



THE ALBERTA DISABILITIES FORUM

ACCESSING EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

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The ability to secure and maintain successful employment remains a crucial issue for Albertans with disabilities. Many face significant challenges when seeking employment, especially accessing employment supports and services needed to find and retain employment.

In 2002, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities developed the *Alberta Disability Strategy* which recommends "full citizenship for persons with disabilities."¹ The Council concluded that "persons with disabilities are not free from intolerance and discrimination. They do not have adequate personal or financial supports to live a life of dignity. They cannot go everywhere in the province and have ready access to buildings, offices or public facilities. They are not treated equally when vying for employment and educational opportunities."² Without commitment from the Government of Alberta and without proper supports, Albertans with disabilities will not be able to achieve independence and maximum potential.

In the report, the Council pointed out that without proper employment supports, Albertans with disabilities will not be able to participate in the work force. The Council concluded that "without the assistance of employment supports, persons with disabilities will continue to be under-represented in the workforce, earn less income than their nondisabled peers, and require ongoing government assistance for funding basic and disability supports required for daily living."³

The Council made the following recommendations:

1. "Persons with disabilities will have the same opportunity as non-disabled Albertans to choose from employment options.
2. All Albertans will have the support they require (e.g. personal care, mobility aids) to prepare for and be engaged in employment.
3. All Albertans will have the support and information required to access and make informed choices from a range of employment opportunities and to fully progress along a chosen career path.
4. Persons with disabilities will be valued members of Alberta's workforce."⁴

Nine years have passed since the introduction of the *Alberta Disability Strategy*; yet Albertans with disabilities still experience many of the same challenges when obtaining employment and accessing employment supports and services.

The following section outlines the challenges faced by Albertans with disabilities when accessing employment services and supports and the solutions proposed by the members of the Alberta Disabilities Forum.

¹ Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. (2002). *Alberta Disability Strategy: Summary Document*. Retrieved on June 25, 2010 from <http://www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/premierscouncil/ads/Summary.pdf>

² *Ibid*

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

Issue	Challenges	From a challenge to a solution
Transitional planning from school to workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students with disabilities do not have access to services and supports that will guide them toward future employment opportunities of their choice. Lack of employment training and support programs when transitioning from child to adult services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish training programs for students with disabilities to develop the necessary work skills during schooling years.
Attitudinal barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government staff and decision-makers lack disability awareness training. There is stereotyping about which job positions certain disabilities can do and which training supports and services are appropriate. In many instances, individuals with disabilities are automatically offered an application for AISH or PDD because of low work-skill expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminate negative attitudes about the skills and capabilities of people with disabilities by delivering ongoing disability awareness training programs to government staff and decision-makers. Community-based organizations have developed expertise in delivering disability awareness training programs and using these programs could be cost effective.
Accessibility, alternate forms of communication, and assistive technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of physically accessible intake and referral facilities. Lack of modified and alternative methods of communication during intake, referral or assessments. Lack of access to assistive technology training unless a job is secured. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandate that all facilities that house Alberta Employment and Immigration programs and services must be physically accessible. Mandate availability of resources in alternative forms of communication. Establish programs for assistive technology training prior to employment.
Assessment and Intake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The assessment process is not implemented consistently across the province. There is duplication of assessments across programs and services resulting in prolonged wait times for admission. Program intake capacity limits are based on program budgets rather than on need-based funding. There are complex and costly administrative assessments necessary to prove having a disability in order to be accepted into training programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For effective assessments, there must be collaboration with health professionals and front line workers. Program intake numbers should not be based on limits designated in funding agreements, but on the needs of individuals who have the objective of obtaining employment supports and services. Mandate accountability by designing programs that will be effective and have the highest outcomes for individuals with disabilities.
Career development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current practice is to quickly place individuals in training programs rather than career approach placements. Lack of individualized strength-based training programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create appropriate assessment and placement into programs that are career-based. Employment supports should be attached to the individual's strength and assets rather than limited by a dollar amount. Programs should not be based on time limits but based on the needs.
Employment supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals must fit into pre-set employment programs which lack flexibility and choice and do not meet the needs of participants. Reporting mechanism measures are based on numbers which are not reflective of personal accomplishments. Community-based employment programs are tied to outcomes based on monetary value leaving organizations that deliver the programs to struggle between meeting the needs of the participants and reporting on expected contract outcomes. Additional costs are charged for necessary employment supports. Employment supports are not consistent and portable across the province. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People with disabilities should have the opportunity to choose programs according to their individual needs – programs that will support individual professional growth. Reporting and statistical information gathering mechanisms should be reviewed and made more reflective of the individuals who are entering the employment programs. These reporting mechanisms should take into consideration the skills and capabilities necessary for individuals to gain and maintain employment opportunities. Outcomes should be measured based on personal growth and ability to retain an employment opportunity. All provincially funded education, employment training, and support programs should be open and affordable to people with disabilities and should be tailored to assist them to reach their full employment potential. Only in this way will Albertans “have the opportunity, choice and ability to participate in all aspects of Alberta society.”⁵ The goal of the Ministry should be to create employment programs and services that are consistent regardless of

