**Partnership council on employment opportunities for persons with disabilities report**

The final report from the Council advising the government on how to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

## Employable until proven otherwise

The Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities (the Council) was established in April 2014 to advise the government on how to:

* encourage business leaders to promote hiring people with disabilities
* work with businesses to remove barriers to employment for people with disabilities
* encourage businesses to create inclusive work environments that are accessible to everyone
* develop and promote best practices for businesses to emulate

This is a third party report. It contains the Council's advice to the government.

Bob Stark, Chair, Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities and Council members.

The Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities is delighted to present you with our final report, "Employable Until Proven Otherwise."

[Read an open letter from Tracy MacCharles, the Minister Responsible for Accessibility, thanking the Council for their final report.](http://news.ontario.ca/medt/en/2016/06/open-letter-to-the-partnership-council-on-employment-opportunities-for-people-with-disabilities.html)

## Letter to the Minister

April 29, 2016

Dear Minister Duguid:

The Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities is delighted to present you with our final report, "Employable Until Proven Otherwise."

Our recommendations are firmly based on consultation with many experts inside and outside government, and reflect what the Province needs to do to catch up with other jurisdictions and lead the way to full employment for people with a disability. We believe the time is right for the Ontario government to take action. The Government of Canada has moved forward, through the appointment of a Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, and it is now building a strong leadership position within the communities of persons with disabilities. Ontario needs to be part of this leadership momentum!

The title of this report represents an exciting, positive new attitude emerging in Ontario toward the role of people who have disabilities. “Employable Until Proven Otherwise” reflects the growing understanding that “talent” and ”ability” are flexible terms, not absolutes. Everyone deserves the right to participate in the workforce to the fullest extent of their ability. Ontario has a long history of social assistance for people who cannot care for themselves, and this report in no way advocates reductions in assistance for those who feel they cannot or should not work. The Partnership Council feels strongly, however, that it is a basic right of every person with a disability to find employment and demonstrate to themselves, their bosses, their family and their friends that they are employable.  We encourage employers to believe all people with disabilities are “Employable Until Proven Otherwise”.

The Council hopes the Province will be excited by the positive economics of acting on this issue. Increasing the labour-force participation rate of people who have disabilities is not just a problem to be solved – it's an opportunity to grow the provincial economy, while reducing social-assistance costs in the process. Combined with the personal and lifestyle benefits that will accrue to thousands of Ontarians with disabilities who stand to achieve financial independence for the first time in their lives, this is one of those rare issues that is truly a triple win.

Our primary recommendation focuses on the need for leadership in government by assigning a senior Minister with accountability for persons with disabilities, supported by a dedicated Deputy Minister.

There are 1.9 million persons with disabilities in Ontario, larger than the populations of six of Canada's provinces.

The Ontario government spends in excess of $11 billion per year related to persons with disabilities, across 7 ministries.

According to our research, for every 5,000 people with disabilities hired away from the Ontario Disabilities Support Program (ODSP) rolls at a moderate wage, taxpayers will benefit by more than $74 million annually.

The need for focused and dedicated leadership to align government strategy, policies and operations and to ensure effective spending is obvious. We are the third independent committee commissioned by the Ontario government in the past six years to make this recommendation. Government needs to act.

In terms of effecting important cultural change enabling employers to recognize the benefits of hiring people with a disability, the largest opportunity is within the small and medium-sized businesses community. The Council recommends government develop a broad, sustainable and integrated communications program to convince employers of the many benefits of hiring, retaining and promoting persons with disabilities.

There are many other important recommendations in our report. However, they all depend on single-focused government leadership and a commitment to educate business in creating a cultural shift toward more inclusive workplaces.

The Council would like to thank and commend various ministries for their openness and directness in their contacts with the committee. Over the Council's two-year mandate, we have witnessed a meaningful shift in attitudes towards, and understanding of, the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. It is now time to act on this deeper understanding!

Thank you for the opportunity to put forward our recommendations for enhancing the employment of persons with disabilities. Of course, Council members are available for consultation at your convenience, and we will individually and collectively continue to promote our recommendations broadly.

Bob Stark (Council Chair)

Caroline Arcand  
Jodi Butts  
Joseph Dale  
Joe Dowdall  
Lisa Foster  
Ian Howcroft

Deanna Matzanke  
Shannon MacDonald  
Laura McKeen  
Barry McMahon  
Steve Sharpe  
Mark Wafer

## Executive summary

The Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities was formed in April 2014 for a two-year term to advise the Ontario Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure on ways to enhance employment opportunities for Ontarians who have a disability.

The 13 Council members appointed by the Minister come from business, advocacy organizations, the not-for-profit sector and the disability community. While bringing different backgrounds and perspectives to the Council's work, they all share a common vision for an Ontario economy that is strong and inclusive. The following summarizes the key points of this report.

We are all flawed. Every human being has strengths and weaknesses. "Disability" is not a label that separates people with "ability" from those who have none. If there is one message this Council would like to hear echoing across the province, it is this: Everyone has abilities to contribute to society. Everyone has a right to contribute. While the Council appreciates the culture of caring that has created a strong "safety net" for Ontarians who are ill, poor, or otherwise disadvantaged, it is unacceptable that people who are willing and able to work are shut out of the workforce – whether it be by misplaced kindness, unintended policy disincentives, or employers' lack of knowledge about the capabilities of people with disabilities.

This Council is unanimous in believing that the Government of Ontario and the province's employers should share a single, positive attitude towards potential employees, whether or not they have reported disabilities: that we are all "Employable Until Proven Otherwise."

This phrase, to the best of our knowledge, was coined by a Partnership Council member at one of the Council’s monthly meetings. It is intended to reflect a new emerging standard of  acceptance and respect for people who have disabilities. Of course, those who feel they cannot work, for whatever reason, should continue to receive the care and assistance currently provided. But for the 80% of people with disabilities who want to work, the Council believes that employers, case workers, family members and other stakeholders should suspend judgement and allow these people to contribute to the fullest extent of their abilities. “Employable Until Proven Otherwise” is a basic right that all Ontarians should enjoy.

This attitude can make a huge difference. Across Ontario, employers say they cannot find the workers they need to operate at peak efficiency. Meanwhile, thousands of Ontarians with disabilities are seeking employment in order to gain income, purpose and increased economic independence – but encounter great difficulties not just finding jobs, but simply landing job interviews. At the same time, the Province of Ontario is looking for ways to improve the efficiency of its social services, while engaging more Ontarians in meaningful employment.

