



# WCG NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT INDEX 2022

ALBERTA SPOTLIGHT







# Table of Contents

Executive Summary	iv
WCG National Employer Index	1
Alberta Spotlight	5
• Employers are Taking Action to Improve Workplace Inclusivity	6
• Negative Attitudes Towards Underrepresented Groups Remain Prevalent	8
• Both Employers and Job Seekers See Value in "Hard" and "Soft" Skills Training to Improve Employability and Retention	11
• Sustainable Employment of Underrepresented Groups Requires a Flexible Approach and Long-term Support	14
Conclusion	18

# WCG Services: leading the way in sustainable employment

WCG Services is an industry leader in developing and delivering employment and vocational rehabilitation services across Canada.

For more than 28 years WCG has been partnering with governments and local service delivery organizations to create sustainable employment opportunities for people, businesses, and communities.

**Every day we help people reach their employment goals and improve the quality of their lives - many of them with multiple, complex barriers to entering or re-entering the workforce. Our participants include persons with disabilities, Indigenous people, Youth, Veterans, Francophones, Black and Racialized People and other demographic groups underrepresented in the labour market.**

WCG is part of the APM Group, which delivers employment and allied health services internationally. Our global network of companies shares a core purpose: to enable better lives. In the last 12 months, our team of more than 13,400 people in 11 countries have reached the lives of more than two million people. In 2020, WCG commissioned independent market research consultancy, CoreData, to conduct research on diversity and inclusivity in the workplace.

The result was the inaugural WCG National Employment Index 2021 and three spotlight reports, one for each of Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. A landmark piece of research, the Index sought to create a benchmark against which to measure and track over time the employment and career access, equity and inclusion in the workforce. The research findings marked an inaugural waypost for businesses and job seekers to navigate and progress towards equitable employment.

One year on, we set out to understand how the landscape had changed. The National Employment Index 2022 provides insights into trends in equity and inclusion of Canadians over the last 12 months.



# About the WCG National Employment Index

WCG Services commissioned independent market research consultancy, CoreData, to develop and establish a National Employment Index. The Index assesses the equity of employment opportunities for unemployed Canadians, and the proactive steps being taken by both job seekers and employers to improve employment outcomes. It measures three main areas: Attitudes, Access and Actions.

## Attitudes

Measures whether the mindsets of employers and job seekers are strengthening employment outcomes. It includes:

### 1.1 Employability:

Employer perceptions of the employability of groups typically underrepresented in the workforce and job seekers' perceptions of their own employability.

1.2 Equity: Employer willingness to employ these cohorts and job seekers' perceptions of employer willingness.

1.3 Myths: Prevalence of negative attitudes and employer misperceptions.

## Access

Measures the accessibility of meaningful employment outcomes. It includes:

2.1 Awareness: Whether job seekers know where to go for assistance finding a job and whether employers know where to go for help recruiting underrepresented groups.

2.2 Availability: Whether job seekers have the support needed to find work and employers have the support needed to recruit and retain people from underrepresented groups.

2.3 Capability: Job seekers' existing skills and knowledge and employers' organizational capability to recruit people from typically underrepresented groups.

## Actions

Measures the tangible actions and interventions that are influencing employment outcomes. It includes:

3.1 Services: Employers' and job seekers' ease of accessing employment services to assist with recruitment, retention and finding work and relevance of services.

3.2 System: Employers' and job seekers' understanding of how to access these supports within the current system.

3.3 Activity: Actions taken or planned by job seekers to increase their employability and by employers to recruit and retain job seekers.

The Index was developed from quantitative surveys conducted in November and December 2022 of 1,393 employers involved in recruitment and 1,375 Canadians who had been actively seeking work within the last 12 months.[1] While the sample of job seekers included both employed and unemployed respondents, the Index results are based only on the responses of those who were unemployed at the time they submitted their responses.

Throughout the report, we use the term “people who represent groups that are typically underrepresented in the workforce”, abbreviated thereafter to “underrepresented groups”. For the purposes of this research, this includes people who are, or identify as:

- Indigenous
- Visible minorities
- People with a disability or chronic physical and/or mental health conditions
- Those with limited work experience
- Recent immigrants to Canada
- Previously incarcerated/with a criminal record
- Homeless or without stable, secure accommodation
- Survivors of violence or abuse
- Youth (under 25)
- A Veteran
- Older (over 50)
- People who identify as part of the LGBTQ2+ community
- Those who have experienced periods of involuntary long-term unemployment

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[1] Referred to throughout the report as ‘job seekers’.





