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No. 60, August 2016

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## Inclusive Employment for Canadians with Disabilities

### **Toward a New Policy Framework and Agenda**

**Michael J. Prince**

The federal government should foster real employment opportunities for persons with disabilities by connecting employers and people with disabilities and support employers in the provision of work accommodations and job-related supports.

Le gouvernement fédéral doit permettre aux personnes handicapées de participer pleinement au marché du travail, en favorisant les contacts entre elles et les employeurs, et en aidant les employeurs à leur offrir du soutien et un travail adapté.

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ISSN 1920-9436 (Online)

ISBN 978-0-88645-354-1-0 (Online)

ISSN 1920-9428 (Print)

ISBN 978-0-88645-353-4 (Print)

# Summary

Canadians with disabilities have consistently experienced low levels of employment, as well as barriers in the educational, economic and social spheres. They face massive obstacles in participating in the labour market, especially those with severe disabilities or low educational attainment. Many need work accommodations and supports.

In this IRPP study, Michael Prince analyzes the employment situation and the policy context for working-age adults with mental or physical disabilities. He finds a disproportionate number of them are unemployed, even if they are able and wish to participate in the labour force. Of those who are employed, many work for below minimum wage and are not protected by labour legislation.

While over the years governments have developed measures to enable Canadians with disabilities to participate in the labour force, their efforts have been inconsistent. Federal, provincial and local programs for Canadians with disabilities are, says Prince, “a disjointed patchwork of widely varying practices and uneven accessibility, affordability and responsiveness.”

This situation is in good part the result of policy choices made by the federal government over the past, such as the transfer — starting in the late 1990s — of the employment insurance funds for labour market programs and services to the provinces and territories; a decrease in spending on programs for persons with disabilities over the past decade; and neglect of the Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities.

The federal government has committed to introduce accessibility and inclusion legislation over the course of its mandate. Michael Prince argues that in order to eliminate systemic barriers and deliver equality of opportunity, priorities for decision-makers should include connecting employers and people with disabilities, and supporting employers in the provision of work accommodations and job-related supports.

The author proposes a six-point strategy for governments to improve labour force participation by people with disabilities: (1) renew the Canadian vision on disability and citizenship; (2) improve transition planning for youth; (3) expand post-secondary education; (4) foster improvement in workplace practices; (5) enhance employment services and supports; and (6) modernize labour market agreements.

Canadians with disabilities should have access to real work for real pay, and their rights should be protected by labour legislation and safety standards, on an equal basis with other workers.

# Résumé

Au Canada, les personnes handicapées ont toujours connu un faible taux d'emploi et font face à des obstacles systémiques sur le plan éducatif, économique et social. Notamment celles qui ont une invalidité grave ou un faible niveau de scolarité sont peu présentes sur le marché de l'emploi. Et elles sont nombreuses à avoir besoin de soutien et d'un travail adapté.

Dans cette étude de l'IRPP, Michael Prince examine la situation de l'emploi chez les adultes en âge de travailler qui ont une invalidité physique ou mentale, et analyse les politiques actuelles à ce sujet. Ses résultats montrent qu'un nombre disproportionné d'entre eux ne travaillent pas, même s'ils en sont capables et souhaitent le faire. De plus, parmi ceux qui occupent un emploi, beaucoup reçoivent un salaire inférieur au salaire minimum et ne sont pas protégés par la législation du travail.

Si, au cours des années, les gouvernements ont mis en place diverses mesures pour faciliter la participation au marché du travail des Canadiens ayant une invalidité, celles-ci manquent de cohérence. Les programmes offerts aux personnes handicapées par les autorités fédérale, provinciales et municipales, écrit Michael Prince, forment un assemblage hétéroclite de pratiques dont l'accessibilité, le caractère abordable et l'efficacité sont très inégaux.

Cette situation est en bonne partie le résultat de choix politiques faits par le gouvernement fédéral dans le passé, en particulier le transfert aux provinces et aux territoires, depuis la fin des années 1990, des fonds de l'assurance emploi destinés aux programmes et aux services liés au marché du travail ; la réduction des dépenses, au cours de la dernière décennie, dans les programmes destinés aux personnes ayant une invalidité ; et le peu d'attention portée aux Ententes sur le marché du travail visant les personnes handicapées.

Or le gouvernement fédéral s'est engagé à adopter au cours de son mandat des lois favorisant l'accès au travail et l'inclusion sociale des personnes ayant une invalidité. Michael Prince soutient que, si les décideurs politiques veulent éliminer les obstacles systémiques et offrir l'égalité des chances, ils doivent prioritairement mettre en contact les employeurs et les personnes handicapées, et aider les employeurs à offrir à ces personnes du soutien et un travail adapté.

L'auteur propose également aux gouvernements une stratégie en six points : 1. Renouveler la conception que nous avons de l'invalidité et de la citoyenneté ; 2. Permettre aux jeunes de mieux vivre la transition des études au travail ; 3. Améliorer l'accès à l'éducation postsecondaire ; 4. Promouvoir les pratiques de soutien en milieu de travail ; 5. Bonifier les services et le soutien à l'emploi ; 6. Actualiser les ententes touchant le marché de l'emploi.

Les Canadiens ayant une invalidité devraient pouvoir occuper un véritable emploi et recevoir un salaire décent. Et leurs droits, comme ceux de l'ensemble des travailleurs, doivent être protégés par une législation du travail et des normes de sécurité.

# Inclusive Employment for Canadians with Disabilities: Toward a New Policy Framework and Agenda

Michael J. Prince

Over 400,000 working-age adults in Canada with physical or mental disabilities are currently unemployed, despite being willing and able to participate in the paid labour force (Till et al. 2015). Canadians with disabilities face more unemployment and underemployment than almost any other group. Those with severe disabilities and low educational attainment face even more barriers to participating in the labour market. People with disabilities who do not have a high school degree are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as those with a university diploma (Statistics Canada 2008). As a result, Canadians with disabilities have not seen the promise of equality of opportunity in the labour market fulfilled.