Ontario today faces numerous social and economic challenges that will prove difficult and expensive to solve. Engaging people with disabilities in the workforce is not one of these costly, intransigent problems. There is no trade-off, no hard choices to be made. Hiring, retaining and advancing people with disabilities is an opportunity to create positive results for all parties **–** including more positive financial outcomes for business, the government, and people with disabilities. The Council has studied the economics of this issue and firmly believes that every dollar invested in promoting the mutual interests of employers and people with disabilities will produce a positive return on investment.

This report notes that people who have a disability comprise one of the largest, most diverse demographics in Ontario. There are 1.9 million Ontarians with disabilities. In 2012 (the most recent data), the unemployment rate among Ontarians with disabilities was 16%, compared to 7.6% for Ontarians who do not report having disabilities. Employers rate 90% of their employees with disabilities as average or better workers compared to employees who do not have disabilities. And a U.S. study indicates that 80% of people with disabilities who do not have a job want to be employed.

Together, these numbers tell a compelling story. The majority of Ontarians with disabilities are, or want to be, capable, productive workers. Given that a full 60% of Canadian business owners say they have difficulty finding qualified employees, persons with disabilities represent a ready, willing workforce that can help employers achieve higher productivity and enhance Canada's global competitiveness.

But there's a mismatch. Employers have been slow to recognize this advantage. Many members of the Partnership Council work regularly with employers, and have heard first-hand their doubts and fears regarding introducing employees with disabilities into their workplaces. While most of their concerns stem from myths and misconceptions, they constitute real barriers to the Government of Ontario's goal of creating fully inclusive workplaces by 2025 [[1]](https://www.ontario.ca/#foot-1). "Accessibility", after all, is not just about ramps, accommodations and customer service: It means addressing and eliminating every possible obstacle (physical, systemic, or attitudinal) to creating a truly inclusive society.

Accordingly, the Council urges the government to take strong actions to assist Ontarians with disabilities to seek fulfilling work and engage with employers to eliminate the barriers that prevent them from hiring this needed workforce.

Government must lead.

Investing in the elimination of employment barriers today will result in a more prosperous economy tomorrow – as well as a more effective, diverse and innovative workforce, and higher living standards and greater quality of life for persons with disabilities.

To that end, this Council makes the following recommendations. Note that the first two constitute our highest-priority recommendations. The remaining proposals are important, but they would flow most effectively from the establishment of strong, strategic leadership.

### Creating government leadership

The Council urges the appointment of a Cabinet Minister with responsibility for ensuring a coordinated effort by the province to provide more effective and efficient support programs and services to people with disabilities, including outreach to employers. Promoting and facilitating the employment of people who have a disability will require a significant and permanent culture change in government, in which "employability" and "entrepreneurship" emerge as key objectives equivalent to the traditional "custodial" model of supporting and caring for people with disabilities. This Minister should be assisted in his or her duties by a dedicated Deputy Minister who will oversee the development and alignment of policies and priorities for 1.9 million Ontarians with disabilities, optimizing the total current spending (greater than $11 billion per year) across multiple ministries.

In the event that there are political or cultural barriers to the creation of this specialty ministerial position, the Council proposes an interim step. We recommend appointment of a parliamentary assistant to hold this responsibility on an interim basis, and that he or she be supported by a "People with Disabilities Officer". Ultimately, our intention is that a full Minister and Deputy Minister would assume these duties over time, to lead and align the Province's efforts to serve this extraordinary and growing community.

### Engaging employers

The Council recommends the development of a broad, sustained and integrated communications program to convince employers of the many benefits of employing people with disabilities.

Despite the very positive business case for employing people who have a disability, employers still need help seeing beyond [the many myths, misconceptions and misgivings](http://www.ccrw.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Myths-and-FAQs-Employer-Resource.pdf) they may hold regarding hiring of people with disabilities. It is recommended that this program includes funding of advocacy tours, peer mentoring, advertising and publicity campaigns, production of print and online resources, and an ongoing social-media campaign.

### Additional recommendations

#### Government must lead

The Council recommends that the Province of Ontario lead on the issue of employing people with disabilities by setting targets for its own accelerated recruitment of an inclusive, representative workforce. The government's messaging will be more credible and convincing if all of its ministries, departments and Crown corporations also "walk the walk".

#### Policy barriers

Eliminate policy barriers that reduce individuals' incentives to seek employment or entrepreneurship. Currently, a range of programs and policies prevent Ontarians with disabilities from achieving greater employment success. These relate to financial disincentives to work for those currently receiving income supports, funding of employment services, and overly bureaucratic processes. To shift more people permanently into the workforce, the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) should continue reviewing the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) to ensure that employment incentives are appropriate and that funding of employment services is connected to performance in meeting labour market demand, thereby helping to place more candidates with disabilities in the workforce.

The key to success will be to embrace a service culture that assumes that all Ontarians are "Employable until proven otherwise".

#### Youth with disabilities

Develop a government-wide strategy with a subsequent series of programs that specifically engage youth with disabilities. Studies show that the earlier that young people are introduced to the workforce, the more likely they are to succeed throughout their working years. Current programs designed to help youth in the general "disadvantaged" demographic engage with work mainly fail youth with disabilities, as they are often the "last group picked" by employers who don't understand the value they bring.

#### Work with employers

Proactively involve employers in addressing barriers and challenges they face in hiring candidates with disabilities.

#### Employment strategy

Create an Employment Strategy for people with disabilities that aligns with the spirit and recommendations of this report. The Partnership Council welcomes the February 2016 budget announcement that the government will over the next year develop a made-in-Ontario employment strategy for persons with disabilities, and offers eight basic principles for its consideration. We particularly stress that leadership must fall to a designated Minister and Deputy Minister to take accountability for development of an employment strategy that is endorsed and supported by all relevant ministries.

#### Measuring impact

The report concludes by proposing 10 key performance indicators for government to measure and track in order to evaluate progress and assure results.

## About this report

The Council began work in 2014 with a mandate to offer the Minister clear recommendations on the following issues:

* how the government can engage business leaders in promoting the hiring of Ontarians with disabilities
* removing barriers to employment for persons with disabilities, and how government and businesses can work together to ensure businesses are creating an inclusive environment that is accessible to all
* specific best practices that Ontario employers can showcase or emulate;
* possible refinements to existing business support and training programs to support hiring of Ontarians who have a disability, and
* other options / recommendations that will support employment opportunities and greater workplace participation for Ontarians with disabilities

Council members worked diligently through 2014-15 to explore the employment conditions of people with disabilities, the barriers they face in finding and retaining paid work, and the business case for hiring these individuals. On May 11, 2015, [the Council released its Initial Report](https://www.ontario.ca/page/partnership-council-employment-opportunities-people-disabilities-initial-report) to the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, with the declaration that: "It is an unacceptable failure of our commitment to human rights for people with disabilities to be so underrepresented in our Ontario labour markets."

