

Your guide to disability inclusion in the workplace.



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Introduction

Hiring people with disabilities can make a big difference in their lives, as well as in the community. It brings financial, social, and health benefits to them and their families. But what might not be as clear is how it can also be good for businesses.

According to a research report by Accenture, working with Disability:IN and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), companies that do a great job of hiring and supporting people with disabilities have done better than their peers. These top-performing companies were twice as likely to have higher returns for their shareholders compared to others.⁷

There are a few reasons for this success. One of the main ones is that some businesses don't realize they're missing out on a big, untapped resource.

Why isn't every company creating a more inclusive workforce and culture?

Around one in four Canadians are estimated to have a disability. That's 8 million people. Yet they are incredibly underemployed.¹

Only 62% of working-age Canadians with a disability are employed, compared with 78% of those without a disability.¹

What this tells us is that there's a lack of understanding of not only the untapped talent pool but also the potential benefits to business - both to the bottom line and the culture within the workplace.

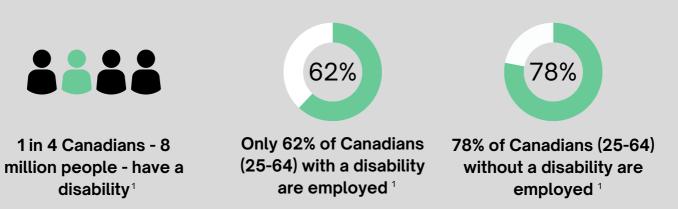
People with disabilities bring more diverse ways of thinking, viewpoints, experiences, skills, and talents. Inclusive hiring improves workplace culture and boosts productivity across an organization. When done right these practices change people's lives and improve overall employee satisfaction.²

If you're an employer wanting to make the most of these opportunities and unlock a wider pool of employees, creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace is easier, and probably cheaper, than you think.

This guide is designed to help you understand disability diversity and inclusion, and the many benefits it has for individuals, business, and the broader community.

We'll take you through the benefits, and provide information, tools and strategies so you can build disability inclusion in your workplace.

We also share how WCG's services can help you make it happen.



Benefits of disability inclusion

It's a win for both people and workplaces.

Disability is more common than you think. It's just one of the many things that add to the diversity of people. We know disability is part of everyday life, and we also know that disability inclusion in the workplace is good for business.

Many disabilities are not always visible. With mental health, for instance, which is so prevalent in our community, the chances are a member of your team, or yourself has a disability.

Yet people with disabilities are significantly underrepresented in Canada's workforce.

People with a physical disability also experience higher rates of social isolation and loneliness - 28% compared to 23% of people without a physical disability.³

A secure job gives them a sense of belonging within their local community while significantly improving their health, social and economic outcomes. This, of course, flows onto their family life and reduces welfare dependency.



We all benefit

Increasing workplace participation for people with disabilities would deliver numerous benefits to our economy and community.

If we could increase the employment of people with disabilities even moderately, it is estimated this would provide a boost to real GDP of roughly \$50 billion and add nearly 450k net new jobs over the coming decade.⁴

As a population grows, diversifies, and the average age rises the number of people with disabilities is expected to increase. Meaning that the value and necessity of better including people with disabilities in the workforce is only growing over time.⁵ The simple fact is, people with disabilities are people you know – you, your family, neighbours, friends. It's easy to understand how hiring a job seeker with a disability provides life-changing opportunities for people in our communities.

Plus, it helps employers build better and more successful businesses. It's a win for everyone.

Building a better business

On top of the economic and social benefits, a diverse workforce creates a range of organizational benefits.

In WCG's own annual National Employment Index 2022, 27% of Ontario employers had been actively hiring people with disabilities over the past year, up from 20% in 2021.⁶

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The top 8 benefits

Widen your talent choice

There are 8 million people in Canada who have a disability and are of a working age.¹ With an unemployment rate of 6.9%, almost twice as high as the rate for people without a disability, there are a significant number of potential employees available right now.²

Increase your customer base

People with disabilities have often had to navigate and overcome multiple barriers in life. So they often bring skills in innovation, creativity and problem solving. Businesses practicing inclusive hiring reported two times more net income when compared to those who did not.⁷ This can help an organization develop products and services that appeal to a much wider audience and open up their markets.