Disability affects people with a spectrum of conditions that includes developmental or intellectual limitations and mental health, as well as physical, visual or sensory limitations. Although the needs and the potential of Canadians with disabilities have largely been absent from the policy radar (Torjman 2015), we are entering an era of policy renewal and program innovation as policy-makers seek to create the conditions for inclusive growth. The new federal government is committed to introducing accessibility and inclusion legislation over the course of its mandate, with the overarching objective being to “eliminate systemic barriers and deliver equality of opportunity” (Office of the Prime Minister of Canada 2015a). The goal is to open opportunities for federal and provincial governments to collaborate and revise their policies on accessibility and inclusion. This could also help the country fulfill its duties as a signatory (2010) to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN Convention). Under the UN Convention, labour markets and work environments should be open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities on an equal basis with other people. As well, the federal government is committed to implementing a poverty-reduction strategy in coordination with provincial and municipal efforts already in place, which could support some of the objectives of the accessibility and inclusion legislation.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the current employment situation for working-age adults with disabilities and to propose possible reforms to enhance their educational, training and employment opportunities. I believe that the priority in programming for people with disabilities across the country should be to ensure they have better access to gainful employment. In the first part, I examine the current situation of persons with disabilities in the labour market and point out important employment and income gaps. I then outline the evolution of disability policy in Canada’s employment and labour market field since the 1970s and assess current federal and provincial programs. In the third part, I present the principles and reform options for a new policy framework that is intended to advance the labour force participation of Canadians with disabilities. Strong federal leadership is needed to ensure that more Canadians with disabilities have access to real work for real pay, and that their rights are protected by labour legislation and safety standards on an equal basis with other workers.

My analysis and discussion draws on the work of academics and practitioners as well as on government reports. It is also the product of my research over the last three decades, in partnership with disability organizations across the country, on the issues of disability and employment.

## Disability and Labour Market Policy

**I**n Canadian disability policy, employment can be in a number of different sectors, organizational settings and particular arrangements, not all of which involve paid work and participation in the conventional labour force. Of the working-age population between 15 and 64 years, 10.1 percent, representing 2.3 million Canadians in this age group, report a disability. About half of working-age adults with disabilities are outside the labour force (1.15 million), while others who are in the labour force are employed (1.05 million) or unemployed (125,700) (Till et al. 2015).

Rudimentary employment preparation takes place in adult day programs and activity centres, where the emphasis is usually on social services, recreation and leisure, and life-skills training. Vocational training and support services take place in activity centres and sheltered workshops (facilities operated by charities or business that offer segregated work spaces for disabled people). Local employment service agencies facilitate work-experience placements for clients with disabilities. More integrated jobs are provided through worker cooperatives, social enterprises, self-employment and what is called “supported employment.” Supported employment is gainful employment — that is, meaningful paid work in the labour market obtained and maintained with appropriate supports such as equipment or job-coaching assistance.

Disability is usefully considered from a number of different perspectives, depending on when the disability occurred; each situation has a different implication for the design of employment-related policy. For people whose disabilities occur at birth or are acquired and diagnosed in their early years, issues arise about inclusive education as well as gaining work experience during secondary schooling and gaining entry into the labour market as a young person. For people whose disabilities occur when they are working-age adults in the labour market, issues relate to rehabilitation, perhaps retraining, the provision of supports and possibly accommodations in the workplace.

These distinctions are also important because they reflect significant underlying differences in labour market outcomes. How people with disabilities are attached to the labour force varies according to when a disability is acquired over the course of life (Spector 2011). In general, individuals who acquire disabilities later in life or experience them in an episodic or recurring fashion are significantly more likely to be employed constantly than those whose disability is constant throughout their lives. The reason is that those who acquire a disability later in life likely have more career experience and a track record in the labour market, which helps to mitigate the economic and social effects of their disability. This differentiation underscores the challenge facing policy designers in meeting the individualized needs of a highly diverse population (Torjman 2015).

Employment rates among those with disabilities vary by type of disability. People with a hearing- or pain-related disability have the highest employment rates — approximately 50 percent, whereas people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have employment rates of around 25 percent (Arim 2015; Crawford 2012a). Employment rates also differ markedly according to the severity of the disability. One analysis suggests that the “severity of a disability has more impact on labour market participation than does the type of disability” (Galarneau and Radulescu 2009, 6). Greater severity of disability is associated in a statistically significant way with lower earnings and, even more, with fewer hours worked (Hum and Simpson 1996). According to the data from the 2012 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD), working-age adults with mild disabilities have an employment rate of 65 percent, whereas working-age adults who report a very severe disability have an employment rate of only 25.9 percent (Turcotte 2014).

Lower educational levels, health conditions and marital status are other factors that lead to differential results in labour force participation. These three factors account for 85 percent of the probability that disabled persons will be poor (Fang and Gunderson 2014). Policy interventions to enhance formal education, training, work experience and labour force attachment could alleviate the poverty of many Canadians with disabilities (Galley 2015; Till et al. 2015).

The 2012 CSD indicates that disabled people who are unemployed and future job-seekers estimated at 411,600 — are more likely than employed people with disabilities to require work accommodations (58.6 percent versus 42.3 percent) such as modified work hours or duties, ergonomic workstations, telework, human supports or accessible facilities (Till et al. 2015). The employment gap between people with and without disabilities would greatly narrow and might effectively disappear, “where investments have been made to enable people with disabilities to have better education, avoid local transportation difficulties and to receive the needed personal help in everyday activities and/or the aids/devices they require” (Crawford 2012a, 24; see also Crawford 2016; Jongbloed 2010a, 2010b; Kirsh et al. 2006, 2010; Morris-Wales 2010).

## Review of Disability Policies

**B**efore I examine the specific policy options that should underpin a new disability policy framework, it is important to briefly reflect on how the landscape in this area has evolved to its current state and why many of the challenges identified earlier have remained persistent.

Schematically, we can distinguish three general and overlapping phases of labour market and other social policy development for Canadians with disabilities over the last 40 years: focus on antidiscrimination, employment equity and income support (1970-90); emphasis on active labour market measures for the economic inclusion of people with disabilities (1990-2000); and devolution of federal program responsibilities to the provinces and innovation in federal policy tools (2000-17) (see box 1).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the federal government introduced several antidiscrimination, employment equity and income support measures for disadvantaged groups, including

### **Box 1. Canadian public policies related to people with disabilities, 1970-2016**

#### *1970-90: Antidiscrimination, employment equity and income support*

- Canada Pension Plan (CPP) Disability launched, 1970
- Unemployment insurance (UI) sickness benefit introduced, 1971
- *Canadian Human Rights Act*, 1977
- The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982
- Canadian Jobs Strategy, 1985
- Disabled Persons Participation program, 1985
- Federal Contractors Program, 1985
- *Employment Equity Act*, 1986
- CPP Disability (CPPD) reforms, 1987
- Reforms to Canada Assistance Plan and Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons (VRDP), 1988-90