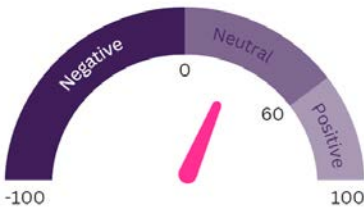


# 2022 NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT INDEX SCORECARD

## 2022 Index Scorecard (average of Attitudes, Access and Actions)

**39.7/100**

-0.7 vs 2021



This score is in the neutral-to-negative range and has declined since the inaugural benchmark research was conducted 12 months ago, suggesting there remains strong room for improvement.

Established in 2021, the Canadian National Employment Index is designed to understand the employment landscape in Canada from the perspective of both Canadians seeking work and employers. It tracks the challenges and issues they face, job seekers' steps to become employed and employers' steps to recruit and retain people from groups typically underrepresented in the workforce.

The Index and sub-component scores can range from +100 to -100 as they track both positive and negative factors.

## Attitudes

**24.1/100**

-4.8 vs 2021



The Attitudes pillar experienced the largest overall shift, driven by increased prevalence of negative attitudes about people from underrepresented groups, observed by both employers and job seekers. These included, for example, negative attitudes about people with limited work experience and the perception that employing people with disability, injury or illness is challenging.

While perceptions of employability and employers' willingness to hire people from underrepresented groups remains stable, this was offset by an increase in negative attitudes towards them and a range of misperceptions.

### Components

**67.4**

### Employability

-0.2 vs 2021

**27.3**

### Equity

+0.1 vs 2021

**-22.4**

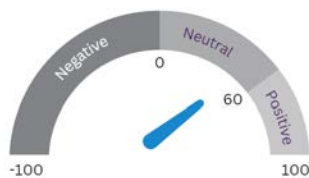
### Myths

-14.2 vs 2021

## Access

**55.5/100**

+1.4 vs 2021



Access remained the best-performing Index pillar with the score stable year-on-year.

This was influenced primarily by an improvement in the Capability score, driven by greater confidence among employers in their ability to recruit and retain newly-hired employees who represent groups that are typically underrepresented in the workforce. This is reflective of wider trends observed in the results, with employers increasingly taking steps to make their workplaces inclusive, such as hiring diversity and inclusion officers and raising awareness of different characteristics employees may have.

### Components

**48.7**

### Awareness

+1.8 vs 2021

**46.5**

### Availability

-0.9 vs 2021

**71.3**

### Capability

+3.0 vs 2021

## Actions

**39.5/100**

+1.2 vs 2021



The Actions pillar remains stable year-on-year, with marginal improvements across all subcomponent scores.

There is increased awareness of employment services providers among businesses, as well as improvement in the perception that such services are easy to access. Furthermore, most Canadian employers are actively recruiting at least one underrepresented group and the proportion who are doing so increased compared to last year. While a slightly lower number of job seekers took steps to improve their situation this year, the Activity score overall remained stable.

### Components

**20.8**

### Services

+3.4 vs 2021

**29.9**

### System

+1.2 vs 2021

**67.8**

### Activity

+0.8 vs 2021





# Alberta Spotlight

## Key Findings



# Alberta Spotlight - Key Findings

The Albertan job market has recovered considerably since the onset of the global pandemic. In December 2020, Alberta's unemployment rate was the second-highest nationally at 11.2 per cent, behind Newfoundland and Labrador. By December 2022, unemployment had almost halved to 5.8 per cent.[2] This trend was reflected in our research, with far fewer job seekers having lost their job due to COVID-19 compared to last year's study (25 per cent vs 45 per cent).

Against this backdrop, employers have had to work harder to recruit and retain talent. However, entrenched practices and attitudes towards employment of people with disability remain – and in some areas, these have increased in prevalence.

## 1. Employers are Taking Action to Improve Workplace Inclusivity

a) Half of Albertan employers took steps in the last 12 months to promote hiring diversity and inclusivity (51 per cent), up from 38 per cent last year. The most common actions were: introducing or expanding a diversity and inclusion role (45 per cent), making workplace culture and values changes to ensure all employees feel welcome and included (44 per cent) and building organisational awareness and understanding of different characteristics employees may have (43 per cent).

b) This year, more Albertan employers reported actively recruiting candidates from diverse backgrounds, the biggest increases being active recruitment of people who identify as part of the LGBTQ2+ community, Indigenous Canadians and visible minorities. Albertan employers are more likely to say they have recruited an Indigenous Canadian compared to the national average (54 per cent vs 47 per cent).