Keep your staff

Right now, it's just as difficult to keep good staff as it is to find them. Which makes employing people with disabilities an even better option. People with disabilities are reported as having 72% higher rates of staff retention as compared to the general population.² And it's not just people with a disability- in a global report Deloitte noted that diverse and inclusive teams are more innovative, engaged, and creative in their work.⁸

Better reflect your customers

Your customers are diverse, and it makes sense that your staff reflect that. A diverse team gives you wider skills and perspectives to understand a broader market and improve your customer experience. An inclusive workplace is five times more likely to have excellent customer service.[®]

Build a more dependable team

Many people wrongly believe that people with disabilities will need more days off work. Employees with a disability have lower absenteeism rates, higher rates of retention, better attendance and fewer occupational health and safety incidents than those without a disability.¹⁰

Build a stronger brand

A more diverse and inclusive workplace will enjoy better brand reputation, and customer loyalty, and create more opportunities for winning new business. Successful brands are seen to be doing good in the community, beyond simply pursuing a profit, build a trusting and loyal customer base.¹⁰ A good brand means customers are more likely to purchase from them, people want to work for them, and organizations want to do business with them.

Increase your productivity

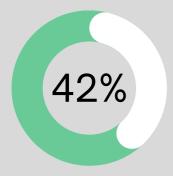
If you want to build a more productive workforce studies show that employing people with disabilities will help you achieve it.¹⁰ In fact, in a 2018 study, business practicing inclusive hiring have on average 72% more employee productivity than their counterparts.⁷

Create a better culture

Employing people with disabilities has a positive impact on workplace culture. Inclusive workplaces benefit everyone because they attract and embrace people from all walks of life. All people feel good where they feel welcome. Better disability inclusion can improve workplace morale and foster better teamwork as members of teams who undertake such inclusive hiring practices report they are proud to be in a workplace that values inclusion and diversity.¹⁰

30%

An inclusive business will have 30% higher profit margins.⁷



More diverse and inclusive workplaces experience a 42% improvement in team collaboration.¹⁴



Inclusive workplaces are six times more likely to effectively anticipate change.¹⁵ If you want to grow your business, it's good to show existing and potential clients that you are open and welcoming to everyone.

The best way to do that is to reflect the diversity of your community within your team.

By removing barriers to participation, people of all ages, genders, races, religions, and abilities can engage with you. An inclusive workplace with a more diverse employee base is better equipped to serve, empathize with, and respond to a diverse range of customers.

Research has found that businesses with more diversity and inclusion enjoy better business performance. It makes sense when you think about it.

People who feel accepted, heard, and respected are happier at work. When you feel happier, you're more motivated, and that enhances productivity across your whole workforce.

But it doesn't stop at productivity.

Diversity creates a more intelligent team. A diverse range of people will give you more knowledge and different perspectives. Fresh approaches often help with tackling challenges and driving growth.

We all know the importance of teamwork when it comes to creating and growing a successful business. Happier, more productive employees will naturally work better with the people around them.

An inclusive culture that respects the perspectives and voices of everyone is more likely to have strong team collaboration.

As well as opening up a wider pool of talent to consider, a workplace that embraces and celebrates diversity will be a more attractive proposition for potential candidates from diverse backgrounds, enhancing talent engagement and retention.

In short, more people will want to work for you, and more will want to work with you. A more diverse and inclusive workplace is good for your brand reputation and improved customer loyalty.

Breaking down barriers in your workplace

We want to look at how you can help people with disabilities overcome the barriers to employment and build diversity and inclusion in your workplace.

First, it's important to understand what disability is and identify the misconceptions that can prevent organizations from employing people with disabilities.

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What is disability?

The Government of Canada's Federal Disability Reference Guide gives us two ways you can look at disability.¹¹

The bio-medical approach

The bio-medical approach looks at disability as a medical or health problem that prevents or reduces a person's ability to participate fully in society.

