) Barriers in the use of information and communication technologies

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines information and communication technologies as a “diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information.” These technologies include computers, the Internet, live and recorded broadcasting technologies and telephony.¹⁰² Interestingly, none of the journal articles reviewed for this report defined information and communication technologies explicitly.

Watling has identified three sequential layers of barriers to digital access. First, the price of access to technology in general, and to assistive technologies in particular, is out of reach for many persons with impairments (e.g., those on a fixed income). Second, procurement of appropriate training can be difficult and expensive. Specialist support is seldom available from local or independent retailers, face-to-face and telephone support is expensive, and online support may presuppose visual and audio acuity that a user may not have. Furthermore, assistive technology often presupposes a level of familiarity and comfort with computer and Internet use that may not exist. Third, digital content is often not accessible by design.¹⁰³

As Wentz, Jaeger and Lazar observed:

Digital information is not inherently accessible or inaccessible, but the choices made by those developing and implementing technology determine whether a technology ultimately will be accessible or inaccessible. This is particularly true in the online environment, given the rapid pace of technological change and introduction of new Web enabled technologies, as online technologies are often obsolete before they are made accessible.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, information and communications technologies (ICTs) create an environment distinct from the analogue world, which some individuals may find significantly less disabling (e.g. users of mobility devices) while others may find far more disabling (e.g. persons with visual, hearing, cognitive or manual dexterity impairments).¹⁰⁵ For instance, a recent study of online content accessibility by Lazar and Jaeger underscored that since computer interfaces are still primarily visual, with heavy reliance upon texts and images, blind and visually impaired individuals are often the most affected by inaccessible online content. For the visually impaired, the lack of compatibility of interfaces with screen readers and buttons and links that are too small constitute access barriers. Individuals with hearing impairments can access most content, except for the audio, when transcripts or captioning are not included. Interactive components, such as Web chats, may not be accessible to persons with hearing, speech or communication impairments. Individuals with motor impairments, who may not be able to use standard keyboards or mice, may have difficulty accessing content that can only be called up using a pointing device. The study also found that little research has been conducted into the accessibility of online content for persons with cognitive impairments.¹⁰⁶ The authors argued that for the latter, which include individuals with impairments such as autism, dementia, or traumatic brain injury, “issues of design, layout, and navigability are the difference between being able to use a site and not being able to use it. [...]”; for people with seizure disorders, rates of flickering and flash can jeopardize their health.”¹⁰⁷

In an effort to address and remove these barriers, various accessibility guidelines and norms have been developed. Borg, Lantz and Gulliksen compared 20 such sets of guidelines for online content, finding considerable differences and relatively little consensus between them.¹⁰⁸ The World Wide Web Consortium’s Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are widely-used norms intended to make Web content accessible to a wide range of publics, but adherence to these norms (or others, such as the European Union’s Directive 2016/2102) does not guarantee accessibility to all individuals with impairments. Persons with cognitive, language or learning impairments, or with certain degrees or combinations of impairments, may still not be able to access online content that conforms at the highest level to WCAG.¹⁰⁹

Another dimension of ICT is their use as assistive devices for persons with a disability. As various authors have observed, ICT holds huge potential for expanding access to social and economic activities as well as public services.¹¹⁰ However, the enabling effects of ICT can be overstated. As Vanderheiden and Treviranus cautioned a decade ago:

As we move more to a digital economy and integrate technology ever more completely in all aspects of life there is a looming crisis for a growing number of increasingly marginalized individuals. The accessibility technologies we have are meeting the needs of only some, at high cost – and will not

work with many new technologies. In addition, the pace and path of technological change predestines these approaches to fail in the very near future. [...] The cost of assistive technologies is increasing, while the functionality, reliability and availability are decreasing. The opposite is true for mainstream ICT.¹¹¹

It is also important to underscore that only about 10% of persons with disabilities have the assistive technology they need, and there are disabilities for which no assistive technologies exist.¹¹²

How these findings relate to the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada

The Technology pillar of the Strategy aims for a state in which “Government of Canada clients and employees can access and use all information and communications technology, regardless of ability or disability.”¹¹³ In preparing the Strategy, the Government of Canada identified several issues that create barriers for persons with communication impairments:

- The Government of Canada does not have a complete accessible information and communications technology standard;
- Procurement, development, and use of information and communications technology hardware and software across the Government of Canada do not consistently reflect accessibility requirements (as evidenced in documented issues with key applications including Phoenix, PeopleSoft and GCDOCS);
- Within the public service, accessibility features are often not enabled on commonly available software and hardware;
- The use of adaptive technologies does not necessarily result in full access to information and communication technology required on the job.¹¹⁴

These issues corroborate the findings in the literature. They point to the importance and impact of establishing and systematically applying accessibility norms to information and communications technologies. They also support the findings in the literature that for all their merits and results, adaptive technologies are imperfect solutions to problems resulting from design choices that create barriers to access and use.

The Strategy outlines a number of initiatives respecting information and communications technologies, intended to remove barriers both for public servants (as employees) and for Canadians accessing federal programs and services. This includes, but is not limited to, the development of a new government standard for accessibility for information and communications technology; developing a new process for procuring and deploying adaptive technology and supporting its users; and providing employees with resources to generate content that is accessible by design, using commonly used tools.¹¹⁵ The Strategy further states that the Government will engage with industry to assess compliance of commercially available technologies against

international accessibility standards and to “develop a framework to build accessibility requirements into information and communications technology procurement, based on the agreed standard.”¹¹⁶

5) Barriers in program or service design and delivery

In a joint submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the Canadian Association for Community Living and People First of Canada stated that one of the main barriers persons with intellectual impairments encounter when attempting to access programs and services is they “are denied the power to make and communicate their decisions with support [to exercise legal capacity].”¹¹⁷ The organizations explain further in this way:

While Canadian adults are presumed competent and capable of decision-making, the lack of supports to exercise legal capacity, as required under Article 12 of the CRPD [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities], has resulted in over 50,000 Canadians with a disability currently under guardianship. People are discriminated against in the enjoyment and exercise of the right to legal capacity, on the basis of mental disability. For example, an individual with an intellectual disability who wishes to open a Registered Disability Savings Plan but is not deemed competent to enter into a contract with a financial institution, faces a barrier. An individual wishing to access federally-regulated transportation services, but who is considered unable to enter into a contract, can be denied.¹¹⁸

Persons with communication disorders may also encounter barriers in program or service delivery, whether as service providers or as clients. The interactive nature of program and service delivery – for instance a client expressing a need, a provider offering information or advice in response – place communication at the centre of the exercise. Delivery models that fail to account for communication disorders can become inoperable in situations involving a person with a communication disorder, thereby raising an access barrier.

It is important to underscore that behavioural barriers, barriers in the built environment, and technological barriers can also reveal flaws in the design or delivery of programs and services. For instance, discomfort in interacting with persons with disabilities can result in avoidance and poorer quality service delivery. Barriers in the physical environment can impede access to a service delivered in person. Technological barriers can impede access to digital services. Consequently, a number of barriers of different types can exist simultaneously and create an environment that impedes delivery of and access to high quality services.

How these findings relate to the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada

As previously noted, the Strategy mentions several systemic measures intended to address barriers in program or service design and delivery. Reviewing Treasury Board Secretariat policies with an accessibility lens, developing tools and training on creating inclusive environments, and providing guidance to federal institutions on how to assess their programs and services for accessibility are selected means of fostering a culture and practice of inclusive design. Initiatives to raise awareness among public servants about disability,

combat myths and remove stigma are complementary ways of creating a culture of inclusion within the public service.