Following submission of its Initial Report, the Council reconvened in September 2015 and commenced digging more deeply into this issue. In a letter dated December 10, 2015, Brad Duguid, Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, thanked the Council for its report. He noted that the Council's recommendations were consistent with many actions taken by the Ministry, and had already influenced new program development.

In this Final Report, the Council re-examines and updates the recommendations of the Initial Report. We provide more insights from our work focusing on topics outlined by the Minister, and provide additional context around the personal, business, economic and societal benefits of improving employment opportunities for Ontarians who have a disability. We also offer new recommendations specifically aimed at encouraging the cultural change that the Minister identified as being key to bringing together Ontario employers and people with disabilities, for their mutual benefit.

Council members were pleased to serve the province on this very important issue. And they are united in the hope and expectation that this report will help the Ontario Government move forward faster to engage both business owners and the communities of persons with disabilities in employment-enhancement programs and policies that will truly prove to be win-win-win.

### The importance of employment

Joe Dowdall is a licensed crane operator who has worked on many projects in Ontario. He helped build First Canadian Place and the second Burlington Skyway bridge, and lowered the Maid of the Mist IV into the river below Niagara Falls. He was working on the 68-Storey Scotia Plaza in August 1987 when he was injured in a man-and-material-hoist accident in which two workers were critically injured and two other workers died. As a 32-year-old father of two, Dowdall sustained neck injuries and spinal-cord damage that left him a paraplegic.

"After being told I would never walk again, I started to worry immediately," he says. "I had a young family and wife to support. I had no idea what I was going to do."

After spending 14 months in rehab, Dowdall was offered a job with International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 793. He said yes, but first there were a few problems to take care of, such as building a ramp for his wheelchair, installing a lift and renovating the washroom. "Knowing that I was working and making a good wage and starting to be independent again was a great feeling," he says.

"Having employment brings back some sort of stability, not only for the person who is disabled, but for the family as well. It was important to show my children that you can have a good fulfilling life after a life-changing tragedy."

Dowdall is now Vice President and Director of Training and Apprenticeship for IUOE Local 793. He is also a member of the Partnership Council. He says succeeding at work took away much of the anxiety of living with paralysis. "The longer I remained unemployed, I watched my family struggle financially and I saw myself not contributing. That was both mentally and physically difficult."  
Dowdall feels fortunate to have had a sympathetic employer. "They were willing to take the risk and train me. They never looked at the wheelchair but at the person."

## Who are 'people with disabilities'

People who have a disability constitute one of the largest, most diverse demographics in Ontario. Today, 15% of Ontarians – nearly two million people – have a disability of some sort. And that percentage will grow to 20% or more in the next few years as society continues to age.

It is common to think of people who have a disability as people apart from society. But there are many types of disabilities, and infinite levels of ability. More than a third of Ontario families include people with disabilities – and no one is more than one unlucky accident away from needing help. As former Lieutenant Governor David Onley has said of people with disabilities, "They're the only minority group you can join in the blink of an eye."

Human beings come in all shapes and sizes, and represent many different levels of ability. In a word, people with disabilities are us.

"Work disability occurs when a person is unable to find, remain at or return to work due to a health condition or impairment. Taking into account all forms of disability—whether acute or chronic, temporary or episodic, physical or mental, coming early in life or late, work-related or otherwise—work disability is likely to touch most people at some point in their lives." [*The Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy*](https://www.crwdp.ca/en/news/2014-02-04/backgrounder_about_crwdp), Toronto

### Table 1

| This is a table showing the number of Canadians aged 15 and over with disabilities by type, the percentage of total people with disabilities and the percentage of the total population in Ontario in 2012. | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Type** | **Number** | **% of total persons with disabilities, 15 and over** | **% of total population 15 and over** |
| **Seeing** | 331,930 | 20.1% | 3.1% |
| **Hearing** | 391,100 | 23.7% | 3.6% |
| **Mobility** | 857,690 | 51.9% | 8.0% |
| **Flexibility** | 971,630 | 58.8% | 9.1% |
| **Dexterity** | 450,940 | 27.3% | 4.2% |
| **Pain** | 1,191,230 | 72.1% | 11.1% |
| **Learning** | 283,980 | 17.2% | 2.6% |
| **Memory** | 303,140 | 18.4% | 2.8% |
| **Developmental** | 73,040 | 4.4% | 0.7% |
| **Mental/psychological** | 510,280 | 30.9% | 4.8% |
| **Unknown** | 29,860 | 1.8% | 0.3% |

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2012.

Note: Some respondents reported more than one type of disability.

In the past, people who have a disability were often segregated from society, whisked from public view into specialized schools, sheltered workshops or group homes. Defined by their disabilities rather than by what they can do, many of these people live apart from the workforce, discouraged from seeking work or otherwise participating in broader society. Often, family members, caregivers or caseworkers enable them to live "apart" and may encourage them not to seek work, trying to protect them from risks in the workplace, unfeeling bosses or nervous coworkers. Other people with disabilities who have sought work have been discouraged themselves by the difficulty of finding jobs – how hard it is to simply land an interview, let alone reassure potential employers that they can do the job and "fit in" with existing workforces and workplace cultures.

Increasingly, across North America, it is understood that the custodial approach is not the only, or best, way to assist persons with disabilities. Consider these trends, described in the 2013 report [A Better Bottom Line: Employing Individuals with Disabilities](http://governor.delaware.gov/docs/NGA_2013_Better_Bottom_Line.pdf), produced by the U.S.-based National Governors Association:

"Many state policies and cultures are rooted in the past, when funding and practices went toward the old paradigm of 'taking care' of people with disabilities and assigning that responsibility to human services agencies. That outdated thinking is beginning to change, with an increasing number of states making integrated employment a priority for people with disabilities and adopting the same strategies for people with disabilities that are used with the broader workforce, as illustrated by the wave of states adopting Employment First practices.

"States also are recognizing the need to set employment as a state priority so that the various agencies serving people with disabilities incorporate employment goals. It is essential that these agencies be able to work collaboratively, share expertise and resources, and create a more integrated and seamless employment and training approach."

Uncharacteristically, Ontario has not been in the forefront in such employment-centered initiatives. But with the phasing in of new standards under the AODA, by forming the Partnership Council, and by creating a new Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, Ontario has some hope of catching up in the employment of people with disabilities.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005, defines "disability" as:

* any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device
* a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability
* a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language
* a mental disorder, or
* an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997; ("handicap")

Given the broad range of potential "disabilities," the Council encourages Ontarians, and specifically policymakers and civil servants, to think inclusively. Judge people by their abilities, not their disabilities. Assume that those who want to work can work.