Disability can steadily worsen, remain the same, or improve. It can be very mild to very severe. It can be the cause, as well as the result, of disease, illness, injury, or substance abuse. It can be permanent, temporary, episodic, lifelong, or acquired.

It can be many things, and people are surprised to realize that more often than not, the disability can't be seen, such as anxiety and depression.

Types of disabilities include:

- Pain-related (constant or recurring)
- Flexibility (bending or reaching)
- Mobility (difficulty walking on a flat surface for 15 mins or with stairs)
- Mental health-related (emotional, physiological, or mental health condition)
- Seeing
- Hearing
- Dexterity (difficulty using fingers to grasp small objects)
- Learning
- Memory (ongoing forgetfulness or periods of confusion)
- Developmental

The social model

The social approach views disability as a natural part of society, where attitudes, stigma, and prejudices present barriers to people with disabilities and prevent or hinder their participation in mainstream society.

Because the medical model of disability says it's impairments or conditions that cause disability, some people believe this focuses on what impacts a person, not what a person needs.

This can create low expectations and lead to people losing independence, choice and control in their lives.

The social model helps us recognize barriers that make life harder for people with disabilities. By removing these barriers we can drive equality and offer people with disabilities more independence, choice and control.

Removing barriers in society

When barriers are removed, people with disabilities can be independent and equal in society.

There are several barriers that make it difficult or even impossible for people with disabilities to enjoy independence and opportunities many people without disabilities have.

Attitudinal barriers

Are created by people who only see the disability when associating with people with disabilities in some way.

Environmental barriers

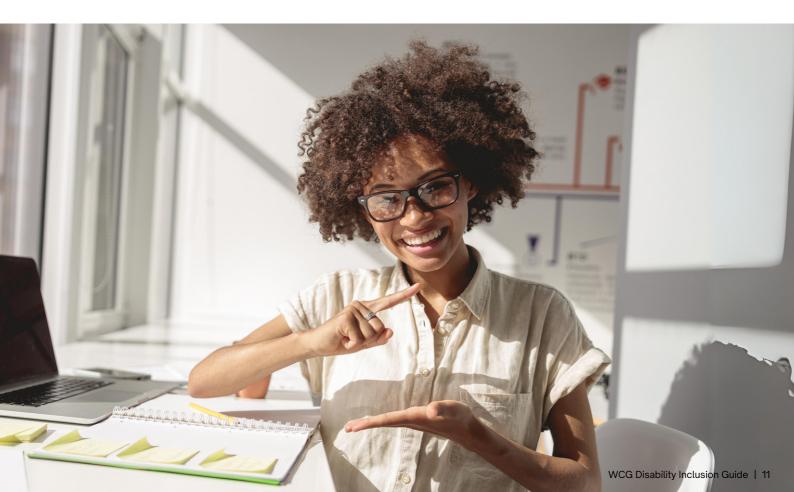
Natural or built environments can create barriers to inclusion, such as sidewalks or doorways too narrow for a wheelchair, desks that are too high for a person who is using a mobility device, poor lighting for a person with low vision, or door handles that can be difficult to grasp for a person with arthritis.

Institutional barriers

Include many laws, policies, practices, or strategies that discriminate against people with disabilities. Things like not making reasonable adjustments so people can perform the essential functions of their job or public transport being inaccessible.

Communication barriers

These are experienced by people who have disabilities that affect hearing, speaking, reading, writing, and/or understanding. These can include written health messages or videos that don't include captioning or ASL.



Understanding leads to diversity and inclusion

The more we understand about disability and employment, the more likely we are to give people with disabilities secure work.

Unfortunately, many misconceptions about people with disabilities create bias often unconscious, that prevents them from finding satisfying and fulfilling jobs.

There are many wrong assumptions, such as a person's desire to work, level of skills and abilities, HR and OHS issues, and workplace accessibility.

Busting myths and misunderstandings

Here we look at some of the most common misunderstandings.