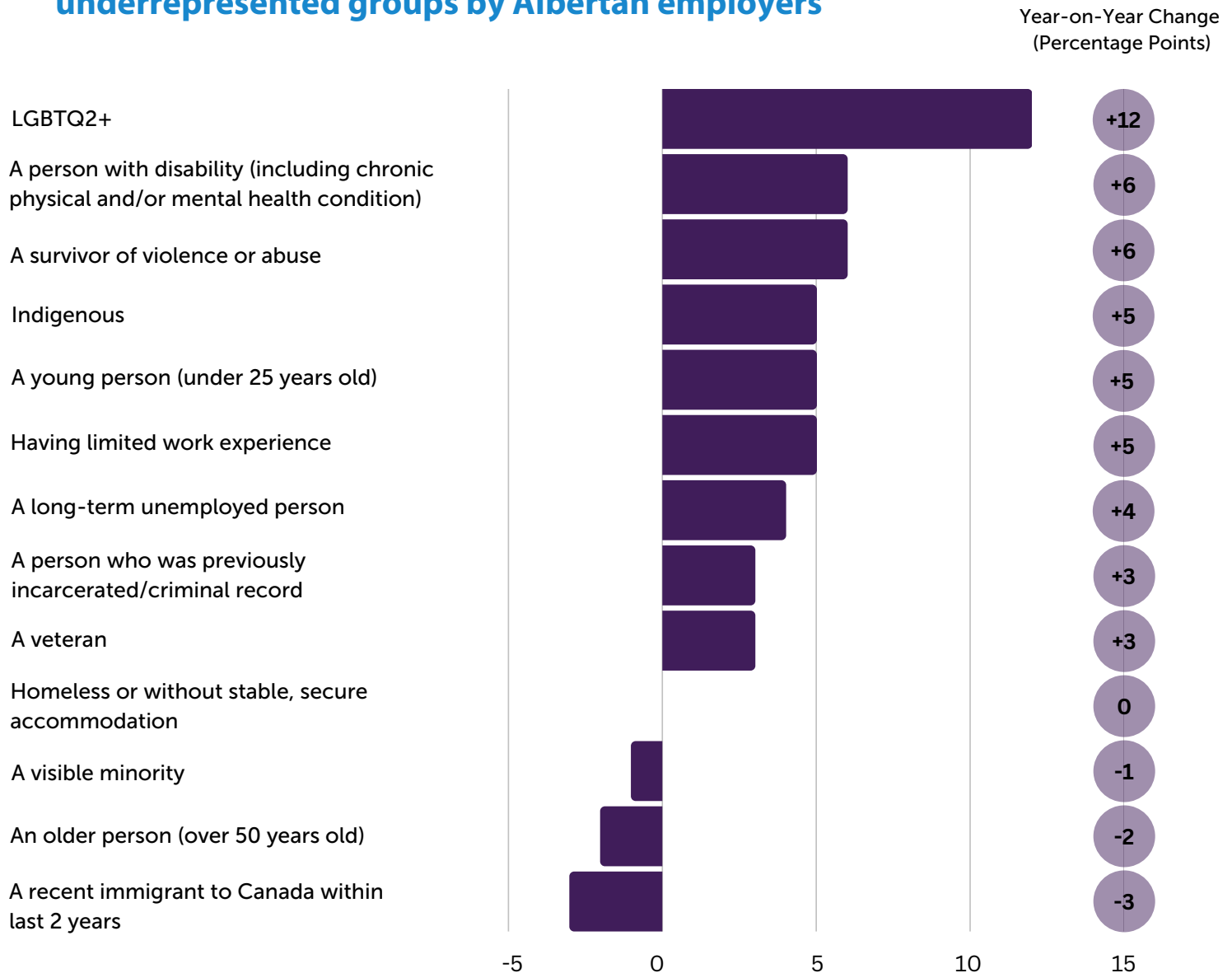
c) However, disparities between underrepresented groups remain: while actual employment of people who identify as LGBTQ2+, people with disability and Indigenous Canadians by Albertan employers saw the largest year-on-year uptick, employment of other groups such as recent immigrants, older people and visible minorities remained static or declined.

