

Policy Levers and Opportunities in Inclusive Employment Discussion Summary



Moving from Disability Employment Awareness to Disability Employment ACTION

The Discussion

On October 13th, 2021, in recognition of Disability Employment Awareness Month, Alberta's Provincial Inclusive Employment Network members (Calgary Employment First Network (CEFEN), Edmonton Pan Disability Connection (PDC) and Employ-Us YQL Network (South Region)) convened a policy discussion via webinar focused on inclusive employment with the goal of identifying opportunities and change imperatives to improve employment outcomes for Albertans with disabilities.

An audience from across Alberta participated via webinar. Panel members included thought leaders representing the supported employment sector, lived experience and employers engaged in an energizing discussion:

Rod Miller, President and CEO, CPHR Alberta

Braedan Deitsch, Student, St. Mary's University

Chantelle Robinson, HR Manger, Calgary Winter Club

Johnathon Red Gun, Disability Employment Coordinator, Community Futures Treaty Seven

Katherine Hughes, Director, Human Resources, Calgary Hyatt

Kelsey Barham, Restaurant Owner, Tim Hortons

Tanya McLeod, President, The Sinneave Family Foundation

Teodora Jokic, Workplace Inclusion Strategist, Gateway, Association-Calgary

Inclusive Employment – An Important Opportunity for Albertans

Inclusive employment is an attractive proposition for businesses in Alberta and employing persons with disabilities is an important component of an inclusive employment strategy. The business case for inclusive employment is well established. A diverse workforce can directly affect productivity and improve a company's bottom line.

Highlighted Policy Levers

Alberta Jobs Now Program - Employers can apply for funding to offset the cost of hiring and training unemployed or underemployed Albertans in new or vacant positions to offset salary or training costs, or both.

78% of attendees were aware of the Alberta Jobs Now Program, but only 7% had applied.

The Employment First Strategy (2013) - The strategy centers around the underlying principle that employment is the preferred outcome for adult Albertans with disabilities and an important experience for working age youth.

95% of attendees support updating Alberta's Employment First Strategy.

Opportunities - Discussion Themes

- **Embrace inclusion** - See inclusive hiring as a way of working, a way to fill your talent pipeline, a way of making sure your business has the right skills, in the right place, at the right time, for the right role.
- **Improve Communication** – Get comfortable talking about disabilities and talk about disability in a positive way, from a strength-based perspective. Workplace adjustments, accommodations and accessibility support everyone.
- **Simplify and consolidate** – Make it easy for businesses to understand, access, and deploy programs. Establish and communicate stable timelines early to support businesses' budget cycles. Develop collaborations and partnerships between different levels of government and ministries to remove jurisdictional red tape for First Nations People.
- **Indigenous programs and services** - Build employers' capacity to hire and retain Indigenous employees. Acknowledge the complexities and the need to develop relationships that dispel myths, misconceptions and stereotypes about Indigenous peoples. Better Improve coordination between all levels of government so that accessing programs on and off reserve is consistent and easy.
- **Education and awareness** - Improve cultural and disability inclusive practices at employment centers so job seekers are willing to access services and not hesitant to self-identify for fear of being discriminated against, stigmatized or labelled.
- **Challenge assumptions** – COVID demonstrated business and government's capacity to quickly adapt and accommodate. Continue to adapt and accommodate post-COVID. Challenge old business constructs and shatter out-dated assumptions.

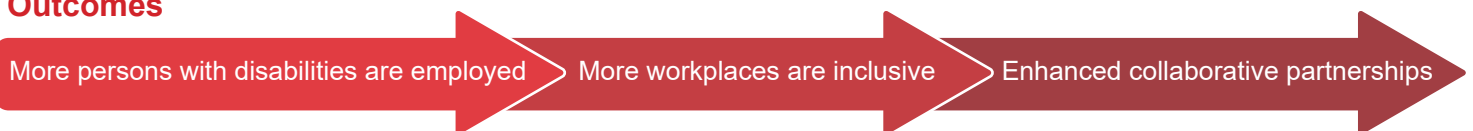
ACTION: Renew Alberta's Employment First Strategy

The community is keen to update and action Alberta's Employment First Strategy.

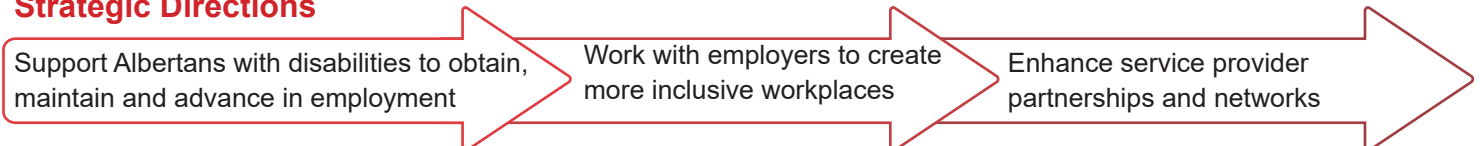
48% of attendees encouraged the Government of Alberta (GOA) to prioritize work with employers to create more inclusive workplaces and 42% recommend prioritizing support for Albertans with disabilities to obtain, maintain and advance in employment. This reinforces that disability employment outcomes will improve, and employment relationships will be strengthened, when both employers and the employees have access to the support they need to be successful.

Alberta's Employment First Strategy (2013) identified the following outcomes and strategic directions:

Outcomes



Strategic Directions



Many of the opportunities identified in the discussion could be actioned with an updated Employment First Strategy that is reflective of the unique culture and experiences of Indigenous people. Alberta's Provincial Inclusive Employment Network members welcome all opportunities to work collaboratively with our government to renew Alberta's Employment First Strategy.