⁵ Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. (2002). Alberta Disability Strategy: Summary Document. Retrieved on June 20, 2010 from <http://www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/premierscouncil/ads/Summary.pdf>

Issue	Challenges	From a challenge to a solution
		place of residence.
Government / policies and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is inability to navigate the system due to the complexity in finding supports and services delivered through numerous government departments and programs. Assessments often require information from Health and Wellness, Employment and Immigration, Seniors and Community Supports, and Children and Youth Services. Individuals and/or their families must deal with a complex bureaucracy that includes duplication and inefficiency. • The Ready, Willing, and Able employment model is discriminatory and prevents individuals from receiving suitable supports. Referral from a government agency is required in order to access pre-employment programs and services. • Policy developers lack knowledge about the employment needs of people with disabilities. Policies and procedures are developed with the assumption that <i>one size fits all</i>. • Effective community-based, best-practices pilot employment projects have not been implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish streamlined processes across various ministries. • Re-evaluate and modify the criteria in deciding who is Ready, Willing, and Able for employment. Current policies discriminate against individuals that want to gain employment, but are considered as not Ready, Willing, and Able. • Employment policy developers should receive disability awareness and training about the individual needs of people with disabilities who are going to training or other programs in an effort to gain and maintain employment. • Implement successful pilot projects that were previously sponsored by the Government of Alberta.
Ongoing and Continuous support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is limited funding available to retain on-site facilitators and coaches necessary for long-term employment opportunities. Timelines for employment supports are not long enough. • If an individual loses their employment, they are not able to access any services in order to search for a new employment opportunity (services such as resume upgrade or development of new work-related skills). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish long term supports such as on-site facilitators and coaches with the intent of supporting the individuals to maintain job performance and stability. • Allow for individuals that lose their employment to be able to access necessary services and supports that will allow them to enhance their work-related skills.
Information and referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of central information and referral point for employment supports and services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a one-point-of contact central registry that will maintain updated information concerning various employment supports and services that are offered in the province.

Diversity and availability of employment support programs should be the norm. People with disabilities should have the opportunity to choose programs according to their individual strengths, interests, and needs – programs that will support individual professional growth. Programs need to be proactive and support the individual to grow in an employment position. Many individuals need ongoing and continuous support services at their place of employment in order to keep up with the demands of the position. Employers adapt to the demands of the marketplace by developing innovative new ways of doing business. People with disabilities should have the opportunity to become accustomed to these new ways and augment their skills. Community-based organizations should be sustained in offering individually-focused support services as they are more likely to comprehend the unique needs of the people accessing their programs and services.

The ability to work goes far beyond economic advantages: integration into the community, acquiring a sense of confidence and belonging, and workplaces that demonstrate a commitment to full citizenship and enhancement of quality of life. The members of the Alberta Disabilities Forum ask the Government of Alberta to enhance and maintain supports and services that are needed by people with disabilities.