#### *1990-2000: Activation*

- *Mainstream '92* report (published 1994)
- National Strategy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities, 1992-96
- *Employment Equity Act*, 1996
- From UI to new employment insurance (EI) system, 1996
- Canada Assistance Plan ended, 1996-97
- Reforms to CPPD, 1997
- Opportunities Fund launched, 1997
- Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities (EAPD) replaces VRDP, 1997
- *In Unison* intergovernmental disability policy framework, 1998 and 2000
- Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy, 1999

#### *2000-17: Devolution and innovation*

- Devolution of EI part II, programming and design, to all provinces and territories, from late 1990s to 2010
- Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities (LMAPD) replace EAPD, 2004
- Canada Access Grants for college and university students
- Disability Supports Deduction (replaces Attendant Care Deduction)
- EI Compassionate Benefit
- Apprenticeship Job Creation Tax Credit
- Canada Employment Credit
- Enabling Accessibility Fund, 2007
- Working Income Tax Benefit with a disability supplement, 2007
- Employers' Forum, 2013-14
- Consultation and engagement process on a national disabilities act, 2016-17

people with mental and physical disabilities. The measures included, under the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, adding the duty of work accommodation for people with disabilities; under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, adding equality rights, with specific mention of people with physical and mental disabilities; and employment equity legislation for four designated groups, one of which was people with disabilities. The concept of employment equity featured in the Federal Contractors Program and the Canadian Jobs Strategy, again targeting the group of people with disabilities for action. Changes were also made to the Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons (VRDP) intergovernmental



agreement to allow broader federal financial support for provincial programs promoting the economic participation of persons with disabilities.

This theme of activation measures for people with disabilities became more prominent in the 1990s, symbolized by the replacement of the VRDP with the Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities (EAPD). Other measures promoting the participation of disabled persons in the workforce were the five-year National Strategy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities, new employment equity legislation with mandatory elements and the pilot launch of the Opportunities Fund for People with Disabilities. This period also featured the termination of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), which had serious consequences for social services and disability supports as well as for intergovernmental relations. Under the CAP, the federal government had cost-shared the provincial social assistance systems as well as community services and supports for the general population, including for a considerable number of people with disabilities. The end of the CAP reduced the traditional cooperation among disability policy-makers and raised concerns of increased inequity in income programs and support services (Lazar 2006).

The third phase, since the early 2000s, entails devolution of federal programming and innovation in federal policy instruments in the areas of working, learning and living with a disability. The trend of devolution most relevant to employment and people with disabilities involves the transfer of employment insurance part II, programming and design, to the provinces and territories. The EAPD agreements were replaced with the Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities (LMAPDs), which, again, sought to emphasize job preparation and employment and to move away from federal funding of sheltered workshops and other activities that were seen as unrelated to the labour market. Innovations in income support directed at workers and employment for people with disabilities include the introduction of the EI compassionate benefit, the earnings exemption and automatic reinstatement rules in the Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPPD) program, and the Working Income Tax Benefit, which also has a disability supplement.<sup>1</sup>

The 2014 federal budget announced a new generation of LMAPDs with the provinces, with stronger accountability measures but little in new federal dollars. Indeed, as noted in the first annual report since the Canada-Ontario LMAPD was signed in 2014, total federal contributions remained the same in 2014-15, and provincial expenditures increased only modestly (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services 2015).

In the 2015 election, the Liberal Party's platform contained a series of policy and program initiatives that bear on several aspects of employment, disability policy and income security (Liberal Party of Canada 2015). On employment insurance, for example, it promised to reduce the waiting period for benefits from two weeks to one week, and to introduce more flexibility in parental benefits and accessing the compassionate care benefit. The Canada Labour Code was to be amended to grant federally regulated workers the legal right to formally request more flexible working conditions from their employers, an important feature of job accommodations for many people with and without disabilities. Injured and disabled veterans

and their families figured prominently in the Liberal Party's platform, with commitments to increase the earnings loss benefit and the value of the disability award, and to introduce a new education benefit to support post-secondary and technical education for veterans.

Will the government carry out its promises? Although the government's 2016 budget is a "social-policy-is-back budget" (Battle, Torjman and Mendelson 2016), people with disabilities are not a notable theme. No substantial new investments in programs and services for people with disabilities were announced, and relatively few elements of the government's disability agenda were signalled. Some modest investments were announced: \$2 million over the next two fiscal years for consultations with provinces and other stakeholders on introducing a federal disabilities statute, and \$4 million over the next two fiscal years to enhance the Enabling Accessibility Fund to improve the physical accessibility and safety of community facilities for people with disabilities. In the renewed Youth Employment Strategy, there was a mention of disabled youth in regard to the Skills Link program.<sup>2</sup> Although there are enhanced investments in training in the Canada Job Fund Agreements and the Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) (\$175 million in additional funds for 2016-17), the 2016 federal budget did not allocate new funds to the LMAPDs. Given the explicit statement by Prime Minister Trudeau acknowledging the economic barriers that many persons with disabilities still face (Office of the Prime Minister 2015b), and his government's commitment to introduce a Canadians with disabilities act during this mandate, it is reasonable to expect subsequent federal budgets to include more significant initiatives.

### **Current programs**

Responsibilities related to employment for people with disabilities are divided among the federal and provincial governments and involve intergovernmental collaboration. The principal programs are listed in box 2 according to the two orders of government and types of policy. Intergovernmental dimensions include shared constitutional responsibility for the Canada Pension Plan, the UN Convention, vision documents such as *In Unison*, negotiated federal-provincial agreements on labour market programming, and fiscal interactions through tax measures and income support programs across the federal and provincial governments.