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[2] Statistics Canada, Labour force characteristics by province, monthly, seasonally adjusted, [Click Here](#)



## Annual change in employment of underrepresented groups by Albertan employers



**Q: Has your organization ever employed a person, or people who identify as:**  
**n=225, Albertan employers**

"I AM OVER 61 YEARS OLD WITH A GOOD EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE AND SUCCESS IN MY TRADE. AFTER SEVERAL INTERVIEWS I HAVE THE FEELING HR IS THINKING I AM TOO OLD TO FILL [A] WORK POSITION WITH THE POSSIBILITY THAT I RETIRE AT 65."

(Job seeker, Male, 61 years old)

d) Albertan employers continue to believe there are adequate employment opportunities for people from underrepresented groups (62 per cent). While less than half of Albertan job seekers from underrepresented groups believe this to be the case (45 per cent), this is an improvement on last year (34 per cent).

## 2. Negative Attitudes Towards Underrepresented Groups Remain Prevalent

a) Last year we found job seekers from underrepresented groups and employers from Alberta were slightly more likely than the national average to report experiencing negative attitudes towards these groups. This trend continued in 2022, with the prevalence of both increasing.

b) Nearly four in five (82 per cent) Albertan job seekers from underrepresented groups say they experience negative attitudes from employers at least some of the time, when job seeking or at work, with a similar proportion of Albertan employers (80 per cent) claiming they encounter such attitudes or misperceptions from colleagues or leaders. This is compared to 75 per cent and 71 per cent respectively last year.

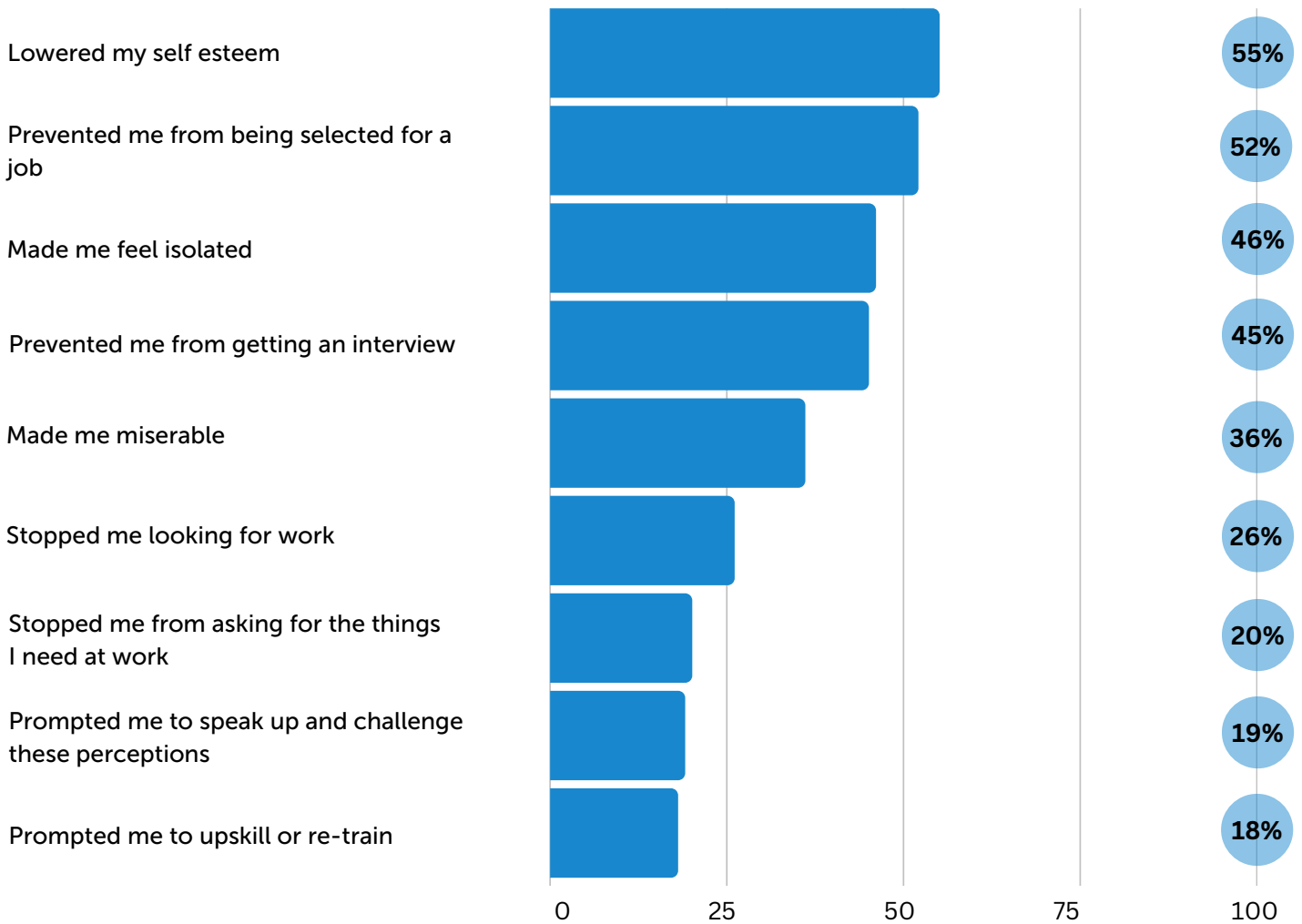
c) Despite Covid-19 driving greater acceptance globally of working from home and seeing many lose jobs, key themes from Albertan job seekers encountering negative attitudes include perceptions that: hiring people who need flexible work days/hours is too difficult (43 per cent) and people with gaps in their resumes are not good employees (40 per cent). Nearly half say they have encountered the attitude that older workers are not worth employing (47 per cent), with the latter higher in Alberta than the national average of 37 per cent.

