

Disability Employment & Inclusion in the Workforce

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October is Disability Employment Awareness Month and as such we have put together some information on what this means for employers in Canada. Disability Employment Awareness Month is an annual campaign to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce, and to celebrate their many contributions. In this article, we will first define what a disability is and recent government strategies related to supporting persons with disabilities and their employers. Moreover, we will provide some tips on how your organization can support persons with disabilities in the workforce and create a more inclusive culture.

What is a disability?

Disabilities are complex, and a person's disability is not always something visible. A widely accepted definition of disability as described by the World Health Organization is:

"Disability is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations."

What does this mean for your organization?

Nearly 850,000 (21%) working-age Canadians with disabilities live in poverty, according to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability. Persons with severe disabilities (26%) and very severe disabilities (31%) are

particularly vulnerable and experience a high rate of poverty, nearly three times the rate of persons without disabilities (11%). ([Employment and Social Development Canada](#))

In August of this year, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Carla Qualtrough, announced an investment of up to 7.5 million to the Rick Hansen Foundation. The investment will go towards a project funded under the Sectoral Initiatives Program (SIP). This project is part of the Government of Canada's investment of up to \$36 million to create employment and career building opportunities for persons with disabilities by helping to remove barriers, improve employer resources, and provide training tools.

What can organizations do to support persons with disabilities in the workforce?

Here are three (3) tips you can do **today** to support the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce:

1. Form a Diversity and Inclusion Council

This council should receive proper training and education on diversity and inclusion in the workforce. Moreover, the council should consist of those who are in leadership roles with adequate representation of those with unique experiences living with disability in the workforce. For a lasting change to take place, middle/senior management needs to be involved in this committee as they are the ones that can help drive the change and promote diversity and inclusion in the workforce. The members of the council may consider quarterly meetings to discuss organizational feedback, troubleshoot challenges, and evaluate the effectiveness of their diversity and inclusion strategies.

2. Celebrate Employee Differences

A key part of promoting diversity and inclusion in the workforce is by allowing those employees to share their backgrounds, traditions, and stories

in the workforce. This can help employers understand some of the unique challenges these individuals face as well as gain further insight to their cultures and backgrounds. One way to achieve this is by organizing company/team events where individuals have an opportunity to share their unique stories/cultures.

3. Keep communication channels open

By keeping communication channels open, you will help encourage those suffering from disabilities to express their unique challenges and experiences they face in the workforce. This will help promote a more inclusive culture as well as provide management an opportunity to address these concerns.

If you have any questions about disability and inclusion in the workforce, please contact us at info@integrityconsultation.com or 705-524-7945