6) Barriers in government procurement

Barriers in procurement practices are seldom directly identified in the literature reviewed. In fact, just one study explicitly addressed government procurement, albeit in passing, in the context of a discussion of the Global Public Inclusive Infrastructure (GPII) project. Authors Lewis and Treviranus observe that as the GPII project matures, “it could be appropriate for procurement regulations around the world to mandate that government websites be constructed so as to work with GPII’s auto personalization system.”¹¹⁹ As such, their comment suggests that as new technologies such as auto personalization emerge, procurement policies and practices must not act as barriers to the adoption and use of such assistive technologies and should perhaps even enable their adoption and use to optimize access to government websites. The Public Policy Forum report, “Skills, Gaps, Underemployment, and Equity of Labour-Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in Canada” identifies the need for “disability confidence” in employers, which can eliminate barriers with respect to procuring what is needed for an inclusive work environment.¹²⁰

Furthermore, a 2016 background paper prepared for the World Bank described amending public procurement rules to require accessibility in any ICT equipment, software and applications purchased by governments or publicly funded programs as an evidence-based best practice.¹²¹ Its effectiveness is greatest when tied to compliance with specific accessibility standards.¹²² Research by Astbrink and Tribben concluded that is because such measures can facilitate the employment of persons with impairments in the public sector and set a standard of practice for the larger labour market. They also found that since governments are major purchasers of ICT, their demands for accessible ICT solutions can have a ripple effect on the larger ICT market.¹²³

While the literature barely addresses barriers in government procurement explicitly, a critical examination of barriers identified in other areas can inform analysis of how procurement practices factor into the inclusion or exclusion of persons with impairments, either as public servants or as beneficiaries of government programs and services.

a) Recent changes to federal government policy and guidance on accessible procurement

The *Contracting Policy* of the Government of Canada seeks to ensure that the acquisition of goods and services by government advances four key principles: access, competition, fairness, and either best value or the optimal balance of overall benefits to the Crown and to Canadians.¹²⁴ Following the coming into force of the *Accessible Canada Act* in 2019, the Policy was updated with new accessibility requirements in subsections 4.2.26 and 4.2.27, to the effect that departments must, where appropriate:

- Include accessibility criteria when specifying requirements for goods and services;
- Ensure that deliverables incorporate accessibility features; and

- Clearly document any justification for not including accessibility criteria as part of commodity specifications or explain the department's inability to obtain compliant deliverables.¹²⁵

The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat also issued guidelines for interpreting those changes to the *Contracting Policy* that articulate the principles that:

- 1) Users of the goods and services acquired through contracting should be engaged from the outset to ensure that deliverables are accessible to individuals with distinct needs;
- 2) Users and groups representing persons with impairments should be consulted to ensure that the accessibility criteria will result in accessible goods and services, which may require going beyond compliance with accessibility standards;
- 3) In the absence of applicable accessibility standards, goods and services should be accessible by design and offer *bona fide* accessibility features.¹²⁶

Also in 2019, Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) established the Accessible Procurement Resource Centre "to ensure that goods and services purchased are accessible by design, where possible, so that Canadians with disabilities can use them without adaptation."¹²⁷ The Resource Centre's three functions are:

- 1) Developing guidelines and training material for PSPC procurement officers;
- 2) Examining industry accessibility standards and best practices that could be applied to federal procurement;
- 3) Conducting market analysis to identify goods and services for which accessibility can be considered in procurement (e.g. vehicles, telecommunications and voice products, and professional services).¹²⁸

Furthermore, the Government of Canada is establishing an organization called Accessibility Standards Canada whose mandate will be to "develop and revise accessibility standards that will set out how federal[ly-regulated] private sector organizations and Government of Canada departments and agencies can prevent, identify and remove barriers to accessibility."¹²⁹ Accessibility Standards Canada will establish technical committees and will develop standards, which the Minister of Accessibility may choose to make mandatory by adopting them into regulations.¹³⁰ It is possible, therefore, that government procurement may change in response to future accessibility standards and/or regulations.

How these findings relate to the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada

The Technology pillar of the Strategy outlines a number of initiatives planned or underway to integrate accessibility standards into government procurement, as previously discussed. Building on the recent changes to federal government policy and guidance on procurement, the Strategy includes a commitment to “lead the development of a more streamlined and efficient process to procure and deploy adaptive technology and ensure that users have access to ongoing technical support.”¹³¹ These measures would directly respond to some of the main barriers identified in the literature, involving the acquisition and ongoing use of adaptive technologies.

As previously noted, the Strategy also states that the federal government will engage with industry to “develop a framework to build accessibility requirements into information and communications technology procurement, based on the agreed standard.”¹³² Finally, the Strategy announces that by 2021, the federal public service expects that all major new technological systems, used both for internal and external purposes, will be accessible at the time of deployment.¹³³

It is clear that numerous barriers face persons with a disability in recruitment and retention in the workplace, and it is clear in the literature that much of the research on persons with a disability in the workplace focuses on these barriers. However, a complementary body of literature details the benefits of hiring a worker with a disability. These benefits extend beyond the employee to coworkers, the hiring organization, and society as a whole. The next section of this literature review details those benefits from both a theoretical and a practical perspective.

Benefits of Disability Inclusion in the workplace

Diversity has a direct, positive correlation on the morale of employees when managed properly by the leadership team to ensure the work environment is inclusive, which is proven by a litany of anecdotal evidence.¹³⁴

An emerging body of work documents the benefits realized when persons with disabilities are included in the workplace, whether for the employer, the employee, the larger workforce, or for society as a whole. Kendall and Karns found that there is as yet little research into the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce and for providing concrete data to support hiring people with disabilities.¹³⁵ As Lengnick-Hall, Gaunt and Kulkarni argue, most research to date has focused on the “supply-side perspective;” in other words, “examining issues related to the preparation of persons with disabilities to be good job candidates. Virtually no research has examined the demand side – attempting to understand why employers hire (or don’t hire) people with disabilities.”¹³⁶ Furthermore, Hartnett et al found that little research has been conducted on the importance of retaining employees with disabilities.¹³⁷

Addressing inclusive hiring practices is of particular urgency, considering our aging population, increasing instances of chronic illness, and shortages of skilled workers.¹³⁸ Mismatch of skills between employment and workers with disabilities is also a concern.¹³⁹ Clearly articulating the benefits of including workers with disabilities, not only in terms of the social good but also for employers' bottom line, is an integral part of efforts to raise awareness among employers of the underestimated potential of workers with disabilities. This section of the literature review provides an overview of the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities. These range from increased productivity, decreased absenteeism, and an enhanced bottom line for the employer's finances to broader benefits for individual wellbeing and the greater social good.

Overall, hiring people with disabilities can be a boon to all: employees, employers, and society. It reduces unemployment amongst persons with a disability, which means that they can obtain a stream of income, support their families, develop a career, and contribute to both the organization and to society. Employers increase the talent pool among their staff, augmenting their chances of organizational success. For society at large, when more individuals are gainfully employed, it means fewer are on social assistance, more taxes are being paid, and there is more disposable income as employed individuals have greater purchasing power than the unemployed.¹⁴⁰ Lengnick-Hall's article cites a US study by Riley (2006) that indicates that society could save as much as \$37 billion USD a year in benefits payments alone if more people with disabilities were employed.¹⁴¹

In addition to these positives, some particular industries identify more specific benefits that persons with disabilities bring to particular jobs. For example, Tome Alm Andreassen's article, "Disability as an Asset?" identifies particular benefits to hiring a person with a disability within the health care profession:¹⁴²

The valuation of disability as an asset is no longer promoted solely by people with disabilities and the disability movement; it is also carried by the employers and managers in health and social care who recognize the knowledge derived from the experience of people with disabilities as both a useful resource and necessity in the development of patient and client-centred care. Further research on the dynamics underpinning the recognition that experiential knowledge of disability is and can be a positive attribute and motivation for employment might lead to expanded perspectives for disability employment policy.

The literature review unearthed myriad reasons that support increased hiring and retention of persons with a disability. The three sections that follow identify clear benefits to the workforce (both the individual and their coworkers), an enterprise's performance, and society as a whole when inclusive hiring practices are used for individuals living with a disability.