d) This creates a cycle of negativity for job seekers from underrepresented groups, more than half of whom say such attitudes lowered their self-esteem (55 per cent). Over one in four (26 per cent) gave up looking for work altogether.

e) Among Albertan employers encountering negative attitudes, the most common are that poor employment history is a red flag (54 per cent), that employing someone with disability, injury or illness is challenging (47 per cent), and the perception that younger workers are less reliable than older workers (47 per cent).



## Effects of negative employer attitudes on Albertan job seekers



**Q: What impact(s) has this had on your experience job seeking or working?**  
**n=129, Albertan job seekers from underrepresented groups who encountered negative attitudes while job seeking**

"I HAVE AN MBA BUT BECAUSE I'M NOT CANADIAN (ALTHOUGH MY ENGLISH IS PERFECT) I'M NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY."

(Job seeker, Female, 29 years old)







### 3. Both Employers and Job Seekers See Value in "Hard" and "Soft" Skills Training to Improve Employability and Retention

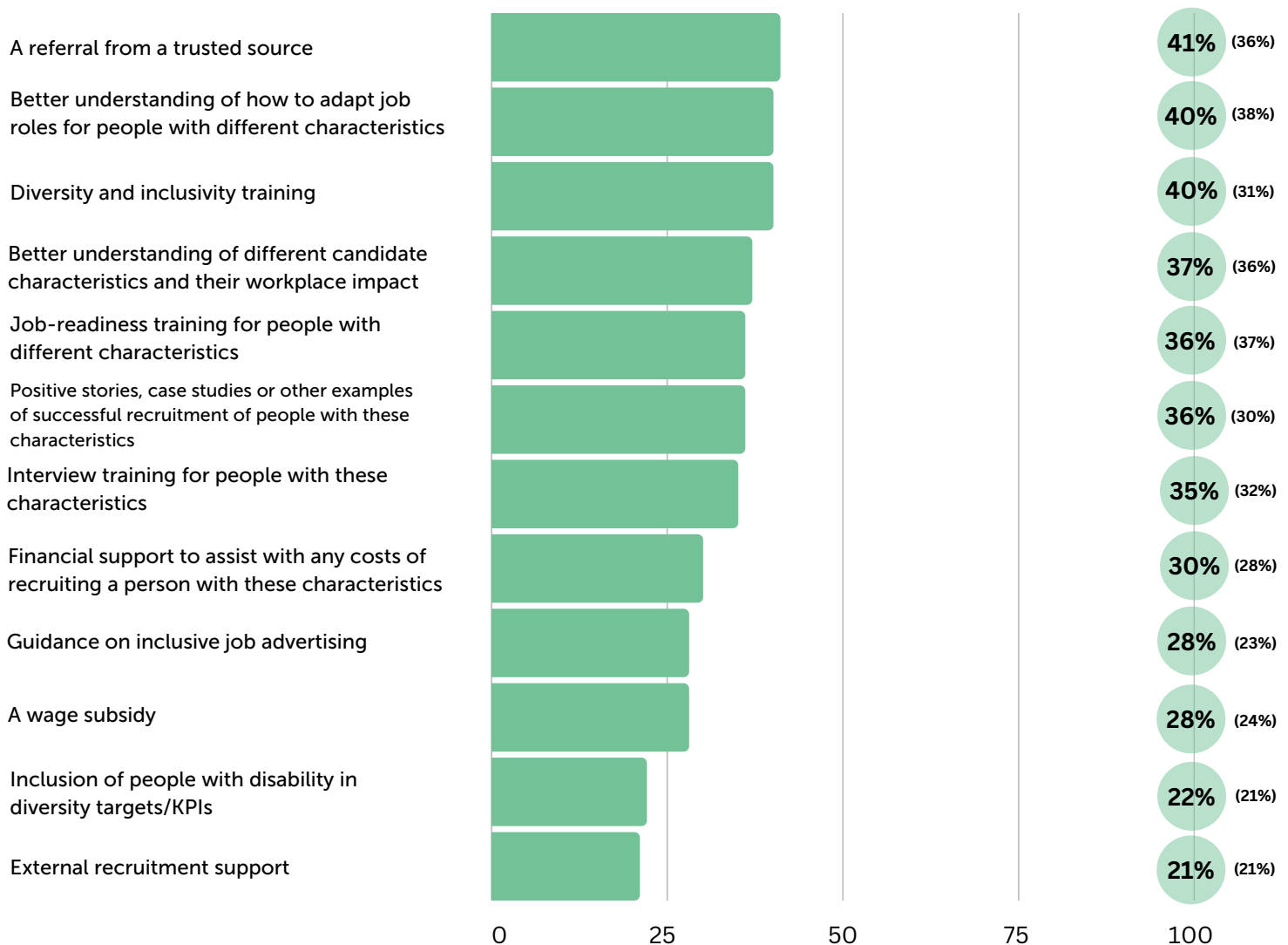
- a) Despite the fall in Alberta's unemployment rate, most job seekers from underrepresented groups are finding it challenging to get a job (77 per cent), and nearly two in five of those who are facing challenges say it is due to a lack of jobs and job vacancies (39 per cent).
- b) Job seekers from underrepresented groups are taking steps to increase their chances of finding work (62 per cent) but most often, their actions are day-to-day parts of the job seeking process like looking for jobs online (82 per cent), updating a CV/resume (68 per cent) or attending interviews (52 per cent). Only 14 per cent sought help from an employment services provider.
