



International Day of People with Disabilities

**December 3, 2022
Commemoration Guide**



**Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion**

International Day of People with Disabilities

The International Day of People with Disabilities (IDPWD), observed every year on December 3, was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1992. IDPWD is an opportunity to celebrate the achievements and contributions of people with disabilities, improve our understanding of the barriers people with disabilities face, and evaluate our effort towards inclusive and accessible communities and workplaces. This guide provides information, resources, and actionable advice for building workplaces that are accessible and inclusive.

This year's theme, declared by the United Nations, is "Transformative solutions for inclusive development: the role of innovation in fuelling an accessible and equitable world." For more information about IDPWD, please visit the [International Day of People with Disabilities website](#) and the [United Nations information page](#).

A note on terminology

DEI language – and disability language in particular – is constantly evolving. Context, connotation, tone, and individual preferences play a role in what terminology is acceptable. For example, the connotation of a word may change (for positive or negative), or the terminology that someone may prefer in reference to themselves may change.

There is a great deal of debate around the use of person-first and identity-first language.

Person-first language places emphasis on the person as an individual first and less emphasis on their disability. For example, "person with a disability" instead of "disabled person". Person-first language should be used unless you know an individual prefers identity-first language.

Identity-first language places the disability identity first. For example, "disabled person" instead of "person with a disability". Identity-first language is preferred by many people with disabilities, particularly those who view their disability as an important part of their identity. However, it is best only to use this type of language if you know it is what the person prefers.

In this guide, we use person-first language, but the "correct" choice between the two varies between individuals. As terminology evolves, it is always best practice to ask wherever possible.

Further reading

- [Glossary of Terms, Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [Disability Language Style Guide, National Center for Disability and Journalism](#)
- [Inclusive Language in Media: A Canadian Style Guide, Humber College](#)
- [Inclusive language: The dos and don'ts, Business Disability Forum](#)

Defining disability

It is generally accepted in disability communities that disabled and disability are not bad words and that euphemisms for these words, like differently abled or diverse ability, should be avoided unless explicitly requested. "Disability" refers to a broad range of medical conditions an individual can have from birth, due to an accident, or developed over time, which impact an individual's ability to function.¹ Disabilities can be visible or invisible, permanent, temporary, or episodic.

There are two common ways of looking at disability: the medical model and the social model.^{2 3 4} **The medical model of disability** suggests that disability is caused by a condition, impairment, or difference. This model sees disability as a deficiency or abnormality and implies that disability is addressed through medical or other treatments. Under the medical model, medical professionals are the experts on disability, and it is the responsibility of the disabled person to “fix” their disability. **The social model of disability** suggests that disability is caused by the design and structure of society and the environment, both physical and social. That is, disability is socially constructed. This model sees disability as an aspect of someone’s identity, like race or gender, and implies that disability is addressed by removing societal and environmental barriers. Under the social model, people with disabilities are the experts on disability, and everyone is responsible for removing the barriers that cause disability.

The social model is a newer concept, and it is argued that it offers substantially more solutions for improving the lives of people with disabilities than the medical model. The key message of the social model is that if we listen to the needs of people with disabilities and work together to remove barriers, we can create more accessible workplaces and communities where everyone can participate to their full potential.

Further reading

- [Glossary Medical Model of Disability versus Social Model of Disability](#), Citizens for Accessible Neighbourhoods
- [Social Model vs Medical Model of disability](#), Disability Nottinghamshire
- [The Social Model of Disability Explained](#), Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians

Canadian disability statistics

- One in five Canadians above the age of 15 – or 6.2 million people – have at least one disability.⁵
- 1.6 million Canadians with disabilities are unable to afford the aids, devices, or medication they require.⁶
- People without disabilities make a higher average personal income after-tax (\$39,000) than those with disabilities (\$19,200-\$34,300, depending on disability type).⁷
- Approximately 59% of working-age adults with disabilities are employed compared to approximately 80% of those without disabilities.⁸
- 39% of unemployed Canadians with disabilities have the desire and potential to work.⁹
- Over 14% of Canadians who are unemployed due to a disability indicated that appropriate accommodations would enable them to work.¹⁰
- Among working-age adults with disabilities, 37% require at least one workplace accommodation to be able to work,¹¹ and 20% of employees with a disability require no accommodations at all.¹²
- Over half of the workplace accommodations cost absolutely nothing to implement, and the remaining have a typical cost of \$500 (USD).¹³ The most common type of workplace accommodations required are flexible work arrangements and workstation modifications.¹⁴

