

Helping people with disabilities and intermittent work capacity  
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People with disabilities are much more likely to be unemployed than non-disabled Canadians, for reasons directly related to their disability and beyond their control. As result, their incomes are generally much lower, and many rely on disability benefits provided through income support programs.

Yet substantial numbers of Canadians with disabilities are willing and able to work – if not full-time, then at least on an intermittent basis. Certain conditions such as multiple sclerosis, arthritis, HIV, some mental health conditions, and others have symptoms that are considered “episodic,” in which periods of good health are interrupted – often unpredictably – by periods of illness or disability that affect one’s ability to work. In other cases, people with more stable symptoms may still be able to work some of the time if provided with appropriate supports.

The Government of Canada is interested in finding ways to assist people with disabilities who can work intermittently to do so. Helping more people with disabilities stay in the labour force will help Canada deal with a predicted shortage of skilled labour, and will give people with disabilities a chance to enjoy the benefits of employment, such as feeling more included in society and having improved quality of life.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada commissioned this research to better understand why some people in Ontario with disabilities who have intermittent work capacity remain working, while others with similar disabilities become discouraged and drop out of the labour force. The goal of the project was to identify the conditions, support services, and employer practices that help people with disabilities and intermittent work capacity stay employed.

SRDC conducted a literature and document review and conducted interviews with people involved in disability and employment, such as policy makers, service providers, and community advocates. Researchers also conducted focus groups with people with disabilities in several locations across the province and by teleconference, and asked others to send written stories of their experiences returning to work. The study focused on the experiences of people with disabilities in Ontario who are not able to work full-time and who have some employment experience.

SRDC researchers found that, to a certain extent, recent reforms to the income support system do consider the needs of people with disabilities who can work intermittently, and can help them move into employment. Key features include being able to get benefits reinstated quickly after illness, and having access to certain health benefits if an employer is not able to offer these. However, some participants in this study were not aware of these program features, and many argued that there are still a number of built-in disincentives to employment.

In addition, some participants expressed concern about the recent shift of employment support programs in Ontario toward an outcome-based funding model, which in their opinion, has meant

that many people with disabilities are not receiving the supports they need to overcome the numerous structural barriers that exist for them in the labour market. Many participants reported that they still face stigma and discrimination in the workplace, and do not receive the accommodations they need to do their work effectively.

Based on the literature and the experiences of people involved in this study, the authors of the study's final report conclude that the likelihood of being successfully employed in the long-term longer-term is directly related to three factors: 1) the degree of control persons have over disclosure of their disability, 2) whether or not they still have a job to return to, and 3) whether or not they receive appropriate accommodations in the workplace.

Read the [report](#).

Read the [executive summary](#) of the report.

### **For information**

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