- c) While Albertan employers are confident in their ability to recruit (average 7.2 out of 10) and retain (average 7.2) employees, their confidence reduces when it comes to recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups (6.4 and 6.5, respectively). Critically, when asked why people from underrepresented groups do not make it through the hiring process, lack of technical/hard skills were cited by nearly half (48 per cent). A lack of soft skills (38 per cent), meaning the interpersonal skills required to do the job, was also commonly mentioned. Similar to employers, unemployed job seekers are most likely to consider 'hard/technical' skill gaps areas requiring improvement, such as digital skills, experience with specific software and certificates/credentials relevant to a particular field. However, there is a disconnect between Albertan employer and job seeker perceptions about 'soft skills'. Unemployed Albertan job seekers recognise the importance of soft skills but largely believe they already possess these.
- d) Employers recognise the value in ongoing support to address skills gaps. Among Albertan employers who say they lack support to retain underrepresented employees, the most beneficial supports would be a mix of soft (50 per cent) and hard/technical skills (46 per cent) training.
- e) Similarly, unemployed Albertan job seekers from underrepresented groups say training to prepare them for a specific job is the second-most important support to help them get a job (42 per cent), behind being connected to employers who are hiring (66 per cent).

## Albertan employers want education to help them recruit and retain underrepresented groups

Our research suggests that there is a willingness and desire from employers to hire people with diverse characteristics and backgrounds, but they require support to do so effectively.

In particular, education about how to adapt roles and the workplace impact of employing people with different characteristics is a key enabler, as are referrals from trusted sources.