### Voices of persons with disabilities

Consider these "Voices" of people with disabilities. They come from recorded interviews of a number of Canadians talking about their perspectives on disability, work and employment.

From the Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy, "[Community Videos](https://www.crwdp.ca/en/stories/)"

Eugene, injured in a lumbering accident in Northern Ontario: "Treat me as a worker, instead of a liability. When I was working, I was an asset to the company. As soon as I got hurt, I'm a liability. If they were to spend more time getting me back to work, then I would be on the books, and everyone would be happy. But no - I had to fight tooth and nail just to get pension increases."

Ali, 25, has multiple mental-health issues: "It's kind of hard for me to find positions that are really going to be suitable for my abilities, or barriers to my abilities, however you want to put it... I don't require any major accommodations. It's just simple little things I run into. It's not like I need anything changed in any huge respect for me to be employed. Just someone [a boss] who has an understanding that A, B or C is going to take me a bit longer than another employee without a disability."

Lynn, 45, who has a developmental disability, works part-time at a Sobey's store. "I have trouble comprehending stuff," she says. "When I want to say something, I just get mixed up." She believes this condition inhibits her ability to find employment: "I feel that when I am looking for work, there are people out there who don't want to give me a chance... I feel they are not allowing people to show them what they can do." How might that be changed? Lynn is clear: "Try to get the word out to let the people know that there are people with disabilities, but -- in my mind I don't have it [a disability]. I know I can do anything."

Paul, 28, was a plasterer before suffering a herniated disc on the job. "It's really hard. I don't feel as much a part of society anymore."

From the video, "[A Hire Awareness](http://www.ndeam.ca/a_hire_awareness.shtml)", produced by the Toronto-based organization, LinkUp Employment Services for Persons with Disabilities and National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Margarita, a Paralympic-level cross-country skier who works as a translator: "Having impaired vision doesn't mean I can't do my job. It means I may do it in a different way... Having the challenges of my vision made me stronger and more determined. It taught me how to solve problems."

Margarita's boss: "She's very focused and always strives to improve."

Margarita: "My biggest challenge right now is finding the time to do everything I want to do. I train six times a week... My motivation is mostly internal. I am interested in pushing my limits and seeing how far I can go."

Tim, a former courier driver who is now an award-wining sales representative for the same company, following a spinal-cord injury: "I don't think you can go through an injury like that and not have a new perspective. Instead of looking at the glass half-empty, you learn to enjoy what you've got. You learn to appreciate what you can do. You also have an understanding that things could be worse. You owe it to yourself to make sure you're [working] at your potential. Your disability doesn't have to be a topic of conversation. Once you get talking to me, you're going to forget I'm sitting in a wheelchair."

Tim: "I was 20 when I was hurt, and didn't want to sit watching TV for the rest of my life."

### The entrepreneur

Any discussion of increasing employment opportunities today must also include the potential for starting one's own business. With the development of low-priced and easy-to-access tools such as e-commerce websites, social media, coaching and mentoring, and even financial assistance, entrepreneurship has emerged in recent years as an attractive, viable opportunity for many. It can even be argued that some forms of entrepreneurship are particularly suited to the needs and talents of people with a disability. For instance, running a small business gives some owners more flexibility in their personal schedules, which might assist those who have episodic disabilities. As well, the best entrepreneurs often target narrow, creative niches that only they can see – which plays to the strengths of people whose disability has created for them unique experiences and perspectives on the world [[2]](https://www.ontario.ca/#foot-2).

Apanaki Temitayo Minerve is a self-taught, Trinidadian-Canadian artist who found both her calling and her salvation in textile art. As a survivor of sexual abuse trauma who still lives with post-traumatic stress disorder, she has received business coaching and startup financing from Toronto-based Rise Asset Development. Her business, Apanaki Designs, focuses on multi-media acrylic artwork incorporating African textile collages on canvas, selling original works, posters, postcards, archival prints and merchandise. She says this creative work has helped channel and transform her longtime pain, fear and shame into "serenity, joy and liberation."

The work of Apanaki Designs has been showcased at numerous venues, ranging from Scotiabank Nuit Blanche to the Caribbean Tales Film Festival and the Afro-American Fiber Art Exhibit in North Charleston, South Carolina. In January 2016, Apanaki won the Peer Powered EnterpRISEr of the Year award at Rise's annual Entrepreneurial Achievement Awards.

In a subsequent interview with CBC Radio, Apanaki said she lives with mental illness daily. "But I also have a big dream of actually surpassing my trauma to have a successful business, and I've decided to just work through that. Rise helps in so many ways, in not giving me any stigma if I'm having a bad day or having a bad run of it."

She hoped her award would help more people recognize that "Just because you happen to have a mental illness doesn't mean your life is over... You can still make gains and still have a business and still be a successful person in society." [[3]](https://www.ontario.ca/#foot-3)

### Persons with disabilities in the workplace

The employment landscape for people who have a disability is a sad litany of unmet needs. A high percentage of people who have a disability want to work. Many of them are highly capable and reliable. Most people who have a disability can be easily and inexpensively accommodated in the workplace. Yet many – if not most – of these willing workers remain excluded from the workforce.

The widely agreed-upon statistics:

* 9 million ontarians have a disability, or 15% of the population.
* given that percentage, one might reasonably estimate that disability affects approximately 35% of the population
* according to a 2012 Statistics Canada survey, the unemployment rate among people with disabilities in ontario was 16%, compared to 7.6% for people without disabilities. obviously, both percentages exclude people who have stopped looking for work. the participation rate of working-age Ontario adults in the workforce was only 46%, just two-thirds of the 69% participation of those who did not report a disability
* people with disabilities want to work. according to a 2010 study based on the 2006 U.S. general social survey, 80% of those with disabilities who did not have a job wanted to be employed. (for comparison, just 77.5% of adults without disabilities who did not have jobs said they wanted to be employed)
* people with a disability who are working earn on average $31,000 a year, compared to $44,000 for those without disabilities
* 90% of persons who have a disability rate average or better on job performance compared with their colleagues who do not report having disabilities
* 90% of Canadians believe people with disabilities are not fully included in society
* 70% of Canadian small business owners have never hired someone who has a disability
* 55% of Canadians who have a disability believe that hiding their disability increases their chances of getting hired and promoted
* regarding workplace accommodations required to enable employees with disabilities to operate safely and effectively, the U.S.-based job accommodation network says that 57% of accommodations needed by employees cost nothing, while 36% require an accommodation with an average one-time cost of $500. the most common accommodations are modified or reduced hours and job redesign
* the prevalence of disability will likely increase as the population ages, as seen in statistics Canada's 2012 Canadian survey on disability. within the working-age population, 4.4% of people aged 15 to 24 reported a disability, vs. 6.5% of those aged 25 to 44, and 16.1% for those aged 45 to 64

The evidence is clear. Ontarians with disabilities are eager to work and ready to contribute. Employers need their skills, their positive work ethics and passion to succeed. Tragically, however, neither side realizes how much they need each other.