Annual federal transfers on labour market programming to the provinces in 2016-17 include \$2.1 billion for the LMDAs for employment benefits and support measures eligible under employment insurance part II; \$550 million for the Canada Job Fund Agreements for economically disadvantaged individuals who fall outside the EI and thus do not fit the LMDAs; and \$218 million for the LMAPDs (Employment and Social Development Canada 2016). In expenditure terms, the LMAPDs make up a comparatively small amount of federal spending power in labour market policy, and have a long history of established practices. Annual federal expenditures on other labour-market-related measures for people with disabilities — the Opportunities Fund (\$30 million), the Enhancing Accessibility Fund (\$17 million), the CPPD vocational rehabilitation program (\$2.2 million) and the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities program (\$1.5 million) — are even smaller in scale. The share of funds in the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, the Initiative for Older Workers, and the Youth Employment Strategy that target people with disabilities is equally modest. Overall, federal

## Box 2. Disability policy in Canada today

### Income supports

#### *Federal government*

- Employment insurance: regular benefits, compassionate care and sickness benefits
- Canada Pension Plan Disability
- Working Income Tax Benefit disability supplement

#### *Provincial governments*

- Workers' compensation
- Social assistance: general and specific programs for people with disabilities, with asset and earnings exemption rules

### Tax measures

#### *Federal government*

- Disability Tax Credit
- Medical Expense Supplement for Earners

#### *Provincial governments*

- Child and family, health, housing and disability supports

### Labour market measures

#### *Federal government*

- LMDAs
- LMAPDs
- CPPD vocational rehabilitation program
- Opportunities Fund
- Enhancing Accessibility Fund
- Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program
- Canada Studies Grants to Persons with Disabilities
- Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy
- Youth Employment Strategy

#### *Provincial governments*

- Employment benefits and support measures that include education, training, counselling, job assistance services, targeted wage subsidies, skills development
- Funding and accountability regimes for employment service providers
- School-to-work transition programs

### Protective legislation

#### *Federal government*

- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- *Canadian Human Rights Act*
- *Employment Equity Act*
- Canada Labour Code

#### *Provincial governments*

- Human rights codes
- Accessibility legislation (Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba)
- Employment standards that include rules on sick leave

### Comprehensive measures

#### *Federal government*

- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

#### *Provincial governments*

- Disability strategies
- Poverty-reduction strategies

spending on labour market measures for adults with disabilities represents only 8 percent of annual investments by the Government of Canada in labour market policy (Employment and Social Development Canada 2016).

Federal, provincial and local programs for Canadians with disabilities are a disjointed patchwork of widely varying practices and uneven accessibility, affordability and responsiveness. In an important recent report on this issue, Torjman accurately portrays the governance and delivery of these programs as “the disability supports maze” (2015, 4). Within and across provinces and territories, disability supports and goods and services are characterized by multiple entry points through numerous public, nonprofit and business organizations; diverse eligibility and funding rules; and several assessment and review procedures. As Torjman says, “Sometimes there are such lengthy delays in service provision that circumstances change significantly from the initial contact. The assessment process then begins all over again” (2015, 5). In addition to complexity, unavailability and unaffordability, responsiveness is another challenge. “Disability supports are often not available at the place they are required. While some services may be provided to individuals in their homes, these may not be delivered in settings such as schools, workplaces or recreation centres” (Torjman 2015, 7).

From my work with disability organizations across the country over the last decades, I have found that transition planning and employment preparation for youth with disabilities are not very effective. Aspirations and expectations for gainful employment are not always promoted within school systems, or by families, who see few feasible opportunities in the labour market or post-secondary education for their sons or daughters with disabilities. Work co-op experiences are often not available. Parents may be too busy or too worried to see the employment potential of their teenage child with a disability. Teachers or school administrators may unintentionally focus on what the young person cannot do because of his or her impairment, rather than on what the person might be able to do in a setting with appropriate services and support. As a result, the alternatives for these young people are to stay at home, go on provincial social assistance, or attend a day program or sheltered workshop.

Challenges exist across the country in identifying available jobs and having readily accessible transportation, but they are particularly acute in rural and small communities. Community partnerships between school districts and local employers and employment service agencies are underdeveloped. A few supported-employment organizations run summer employment programs and operate in high schools. Despite Canadian jurisdictions being involved in supported employment initiatives for about 20 years, only a modest number of people with significant disabilities, such as a developmental disability or a complex episodic disability, are gainfully employed (Crawford 2016; Priest et al. 2008; Shier, Graham and Jones 2009).

That said, there are pockets of promising practices. New Brunswick represents one example where transition planning processes are in place, with facilitators or planners who work with parents and families, high school teachers and local school districts, area employers and

potential mentors. The aim is to secure meaningful work experiences and paid employment while the young person with a disability is in high school. In the last five years, Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Ontario have already or have announced the intention to move toward an “employment first” policy for people with developmental disabilities.<sup>3</sup> For this policy shift — which sees employment as the best vehicle to promote community inclusion — to truly work, a culture shift must take place among social service and employment service providers, and employers must be offered appropriate incentives.

Not all community-based employment service providers routinely assist people with disabilities, and not all staff at these agencies have an adequate understanding or awareness of issues pertaining to disabilities and job accommodations. Typically, only a minority of provincial employment service providers offer programs, placements or advisory services to working-age adults with disabilities (Canada-Manitoba 2010; Crawford 2004; Nova Scotia 2008). Of employment service providers that do, there is a division of specializations and orientations: some focus on people with a particular disability, such as mental health or a physical disability, while other providers serve people with multiple disabilities. Some employment agencies operate day programs and/or sheltered workshops; the latter may be connected to local businesses or may actively recruit from high schools.

Labour force placements that result from community-based employment service providers are a mixture of promising and troubling outcomes. They can be one of the following: (1) volunteer activities and “unpaid employment,” that is, offering experience and confidence; (2) clustered placements with a number of people with disabilities in a single work site or assigned to a single activity; (3) customized supported employment and individual placements with on-site training and support, perhaps even a job coach for a period of time; and (4) open employment with paid work, which may be on a contract, short-term or full-time basis. Paid employment may be at minimum wage or higher, but in some provinces it is less than the standard minimum wage rate established in that jurisdiction for other workers (Rudner 2013).

### **Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities**

LMPDs are a legacy commitment and for some time now have been a low priority. They were introduced in 2004, yet derive from the earlier age of cooperative federalism and shared-cost policy development. As a form of intergovernmental relations, the LMAPD program comprises a multilateral framework and a series of bilateral agreements. As a form of fiscal federalism, the LMAPD is cost-shared 50-50 between provinces and Ottawa, subject to certain conditions and a cap on the annual federal commitment. A review of LMAPD reports prepared by provincial governments indicates that many provinces in fact exceed the 50 percent shared costs on labour-market-related programming for people with disabilities (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services 2015).

Specific objectives of LMAPDs are to enhance the employability of persons with disabilities, to increase the employment opportunities available to them, to build on the existing knowledge base of data collection and research, and to establish best practices (see box 3).

These objectives and priority areas relate to both the supply side and the demand side of employment, as well as to evidence-based policy and practice. In reality, the current LMAPDs, built upon intergovernmental agreements on broad conditions and programming from the early 1960s, still tend to focus on individuals and on the supply-side, as well as on enhancing the employability of clients in direct or indirect ways. Provincial spending priorities vary under the LMAPDs. With respect to the priority of increasing employment opportunities, workplace-related disability supports are relatively underutilized as a programming approach by the provinces.