Skills are low

Some mistakenly think that people with disabilities have a low level of skills and won't be able to do the job. However, people with disabilities bring a range of skills, talents, and abilities to the workplace. They work in all sorts of jobs and hold a range of tertiary and trade qualifications.

A common misconception is that hiring people with disabilities will have a negative impact on productivity. Advocates repeatedly cite the statistic that 90% of employees with a disability perform at levels equal to or higher than the average for their co-workers without a disability.¹²

Costs are high

Contrary to popular belief, it doesn't cost more to employ a person with a disability, nor does it create more Occupational Health and Safety issues. Workers' Compensation Premiums are based on accidents at work and not the characteristics of particular groups of employees.

In fact, people with disabilities have fewer compensation incidents and accidents at work compared to other employees and lower levels of absenteeism. And 98% of people with a disability rate average or better in work safety as compared to their non-disabled colleagues.¹⁰

It's not just about wheelchairs

The stereotypical image of a person with a disability in a wheelchair couldn't be further from the truth. Only 29% of people with disabilities are visible with the majority being cognitive, learning or pain-related.¹³

More than half of people with disabilities do not require accommodation. Of the accommodations requested by employees with a disability, 58% were free to implement and 37% only required a onetime investment of less than \$500.¹²

The most commonly required type of workplace accommodations were flexible work arrangements (27%), workstation modifications (15%), and human or technical supports (6%).⁵

Productivity is lower

Some employers might believe that it is not financially viable for them to hire people with disabilities as they work too slowly. The reality is most people with disabilities work at productivity levels equivalent to other employees and receive full wages. Inclusive businesses on average have 72% more employee productivity.⁷



Customer service is impacted

Rather than negatively impacting customers, a diverse workforce is more reflective of our society. Remember one in four Canadians has a disability and this rate is expected to grow over the next decade.¹

People with disabilities can build relationships with customers across a wider community. That must be good for business.

Overcoming the bias

In the simplest terms, building diversity in your workplace is about creating a mix of people with different beliefs, backgrounds, preferences, behaviours, ages, genders, and abilities.

Conscious or unconscious (intentional or unintentional) bias based on stereotypes is often deeply ingrained and can influence our behaviour. In WCG's annual National Employment Index 2022, one of the most common misconceptions that Ontario employers reported believing was that hiring people with a disability, injury or illness would be a burden (34%).⁶

It's important you are aware of you and challenge them within yourself and your team. This can inspire change and build a better understanding between your employees. If your exposure to people with disabilities is outside the workplace, your unconscious bias may lead you to believe that most people with a disability can't work.

One of the best ways of countering unconscious bias is through direct exposure to people with disabilities in your own workplace.

It's a great way to learn about the diversity of disability, break down myths and stereotypes, enhance understanding, and, most importantly, build a more inclusive team from a wider talent pool that's even more productive.

Support is out there

If you think there's little or no support available for employers who hire staff with disabilities, it's good to learn that the federal and provincial governments in Canada provide support through various programs.

This includes no-cost recruitment, wage subsidies, and financial support for workplace modifications. You can find out more information here:

WorkBC WorkConnect Calgary Career Hub Employment Ontario



Getting it right

It's all about respect

The basic underlying foundation of diversity and inclusion is respect.

When each team member feels respected for their different abilities, beliefs, and ideas, they feel valued. It creates a culture where they will be able to contribute better to the company, meaning both the business and them can benefit.



A toolkit for building disability diversity and inclusion

Now that you know some of the many benefits, here's some simple ways you can create, refine or improve disability inclusion in your workplace.

Making a commitment to disability inclusion is the important first step, and following the guides, principles and resources should help you build a good workplace for everyone.

Start by talking about it

It begins by promoting the benefits and values of diversity and inclusion. And this starts with conversations.

- Speak with your staff about inclusion and accessibility and why it's important.
- Bring your leadership team on board by sharing some of the benefits included in this guide.
- Do your own research about the benefits that apply directly to your industry. It's hard to argue with facts and figures.

One of the most important things you can do is listen to your staff. Find out from the most diverse range of people you currently employ about their experiences, good and bad, to get a real insight into your culture.