- Benefits of accommodations reported by employers include retaining valued employees, increasing employee productivity, and avoiding costs related to training a new employee in the same job.¹⁵
- Over 30% of people with disabilities say that their disability makes it difficult for them to change jobs or advance in their careers.¹⁶
- 48% of Canadians, and 55% of Canadians with disabilities, believe a person is more likely to be hired or promoted if they hide their disability.¹⁷

Creating inclusive and accessible workplaces

A 2018 report found that organizations that excel in disability inclusion were more likely to outperform their peers with an average of 28% higher revenues, 200% higher net income, and 30% higher profit margins.¹⁸ Organizations that commit to accessibility send the message that people with disabilities are welcome, making them more likely to be chosen by people with disabilities, as well as their friends and families.¹⁹

If your organization intends to recognize IDPWD, it is essential that there is already meaningful action in place toward disability inclusion. Below, we outline some specific actions organizations can take to create inclusive and accessible workplaces for people with disabilities.

Communicate the organization's commitment to disability inclusion and accessibility

- [Communicating Your Commitment to Accessibility: Tips for Employers](#), Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (available in the Knowledge Repository)
- [Expressing a Commitment to Disability Inclusion](#), Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN)
- [Getting Started with Disability Inclusion](#), Disability:IN
- [5 tips for employee communications about disability inclusion](#), Understood

Set goals related to disability inclusion

- [Embedding Disability Inclusion in DEI Plans](#), Accessible Employers
- [Examples of Diversity and Inclusion performance goals: how to set and achieve them](#), Together
- [How to Create a Disability Inclusion Plan](#), Accessibility.com
- [Inclusion@Work: A Framework for Building a Disability-Inclusive Organization](#), EARN
- [Setting Diversity and Inclusion Goals](#), Lever

Audit internal practices and policies. Partner with disability and accessibility organizations to assess and build your organization's disability competencies.

- [HR Inclusive Policy Toolkit](#), Canadian Association for Supported Employment
- [Employer Toolkit, Hire for Talent](#)
- [Accessible Employer Self-Assessment](#), Presidents Group (available in the Knowledge Repository)

- External organizations that support with policy development, accessibility audits, and training:
 - Abilities Centre LEAD Canada™ program
 - March of Dimes Canada Employment Services and Training Institute
 - Accessibility Services Canada
 - Canadian Association for Supported Employment
 - Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work
 - Enabling Access
 - Hire for Talent
 - Ready, Willing & Able
 - Rick Hansen Foundation

Facilitate the creation of a disability-focused employee resource group

- 7 Benefits of Disability Employee Resource Groups, Equidox
- Disability Employee Resource Groups – An effective tool for strengthening companies' inclusion efforts, DiverCity
- Employee Resource Group/Business Resource Group Resources, Disability:IN
- Establishing and Maintaining Successful Employee Resource Groups, EARN
- Fostering Disability-Inclusive Workplaces Through Employee Resource Groups, EARN
- How disability ERGs support inclusion during unprecedented times, HR Dive
- Starting a Disability Employee Resource Group (ERG), VMware Accessibility

How to celebrate IDPWD in your workplace

- Host a workshop, training session, speaker, or lunch and learn event.
- Donate to a [disability charity](#).
- Support employees to [volunteer](#) with disability organizations.
- Take action in your workplace to remove barriers and improve accessibility for people with disabilities
- Listen to the voices and experiences of people with disabilities. Share articles, host a book club, or organize a watch party.
 - Cripple Media, “The first-ever media company by and for young disabled creatives.”
 - 10 awesome books for adults about disabilities, accessibility and inclusion, Easter Seals Canada
 - 5 Books You'll Love by Authors with Disabilities, Rick Hansen Foundation
 - Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century, Alice Wong
 - Disabled writers, Disability Visibility Project
 - 10 movies and films for adults about disabilities, accessibility and inclusion, Easter Seals Canada
 - Focus on Ability Short Film Festival
 - Portraits – People with Disabilities, National Film Board of Canada