1) Benefits for the workforce

The most immediate and perhaps most obvious benefit to the workforce is for the employee with a disability who has been hired. Alison Konrad's study determines that, beyond augmentation of income and financial stability, wellness is increased significantly when a person with a disability is hired and appropriately accommodated in the workplace. Data from Statistics Canada's 2006 *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey* indicated that persons with a disability who were employed and fully utilized at work reported being

discriminated against less and reported greater life satisfaction than those who were temporarily employed or underemployed. Furthermore, accommodations in the workplace reduced any negative effects of such temporary or underemployment situations.¹⁴³

Tome Alm Andreassen's article "Disability as an Asset?" identifies a number of industries where individuals with disabilities tend to find increased employment opportunities: self-employment in a disability-related area, employment in organizations for people with disabilities, in social employment cooperatives, and in social firms. The overrepresentation of workers with disabilities in health and social care jobs raises the question of whether it is employers whose attitudes about disability figure more largely into hiring practices, or whether it is related more closely to the labour market itself and the suitability of individuals with a disability to work in that sector. The article suggests that relevant factors may include on-the-job requirements of particular sectors, the ability to work part-time or an adapted schedule, certain sectors feeling a greater sense of social responsibility, those with disabilities seeking employment that might find work that is related to their health issues to be interesting, or that they would have an experiential knowledge base that would enhance their work practices. As the article states, "for some tasks in the health sector, knowledge about living with health problems or impairments is a requested qualification, and thus disability is considered an asset." An example of this is the trend towards including lived experience in the development of patient-oriented services, which is based on the notion that such user experience can be a way to positively advance or enhance services that those without such experience may not understand. Employing persons with disabilities ensures that those with that lived experience are able to contribute regularly to such discussions. Moreover, research shows that health and social care professionals with disabilities, such as physiotherapists and nurses, often feel that their disability is an advantage at work, as their personal experience with chronic illness or disability can help them provide better care to their patients. Diversity in a workforce population leads to diversity in ideas. As Kendall et al state, hiring individuals with a disability can reduce the risk of "groupthink;" in other words, accepting the first idea that is presented because it is familiar and acceptable to all.¹⁴⁴ Diversity of opinion means that convention is challenged, and everyone is forced to consider ideas that may not have been on the table otherwise. Lindsay et al's systematic review of the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities found evidence supporting the argument that innovation skills are critical when hiring persons with a disability. They found that: "Three studies noted people with disabilities' innovation and creative skills as a benefit of hiring them. For instance, employers viewed people with hearing impairments in the business process outsourcing industry as creative. In the hospitality sector, employees with disabilities helped create innovative services."¹⁴⁵ Such innovation on a team undoubtedly results in diversity of ideas and more interesting work outputs in any sector. As Lysaght points out, disability is a social construct. In other words, disability is only viewed as negative because our society has decided that it is.¹⁴⁶ Research, such as that by Page (2007), "has shown empirically that a group that includes diverse perspectives, especially perspectives from the margins, trumps a group of the 'best and brightest,' in decision-making, accurate prediction and innovation."¹⁴⁷ Viewing disability as a diverse way of being means that diverse perspectives may be more welcome and better heard by colleagues and superiors alike.

Benefits from hiring people with disabilities may extend beyond those workers themselves to the larger employee population.¹⁴⁸ For example, Graffam et al point out that integrating a person with a disability into the workplace may help reveal problem areas in the organization's working conditions, including training and supervisory practices, basic work practices and health and safety issues. This may lead to improved work practices that all employees will benefit from. The article also suggests that hiring a person with a disability who performs well at their job may raise expectations and may encourage other employees to work to the same level. Overall, this can be a catalyst for positive change, benefiting all employees and the organization at the same time.¹⁴⁹ Graffam et al term this "third party benefits" which may include the expansion of privacy in the workplace, and a greater focus on an individual's ability to perform the tasks necessary for a job when hiring and promoting, with less of a focus on an individual's personal characteristics.

Third party benefits may also include those benefits to the enterprise as a whole, such as reduced absenteeism.¹⁵⁰ Such benefits are not just limited to the workforce itself, but also positively affect the performance of an enterprise as a whole.

2) Benefits for an enterprise's performance

Deloitte's white paper, *The Road to Inclusion: Integrating People with Disabilities into the Workplace*, states:

Creating a more inclusive workplace is necessary for many reasons. The rationale for working towards a diverse work environment, according to roundtable participants, is threefold: responding to future talent shortages, building a strong reputation and reflecting the markets you serve are all benefits of working with a diverse group of people – including people with disabilities.¹⁵¹

There is no consistency in terms of how an enterprise approaches the possibility of hiring a person with a disability, with some businesses investing more heavily in workers with disabilities than others. According to Point et al, there are two human resource management approaches that businesses use when hiring persons with disabilities. The first is reactive, where they may look to fill quotas or to comply with the law; the second is proactive, where they implement disability policies that are sustainable and in line with company policies and the overall functioning of the organization.¹⁵² Boris Miethlich and Anett Oldenburg suggest that a corporate culture with an established practice of diverse hiring is a mandatory prerequisite to successful integration of persons with a disability into the workplace. They argue that companies in various industries involved with different technologies, products, and markets, can effectively hire people with disabilities. Therefore, "people with a disability's employment as part of the value creation strategy can make a long-term contribution to the company's success and represent a sustainable competitive advantage."¹⁵³ The data found in the literature review support this core idea of inclusion being a positive force in the workplace.

In addition to potential financial benefits to an enterprise, company support for individuals with a disability in the form of appropriate accommodations can reduce employee sick days, engage staff more wholly, and reduce turnover, which lowers overall recruitment and related costs by retaining employees.¹⁵⁴ Finally, it is

notable that companies that recruit persons with disabilities to their workforce also benefit from the public image of being seen as one that does not discriminate, thereby bolstering its reputation in the public eye.¹⁵⁵

An American study, a widely cited 2018 Accenture report, details the financial benefits for an enterprise that elects to hire persons with disabilities. In its examination of 140 companies in the USA, the study identified 45 companies (32% of the total) that it branded as an “elite” group of Disability Inclusion Champions, based on those companies’ leadership in key areas related to disability employment and inclusion. Those areas include: hiring people with disabilities so that they are represented in the workplace; establishing practices that encourage and advance these employees; providing accessible tools and technologies along with a formal accommodations program; actively recruiting through grassroots initiatives, generating awareness through a disability education program; and providing mentorship and coaching to empower their employees.

Of particular interest in Accenture’s report is data that indicates that, on average, Disability Inclusion Champion companies achieved:

- 28% higher revenue;
- double the net income;
- 30% higher economic profit margins.¹⁵⁶

Furthermore they were twice as likely to produce higher shareholder returns compared to the rest of the sample, over the four-year period of the study. These data were collected by measuring companies’ profitability (revenues and net income) and value creation (economic profit margin).¹⁵⁷ This indicates that Disability Inclusion Champion companies perform above average, financially, compared to the rest in the sample.

In addition to profitability and economic value, barriers related to productivity, turnover, absenteeism, and safety are often cited as reasons to decline hiring persons with disabilities. However, the literature indicates that these perceived challenges are typically unfounded; and, in fact, the opposite tends to be the case when companies employ those with disabilities.¹⁵⁸ The Ottawa Discoverability Network, a free online portal that connects Ottawa businesses with potential employees living with disabilities, provides data that supports their argument that: “Hiring people with disabilities isn’t about ‘doing the right thing.’ It’s about ‘doing the right thing for business.’”¹⁵⁹ Their findings, and with those from multiple other studies,¹⁶⁰ support this position:¹⁶¹

- Absenteeism:
 - In 2011, absenteeism among the 35 employees with disabilities (17% of the company’s workforce) at Tim Horton’s franchisee Megleen, which operated six stores, was zero.
- Turnover:
 - In Megleen’s six Tim Horton’s stores employing staff with disabilities, turnover was **35%** compared to the **75%** industry average.
 - A three-year study at savings bank Washington Mutual found a turnover rate of **8%** among persons with developmental disabilities, compared to an overall rate of **45%**.

- Hotel chain Marriott reported a **6%** turnover rate among persons with disabilities versus **52%** overall.
- Safety:
 - Among its employees with disabilities, U.S. pharmacy chain Walgreens cited a 40% lower safety incident rate, 63% lower employee time away from work due to accidents, and 78% lower overall costs associated with accidents.
- Productivity:
 - Walgreens's management analyzed a total of 31 distinct locations in three distribution centres where 40% of employees have disabilities. In 18 locations, the difference in productivity rates was statistically insignificant; in three locations, employees without a disability were more productive; and in 10 locations, employees with a disability were more productive.