**Box 3. Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities: Priority areas with respect to the unemployed**

Education and training

- Technical aids and equipment, interpreters' services, transportation and income support

Employment participation

- Work and volunteer placements and school-to-work transition programs

Employment opportunities

- Workplace-related disability supports, self-employment, job coaching and mentoring

Connecting employers and persons with disabilities

- Awareness campaigns, labour market information collection and dissemination strategies

Building knowledge

- Data collection, information sharing and program evaluations

Three approaches in provincial policy spending are apparent.

- Emphasis on mental health and addiction services:<sup>4</sup> Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan
- Emphasis on community services, education and employment: Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island
- Emphasis on funding for adults with developmental disabilities: Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario

Spending patterns do not reflect local labour markets or provincial discretionary choices made in recent years. Such program legacies can be a source of stability but also an impediment to change.

The expressed objectives and priority areas of LMAPDs with reference to evidence-based policy and practice have largely been passed over. Only one summative evaluation of an LMAPD has been published, that for Manitoba (Canada-Manitoba 2010; see also Mason et al. 2013). This near total absence of evaluative information constrains the ability of officials and community groups to share program and governance experiences, to know the effects of specific interventions and to tell important policy stories to political decision-makers.

For individual participants, the Canada-Manitoba LMAPD evaluation found there was increased average work income and increased job satisfaction. Clients who reported more severe disabilities experienced less growth in earnings and in hours of work, a finding that fits with the research literature (see, for example, Hum and Simpson 1996 and Turcotte 2014).

More education and increased self-esteem and confidence were reported as indirect positive impacts for participants. For individuals with cognitive impairments, mental illness, multiple disabilities and more recently acknowledged disabilities such as Asperger's syndrome and fetal alcohol syndrome disorder, the evaluation found they were not as well served because no service provider agencies were dedicated to these particular disabilities or conditions. This finding echoes the point I made earlier, that among employment service providers to persons with disabilities, there is a division of specialization that can result in a lack of appropriate services. To date, the federal government's response such gaps has been limited.

The Canada-Manitoba LMAPD evaluation also found that employer satisfaction with individuals placed in their organizations was mixed. Employers expressed concerns about "the cost of hiring persons with disabilities, providing on-the-job support and [the lack of] information about how to implement disability accommodations" (Canada-Manitoba 2010, viii). A key finding was that limited emphasis was given to connecting employers with people with disabilities. Moreover, there was "little coordinated effort under the agreement to develop and disseminate best practices," and "little formal cross-agency or departmental consultation" (Canada-Manitoba 2010, iii, viii). The evaluation proposed that the demand side of employment initiatives be acknowledged, because employers are important partners and are needed for employment success.

The federal contribution to LMAPDs has declined in real terms over the last decade. For several years now, existing agreements have been renewed one year at a time, which undercuts planning for the longer term. Together with the lack of evaluations and information dissemination, the federal government's neglect of the LMAPDs has meant a decline in their profile in provincial governments, making it harder for officials responsible for this policy file to garner support from their provincial colleagues and political superiors (Graefe and Levesque 2010).

Elements of previous VRDP practices are evident in labour market arrangements. An obvious consequence of this, besides the frustration of innovation, has been the maintenance of certain services and programs for vulnerable groups of people with disabilities. The succession from VRDPs to EAPDs to LMAPDs has meant the renewal, sometimes the expansion, and the protection of services and programs in good and tough budgetary times. Some ripples of change have occurred and others are under way. For disability organizations, certainly at the national level and also in the provinces, the ongoing existence of the LMAPD as a designated intergovernmental agreement is an important symbol of continued federal responsibility and a potential platform for future federal policy leadership and intergovernmental collaboration.

With respect to people with disabilities, however, reform (says the OECD) "has been piecemeal and with seemingly modest impact on employment outcomes" (OECD 2010, 43). The OECD criticizes intergovernmental relations in disability and employment policies, noting the lack of collaboration in identifying and sharing innovative practices or simplifying the processes and requirements. It also points to "the minimal flow of detailed information from the provinces to the federal government about what outputs and outcomes have been achieved with federal funds" (OECD 2010, 57; see also Galley 2015).

## Toward a New Policy Framework

A new national policy framework for the inclusion of adults with disabilities into the labour force is long overdue. The policy agenda must significantly expand the supply and improve the quality of disability services, aids and advice, and supports. It should seek to enable people with disabilities to attain post-secondary education, to participate in training and vocational rehabilitation, and to obtain and hold gainful employment in inclusive workplaces, on an equal basis with other people. These aims require a more focused employment orientation and stronger federal leadership. Greater attention is needed on workplace practices and the role of disability management, bolstered by federal investments through inter-governmental agreements, grants and tax measures.

In addition, the diversity and severity of disabilities must be better recognized in policy design. Enhancing the array of employment services and supports should not mean simply filling in gaps by adding services to the existing suite that is delivered. A more basic requirement would be to review and modernize the range of employment services available.

A forward-looking employment strategy must involve employers, educational institutions, the nonprofit sector, federal and provincial governments, and disability organizations. Such a strategy must extend down from a national conversation affirming common goals and objectives toward measures that promote equal opportunity in skills development, provide greater focus on workplace innovation, and develop the capabilities and support measures across governments to help employers identify and implement workplace accommodations.

Drawing on a number of ideas formulated elsewhere (OECD 2010; Prince and Peters 2015; Meredith and Chia 2015), I propose six components for a new policy framework, directed at both orders of government: (1) renew the Canadian vision on disability and citizenship; (2) improve transition planning for youth with disabilities; (3) expand post-secondary education; (4) foster improvement in workplace practices; (5) enhance employment services and supports; and (6) modernize labour market agreements.

### **Renew the Canadian vision on disability and citizenship**

Federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for social services set out, in 1998, a collaborative policy plan on disability issues in Canadian life in the document *In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues*. To ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in Canadian society, they identified three building blocks: employment, income and disability supports. The key premises about employment for persons with disabilities expressed in that document remain core issues today: “Most persons with disabilities do not consider themselves permanently unemployable. They see themselves as independent individuals”; “persons with disabilities still face barriers and discrimination which prevent them from participating or contributing as equal partners in society”; and “equal access to education, training and support programs will increase their potential for employment and a better economic future” (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services 1998, 5 and 7).