### Snapshot: Megleen Inc. – Tim Hortons

Disabilities related to vision, mobility or mental acuity need not be a barrier to employment. Just ask Mark Wafer, a Tim Hortons franchisee with six cafes in Toronto. Soon after hiring a young man with Down syndrome as one of his first employees 20 years ago, Wafer realized Clint had become his most reliable worker. “He always came to work early,” says Wafer, “and I could barely get him to take a break.”

Two decades later, Clint is still with him. Wafer has now hired more than 130 people with disabilities. He says their hard work and creativity fuel his business’s success: it beats the national average on 14 out of 15 of Tim Hortons’ key performance indicators.

As a result of being an inclusive employer, Wafer says his store’s average annual employee turnover is 38%, well below the industry average of 100%. That creates significant saving for Wafer, who estimates it costs $4,000 to train a new employee.

In 2011, the absenteeism rate among Wafer's 33 employees with a disability was zero. He has never made a work-related injury insurance claim for an employee who has a disability.

Yet many people will be even more moved by the benefits that working created for Sparling. Two decades after joining Megleen, Sparling is married and owns his own condo. Asked how things might have turned out had Sparling not come to work at Tim Hortons, Wafer is adamant: “He would be sitting at home all day watching television.” [[4]](https://www.ontario.ca/#foot-4).

### The role of family

The families of people with disabilities also need to be taken into account in any discussion of employment. While families provide strong and essential support to loved ones who have a disability, some, in their attempts to care for loved ones who have a disability, discourage them from seeking paid work.

Kelly Taylor has Down syndrome and recently retired after 20 years with London, Ont. law firm Cohen Highley LLP. She was paid competitive wages and benefits to oversee office supplies, tidy the boardroom, make coffee for guests and deliver papers to more than 60 professionals – work formerly performed by trained legal assistants.

“She was an excellent worker,” said lawyer Joe Hoffer, a partner in the firm who has long supported the hiring of people with intellectual delays. “We have had no downside whatsoever in all of our hirings [of persons with disabilities],” he says. “It has been nothing but a positive experience. In Taylor’s case, he notes, she “worked full time, she was a community volunteer, she got married and bought a condo.”

But when he and Taylor spoke about the benefits of employment to families of people with Down syndrome, Hoffer says parents expressed surprise at Taylor’s success. Many said they had never considered employment for their child. [[5]](https://www.ontario.ca/#foot-5)

## The business case

Those who are familiar with the three-decade effort to integrate people with disabilities into the workplace have heard these arguments before. No one questions the business case. The truth is, however, that the statistics and case studies that demonstrate the significant contributions of employees with disabilities have been lost on the people who most need to hear them: Ontario's business leaders.

For this reason, we wish to state the case here. We hope this summary will enable and encourage government, media and business leaders to carry the message on, to employers in the private, public and non-profit sectors. People with a disability have much to contribute to any organization. They will make it more productive, more diverse, and more human. In an economy where everyone is looking for greater efficiencies, new ideas, and more inclusive, innovative cultures, people who have a disability can provide a competitive edge.

The People with Disabilities Advantage starts with a basic human fact: people who have a disability want to work. Many lived busy, productive lives, before accidents or health issues interrupted their careers. Others, struggling from childhood with physical- or mental-health challenges, aspire to live as normal lives as possible, making their own money and life decisions. Employment or running a business are platforms that enable people who have a disability to live independently, on their own terms.

This eagerness to work and prove themselves explains the overwhelmingly positive statistics associated with employment of people with disabilities:

* qualified: According to Statistics Canada, over 50% of Canadians with disabilities aged 25 to 62 have a post-secondary education
* on Time: 86% of persons with disabilities rate average or better on attendance.
* safe: 98% of persons who have a disability rate average or better in work safety than their colleagues without disabilities
* high-performing: 90% of persons with disabilities rate average or better on job performance compared with their colleagues without disabilities. In fact, 75% of Ontario small- and medium-sized enterprises who have employees with disabilities report that those employees meet or exceed their expectations
* dependable: Council member Jodi Butts is Executive Director of Rise Asset Development, a Toronto-based organization that provides loans and training to individuals with a history of mental health issues or addiction challenges. She says that Rise has now provided more than 150 loans, and its default rate is less than 7%
* loyal: Job turnover among people who have a disability is estimated to be 20% of the rate of other employees. Statistics Canada research indicates that, in organizations with accessible employment practices, employee retention was 72% higher among people with disabilities

Case in Point: Tim Hortons franchisee Mark Wafer, a member of the Partnership Council, has recruited more than 130 employees with disabilities since hiring Clint Sparling in 1996. He has seen for himself that people with disabilities have better attendance records than most employees, are almost never late, and stay in the job longer. In high-turnover industries such as Wafer's, that makes big savings in recruiting and training. And because of their extensive experience dealing with difficult situations, Wafer says employees who have a disability bring new ideas and approaches. "In bringing them into the workplace you're getting a more loyal employee," he says. "You're getting a person who will stay with you longer, you're getting a person who is more innovative, more productive and who will work in a safer way."

"Not only is hiring people with disabilities the right thing to do," says Wafer. "It can have a dramatic effect on a business's bottom line."

This is not wishful thinking. Many employers report that hiring employees who have a disability produces more diverse, empathetic and collaborative teams. Qualified individuals with disabilities bring diverse backgrounds and insights. They encourage environments where diversity of thinking is embraced and encouraged – giving Ontario businesses extra tools and resources to become more resilient and more competitive.

While these monetary benefits cannot be calculated, it is clear that welcoming more employees with disabilities does not make workplaces less safe, or more nervous – but more productive.

Hiring more people with disabilities can create what every business is looking for today: competitive advantage.

### The accommodation opportunity

The law requires employers to accommodate the needs of workers with disabilities. This knowledge sometimes discourages employers from hiring their first workers with disabilities, because they don't know what to expect. The evidence, however, is clear: accommodation costs are actually quite minimal.

According to the U.S.-based Job Accommodation Network, the vast majority of people who have a disability do not require special workplace accommodations. For those who do, an estimated two-thirds of all accommodations cost less than US$500. Examples of such accommodations might include specialized software, telephone amplifiers or headsets, adjustable-height desks, or keyboard armrests and finger guides. These are low-cost investments for gaining such prompt, present and loyal employees.