Moreover, hiring people with a disability as staff who interact with the public can be of benefit in how the general public feels about a particular company. Kendall et al cite a DiversityInc study that demonstrates that, "businesses that employ people with disabilities as front-facing employees often receive increased patronage due to their hiring efforts. In a nationwide survey, 92% of respondents said they 'felt more favourable towards companies that hire people with disabilities' and 87% 'would prefer to give their business to such companies.'"¹⁶² Lindsay et al's article supports this, surmising that a more diversified customer base may be achieved by hiring people with disabilities, as this may in time attract more customers with disabilities.¹⁶³ This is also supported by 2020 research conducted by Return on Disability, which concluded that the global population of persons with a disability totals approximately 1.85 billion people, a market larger than China. Adding to that the 3.3 individuals who are family and friends of persons with a disability, and there is a significant population that comprises what the study suggests comprises \$13 trillion in disposable income.¹⁶⁴ Companies that can address that population successfully, including with inclusive hiring practices, can undoubtedly benefit from such association.

These workplace results demonstrate that many of the issues that some might claim as barriers, based on misconceptions about hiring persons with disabilities, do not bear out in the data collected from companies that have established more inclusive hiring practices.

It is important to note that issues such as productivity, turnover, and safety are no different when hiring persons with an intellectual disability compared to hiring someone with a physical disability. Lysaght's research reveals that workers with an intellectual disability are a potentially valuable resource for the workforce, particularly in entry level positions in industries that experience high turnover.¹⁶⁵ Employers need to consider the workplace as a social context and address practices that are discriminatory, structural and attitudinal barriers, and determine how certain procedures can be modified to ensure that a broader range of employees will be able to execute them.¹⁶⁶

Moreover, it has also been argued that hiring persons with a disability can result in savings to taxpayers. Beyer and Beyer's article details how these savings may be realized. For example, while employers may take on extra costs for accommodations, they may be offset by government funding programs. The financial benefits to

hiring a person with a disability, or retaining an employee who develops disability or a chronic illness while working, tend to outweigh the costs. The cost of employee turnover – recruiting a new employee, work disruptions, organizational memory loss, and costs associated with the new employee’s learning curve – is as high as 150 to 200% of the employee’s salary, compared to the estimated average cost of US\$500 for most accommodations.¹⁶⁷ This is a savings to both the enterprise’s bottom line as well as to social support systems.

Finally, loyalty to a company can result in reduced turnover and increased dedication to one’s employer. Lindsay et al’s article cites several studies that support this, concluding that individuals with disabilities were seen by their employers as more dedicated and more loyal than other employees. This was found in studies in the food services and leisure and hospitality industries.¹⁶⁸

Alison Konrad et al’s article on wellbeing for workers with disabilities describes a 2006 study that showed that many managers believed that providing accommodations as necessary would lead to positive outcomes.¹⁶⁹ These positive effects extend beyond the individual and the organization, well into society at large.

3) Benefits for society at large

As with many policies that address social inequities, inclusive hiring practices have benefits beyond simply the workplace and its immediate population. Hiring persons with disabilities, according to Stephen Beyer and Annie Beyer, should be a priority for both the individual and for society overall: “Inclusive jobs can be a policy priority as a human right, or because we believe inclusive employment can deliver important non-financial outcomes for us: better quality of life; increased social integration; protection and improvement of psychosocial and physical health.”¹⁷⁰ This is echoed by the Conference Board of Canada’s document, “Business Benefits of Accessible Workplaces,” which outlines the societal benefits of hiring persons with a disability, all of which contribute to the betterment of society:¹⁷¹

- Tapping into a skilled talent pool that has historically be overlooked or underestimated
- Improved bottom-line results, including better job retention, higher attendance, lower turnover, enhanced job performance and work quality, and better safety records
- Diverse workplaces are more innovative workplaces, according to research conducted by Deloitte, the European Commission, and others; people with disabilities develop valuable skills such as perseverance, determination and goal-setting, and organizations that value diversity create more positive working environments.
- Persons with disabilities represent a significant consumer market
- Inclusiveness matters to consumers and can foster a positive brand image and customer loyalty
- Better disability management can lessen absenteeism and its resulting costs
Better integration of persons with disabilities into the paid workforce, thereby lessening the tax burden by reducing the amounts needed for income support and increasing GDP.

Kemper et al’s Ontario-based study from 2010 provides some data to support the benefits to society for hiring persons with a disability, in that, “our research clearly indicates that there are large pools of untapped human capital that could help drive Ontario's prosperity.” They estimate that increasing participation in the workforce

by persons with disabilities will benefit the bottom line beyond a family's income, by increasing the GDP per capita in Ontario by up to \$600 per annum. If standards were improved to achieve educational parity, they estimate that another \$200 per capita GDP increase in Ontario would result. Moreover, their data suggest that certain sectors could serve global markets by creating accessibility-focused business clusters, and that the retail and tourism industries could benefit from accelerated growth.¹⁷² Similarly, Lindsay et al.'s study demonstrates community economic benefit:

For example, Zivolich estimated [in 1997] the economic benefit to the community of hiring people with disabilities at over \$12 million in the form of taxes paid by new workers with disabilities. They also explained that taxpayers saved an additional \$43 million resulting from reduced social welfare payments and rehabilitation costs [56]. Similarly, Eggleton et al.'s study [in 1999] showed that hiring people with intellectual disabilities was economically beneficial to the community because employment was a cheaper alternative to income and welfare support measures.¹⁷³

High unemployment rates, including those for persons with disabilities, increase the costs that a country must incur in providing social assistance to these citizens. Unemployment for one family member may also increase household vulnerability in a ripple effect, possibly affecting the earning capacity of others (particularly women in caregiving roles) as well as increasing marginalization related to health care, asset accumulation, and help in disaster and emergency situations.¹⁷⁴

Therefore, employing persons with a disability with full-time and skills-matched work affects more than just that individual. Fewer unnecessarily unemployed or underemployed people means that the strain on the country's social safety net is lessened, as individuals who are engaged in full-time, meaningful work, will necessarily not need social assistance and will contribute to society in the form of taxes and increased spending power.

4) Benefits realized when persons with disabilities are included in the workplace

This section of the literature review focused on the benefits of hiring people with a disability with the results organized according to benefits to the workforce, benefits to an enterprise's performance, and benefits to society. The statistics and anecdotal evidence clearly point to the need for companies to examine their policies and practices, and to consider that, if they do not hire people with disabilities into positions that match their skills, expertise, and lived experience, that they are not considering a significant portion of the population that can provide both tangible and intangible benefits to an enterprise. The research offers clear evidence of such benefits.

At its heart, inclusive hiring practices are an essential component of achieving integration. However, integration is most effective when it is done with the needs of the employee(s) in mind. Care and attention to appropriate accommodation(s) can help the employer overcome potential hesitation and ensure that an employee with a disability is well-integrated into their job. Reducing stigma means not just accepting disability, but celebrating the fact that an employee's lived experience as a person with a disability will, in fact, bring benefit to the workplace.¹⁷⁵ In short:

The business case for diverse hiring practices, grounded in substantial research, operates under two notions. First, that when provided with an enabling environment, people with disabilities represent a qualified but under-tapped pool of potential workers (direct productivity). Second, that people with disabilities contribute to a diverse workforce, with attendant benefits for workplace culture, morale, and organizational reputation (indirect productivity) (ILO, 2010). Research into organizational diversity actually goes even further, indicating collateral benefits such as lower costs of discrimination and liability, greater organizational problem solving capacity, more innovation, and stronger appeal to a diverse customer base (Yap & Konrad,2009).¹⁷⁶

While it may be easy to demonstrate the importance of hiring people with disabilities, an enterprise may hesitate based on a lack of understanding how to proceed in order to ensure that they approach the matter appropriately. The Conference Board of Canada’s “Business Benefits of Accessible Workplaces” site described the strategies that employers can establish in order to make their employment practices more accessible:¹⁷⁷

- Ensure leadership commitment to implement change
- Create an inclusive work environment for all employees
- Build accessibility into business planning
- Dedicate resources
- Talk to other businesses and share success stories
- Reach out to local partners and agencies
- Take advantage of online resources and tools

Additionally, Lysaght suggests specific approaches that may be used to integrate persons with intellectual disability into the workforce:¹⁷⁸

- Job restructuring
- Affirmative hiring policies
- Staff training and support
- Agency partnerships.