*In Unison* describes the objectives on employment as follows: reduce reliance on income support programs; promote access to the training programs available to all Canadians; increase the availability of work-related supports; encourage employers to make appropriate job/workplace accommodations; and promote work and volunteer opportunities for persons with disabilities. To advance these objectives, ministers identified the following policy directions: (1) more wide-spread understanding and application of the concept of accommodation to promote the hiring of persons with disabilities and help injured workers remain at work; (2) expanded measures to provide more assistance to offset work-related disability costs (such as training programs and tax assistance); (3) greater support for community economic development and self-employment for persons with disabilities, as an approach to local socio-economic development; and (4) enhanced employability through better access to education, training and school-to-work transition mechanisms to support individuals (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services 1998, 22-24). The vision and language of *In Unison* have shaped the work of many governments over the past 18 years or so, informing provincial strategies on full citizenship for the disabled as well as influencing reforms in income support and general employment programs (Prince 2009). It is a wide-ranging and foundational document, and governments should renew their commitment to its principles.

Since then, a notable development from a strategic planning perspective is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Ratified by Canada in 2010, the UN Convention covers the policy areas also found in *In Unison*, plus other domains of social life among people with disabilities. It also contains internationally agreed-upon guiding principles, values and commitments that complement and contextualize *In Unison*.<sup>5</sup> Article 27 of the UN Convention, on work and employment, says that labour markets and work environments must be open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities on an equal basis with other people. The premise of article 27 is that people with disabilities should be able to work in integrated work settings, do real work for real pay, and feel valued as employees and as people. The article's goal is to assure the right to gain a living through work in all forms of employment. Article 27 also refers to affirmative action programs, labour and trade union rights, and public sector employment for persons with disabilities (United Nations 2006, 19-20).

A renewed intergovernmental vision and approach to disability issues should be developed, informed by the important legacy work of *In Unison* and by the UN Convention. A new intergovernmental framework would help make issues of disability, access, inclusion and equality a priority for both orders of government, in partnership with other groups and sectors. It is critical that concrete action be taken, along with measurable and time-specified indicators, in order to track performance and hold governments publicly accountable. Looking through a disability and inclusion-based policy lens would go toward ensuring that both the type and severity of disabilities receive careful assessment in employment programming, to enable people to reach their full potential — whether in co-ops, work-based training, social enterprises, self-employment, or private and public sector jobs.

### **Improve transition planning for youth with disabilities**

Critical policy issues and budgetary choices surround efforts at improving planning for youth with disabilities while they are in high school, transitioning from high school to college or university, or preparing to be job-ready. This planning requires further cooperation and new investments by provincial governments and school districts, with the support of local employers, teachers and counsellors, parents and families. Public policy development will require changes in the traditional practices of student advisory services, summer employment programs, facilitation planning, the operation of day programs and sheltered workshops, and the functioning of post-secondary institutions. To ensure accessible and supportive learning environments, we need to invest in “human and technical support, accessible transportation and educational/training facilities, funding for tuition, books and supplies, modified curricula, mix of classroom training and work experience, [and] support for longer-term rather than short-term programming” (Crawford, 2012b, 29).

Elementary and secondary schools are the places for some of these supports and services; they are fundamental sites for investments in educational success, in career-planning activities and job experiences in high school, and in effective transitioning to post-secondary learning and work placements. Rather than focusing on the age of majority (age 18 or 19) as the transition from youth to adulthood, policy-makers could focus more effectively on ages 15 to 25 for managing transitions in partnership with individuals and their families. For young people with complex health conditions or multiple disabilities, this is particularly important. Transitions require time, information, plans, investments, supports, trust, accountability and collaboration. Networking and collaboration among various stakeholders — including educators, employers, parents, mentors, and colleges and universities — are crucial to the functioning of these transitions. These responsibilities for policy and practice are provincial, operating in combination with family beliefs and practices.<sup>6</sup>

### **Expand post-secondary education**

Fundamental to increasing the employment possibilities of people with disabilities is expanding post-secondary education, which requires an effective transition from high school to a community college, technical institute or university. Post-secondary institutions should be adequately prepared to meet the significant challenge and opportunity of upskilling Canadians with disabilities. Because they have relatively lower post-secondary educational attainment than other Canadians, working-age adults with disabilities face obvious difficulties in acquiring the skills and knowledge employers require in a competitive and technology-driven economy. As the *Jobs Report* notes: “Challenges in adapting facilities at educational institutions and workplace policies and accommodations (e.g. modifications to working days, reduced work hours, modified or ergonomic workstations) can often be a barrier” (Finance Canada 2014, 20).<sup>7</sup>

In this regard, an important role for provincial governments is to provide accommodation grants to post-secondary institutions, and to fund direct services and on-site supports for post-secondary students with disabilities (for example, tutors, interpreters, note takers, special equipment). The provinces and the federal government play a role in offering financial aid and support for equipment for students with permanent disabilities. In supporting the transitions of young people

with disabilities, an enhanced and targeted federal role should be to expand the Opportunities Fund. The fund could make it a priority to increase opportunities for employment experiences of post-secondary students with disabilities. Through the LMAPDs, Ottawa could offer to cost-share provincial programs that offer students with disabilities cooperative placements, work terms, summer jobs in the private sector or jobs in social enterprises with inclusive work settings.

Apart from the labour market policies, other policy instruments and initiatives are worth examining.

- ▶ The Canada Social Transfer (CST) should address the learning needs of those most vulnerable in Canadian society, which include people with disabilities. A case can be made for using the federal spending power in a purposeful and focused manner. With regard to education and employment, Canadians with disabilities are among the most disadvantaged citizens relative to the general population. Therefore, the equity aim would be to increase the number of men and women with physical and mental disabilities who participate in post-secondary education. There is merit in adopting a multi-year time frame to ensure a degree of predictability in fiscal relations, which has not been the norm in recent years in disability employment policies. The inclusion of an automatically indexed growth formula would show a commitment by the federal government to sustained growth in real terms to this underinvested area of labour market policy. In this revised CST, as another aspect of federal leadership, the per capita formula could be modified to reflect the percentage of the population in each province that is demonstrably vulnerable, based on data from the newly launched Canada Disability Survey conducted by Statistics Canada.
- ▶ The Council of Ministers of Education should identify students with disabilities and post-secondary education as a new priority. Ministers should focus on students' transitions from secondary schools to post-secondary institutions; make financial assistance available to students with disabilities; and examine best practices on work accommodation and inclusive education at colleges and universities.
- ▶ The federal Child Disability Benefit is a tax-free benefit for families who care for a child under age 18 with a severe and prolonged impairment in mental or physical functions. To assist in managing transitions and the extra living costs associated with a disability, the federal government should consider extending this coverage to age 25 to enable families with a child with a significant disability to defray some of the costs of attending post-secondary education programs.
- ▶ The federal government should introduce a new inclusive workplace tax credit as a concrete financial incentive to support Canadian employers so they can offer a range of eligible accommodations to enhance employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the labour force. Such a demand-side measure would complement the supply-side initiatives on job search assistance and matching.