Some employers have specific concerns regarding employment of workers with episodic disabilities, which are characterized by unpredictable periods and degrees of wellness – and include such conditions as arthritis, HIV and some forms of mental illness. Even here, however, the problem is more of perception than reality. Preparation and accommodations (such as flexible work schedules, adaptive technologies, work-sharing, peer support, and an accommodation plan that includes processes for completing work during unscheduled absences) can keep most employees working productively for the long term.

In all cases, it's important to note that the most-requested accommodations are flexible scheduling and extra training, both of which involve minimal costs while creating ongoing value for employers – particularly given the higher retention rates associated with employees who have a disability.

### A talent pool is waiting – and willing

The people with disabilities advantage is even more marked when businesses face talent shortages – as many Ontario businesses currently do.

Despite unemployment rates that have stayed persistently high, Ontario employers are short of talent. As of the third quarter of 2015, Ontario had about 150,000 job vacancies. Out of all payroll jobs available (both occupied and vacant) Ontario had a job vacancy rate of 2.6%. This is not a one-time figure, but a fairly consistent and ongoing gap, demonstrating that Canadian employers cannot find all the help they need. Nor is this condition likely to change in the near future; Ontario job vacancies are expected to rise steadily through the next decade and beyond as the population ages and growth in the labour force continues to slow.

A 2014 survey by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that 60% of independent business owners had difficulty finding qualified employees over the previous year.

One Windsor employer recently summed up the paradox this way: "Our region has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada – but we can't even hire a sweeper."

As employers struggle with the growing talent shortage, Ontarians who have a disability represent a clear and present opportunity. This is a large, educated and willing workforce.

### Doing the right thing

As more employers come to understand both the value and necessity of hiring people with disabilities, many may find it boosts their reputation – and possibly even their market share. In a 2008 COMPAS Research poll, 78% of Canadians said they were more likely to buy a product or service from a business that has a policy of hiring people with disabilities than from a business that doesn't. As this issue becomes more prominent, it seems fair to assume that this support will only grow.

In addition, a 2000 study by the Royal Bank of Canada estimated that Canadians with disabilities had spending power of about $25 billion annually. Adjusted for inflation (although not for the growth in the number of Canadians with disabilities), that's currently $34 billion a year that is likely to flow more freely to businesses that demonstrate their genuine commitment to equity and inclusion.

### The potential payoff

Despite the very positive business case, people with a disability still have a hard time finding jobs. Statistics Canada's 2012 Canadian Survey on Disabilities established that the unemployment rate of Ontarians with disabilities in 2011 was 16%, compared with 7.6% for those who did not report disabilities. As previously cited, the participation rate of Ontario adults with disabilities in the workforce is 46%, just two-thirds of the 69% participation rate for Ontarians without disabilities. Much of this gap is rooted in the fact that 20% of people with disabilities said they had failed in past attempts to find work, and thus felt discouraged to further seek employment.

Former Lieutenant Governor David Onley has described this state of affairs as "a perpetual depression" for people with disabilities.

The size of the potential labour pool of Ontarians who have a disability can be roughly estimated. According to Statistics Canada, there were 73,410 unemployed Ontarians with disabilities in the labour force in 2011, and 999,850 Ontarians with disabilities over the age of 15 who were not in the labour force. We have found no estimates of the number of Ontarians with disabilities who are not currently in the labour force but would like to work. But consider the U.S. research finding that 80% of working-age Americans with disabilities who don't have jobs would like to work. If just 10% of the discouraged Ontarian adults with disabilities are actually willing to work, that would add 100,000 new people to Ontario's workforce. Along with those currently unemployed, that totals 173,000 Ontarians willing to work hard and prove themselves.

"It's just good strategy to do this (recruiting employees with disabilities). In the end, you're going to grow your business, you're going to grow your market share and you're going to end up in the leading place in the market." Paul Clark, Executive Vice President, Specialized Commercial Banking and Lead, Persons with Disabilities Committee, TD Bank

### What's holding business back

If the business case for hiring people with disabilities is clear, the sad truth is that logic is not enough. Some 70% of Canadian small business owners say they have never hired a person who has a disability.

Culture change is hard, and employers understand that hiring people with disabilities will require changes to their approaches and processes. And as mentioned earlier, employers remain concerned about such issues as liability, safety, employee performance and corporate culture. Members of the Partnership Council generally agreed that the No. 1 "myth" discouraging employees from hiring people who have a disability is the unfounded fear that "human rights" laws won't let them fire the employee if he or she fails to perform to an agreed-upon level. The members agree that companies that deal fairly with their employees will rarely have a problem. "I've hired people with disabilities and I've fired people with disabilities," says Council member Steve Sharpe, a retailer in Campbellford, Ont. "It doesn't always work." But he says he has never faced any legal or human-rights challenges for any of these decisions.

Finally, even employers who are willing to recruit workers who have a disability don't usually know where to look, or how to get started. They need an advisor, a coach or an experienced mentor to help them hrough the process.

Joe Dale, Executive Director of the Ontario Disability Employment network and a member of the Partnership Council, has worked with innumerable employers and business groups. He characterizes their sluggishness this way: "Businesses generally seem to feel there is some mystery or magic to hiring people with disabilities, and want professional help/expertise to show them how to find, on-board and retain employees who have a disability."

If there was ever a role for government, this is it: to understand employers' fears and misgivings, bridge the knowledge gap, and find ways to encourage them to take those first steps in recruiting employees with disabilities. The following section demonstrates why the Council believes this role is appropriate and affordable for the Ontario Government.

## Bridging the gap - why government investment will pay for itself

"This persistent unemployment gap of people with disabilities needs to be addressed... It costs government and taxpayers' money unnecessarily, and it robs Canadian businesses and our economy of the vital contribution persons with disabilities are ready and able to make." [*Sonya Kunkel, Director of Diversity and Inclusion at Bank of Montreal, in BMO Survey (2012)*](https://newsroom.bmo.com/press-releases/bmo-study-canadians-believe-people-with-disabilit-tsx-bmo-201210110825216001).

Expanding the role of Ontarians with disabilities in the workforce benefits employers and workers alike. But it also generates significant benefits for government.

The Ontario government currently spends more than $4 billion a year on ODSP income-support payments. And the program's caseload continues to grow steadily, with 337,583 cases in February 2016, up 2.7% from February 2015 and up 6.3% over February 2014. By increasing the employment rate of Ontarians who have a disability, the province will gain significant savings.