The intangible benefits of hiring people with a disability are, as Graffam points out, not easily quantifiable. But that does not negate their importance. For the individual, they may include improved self-esteem, self affirmation, social contact, and personal satisfaction, as well as a shift from being the recipient of services to a provider of services. The employer benefits from a wider range of workers, and improved equity in the workplace. Overall societal benefits include supporting equal opportunity, and potentially shifting societal attitudes when people with a disability are seen as contributors to labour market activities.¹⁷⁹

It is not an insignificant thing, as Helen Hartnett et al state, for employers to accommodate workers so they:

Foster[ing] a sense among all employees that employers recognize both the value of the individual worker as a human being, and the inherent social benefits of creating and sustaining an inclusive workplace.¹⁸⁰

The literature clearly reflects the benefits, at multiple levels, of hiring a person with a disability. It provides a compelling argument for employers who are considering such hires, and not only explains why it is of benefit to the person hired, as well as to the bottom line of an enterprise. The literature also helps to dispel some of the perceived barriers related to inclusive hiring practices. To more fully complete the picture of the Canadian context, the next section of this document provides an overview of legislation and policies from other jurisdictions as they relate to hiring persons with a disability.

Overview of legislation and policies from other jurisdictions

In this section, we examine the legislation and specific policies that provincial governments in Canada and select governments abroad have adopted respecting people with disabilities, as a basis for comparing and contrasting the Canadian context. The research targeted official government publications as well as grey literature made publicly accessible.

While we have considered all notable initiatives and programs, the most relevant comparisons concern those jurisdictions that have developed legislation, not just social policies. In Canada, four provinces are in the former category, namely Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and Nova Scotia. It is important to note that provincial laws are complementary to federal legislation insofar as they concern distinct areas of jurisdiction. Provinces cannot address some aspects covered by the federal legislation, and vice versa. The regulation of labour is an area of shared jurisdiction. Workers in federally regulated sectors, such as broadcasting, interprovincial transportation and banking, are subject to the federal labour code whereas the vast majority of Canadian workers are instead subject to the provincial or territorial code applicable to their place of work. Several provinces have also developed strategies and action plans on accessibility and inclusion specifically designed for their public services.

We have also considered other comparable jurisdictions at the international level who have developed disability legislation, notably the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and the United States.

1) Provinces of Canada

Quebec

In Quebec, the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights* was first adopted in 1978. It was thoroughly reviewed in 2004 and is now known as the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration*. The Act is based on three main pillars:

- Increased involvement of the provincial and municipal governments and public and private agencies to help integrate people with disabilities into society to the same extent as other citizens

- Major responsibilities for partners with respect to people with disabilities and their families, including developing an annual action plan regarding people with disabilities and their families, preparing a transportation development plan and promoting the supply of accessible goods and services
- An office with duties and powers including a cross-cutting monitoring role, enabling it to advise the Minister, the government and public- and private-sector partners and to ensure that society continues to enhance the opportunities available to people with disabilities with respect to their social integration¹⁸¹

In 2009, to help implement the Act, the Quebec government adopted a policy entitled *Equals in Every Respect: Because Rights Are Meant to Be Exercised*. The purpose of the Policy is to increase social participation of people with disabilities over a 10-year timeframe.¹⁸² An evaluation report regarding the Act, prepared by the private firm Sogémap in 2017, provided various analysis criteria to compare the Act with other jurisdictions. The criteria included the definition of persons with disabilities, comparison with some of the inclusive scope provisions of the Quebec Act, provisions relative to integration into the labour market and impacts of the Act.¹⁸³

An important distinction raised in the Report is that the Quebec Act defines “handicapped person” based on a non-categorical approach, that is, without connecting them to having or not having a specific disability.¹⁸⁴ It does not specify what type of disability (physical, intellectual or other) it pertains to. This distinguishes it from other statutes, which categorize disabilities based on their types. The Report also states that some departments and agencies are still not complying with the Act.¹⁸⁵

A second notable feature of this Act, which is being criticized by organizations that advocate for disability rights, is that it applies only to the public sector, namely, to departments, government agencies and municipalities. According to Québec Accessible, a grassroots initiative advocating for a strong provincial accessibility law,

The Quebec law lacks teeth. ... It has no clear goals or penalties to ensure compliance. That’s why Québec Accessible is calling for a stronger provincial accessibility law to promote the full inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of society.¹⁸⁶

Québec Accessible also notes that there was no public consultation leading up to the independent evaluation reports, including the one by Sogémap cited above.¹⁸⁷ It further states that, since the law doesn’t include any clear and measurable goals, it was impossible to determine whether the work done so far met the legislature’s expectations.¹⁸⁸ The lack of such targets distinguishes the Quebec Act, which is based on the exercise of rights by people with disabilities, from the Ontario, Manitoba and Nova Scotia accessibility statutes, which are based on measurable criteria.

Ontario

Ontario is the second province to have enacted legislation in support of persons with disabilities, and the first to pass standards-based legislation. The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* has been in force since 2005 and defines a number of obligations:

- People with disabilities must be included when developing accessibility standards under the AODA, reviewing the AODA, reviewing public sector accessibility plans, building or renovating outdoor public spaces like parks and rest areas.
- Organizations must develop policies to meet the accessibility needs of people with disabilities. Those with at least 50 employees must document their policies, make them public and provide them in an accessible format upon request.
- Organizations must train their employees and volunteers on the AODA and Ontario's Human Rights Code. Those with at least 50 employees must keep a record of this training.
- Organizations with at least 50 employees must post multi-year accessibility plans on their websites. These plans must explain how they will prevent and remove barriers. Organizations must update their plans at least every five years.
- Municipalities with at least 10,000 residents must set up accessibility advisory committees. The majority of committee members must be people with disabilities. These committees advise municipal councils on accessibility issues.
- Municipalities must consult their accessibility committees when developing and reviewing their accessibility plans. They must also consult their committees about accessible taxis and about building or renovating bus stops, recreational trails, parks, outdoor rest areas and parking spaces.
- Public sector organizations must take accessibility into account when buying or renting goods, services or facilities.¹⁸⁹

Private and non-profit organizations with more than 50 employees and all public-sector organizations must also make accessibility plans, which outline the steps the organization will follow to prevent or remove the barriers. These organizations must also have their accessibility policies in writing and available to the public in accessible formats upon request. In addition, organizations must train their workers on best practices when serving people with various disabilities. The fact that the Ontarian law applies to private and non-profit organizations sets it apart from the Quebec law, which only targets the public sector. Moreover, the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario and the Minister of Seniors and Accessibility have the coercive power to enforce the law by issuing fines up to \$100,000 to organizations that do not comply.¹⁹⁰

The AODA also sets out a process for developing and enforcing accessibility standards in five areas:

- 1) Customer service
- 2) Information and communications
- 3) Transportation
- 4) Employment
- 5) Design of public spaces.¹⁹¹

Moreover, the AODA establishes the obligation on government to publish an annual report on implementation of the law¹⁹² and to conduct a legislative review every three years, including public consultations.¹⁹³

Manitoba

In December 2013, the *Accessibility for Manitobans Act* (AMA) was enacted, modelled closely on the Ontarian legislation. It commits the province to achieve “significant progress” in accessibility by 2023, with a view to making Manitoba more inclusive for everyone. The government intends to create five accessibility standards, working with representatives from the disability community as well as public and private sector organizations. The Customer Service standard is currently the only one in force. The Employment and Information and Communications standards are under development, while built environment and transportation standards are also planned.