Have a good look into the culture and how management has dealt with any discrimination issues. Have you taken the opportunities to build diversity when you've had them?

Involving the widest range of people from as many backgrounds and at all levels within your organization is the best way to create, build, and maintain a culture of inclusion.

Has your team discussed the importance and benefits of diversity and inclusion in your workplace?

Have you hosted a lunch and learn with a local disability organization to build awareness and relationships?

When speaking about disability broadly, but especially about mental health, language falls into two categories: person-first and identityfirst.

- Person-first language emphasizes the person before the disability, for example, "a person who is blind" or "people with disabilities."
- Identity-first language puts the disability first in the description, e.g., "I'm disabled," or "I'm bipolar."

How a person chooses to self-identify is up to them, and they should not be corrected or admonished if they choose a format they are currently adopting.

As the MHCC recommends, when talking to a person with lived and living experience, listen for- or ask them about- the language they use. It's not about getting it "right" on the first try. It's about listening, learning, and championing the use of respectful, nonstigmatizing language — whichever form that takes.¹⁶



Take a diversity and inclusion workplace health check

An important step is to get a clear picture of where your workplace is right now. This sets your benchmark and gives you a baseline on which to improve.

It starts by asking yourself the right questions:

• How many employees have a disability? And what proportion of your workforce is this?

• In what levels of your business do they work?

How many are in leadership roles or entrylevel positions?

• Do they receive the same pay as others in the same roles?

• Are they progressing at the same rate as others in your workforce?

Regular anonymous surveys are a good way to get honest responses on any issues, observations, and insights, as well as getting a sense of the culture in your workplace and employee satisfaction.

Things you can ask them include:

- Do you have access to appropriate training and professional development?
- Do you feel valued? Are you recognized for the quality of your work, and are your managers recognizing your potential and using it?
- Is there genuine interest in your career with opportunities for growth and advancement?
- Is there good leadership and support from your managers?
- Do you have a cohesive team, and how well do you support one another?
- Do you feel that you can bring your whole self to work?

• How comfortable do you feel disclosing your disability at work?

Put it in writing

It's time to walk the talk. Nothing cements your intention better than public statements and putting it into words for all to see.

In your day-to-day actions, make a public commitment to disability inclusion on your website, social media, inside your premises, job descriptions, and advertisements.

Do you have a statement on your job ads encouraging people of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities to apply?

Organizational policies are more formal ways to state and capture your company's culture and values and give your whole team a better understanding of the behaviour that's expected of them.

A great policy to start with is a disability inclusion policy. You can find useful tools <u>here</u> for developing inclusive policies and procedures.

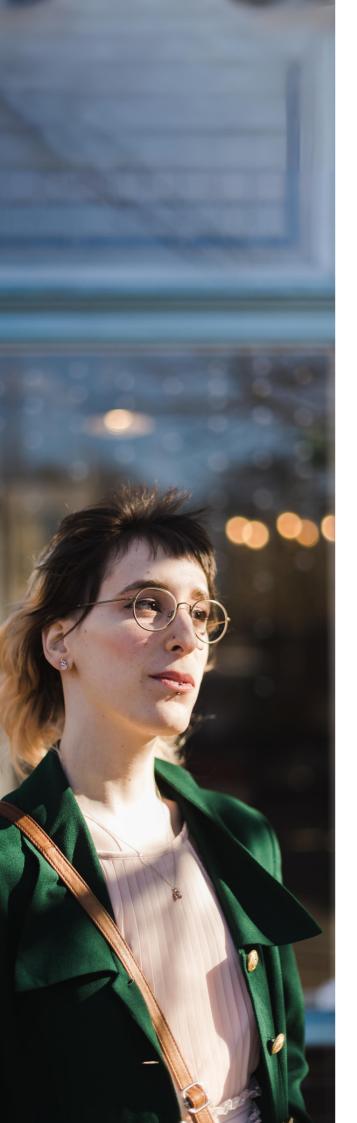
Have you created a team or committee to develop your disability inclusion policy?