A simple calculation demonstrates the impact of engaging people with disabilities in the workforce and removing them from the ODSP rolls. Were 5,000 people (less than 1.5% of the current cases) who now receive the basic monthly ODSP benefit of $1,128 for basic needs and shelter to become employed full-time at a moderate wage of $17 per hour, Ontario would save $69,500,000 in benefit payments, and bring in an additional $5,300,000 in taxes. That's a net annual return of $74,800,000.

This calculation does not include the benefits to the employer organizations accrued by filling jobs that might otherwise have languished vacant –a significant cost to Ontario firms. In 2013, [the Conference Board of Canada estimated that this "skills gap"](http://www.collegesontario.org/Need_to_Make_Skills_Work_Report_June_2013.pdf) costs the Ontario economy up to $24.3 billion in forgone GDP and $3.7 billion in provincial tax revenues annually.

The economic benefits of engaging more people with disabilities in the workforce produces a win-win-win scenario which cannot be contested. Individuals with disabilities win through gaining disposable income and improving their quality of life when they engage in the workforce and regain independence and dignity. Employers gain by filling vacant jobs with qualified, conscientious and loyal new employees. And governments gain on all sides of the transaction, by reducing social-benefit outflows, generating tax revenue and stimulating the economy.

In this way, the Council believes money spent by government to enable and promote the hiring of Ontarians with disabilities will create immediate returns, and prove to be wise and productive investments of public funds.

### The U.S. experience

It should be noted that even in the highly polarized political culture of the United States, employing people with disabilities is an issue both Democrats and Republicans can support. When Delaware's Democratic Governor, Jack Markell, was elected Chair of the National Governor's Association (NGA) in 2012, he focused the organization's annual research project on employment initiatives for people with disabilities. "This is the ultimate bipartisan issue," he later explained. By focusing states' efforts on educating employers and creating business-government partnerships focusing on finding employers qualified new recruits, he identified an issue and an approach that both Republican and Democratic governors could agree on.

The NGA's 2013 report, A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities, concluded with this advice to Markell's fellow governors: "Focus on the ability—not the disability—and focus on the bottom line to business, government, and individuals."

One final note: Never underestimate the importance of a single individual. Gov. Markell says he first identified with this issue when he toured a Delaware factory more than a decade ago. There he met a 25-year-old with Down syndrome who was developing promotional materials. "He was extraordinarily excited to have this job, and he told me how excited he was," says Gov. Markell.

"I asked him what he had done before he got this job, and he told me that he had sat at home for six years watching TV with his parents. A light bulb went off in my head about the profound improvement in his quality of life and the quality of life of his parents, since he had, every morning, a reason to wake up... [[6]](https://www.ontario.ca/#foot-6)

"I've always thought about that guy, and when I found out I had the opportunity to serve as chair of the NGA, I thought this was an issue where we could move the needle. I thought it was an issue which could be totally bipartisan, and it was an area where there was a significant need." [[7]](https://www.ontario.ca/#foot-7)

## Call to action

As this report has outlined, there is a clear case – in business, economic and personal terms – for aggressively helping more Ontarians with disabilities transition to employment or self-employment. Government must do more. And it can do more, because of the uniquely favorable economics of promoting the employment of people with disabilities.

The Council strongly believes that, currently, government is failing people with disabilities.

It's not just wary employers that are holding back workers with disabilities. Many government initiatives and programs are problematic as well. The Ontario Disability Support Program, cornerstone of the provincial income support for people with disabilities, can act as a disincentive to work, "clawing back" from its clients half of all employment income earned above $200 a month. Government employment efforts also tend to focus more on supply (finding jobs, any jobs, for persons with disabilities), rather than demand: preparing jobseekers to fill a need in the labour force.

The Lankin Report ("Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario, 2012") urged the province to repair a social services system that through its bureaucratic complexity fails to meet the needs of many recipients, trapping them in a system that makes finding meaningful employment increasingly unlikely. This is especially true for recipients with disabilities.

A study conducted by Deloitte and Social Capital Partners ([Working Together: Implementing a demand-led employment and training system](http://socialcapitalpartners.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/14-2037T-POV_Demand-led-employment-training_online.pdf)) identified an employment-training system with network providers focused on gaining funding to support job seekers with limited ability or incentive to actively engage with employers. This system is focused on the supply side (the people seeking jobs) rather than the demand side: the types of skills needed by employers. The result is an employment supply chain best described as designed for only limited success.

The requirements of the AODA, which is designed to make Ontario accessible to everyone by 2025, are complex and poorly understood by many employers, particularly small enterprises. Enforcing compliance has been an uphill battle. By December 2014, a shocking 62% of companies in Ontario had failed to file a compliance report. Yet, accessibility is fundamental to harnessing both the talents and spending power of people with disabilities.

Clearly, our support programs for people who have a disability – and our assumptions about how best to help them – need a reset. These policies and systems stem from different ways of thinking at different times. The task now is to summon the political will and create a new platform to align all these approaches to create greater equity and efficiency.

Fixing this system will require bold new approaches, from employers and government alike.

While there is no single solution to improving employment for those with disabilities, there is a clear need for a more balanced approach. The Council agrees that this more balanced approach should include:

* greater emphasis on the demand side, engaging employers more directly, with government-supported programs and agencies treating jobseekers and employers as equally important customers
* remodelling social assistance to encourage sustained employment
* government and employers partnering on investments in training and career development for those with disabilities, based on current and future job needs
* bringing together stakeholders in communities across Ontario to address the misalignment of supply and demand, and enhancing responsiveness to local employer needs and the diversity of local labour markets, and
* piloting and testing opportunities to better align the capabilities of people with disabilities to future labour-market needs

The following recommendations will help Ontario transition to this better-balanced future.

## Major recommendations

### Create strong political leadership

Concerted government action to ensure equitable treatment for people with disabilities seeking employment has been a long time coming. Awareness of the need for action in Canada is thought to have begun with the United Nations' declaration of the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981, which continued into the Decade of Disabled Persons from 1983 to 1992. Since then, scores of standing committees, special committees, sub-committees, studies, reports, task forces and pilot projects have tackled these issues, gradually advancing the accessibility agenda, but never really making much impact on the workforce.

A few milestones stand out. The Employment Equity Act (1986) (EEA) designated four groups for "employment equity" protection: women, visible minorities, Aboriginal people and people with disabilities. However, the federal act was limited to companies under federal jurisdiction, such as banks, railways and airlines. Unlike the Charter of Rights and Freedoms or the Canadian Human Rights Act, which merely prohibit discrimination, the EEA required employers to engage in proactive measures to improve the employment opportunities of the four protected groups. However, the EEA has also been criticized for a lack of strict penalties or enforcement.