Accessibility standards developed under the AMA focus on five key areas of daily living (the same areas chosen by Ontario):

- 1) The Customer Service accessibility standard addresses business practices and training requirements to provide better customer service to people with disabilities.
- 2) The Information and Communications accessibility standard will address barriers to accessing information, whether provided in print, in person, on websites or in other formats.
- 3) The Transportation accessibility standard will apply to public transportation to address barriers Manitobans might encounter while getting to work or school, shopping, socializing and other aspects of daily life.
- 4) The Employment accessibility standard will address practices related to employee recruitment, hiring and retention.
- 5) The Design of Public Spaces accessibility standard will deal with access to those areas outside the jurisdiction of the Manitoba Building Code, such as sidewalks, pathways, parks and other aspects of the built environment.¹⁹⁴

The AMA calls for a comprehensive review of its effectiveness every four years; the first review was published in December 2018, and bases its evaluation on public consultations.¹⁹⁵ It concludes that:

The AMA calls for significant progress towards achieving accessibility by 2023, and the current Government has committed to developing all remaining standards referenced in the Act by the end of its mandate, in 2020. This is, as noted earlier, an ambitious goal that will require sustained commitment, partnerships and collaboration among all affected sectors (government, the private, public and non-profit sectors, municipalities, Manitobans with disabilities, and the public at large). [...] Much work, however, lies ahead.¹⁹⁶

Nova Scotia

In 2017, Nova Scotia became the fourth Canadian province to enact accessibility legislation, setting a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. Nova Scotia's *Accessibility Act* is inspired by the Ontario and Manitoban legislation, which define clear objectives and measure mechanisms. The legislation is administered government-wide by an accessibility directorate, which also responsible for advancing broader issues pertaining to disability. The legislation establishes an Accessibility Advisory Board, the majority of whose members are persons with disabilities. It also enables the development of six standards for an accessible Nova Scotia, pertaining to:

- 1) Goods and services
- 2) Information and communication
- 3) Transportation
- 4) Employment
- 5) Education
- 6) Built environment¹⁹⁷

These six standards are largely the same as those announced by Ontario and Manitoba, with the notable addition of education.

An Accessibility Advisory Board, the majority of whose members are persons with disabilities, makes recommendations to government on accessibility and advises on the current development of accessibility standards. After public consultations taking place between December 2017 and June 2018, the government released a strategy called *Access by Design 2030* that provides a framework and sets priorities. Standards for the built environment and education are to be developed first (a different choice than Manitoba had made), followed by employment, goods and services, information and communications and transportation. Access by Design is based on the following guiding principles:

- Human Rights and Social Justice – this principle includes respect for difference, dignity, independence, and autonomy; equitable access and opportunity; non-discrimination; and full participation and inclusion in society.

- Engagement and Collaboration – work is to be guided by the experience of persons with disabilities, supported by the strength of existing community-based programs and the development of collaborative, cross-sectoral initiatives.
- Coordination and Harmonization – accessibility initiatives and strategies must align across organizations and all levels of government.
- Innovation and Modernization – these principles are to be employed in the development of initiatives and the allocation of resources.¹⁹⁸

British Columbia

While British Columbia does not have a statute that defines accessibility standards, is it developing legislation on accessibility. It also introduced an action plan in 2014, titled *Accessibility 2024*, which has the goal of “making B.C. the most progressive province in Canada for people with disabilities by 2024.”¹⁹⁹ Following a comprehensive public consultation, the action plan was founded on 12 building blocks with stated goals and measures:

- 1) Inclusive government, measured by the percentage of British Columbians engaged annually in disability-related policy discussions
- 2) Accessible service delivery, measured by the percentage of fully accessible B.C. government services
- 3) Accessible internet, measured by the percentage of B.C. government websites meeting international accessibility standards
- 4) Accessible built environment, measured by the number of B.C. communities incorporating accessibility into their Official Community Plans, and by the percentage of publicly owned and leased facilities that are accessible
- 5) Accessible housing, measured by the percentage of B.C. publicly-owned housing that is accessible, and by the percentage of new homes that are built to be accessible
- 6) Accessible transportation, measured by the number of B.C. communities that have transportation options for people with disabilities
- 7) Income support, measured by a comparison of B.C.’s income supports, asset limits and earnings exemptions to other provinces
- 8) Employment, measured by the labour market participation gap for persons with disabilities in B.C., with the aim of it being the narrowest in Canada
- 9) Financial security, measured by maintaining B.C.’s position as the province with the highest per capita number of Registered Disability Savings Plans
- 10) Inclusive communities, measured by the number of B.C. communities declaring themselves accessible communities

- 11) Emergency preparedness, measured by the number of community emergency response plans in B.C. that comply with a Functional Needs Framework
- 12) Consumer experience, measured by the number of accessible B.C. visitor centres, and by the percentage of hotels in B. C. that are accessible and easy to identify

The government notably attempts to reach these goals through an array of programs and services for people with disabilities totalling an annual budget of more than \$5 billion, distributed through government, crown agencies and corporations.²⁰⁰ While the government does not have legislative power to regulate accessibility in the private sector, some initiatives involve multiple partners. One example is the Right Fit Pilot Project, a three-year initiative that brings together housing and disability service providers to address challenge facing wheelchair users who need affordable, wheelchair-accessible homes and independent living supports in Metro Vancouver.²⁰¹ A progress update for the accessibility action plan was published in 2018. While it provides an extensive itemized list of initiatives, it does not include public consultations or a general assessment of the situation by an appointed reviewer.²⁰²

Alberta

There is no legislation with respect to accessibility in Alberta. The government offers a variety of programs and initiatives, notably a Disability Advisory Forum, financial assistance for people with disabilities, service dogs, supports for people with disabilities, and the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disability.²⁰³ The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is established by the *Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Act*,²⁰⁴ and advises the Alberta government through public discussion and engagement with the disability community.²⁰⁵ It consists of up to 15 volunteer members. The Council prepared a disability strategy in 2002, but has not renewed or replaced it.²⁰⁶

Saskatchewan

In the Saskatchewan Plan for Growth, as well as the 2012, 2013 and 2014 Speeches from the Throne, Government committed to developing a Disability Strategy in consultation with the disability community.²⁰⁷ Announced in 2015 and entitled *People Before Systems: Transforming the Experience of Disability in Saskatchewan*, the disability strategy provides the framework to transform disability programs and services to meet Government's goal of making Saskatchewan the best place in Canada to live for people with disabilities.²⁰⁸ While the strategy has set some clear recommendation and guidelines, it does not plan for a punctual evaluation. Four drivers of transformation support the strategy:

1. Designing person-centred services able to respond to individual needs
2. Understanding the impact of disability as lived experience
3. Promoting and protecting human rights
4. Investing in accessibility and inclusion for everyone's benefit.²⁰⁹

There are also a number of programs for people with disabilities offered by the government of Saskatchewan,²¹⁰ notably:

- Adapt a home for a person with a disability
- Financial help for home care
- Cognitive disability strategy (CDS) support
- Health services for people with disabilities
- Housing and support for people with intellectual disabilities
- Approved private service homes
- Saskatchewan assured income for disability
- Job support for people with disabilities
- Office of disability issues
- Saskatchewan rental housing supplement
- Saskatchewan aids to independent living
- Saskatchewan disability strategy
- Respite for families caring for a child with intellectual disabilities.