### **Foster improvement in workplace practices**

Focusing on employment for people with disabilities will involve reviewing disability management practices in the workplace and improving financial incentives for employees with disabilities and their employers. This would entail developing a set of tools in

collaboration with employer and employee associations that would involve early identification of and intervention in health problems; employee counselling and assistance; prevention of longer-term health-caused absences from the workforce; a work accommodation policy; and supports and services for job retention and job re-entry among employees with disabilities. These practices could dovetail with related organizational policies on diversity, equity and social responsibility.

The new labour market agreements could work in tandem with the recently established private sector employer network, Canadian Business SenseAbility. In addition to connecting with employers in small, medium-sized and large businesses, Canadian Business SenseAbility could take on roles that align with other LMAPD priority areas such as promoting the expansion of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through sponsored work experiences and co-op placements; and sharing knowledge on sickness-absence monitoring, vocational-rehabilitation planning and progressive practices in inclusive and accessible workplaces across the country. The federal government, in conjunction with other public bodies and Canadian Business SenseAbility, could also play a supporting role in a more robust data collection system, as well as evaluation of recruitment, accommodation and employment outcomes. Meredith and Chia have proposed that Employment and Social Development Canada consider “establishing a centre of expertise to help disseminate information to employers on their respective duties, potential best-practices and available resources to draw on when a worker experiences a health shock and may require a leave from or accommodation to their work” (2015, 30). To promote meaningful self-employment and business development, the federal government should consider extending the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program beyond its current scope of western Canada.

The disability policy researcher Lyn Jongbloed indicates that “for large numbers of employers to subscribe readily to the idea of a ‘duty to accommodate’, especially in small and medium-sized workplaces, federal, provincial and territorial governments need to provide an array of financial incentives for them to do so, as well as information and technical support” (Jongbloed 2010b, 5). Wage subsidies would be an example of such a financial incentive. In a review of the literature, Jongbloed concludes, “Canadian research has found mixed effectiveness for wage subsidy incentives to employers to hire or retain disabled employees. Subsidies work best when coordinated with other forms of employer support, such as tax exemptions for workplace accommodations, assisted access to community-based expertise about accommodation and return-to-work, and grants to retain, hire or retrain disabled employees” (2010b, 6). Other studies reach similar conclusions on the potential of financial incentives for employers to hire people with disabilities and enable an employee with a disability to return to work (Lindsay et al. 2013). Reporting mechanisms may be necessary to prevent employers from taking advantage of the subsidies and of workers with disabilities in general.

McKee, Popiel, and Boyce recommend a “progressive tax refund or benefit subsidy to employers to address the costs of accommodations. The incentives become increasingly progressive as the number of disabled employees hired increases and the objectively-

determined degree of severity increases. Employers thus receive incentives to encourage equal opportunity hiring practices” (2006, 10). With an aging population and workforce, and with human rights legislation on the duty to accommodate, there should be a federal role (if not an obligation) to help employers defray the costs of accommodation for new employees with disabilities and for employees returning to work following the advent of impairment.

How might an employer-side incentive be financed and delivered? To help facilitate return to work by clients of the EI sickness program, the federal government should consider introducing “funding support to help employers with job modification and job retention for workers recovering from an illness” (Meredith and Chia 2015, 29). The Enhancing Accessibility Fund has established funding and an expanded mandate to include ways to promote the employment of people with disabilities. This could involve targeting workplace accommodations such as accessible elevators and washrooms, appropriate parking, and handrails and ramps. These are the types of workplace accommodations needed by people with severe or mild disabilities (Statistics Canada 2008). Likewise, the Opportunities Fund could be expanded to specifically include additional funding for work-related accommodations.

To enhance employment incentives for working adults with disabilities, the federal and provincial governments could consider changes to the CPPD program. Some program changes are relatively modest in scale. These include linking the eligibility assessment process of CPPD to earlier interventions for vocational rehabilitation services; increasing the allowable earnings exemption threshold in the CPP to match that allowed under the Quebec Pension Plan disability program; and extending the length of time provided for trial work periods without losing CPPD benefits. A more substantial reform worth attention is allowing people with disabilities to work part-time, making available vocational rehabilitation services to those who are denied CPPD benefits. On income security and disability services more generally, even larger policy reform options include a federal disability supports fund, individual savings accounts for disability supports, a national social insurance plan and a basic income plan (Prince and Peters 2015; Torjman 2015).

### **Enhance employment services and supports**

Enhancing the array of employment services and supports for people with disabilities should not mean simply filling in gaps by adding services to the existing ones delivered. A more basic requirement would be to review and modernize the range of services available. This means re-examining the role of provincial governments in funding community-based day programs, facility-based day activities attached to residential facilities, sheltered workshops and similar segregated forms of employment (Canadian Association for Community Living 2011; Nova Scotia 2008).

Sheltered workshops and similar programs can offer a degree of safety to individuals, respite for family members, and gainful employment for support workers. However, from my experience, segregated work is keeping some disabled people out of mainstream labour force opportunities. Programs and facilities that concentrate on life skills, daytime support and pre-vocational training may inadvertently exclude some people with disabilities from experiencing the working world. In this respect, these practices can be more disabling than enabling. I therefore recommend that there be some changes to these sheltered employment services and enclaves.

Possible changes include funders, families and agencies working together on shifting the mandate to focus on supported employment choices; creating a worker cooperative; partnering with one or more social enterprises; adopting more entrepreneurial practices that do not exploit employees; developing linkages with local private sector firms and/or local non-governmental organizations and nonprofits; and using financial incentives to enhance supported employment options in local communities, taking account of complex needs of employees through ongoing job coaching, for example. Consideration must also be given to ensuring that decent respite services, funded by provincial governments, are available for families, including the aging parents of middle-aged children with significant disabilities.

The challenge for governments and community service providers is to broaden and deepen the range of employment services and supports available to people with disabilities, including for people with significant impairments. Providing these services would be an important design feature of the new employment policy architecture. Among the policy choices for supported employment in inclusive settings in the Canadian labour market, less priority should be placed on segregated workshops.

