



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 people. 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 that identify as having 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 autistic youth and neurodivergent people.

➔ **Early Work Experience**

There is an important window of opportunity to build early skills of employment in junior and senior high school. Offering volunteer opportunities and work experience for credit during this time period will help Alberta’s neurodiverse 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 mentorship 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 may keep people from working to their full capacity. Ensuring lifespan supports for neurodivergent people regardless of income, and rapid re-instatement of disability benefits would reduce disincentives for people to work.

➔ **Data Driven Decisions**

The Canadian Survey on Disability provides periodic employment benchmarks against which the impact of investments and policy change can be assessed. Credible data sources can inform all levels of government to prioritize policy efforts and target spending. Encouraging service agencies to capture meaningful metrics that measure the impact of policy change would also help to identify system level solutions.

¹Neurodiversity Hub. Webpage <https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/>

²School 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>

³School 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>

⁴University of Ottawa. Human Rights Office Webpage <https://www.uottawa.ca/respect/en/diversity-inclusion>

ABOUT THE SINNEAVE FAMILY FOUNDATION (Sinneave)

Sinneave is an operating foundation based in Calgary, Alberta that aims to improve education, employment and housing outcomes for autistic youth and adults. We believe that investing resources in the period of life in which youth transition to adulthood provides significant and lasting returns and that success in education or training beyond high school can be transformative in creating opportunities for autistic people to fulfill their potential and pursue successful careers.

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, but principally use identity-first language as this is the preference of the majority of people we serve.