New Brunswick

New Brunswick has not enacted legislation supporting people with disabilities, but the Premier’s Council on Disabilities – a consultative body created to advise the province on matters relating to the status of persons with disabilities – adopted a disability action plan in 2011. The plan was based on extensive stakeholder consultation and engagement including a stakeholder’s summit, a public dialogue session, and several meetings with key community organizations commencing in 2011.²¹¹ It formulated 41 recommendations and reports on the status of implementation in a status update of 2017.²¹² In July 2020, a new action plan was adopted under the name *Accountable Path Forward to an Equal Opportunity!*, following a Disability Stakeholders’ Summit held in June 2019, involving 220 stakeholders.²¹³ It includes new accountability and outcome recommendations, namely that:

1. All government departments include a specific section in their annual reports that describes the impact of the services they have provided to persons with disabilities in the past year;
2. The newly-formed Disability Action Plan Committee will present an annual public Status Report on the progress made during the year in question;
3. The Council would attempt to see that data is collected and reported on selected systemic outcome measures.²¹⁴

The Department of Social Services also administers different programs and services in the following fields:

- Health services
- Housing, disability supports and residential services
- Employment and labour market information
- Driving and vehicles²¹⁵

Prince Edward Island

PEI has neither legislation nor a government strategy for accessibility. The PEI government does however administer the AccessAbility Supports program, which offers assistance to Islanders living with disabilities, notably personal supports, housing supports, community supports, caregiver supports, and financial supports:

- support for all disabilities including physical, intellectual, neurological, sensory and mental, based on an assessment;
- a new assessment tool to help better understand how the disability affects activities of daily living to ensure appropriate support is provided;
- new Community Connector positions to focus on improving people’s independence and more active participation in community living;
- a supports coordinator to navigate all available support services and develop a personalized plan to meet individual needs;
- increased supports for finding or keeping a job including coaching and skills training;
- increased financial help for home and vehicle modifications required because of a disability—\$10,000 every 10 years for home (was \$2,000 in a lifetime) and \$6,000 every 8 years for a vehicle (was \$2,000 in a lifetime); and
- a single point of contact by calling a toll-free number for easier access to support.²¹⁶

Newfoundland and Labrador

The Newfoundland and Labrador government conducted public consultations in the fall 2010 and released a provincial strategy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities.²¹⁷ The findings of the consultations were published in a report entitled *What We Heard: Inclusion for All*,²¹⁸ and informed the development of the provincial strategy called *Access. Inclusion. Equality*.²¹⁹ The Strategy aims to remove and prevent attitudinal, systemic, physical and technological barriers by providing the provincial government with a framework with five strategic directions:

1. Creating a positive image of disability
2. Moving forward together: nothing about us without us
3. Accessibility for all in the built environment
4. Strengthening disability-related supports
5. Delivering services with dignity, fairness and respect²²⁰

2) International Comparatives

On the international scene, some jurisdictions have adopted anti-discrimination legislation to address discrimination against persons with disabilities. This is the case in the *Equality Act (2010)* in the United Kingdom, which replaces previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations.²²¹ Some other jurisdictions have adopted

legislation specific to disability, notably the United States with the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (1990),²²² and Australia with the *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992).²²³

United Kingdom

The *Equality Act* is designed to prohibit certain conducts such as discrimination, as well as to enforce a duty to make adjustments, notably for persons with disabilities.²²⁴ In December 2018, the Department for International Development announced a Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development 2018-23 to work with foreign government towards the inclusion of people in a situation of disability.²²⁵ While this strategy targets developing countries, a domestic strategy is not in effect at this point. A disability unit at the Cabinet Office is currently working across government and with persons with disabilities to develop a National Strategy for Disabled People.²²⁶ The objectives for this National Strategy are to:

- develop a positive and clear vision on disability which is owned right across government
- make practical changes to policies which strengthen the opportunity of people with a disability to participate fully in society
- ensure lived experience underpins policies by identifying what matters most to people with a disability
- strengthen the ways in which the government listens to people with a disability and organizations, using these insights to drive real change
- improve the quality of evidence and data and use it to support policies and how they are delivered.²²⁷

Scotland

In 2016, the government of Scotland's Executive Agency of Social Security issued a delivery plan entitled *A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People*,²²⁸ as part of a wider program for a fairer Scotland.²²⁹ Some other relevant initiatives include the Keys to Life, Scotland's learning disability strategy, the Scottish Strategy for Autism and the forthcoming British Sign Language National Plan. The disability delivery plan is unequivocally based on the social model of disability as opposed to the medical model, which lays the blame on the impairment, rather than on society's inability to provide for their needs, rights, and aspirations. It is also rooted firmly in the UNCRPD and in the aim of the independent living movement, which is that disabled people can live the life they choose, participating equally alongside other citizens in their families, communities, workplaces and wider society, with the support they need.²³⁰

The Plan includes 93 actions to achieve 5 ambitions:

1. Support services that promote independent living, meet needs and work together to enable a life of choices, opportunities and participation
2. Decent incomes and fairer working lives
3. Places that are accessible to everyone
4. Protected rights
5. Active participation²³¹

Ireland

The government of Ireland's Department of Justice and Equality has introduced a National Disability Inclusion Strategy for the years 2017-2021.²³² The strategy is the outcome of a broad consultation process of three phases, including an initial round of public consultations to identify the priority themes to be addressed in a new strategy.²³³ It follows a previous National Disability Strategy that ran from 2013 to 2015. The strategy is divided into 8 separate fields of activity, subdivided in 114 actions, each with responsible bodies and timeframes identified. Since the strategy is a living document, input will be sought and recorded on an ongoing basis. A midterm review and consultation meetings where government departments will report on their commitments will also form a key part of the implementation process. The strategy will publish an annual report on progress and a revised iteration of the strategy will be prepared following the midterm review. Here are the key fields of activity:

1. Equality and Choice
2. Joined up policies and public services
3. Education
4. Employment
5. Health and wellbeing
6. Person-Centred Disability Services
7. Living in the Community
8. Transport and Accessible Places²³⁴

Australia

To mitigate the challenges that people with a disability face to an equal participation in society, Australia has both a specific anti-discrimination and a disability strategy. Enacted in 1992, the *Disability Discrimination Act* (DDA) makes disability discrimination unlawful and promotes equal rights, equal opportunity and equal access for people with disabilities.²³⁵ The DDA makes it unlawful to discriminate against someone with a disability in the following areas of life:

- Employment
- Education
- Access to premises used by the public, including the private sector such as places of worship, restaurants, and shops
- Provision of goods, services and facilities
- Accommodation (housing)
- Landowning
- Activities
- Sport
- Administration²³⁶

The National Disability Strategy (2010-2020) is Australia's whole plan for the progressive implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It is based on a consultation with people with disability, their families, and their carers.²³⁷ The strategy includes six outcome areas, each of which include a number of policy directives.

1. Inclusive and accessible communities
2. Rights protection, justice, and legislation
3. Economic security
4. Personal and community support
5. Learning and skills
6. Health and wellbeing²³⁸

The strategy was further defined in three implementation plans; Laying the Groundwork 2011-2014 established the foundations to bring about reform in the planning and delivery of both mainstream and disability-specific programs and services.²³⁹ The strategy's second implementation plan, Driving Action 2015-2018, outlines new priority actions and builds on ongoing commitments to improving outcomes for people with disability; improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability; and communication activities to promote the intent of the Strategy throughout the community.²⁴⁰ The Third Implementation Plan 2019-2020 builds on work undertaken by all levels of government over the life of the Strategy through state, territory, and local government disability plans.²⁴¹ The implementation plans reflect forward-thinking notions and recognizes the multidimensionality and intersectionality of discrimination.²⁴² Progress is monitored through biennial progress reports to the Council of Australian Government, state, territory and local government agencies.²⁴³ An important feature of the report is the inclusion of baseline population trend data to monitor and track national progress against the strategy's six outcome areas.²⁴⁴

United States

The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted in 1990. It is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public, including private institutions like restaurants and retail stores.²⁴⁵ It sets norms and standards to reduce or eliminate potential obstacles that may cause discrimination against people with a disability.

In a scoping review of the ADA, Harris, et al., contend that data is missing to evaluate the impact of the legislation.²⁴⁶ There is no action plan to direct the government's action or clear measurable outcomes. Moreover, suggest Harris et al., "Aside from studies on hiring rates and the legal data available from the U.S. Department of Justice, much of the commonly cited research is anecdotal or descriptive and not necessarily useful for many policy players in its current form."²⁴⁷ To address the need for a thorough assessment of the ADA, the University of Illinois at Chicago is conducting a five-year review, whose results are not published to this day.