### **Modernize labour market agreements**

As the main federal policy instrument in this employment field, the LMAPD program provides a level of visibility for the federal role, but, at the same time, it has little influence country-wide on labour market programming for people with disabilities. In order to substantially improve the labour force participation and employment rate of Canadians with disabilities, larger federal transfers are necessary. That would energize this policy area, gain the attention of ministers and deputy ministers, and prompt new policy discussions, both within governments and between governments. In the Canadian federation, it is imperative that the new agreements provide provinces and territories with some flexibility to tailor programs to local circumstances. It is equally important that the agreements enable the federal government to promote real employment and foster compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The federal government could design the funding formula in a way that would help provincial governments to modernize employment programs and delivery systems for people with disabilities. Additional federal investments could be designated for selected priority areas and require specific obligations, such as supported employment and job retention for working adults with disabilities or wage subsidies for youth with disabilities. These priorities could be supported by an enhanced cost-sharing formula with a federal share of 75 percent, as opposed to the traditional 50 percent, of the cost of eligible provincial/territorial expenses. Precedents exist in the intergovernmental agreements for an enhanced cost-sharing formula in disability policies for blind persons and disabled persons (see Prince 2001, 2016). Under this formula, the federal contribution would still be limited to a predetermined maximum amount.

Under a new 5- or 10-year LMAPD, if the federal government is no longer to share the costs of certain programs and services — for example, for addiction and mental health services

— there should be a transitional phase of two or three years in which these services would continue to be cost-shared, to give provinces time to plan and reallocate resources transparent within their overall budgets. Processes and mechanisms should be transparent to enable monitoring and public reporting on the use of federal transfer payments under the new labour market agreements. The federal and provincial governments should provide avenues for meaningful consultation and engagement with disability organizations.

## Final Thoughts

Canadians with disabilities have consistently experienced low levels of employment, as well as barriers in the educational, economic and social spheres. While the federal and provincial governments have developed measures to support their participation in the labour force, these efforts have been inconsistent. What we are left with, as a result, is a disjointed patchwork of programs. Labour market agreements for persons with disabilities have been characterized by a lack of information sharing and collaboration among the two levels of government. This is compounded by the decrease in the federal government's spending in this area, in real terms, over the past decade. It is time to develop a new generation of LMAPDs, by expanding federal expenditures and investing in targeted areas. Labour force integration and inclusive employment require a number of key reforms, including promoting secondary and post-secondary education and the transition of youth with disabilities; enhancing entry into the mainstream workforce; ensuring job retention and achievement by people with episodic and prolonged disabilities; and encouraging job re-entry of workers with disabilities. Strategic investments in education, training and co-op experiences, adequate information on labour markets and work-related personal supports are also crucial.

In its strategy to deliver equality in the workplace for Canadians with disabilities, the federal government, in collaboration with the provinces, should foster real and fair opportunity for persons with disabilities in the labour force by connecting employers with people with disabilities, while supporting employers in providing work accommodations and job-related supports. The six components of the policy framework I propose are essential for the success of such a strategy. The specific components of this framework are the following: (1) renew the Canadian vision on disability and citizenship; (2) improve transition planning for youth with disabilities; (3) expand post-secondary education; (4) foster improvement in workplace practices; (5) enhance employment services and supports; and (6) modernize labour market agreements.

Above all, a new policy agenda means developing a new vision for the twenty-first century that is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as a renewed commitment on the part of the federal government and the provinces to the principles set out in the report *In Unison*.

## Notes

1. A legislative amendment to the Canada Pension Plan Disability in 2005 introduced automatic reinstatement of disability benefits. This enables CPPD beneficiaries who return to regular employment but who find later that they are unable to continue working — for up to two years — to ask to have their disability benefits quickly restarted without having to reapply formally. Another federal disability income policy innovation in recent times was the introduction in 2007 of the Registered Disability Savings Plan.
2. Arguably, if we take a much wider view on disability policy, mention could be made of planned investments in the 2016 federal budget in chronic health and long-term care; support for caregivers; increases to Canadian student loans and grants; an increase in the Child Disability Benefit as part of the new Canada Child Benefit; and the increase in the Guaranteed Income Supplement for low-income single seniors, many of whom have functional limitations in their everyday living activities. These announcements, however, were identified as initiatives in health care, helping middle-class families, post-secondary education and retirement income security for current seniors. Furthermore, no disability lens analysis was applied to these measures in the budget, which could have specified the kinds of impacts for particular constituents of persons with disabilities. If a cross-government approach to disability issues is to be achieved, this is the kind of analysis that will be required to support such a horizontal policy approach.
3. For example, Alberta has a strategy entitled Employment First (Alberta Human Services 2016), and there was a conference on this topic in Ontario in 2013 (Ontario Employment Disability Network 2013).
4. A previous or existing dependency on drugs or alcohol is recognized as a disability under federal human rights legislation and in human rights board rulings or legislation in some provinces and territories.
5. Take the concept of accommodation, for example. In *Unison* describes accommodation as “the range of modifications to a given job and/or workplace to promote the employment of persons with disabilities. It addresses the physical, procedural and attitudinal barriers that persons with disabilities often encounter which prevent them from finding and retaining employment” (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services 1998, 22-23). The UN Convention defines reasonable accommodation as “necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms” (United Nations 2006, 4).
6. Anecdotal evidence gathered by the author points to families pulling their sons or daughters with developmental disabilities out of school or out of an employment transition program because, once their children were old enough to qualify for social assistance, school or work was no longer seen as necessary. This story is mentioned not to undermine families or to question the care of parents but to draw attention to the interplay of public issues and private actions involved in reforming policy in this domain.
7. The 2014 federal budget of the Stephen Harper government announced a few targeted and modest measures on employment for certain categories of people with disabilities: specifically, \$11.4 million over four years to support job training for people with autism spectrum disorder, and \$15 million over three years for initiatives to connect employers with youth and working-age adults who have developmental disabilities. For further examination of disability and social policy in the Harper era, see Prince (2016).

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## About This Study

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This study was published as part of the Skills and Labour Market Policy research program under the direction of Nicole F. Bernier and commissioned by former IRPP research director Tyler Meredith. Copy editing was by Robyn Packard, proofreading was by Zofia Laubitz, editorial coordination was by Francesca Worrall, production was by Chantal Létourneau and art direction was by Schumacher Design.

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To cite this document:

Prince, M.J. 2016. *Inclusive Employment for Canadians with Disabilities: Toward a New Policy Framework and Agenda*, IRPP Study 60. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.



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