Another example is an equal opportunity and anti-discrimination policy. This demonstrates that you recognize and value the diversity of your community, will try to attract the best skills from a wider talent pool and ensure all your employees can realize their potential.

This policy makes sure people are treated as individuals, respected for their unique attributes and not excluded, harassed, or bullied in any way.

This can be through unconscious bias, stereotypes or unlawful actions that may form the basis of discrimination.

By signing this policy, all your employees will understand that any form of discrimination is unacceptable.



Develop internal advocates

Policies are not enough to set the standards. Use people within your organization to set an example and lead your disability inclusion strategy. Share the contents of this guide and your research with them and help them understand the importance this has to your workplace, organization, and future growth and success.

It's a good idea to regularly meet with them to discuss any issues and develop ways to improve diversity and inclusion. Most importantly, these leaders can drive your strategies. They are having conversations with people and ensuring they uphold the principles and policies. And they are in the best position to listen to people's thoughts, ideas, and concerns and how best to address any issues and make improvements.

Can you identify any current team members who would fit this role?
Do you have regular meetings to develop and evaluate strategies?

Make time for training

At least once a year, set time aside for all team members to attend training and ongoing guidance on disability awareness and inclusiveness.

There is no surer way to build understanding and develop a culture of inclusion than to educate your team on how they can help support people from marginalized groups and gain an understanding of their experiences. They can also develop the skills and techniques to eliminate discrimination from your organization.

Using outside training suppliers is recommended as they are neutral and will be more objective.

We always learn something from someone different with their own expertise or experiences.

To build a more diverse team, it's also important to ensure your recruitment team receives training on inclusive and accessible recruitment practices, which we'll expand upon in the next section.

Is your recruitment team trained in, and implementing, recruitment practices that attract and employ people of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities?



Building through recruitment

Get your recruitment processes right

We know businesses that effectively recruit and manage a diverse workforce have a clear competitive advantage. The recruitment process is the most obvious way to increase disability diversity and inclusivity.

It helps when everyone is on the same page and has the skills and understanding to increase disability diversity and inclusivity.

It's vital that your recruitment team receives training on inclusive and accessible recruitment practices.

Consider appointing a corporate executive champion and an affinity group to support employment for people with disabilities.

Be more attractive to job seekers

The first thing you should do is actively encourage job applications from people with disabilities.

You can even consider designing a job that can match the skills of a person with a disability.

The job advertisements you use to encourage these applications should be available in accessible formats, such as large font and screen reader compatible.

It's good to ensure the descriptions include information about the accessibility of your facilities and working spaces. And even put a short statement on the ad that invites people of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities to apply.

- Are all your job ads in accessible formats?
- Can you design roles that match the skills of a person with a disability?



Create an accessible and adaptable interview process

The interview process is a key part of filling any position.

When you're interviewing someone living with injury, illness, or disability, there are a few things you can do to make sure you do it well.

It's important that all parts of the application and information on the position are in accessible formats.

Because some applicants may not disclose a disability, you should ask all people if they require any adjustments or assistance for the interview. Your building and interview room need to be accessible, as does any paperwork that may need to be in alternative, accessible formats.

Questions are the basis of every interview, so ask the applicant the same questions you would anyone else.

Let them show where they gained their skills and abilities, regardless of the context.

The only questions you can lawfully ask about a disability or injury are about how they will perform the job requirements and any adjustments that may be needed to complete these.

Any other questions about an individual's disability are inappropriate.

- Are you asking every applicant if they require any adjustments or assistance for the interview?
- Are your building and interview rooms accessible?

Constant improvement in your workplace

Even if you've achieved your goals and created a diverse and inclusive workplace in which you and your employees can thrive, you shouldn't stop trying to improve. When a new employee starts, ensure orientation and induction programs are accessible and as adaptable as possible. And put in place a clear and simple procedure for employees and managers to request workplace modifications, aids, or assistive technology.

Employee training and ongoing guidance on disability awareness and inclusiveness are important to ensure everyone stays up to speed on current thinking and best practices.