### What would help Albertan employers to recruit more people from underrepresented groups



**Q: Which of the following would help you, and other employers like you, to recruit more people who represent groups that are typically underrepresented in the workforce?**

**n=225 Albertan employers**

**n=1393 employers nationally**

**(National findings in brackets)**





## 4. Sustainable Employment of Underrepresented Groups Requires a Flexible Approach and Long-term Support

- a) Unlike the national findings, Albertan employers believe a lack of capacity to provide support or accommodations (38 per cent) is a bigger challenge to recruiting people from underrepresented groups than rigid criteria used in the recruitment process (32 per cent).
- b) Even though half of Albertan employers (50 per cent) say they offer, or would consider offering flexible working arrangements to employees, they also claim the biggest barrier they face to retaining them is an inability to provide flexibility and accommodations (27 per cent), as well as the longer-term support required (27 per cent).
- c) This is important because to keep a job, Albertan job seekers from underrepresented groups say they need flexible working arrangements (56 per cent) and on-the-job training (52 per cent), real opportunities for promotion (41 per cent) and upskilling (38 per cent). Importantly, they rated these higher than other forms of assistance like career advice (21 per cent) or workplace modifications (17 per cent).
- d) Other than a referral from a trusted source (41 per cent), better understanding of how to adapt job roles for people with different characteristics (40 per cent) and diversity and inclusivity training (40 per cent) are the top supports employers say would help them, or employers like them, to recruit more people from underrepresented groups. Nearly two in five say job readiness training (36 per cent), positive stories of successful recruitment (36 per cent) and interview training for these people (35 per cent) would help.





e) While the support that both Albertan employers and job seekers need exists via employment services providers (ESPs), awareness remains a barrier to take up. Less than half of job seekers from underrepresented groups (44 per cent) say they would know where to go for assistance finding a job and less than a third (32 per cent) have ever used an ESP.

Most commonly, this is because they have never been referred to one (39 per cent), they didn't know where to find them (38 per cent), or they do not understand how they can be helpful (26 per cent). Interestingly, more than half (53 per cent) of underrepresented job seekers who have used an ESP say they found them helpful. While a majority of Albertan employers say they know where to go for assistance (54 per cent), only two in five (44 per cent) have used an ESP. Albertan employers are less likely than the average Canadian employer to say it is easy to access employment services and support (51 per cent vs 57 per cent). Many are unsure of the benefits of an ESP (27 per cent), unaware they exist (15 per cent) or unsure how to contact them (11 per cent). One in five (21 per cent) say they do not want to pay for the services, demonstrating a lack of knowledge that these services are available free-of-charge. This suggests a need for greater education of Albertan employers about how and where to access ESPs.



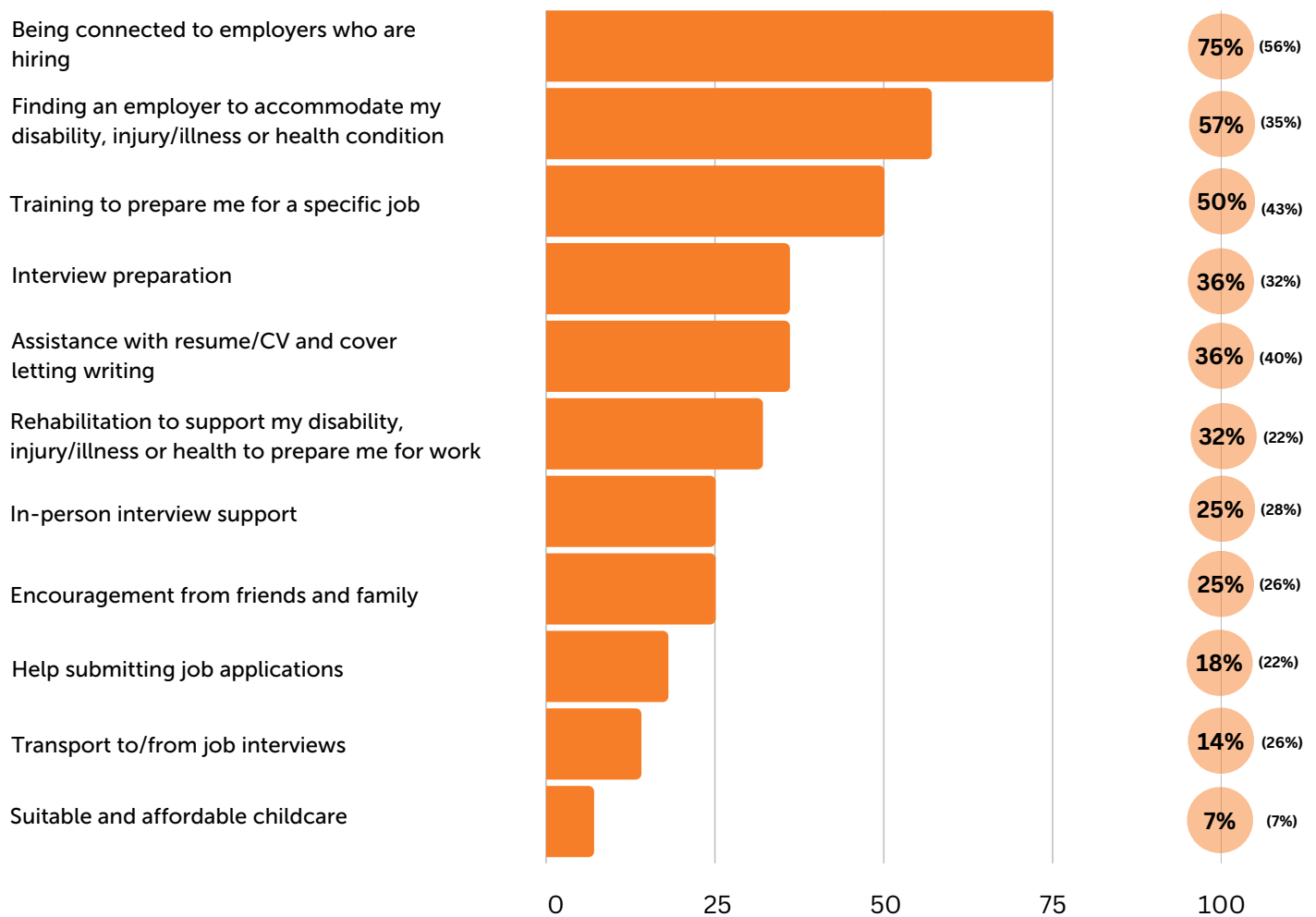
## People with disability seek connection to employers

