



NEURODIVERSITY

1 in 10 people identify as neurodivergent.¹ Neurodiversity refers to the range of differences in people's brain function and behavioural traits. Autism is included under the umbrella of neurodiversity. Strategies that support neurodiversity often focus on individual strengths.

EMPLOYMENT

Obtaining and maintaining employment can be particularly challenging for neurodivergent individuals. In comparison to the general population and other disability groups, autistic adults demonstrate the lowest rate of employment.²

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Two out of three Canadians with a developmental disability are out of work and are not even looking for a job.³ People with a job are healthier, happier, and have a higher standard of living. Societal costs are reduced when individuals work to their full ability.

CHANGING THE ODDS

Working one-on-one with individuals improves their odds of success within existing systems. **Working at the community and systems levels, changes the odds of success for many.** Based on our work, we have identified a number of policy level opportunities that have the potential to change the odds for neuro-divergent individuals.

➔ **Early Work Experience**

There is an important window of opportunity to build early skills of employment in junior and senior school. Offering volunteer opportunities and work experience for credit during junior and senior high school will help Alberta's neuro-diverse population on the road to successful employment.

➔ **Embrace Neurodiversity at Work**

Employment practices that support neurodiversity are good for business. Research shows that by adopting and integrating inclusive policies and practices, employees become more engaged, innovative and productive.⁴ Introducing employers to inclusive hiring with lower risk opportunities like job sampling, internships and volunteer programs is an important first step.

➔ **Reduce Disincentives to Working**

Entering the workforce can mean losing important financial assistance for aids, services and medications. Not being able to quickly re-access health or disability supports if circumstances change keeps many people from working to their full capacity. Ensuring lifetime supports for individuals with a disability regardless of income and rapid reinstatement of disability benefits would reduce disincentives for individuals to work.

➔ **Data Driven Decisions**

The 2012 Canadian Survey on Disability provided an employment benchmark for the developmental disability population. Credible data sources can inform all levels of government to prioritize policy efforts and target spending. Encouraging service agencies to collaborate to capture meaningful metrics that will measure the impact of policy change would help to identify system level solutions.

¹ Neurodiversity Hub. Webpage <https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/>
² School of Public Policy (2015) What do we know about improving employment outcomes for individuals with autism spectrum disorder? <https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Autism-Employment-Dudley-Nicholas-Zwicker.pdf>
³ School of Public Policy (2018) How do we boost employment outcomes for neurodiverse Albertans? <https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Employment-Outcomes-Dunn-Wittevrongel-Zwicker-final2.pdf>
⁴ University of Ottawa. Human Rights Office Webpage <https://www.uottawa.ca/respect/en/diversity-inclusion>

ABOUT THE SINNEAVE FAMILY FOUNDATION

Sinneave is a Calgary based charitable operating foundation dedicated to improving the transition to adulthood for individuals with autism. We believe that investment in the key life transition period between age 15 and 25 will improve the outcome trajectory for individuals with autism and their families. At Sinneave we work with individuals, families, communities and systems to improve outcomes in education, employment and independent living.

A note about language: There are varied preferences in the autism community regarding the use of language. Sinneave appreciates that language is personal and evolving. We aim to be inclusive and use language that represents a variety of perspectives.