- Are all your induction programs accessible?
- How simple is it to request workplace modifications or assistive technology?

Development and promotion

Once securing a job, people with disabilities often find they have less opportunity for career advancement. Everyone deserves an equal chance of development.

Have regular catchups with every employee to check how they are doing and to discuss career goals and professional development.

You can also chat about opportunities to build skills, knowledge, and qualifications, and put strategies and pathways in place for them to achieve their short-, mid-, and longterm goals.

• Are you regularly catching up with individuals to discuss professional development?

Improve your flexibility

Being more flexible creates opportunities for a more diverse range of people to work for you.

You'll become a more attractive place of work to more people, ensuring you attract the best candidates.

Workplace changes over the COVID-19 pandemic have helped organizations become used to new ways of working.

Work-from-home options and flexible hours can be appealing to a more diverse range of candidates, giving parents, people with injury or disability, carers, and people whose location can make it difficult to get to work, an equal opportunity to fill and maintain a position.

How can you improve workplace flexibility to accommodate a diverse range of people and their needs?

Communication and information

How you speak and portray your business on a daily basis is a vital part of showing your understanding and how much you value diversity and inclusion in your workplace.

It's a great way to attract a more diverse range of employees and like-minded customers and organizations that want to do business with you.

How people find information about your business, products, and services is important, as is communicating your commitment to being an inclusive business. A simple and effective way to do this is to make a public commitment to diversity and inclusion on your website, social media, inside your premises, job descriptions, and advertisements.

People always need to get in touch and offering multiple contact methods such as phone, email, SMS, and face-to-face is the best way to make it easy for everyone.

Accessibility of information is essential, so ensure your website meets Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

Use large and easy-to-read fonts in all your marketing and promotional material, including signage, brochures, and menus.

Inclusive language across all your marketing and promotional material should be used. In all this promotional material, and on your website and social media, always include images of people from diverse backgrounds.

Share 'good news' stories about being an accessible, inclusive business on your social media. And if you post a video or other digital content, ensure all images have descriptions and videos have captions.

- Do you supply and support a variety of contact methods?
- Do you actively promote your organization's commitment to accessibility and diversity in your marketing and communications materials?

Get customer feedback

One of the best ways to ensure you are on the right track is to invite feedback from your customers about their experience with your business, especially people with disabilities or from diverse backgrounds.

It's all about being open, authentic, and inclusive.

• Do you send customers and clients a short survey to get more insight into their experience of interacting with your organization?

Make your workplace accessible and inclusive

While often a disability can't be seen, ensuring your building, facilities, and spaces are accessible is critical.

The most important physical access considerations include:

- Accessible parking and toilets.
- A step-free entrance (including a ramp).
- Automatic doors.
- Counters and door handles at an accessible height for people who use wheelchairs
- Non-slip floor surfaces.
- Easy to read signage, including Braille.
- Good lighting throughout.

- Accessible seating and waiting spaces, free from hazards.
- Wide doorways and hallways.

Funding and grants

A barrier to improving the physical access of some workplaces is a perception that modifications will be expensive. But that's not often the case.

If you need to make modifications to your business premises for employees with a disability to perform a particular job, you may be able to access grant funding to assist with the cost.

Contact your local employment services office to discuss the funding available to support both employers and job seekers with assistive devices and adaptive technology to ensure the workplace is accessible and comfortable.



We're here to help

Changing your processes and practices to increase disability diversity and inclusion in your workplace may seem a big task, but it's easier than you think.

There's help out there. We understand the importance and positive impact of disability inclusivity in the workplace.

Our WCG Employment Services team connects businesses with thousands of jobready candidates with barriers to employment such as injury, illness or disability, cultural and language differences and those who have been out of work for long periods of time.

It couldn't be easier to start building disability diversity and enjoy all the cultural and business benefits of a truly inclusive workplace. And we would be proud to be part of it with you.

To find out more, please visit wcgservices.com



To learn more visit <u>wcgservices.com</u> info@wcgservices.com

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This report was based on the APM Disability Inclusion Guide (2022) and adapted to the Canadian context by WCG staff.