- Make a public statement of support or spread the word through social media
 - CCDI Toolkit: [Responding to social issues – The ‘when’ and the ‘how’ of workplace responses \(PDF\)](#)
- For more ideas and tips for hosting an event, see [Celebrating International Day of People with Disability: Information kit for workplaces \(PDF\)](#), from the International Day of People with Disability Australia (additional information kits available for schools and community groups)

Additional information and further reading

Creating inclusive and accessible workplaces

- [Breaking Down Work Barriers for People with Disabilities](#), Cardus (available in the Knowledge Repository)
- [Building an Inclusive Workplace Tipsheet](#), David C. Onley Initiative for Employment & Enterprise Development (available in the Knowledge Repository)
- [Doing Things Differently: A Disability Rights At Work Handbook](#), Canadian Labour Congress
- [The Power of Inclusive Workplaces](#), Rick Hansen Foundation

The business case for disability inclusion

- [Accessibility Is Good For Business](#), Government of Ontario (available in the Knowledge Repository)
- [Business Case \(PDF\)](#), Ready, Willing & Able
- [Disability and leadership: Engendering visibility, acceptance, and support](#), Heidrick & Struggles International
- [Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage](#), Accenture, Disability:IN, and the American Association of People with Disabilities
- [Hiring people with disabilities can improve your bottom line. Here's why](#). Canadian Disability Participation Project
- [The Business Case for Inclusion: People with Disabilities](#), Employment Accessibility Resource Network
- [The Business Case to Build Physically Accessible Environments](#), The Conference Board of Canada (available in the Knowledge Repository)
- [Why Hiring People with Disabilities is Good for Business in the “New Normal”](#), Presidents Group (available in the Knowledge Repository)
- [Why it makes good business sense to hire people with disabilities](#), The Conversation

Accommodations

- [A Template for Developing a Workplace Accommodation Policy](#), Canadian Human Rights Commission
- [Accommodation policy and procedure](#), Ontario Human Rights Commission
- [CCDI Webinar: Accommodations - The ultimate checklist](#) (available in the Knowledge Repository)
- [Duty to Accommodate: A General Process For Managers](#), Government of Canada
- [The Fundamentals - Accommodation Options](#), Government of Canada
- [Workplace Accommodation Guide](#), Presidents Group (available in the Knowledge Repository)

Invisible disabilities

- [Invisible Disability Project](#)
- [4 ways to be an ally to people with Invisible Disabilities](#), Everyday Feminism
- [Living With Invisible Disabilities Publications](#), Invisible Disabilities Association
- [Invisible Disabilities in the Workplace](#), Canadian Equality Consulting
- [Let's Talk About Invisible Disabilities](#), Rick Hansen Foundation
- [Respecting invisible disabilities is everyone's job](#), United Way Greater Toronto

References

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2. [Social Model vs Medical Model of disability](#), Disability Nottinghamshire, n.d.
3. [Conceptualizing disability: Three models of disability](#), American Psychological Association, 2022.
4. [Medical Model of Disability versus Social Model of Disability](#), Citizens for Accessible Neighbourhoods, 2017.
5. [A demographic, employment and income profile of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017](#), Statistics Canada, 2018.
6. [A demographic, employment and income profile of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017](#), Statistics Canada, 2018.
7. [A demographic, employment and income profile of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017](#), Statistics Canada, 2018.
8. [A demographic, employment and income profile of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017](#), Statistics Canada, 2018.
9. [A demographic, employment and income profile of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017](#), Statistics Canada, 2018.
10. [Accessibility Findings from the Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017](#), Statistics Canada, 2021.
11. [Workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities in Canada, 2017](#), Statistics Canada, 2019.
12. [BMO Study: Canadians Believe People with Disabilities Are Victims of Hiring Bias](#), Bank of Montreal, 2012.
13. [Costs and Benefits of Accommodation](#), Job Accommodation Network, 2020.
14. [Workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities in Canada, 2017](#), Statistics Canada, 2019.
15. [Costs and Benefits of Accommodation](#), Job Accommodation Network, 2020.
16. [Roadblocks on the career path: Challenges faced by persons with disabilities in employment](#), Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2019.
17. [BMO Study: Canadians Believe People with Disabilities Are Victims of Hiring Bias](#), Bank of Montreal, 2012.
18. [Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage](#), Accenture, Disability:IN, and the American Association of People with Disabilities, 2018.
19. [Accessibility Is Good For Business \(PDF\)](#), Ontario Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, 2019.