Connection to employers who are hiring (75%) is the number one support that would help unemployed Albertan job seekers with disability to find a job, above the national average for job seekers of 56%.

This is followed by the need to find an employer who will accommodate their disability, injury/illness or health condition (57%).

The research highlights the need for a nuanced approach to support for people with disability, and suggests that a solution that pairs the desire from job seekers to be matched with employers that understand and are willing to accommodate their unique needs with employers who recognise the benefits of a diverse workforce.

### Support that would help Albertan job seekers with disability



#### Q: Which of the following types of support would help you find a job?

n=28 unemployed Albertan job seekers with disability who need support to find a job

n=567 unemployed Albertan job seekers who need support to find a job  
(Unemployed Albertan job seekers findings in brackets)

"I HAVE PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION BUT HAD TO TAKE TIME AWAY DUE TO CHRONIC PHYSICAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH, BUT AM ACTIVELY WANTING TO WORK, PREFERABLY FROM HOME SINCE I CANNOT KEEP REGULAR WORK HOURS DUE TO HEALTH ISSUES."

(Job seeker, Female, 68 years old)





# Conclusion

We hope this report has helped provide meaningful data to inform how to improve labour market participation of people from underrepresented groups. The research demonstrates a clear need to simplify employment services so that job seekers make successful labour market transitions and more employers are able to meet their workforce needs.

Our survey put the spotlight on four key areas that, if addressed, will support employment growth and equity in Alberta.

## **1. Employers are taking action to improve workplace inclusivity**

While our findings demonstrate that employers are taking some steps to improve diversity and inclusivity in the workplace, there remains much work required to improve outcomes for all underrepresented groups.

## **2. Negative attitudes towards underrepresented groups remain prevalent**

Concerningly, this research highlights the prevalence of negative attitudes and misperceptions in the workplace about underrepresented groups, and the need for employer education to address these myths and break down the perceptible barriers to hiring.

## **3. Both employers and job seekers see value in 'hard' and 'soft' skills training to improve employability and retention**

We found that there is a disconnect between perceptions of employers and underrepresented job seekers about the skills they possess, but alignment in the recognition that training in both areas is a key enabler of greater employment of underrepresented groups.

## **4. Sustainable employment of underrepresented groups requires a flexible approach and long-term support**

Finally, to meet labour market needs, job seekers need employers to be open to new ways of working, and employers need access to employment services that are easy to use and access. Our research highlights the continued work that is needed to ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes in Alberta and in Canada more generally.





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