Conclusion: main findings

As is clear from the findings in this literature review, there are widespread systemic barriers to persons with disabilities participating in the workforce, despite the clear benefits for hiring individuals with a disability. In essence, these barriers prevent people with disabilities from full socio-economic participation in Canadian society. The key findings from this document support PCH as it implements the *Accessible Canada Act*, with its ultimate goal of helping to remove systematic barriers through their identification and by demonstrating how employing persons with disabilities does, in fact, benefit the individual, the enterprise, and society as a whole.

This literature review clearly illustrates the inequity and inequality between those with and without disabilities in Canada, particularly when it comes to employment. In support of PCH's commitment to becoming a fully accessible environment by 2040, as identified in its 2020-2025 action plan, this document has identified the barriers faced by persons with disabilities under each of the five pillars of the ASPSC, and has examined benefits realized when persons with disabilities are included in the workplace, with a view to supporting the development of indicators of success.

General barriers include those related to social stratification; socialization in the workplace; stigma prejudice, and discrimination; disclosure and workplace accommodations; and, barriers created by conventions and practices. Other key barriers include: barriers in built environments; barriers in communication modes; barriers in the use of information and communication technologies; barriers in program or service design and delivery; and, barriers in government procurement, including recent changes to federal government policy and guidance on accessible procurement. While this list of barriers may seem daunting, the benefits of hiring persons with a disability are many and varied. Aside from benefitting the individual who becomes gainfully employed, this review revealed that the benefits to the workforce, benefits for an enterprise's performance, and benefits for society at large are significant. It is notable that such benefits are not intangible; in addition to soft benefits such as increased acceptance and awareness, important as they are, organizations and companies can realize concrete financial and human resource benefits by ensuring that they develop and implement inclusive hiring policies. The overview of legislation and policies from other jurisdictions, both at the provincial and global levels, illustrates where strengths lie and what gaps can and must be filled.

While this literature review lays bare the theoretical and academic need for equitable and accessible employment for persons with a disability, the humanity of persons with a disability must be at the forefront. Not only are non-inclusive hiring practices to the detriment of those who are excluded, they also render poorer Canadian companies and society who do not benefit from the skills and experience that persons with a disability may bring to an enterprise. Successful implementation of the *Accessibility Act*, supported by the findings in this literature review, is a significant step towards realizing truly inclusive employment practices in PCH, the Government of Canada, and Canadian society as a whole.

Annex A: Key terms used in the literature

Accommodation

Workplace accommodation refers to the removal of discriminatory barriers by employers to protect employees' human rights. Under Canadian law, employers have the duty to accommodate employees to avoid discrimination on any of the 13 grounds identified in section 2 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, one of which is disability.²⁴⁸ In Canadian texts, the term “accommodation” is widely used as shorthand for “**workplace accommodation**” (“**adaptation du lieu du travail**” in French) in reference to this legal requirement.

Activity limitation

The ICFDH defines an activity limitation as a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action.²⁴⁹ The term “**functional limitation**” (“**limitation fonctionnelle**” in French) is used as an alternative to “activity limitation” by some sources, including documents published by the Government of Canada.²⁵⁰

Barrier

In the literature on disability, the term barrier is seldom defined. It is used widely to refer to a range of obstacles that either impede or prevent someone from going somewhere or from doing something, or impede or prevent something from happening.

The *Accessible Canada Act* defines a barrier as follows:

barrier means anything — including anything physical, architectural, technological or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice — that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation.²⁵¹

Disability

In the *Accessible Canada Act*, disability is defined as follows:

disability means any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society.²⁵²

It is notable that for the purposes of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, disability is defined differently: “disability means any previous or existing mental or physical disability and includes disfigurement and previous or existing dependence on alcohol or a drug.”²⁵³

It is important to note that several terms are used in French as equivalents to “disability” in Canadian texts. The French version of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* uses the term “**déficience**” where the English version uses “disability”, whereas the *Employment Equity Act* refers in English to “**persons with disabilities**” and in French to “**personnes handicapées**”.²⁵⁴ In Canada, disability insurance is referred to in French as “assurance **invalidité**,” including by the federal government.²⁵⁵ Outside of legal and administrative texts, the terms “**incapacité**” and “**handicap**” are generally used in French to refer to “disability.”

Shifting to literature from abroad, another definition of disability is found in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICFDH), used by the World Health Organization as a framework to measure health and disability. It defines disability as “the interaction between individuals with a health condition and personal and environmental factors.”²⁵⁶ It is also “an umbrella term for [impairments](#), [activity limitations](#) and [participation restrictions](#).”²⁵⁷ This definition is often cited in the literature. However, this definition, which aligns with the [social model of disability](#), is not consensual.

Impairment

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) defines an impairment as a problem in body function or structure.²⁵⁸

Participation restriction

The ICF defines a participation restriction as a problem experienced by an individual in taking part in life situations.²⁵⁹

Annex B: Types of disability

Discourses on disability generally employ a typology that seeks to highlight differences in the experiences of persons with a disability.

The *Accessible Canada Act* explicitly identifies eight types of impairments that can result in disability: physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, and sensory. It further defines disability as:

any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person’s full and equal participation in society.²⁶⁰

The qualitative literature tends however to use broader categories, likely due to the focus on documenting and analyzing lived experiences rather than articulating the legislator’s intent. The terms most frequently used in the literature reviewed for this report are as follows:

Acquired disability

An acquired disability is one that has developed during a person’s lifetime as a result of injury (e.g. spinal cord or acquired brain injury) or illness. The term is used to draw a distinction between impairments acquired during one’s lifetime from those present from birth, particularly with respect to lived experience. Acquired disabilities may result from various types of impairments listed in the *Accessible Canada Act*, including physical, mental, cognitive, communication and sensory.

Chronic illness

Chronic illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, arthritis and other musculoskeletal diseases that tend to have disabling effects are another type of impairment. The definition of disability used by the World Health Organization includes explicit reference to chronic illnesses.

Episodic disability

Episodic impairments refer to those related to conditions or diseases that result in discrete periods of disability. The underlying conditions or diseases are lifelong but their effects, which can vary in intensity and duration, are different from those of permanent or progressive disabling conditions.

Invisible disability

Invisible disability is an umbrella term for impairments that are not immediately apparent. It includes cognitive, behavioral or learning impairments as well as mental health conditions.

Annex C: Theoretical models of disability

The concept of disability has taken a number of forms, grounded in competing perspectives on its significance. At least 27 models of disability have been constructed in attempts to define and understand the concept of disability.²⁶¹ Among the most influential and commonly referred to in the literature are the models briefing described below.

Eugenic model

Grounded in the theory of eugenics, which “posits that efforts should be made to decrease all elements of genetic inferiority from the human race until they no longer exist,” this model characterizes persons with a disability as “unfit” or “defective”, i.e. possessing undesirable traits. Though broadly rejected today, it remains influential in having constructed the distinction between people who have a disability and those who do not, and it is considered a precursor to the medical model.²⁶²

Medical (or biomedical, or traditional) model

The medical model “has been the primary paradigm for understanding frames disability since the decline of eugenics.”²⁶³ It frames disability as a medical concern involving impairment or abnormality of mental or bodily function. The role of trained medical or rehabilitation professionals, then, would be to seek to remove or ameliorate the functional problem, which is treated as a deficit as opposed to a variation.²⁶⁴

Charity (or philanthropic) model

The charity model views people with impairments as victims of circumstance who deserve (or even need) charitable treatment as a matter of social responsibility.²⁶⁵ A. J. Withers summed up the mindset that supports this model this way: “If enough people come together to walk/run/bowl/ride/sleep/fast/climb/gamble/skip/donate, disability can be ‘fought,’ ultimately eradicating disability and, therefore, disabled people.”²⁶⁶

Social model

The social model views disability as part of the diversity of the human condition. In this view, disability is not necessarily undesirable nor a condition in need of being cured. Rather, “it is the social context that creates the disability, not the impairment itself. This model emphasizes removal of social and environmental barriers so that individuals with disabilities have opportunities to participate in society.”²⁶⁷

Economic model

The economic model of disability is rooted in the logic of cost-benefit analysis. It portrays disability as a cost burden to society, one that requires the investment of additional resources for intervention and

accommodation and that may result in reduced productivity in or contributions from persons with a disability.²⁶⁸

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