Nearly 20 years later, in June 2005, The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) became law in Ontario. The AODA applies to government, non-profits, and businesses across Ontario that have one or more employees. Because of the AODA generous timelines, it is only in recent years that employers have had to address most of the accessibility issues and barriers in their operations. For instance, businesses with 50 employees or more were required to comply with the new employment standard by January 1, 2016, while smaller businesses have until January 1, 2017. Still, while the AODA addresses accessibility, accommodation, performance management and career development, it does not specifically encourage or require employers to hire people who have a disability.

This long history of supporting the employment of persons with disabilities – but not advancing it – must end. The Partnership Council recognizes there are many barriers to employment of people with disabilities, including:

* employers' fears and misconceptions about the abilities of employees with disabilities, and their perceived needs for costly accommodation and special treatment
* the general distaste for "quotas"
* our heritage of excluding people with a disability from workplaces (and society in general), and the infrastructure of well-meaning policies and facilities that underlie this heritage
* the plethora of jurisdictions and ministries that share responsibility for the health, education, support and employment of people with disabilities

During the Council's short mandate, for instance, we have discussed issues with representatives of the Ontario ministries of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure; Training, Colleges and Universities; Children and Youth Services; and Community and Social Services. Each of these ministries, as well as their many programs and policies, has its own approach to serving people with disabilities, and its own objectives – many of which do not involve encouraging inclusion and employment.

The Council has heard time and again – from support agencies, employers, people with disabilities, and even from Ontario Government social-services providers – that there are too many disconnected programs and funding sources, too much duplication and redundancy, and too many conflicting rules, structures and objectives.

Policies for people who have a disability span all ministries and require relentless support. We need strong leadership now.

For this reason, the Council urges that the Government of Ontario, as soon as possible, assign a Senior Minister with 'People with disabilities' in their title to provide leadership at the political level. Ideally, this individual would be a senior Minister with the experience to bring diverse ministries, programs and people together and create consensus around a process of systemic cultural change.

We further recommend that this individual act promptly to initiate a broad Federal/Provincial/Territorial forum to discuss alignment of policies related to Canadians with disabilities across different levels of government.

Ontario must lead in the evolution of a truly inclusive culture.

The Council notes that this recommendation is not without precedent. The Ontario Government has strong senior leadership for many communities. Women, seniors, Francophones, Aboriginals and children and youth all have dedicated Cabinet Ministers. Yet 1.9 million Ontarians with disabilities do not have direct representation.

Further, this message has been sent before. In his [2010 Report of the Independent Review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](https://www.ontario.ca/page/charting-path-forward-report-independent-review-accessibility-ontarians-disabilities-act), Charles Beer recommended designating a Minister Responsible for Accessibility, and appointing a deputy minister to support this portfolio. Mayo Moran's [2014 Legislative Review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](https://www.ontario.ca/document/legislative-review-accessibility-ontarians-disabilities-act) shared Beer's call for a single minister responsible for accessibility, noting that:

"Strong central leadership is critical for a variety of reasons. It would drive accessibility across the range of government programs, services, facilities and workplaces. It would sustain and facilitate initiatives involving different ministries like joint inspections and joint analysis of where new standards are necessary. Similarly, a central commitment and focus on accessibility should also lead to greater linkages to capital and other spending decisions to ensure accessibility objectives are addressed, as well as to the review of proposed policies and legislation through an accessibility lens."

The Partnership Council supports these recommendations, while observing that employment is a key component of accessibility, as well as an essential outcome of the government's commitment to make Ontario fully accessible to persons with a disability by 2025.

To assist the Minister in repositioning the government's approach to serving people with disabilities, a dedicated Deputy Minister should be named to oversee policies and priorities for people with disabilities, and optimize the total current spending (greater than $11 billion annually) across multiple ministries.

Authority within this role needs to cross all ministry and branch jurisdictions. It must prioritize employment and make specific recommendations that set funding and policy directions and guidelines that support this priority. Government funding of services for people with disabilities must move away from older, segregated day programs, such as sheltered workshops that build lifelong dependency, in favour of employment-related services and supports.

As the Council pointed out previously, this type of leadership would ensure that the needs of Ontarians with disabilities are prioritized, rather than neglected. In April 2015 the government announced a $55-million youth apprenticeship program without taking the opportunity to specifically highlight how youth with disabilities could be included.

The Council encourages this strategic leadership to put the following timely actions on their agenda:

* through consultations with stakeholders, including employers, advocacy organizations and persons with disabilities, develop a strategic plan for people with disabilities to be actively engaged in the workforce and in society. This plan would be composed of progressive policies that become enshrined in legislation as appropriate. The primary strategic focus should be on children and youth to better prepare the next generation, and ensure effective inclusion from a young age
* align the existing policy conflicts between and within ministries (e.g., various marginalized groups compete against each other based on who funds what), ensuring they support execution of the strategic plan
* collaboration to align over time the many areas of policy conflict between federal and provincial interests (e.g., wage subsidies, accessibility and inclusion)
* partner with corporate leaders to champion the hiring of candidates with disabilities.
* Ensure a strong understanding within government of the opportunities, challenges and barriers facing people with disabilities
* work with municipalities, employment-service providers and other key stakeholders to develop provincial standards and best practices for providing employment services, particularly for those with disabilities who are in receipt of ODSP income support
* in consultation, develop a strategy to engage the broader public sector to adopt a proactive approach to hiring people with disabilities and ensure policies and procedures align with provincial initiatives designed to promote cultural change

Due to the favourable economics of engaging more Ontarians with disabilities in the workforce (see "Bridging the Gap: Why government investment will pay for itself", page 19), the Partnership Council is confident that the costs of these reforms will be more than offset by eliminating overlapping government policies and programs, and reducing the growth in social-assistance benefits.

The Partnership Council understands the political and bureaucratic arguments against creating such a position. We note with encouragement that the federal Liberal government under the leadership of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has overcome such concerns and appointed Carla Qualtrough as federal Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities.

Given the greater engagement of provincial governments in health and social-service issues, we understand that there may be more difficulty making such an appointment at the Ontario level. But after 30 years of slow progress on this file, the Council believes strongly that Ontario must employ strong political leadership to align the various players, focus on better outcomes for Ontarians with disabilities, and demonstrate its commitment to, and faith in, this long-frustrated community of 1.9 million people.

If this recommendation does not seem implementable on a timely basis, the Council suggests an alternative proposal on an interim basis.

As an alternative to a senior Minister, we recommend the government appoint a junior Minister on an interim basis, or a Parliamentary Assistant, with responsibility for Ontarians with disabilities. This individual could begin the change process and build support for reform.

The Council also suggests that the junior Minister or Parliamentary Assistant be assisted by the appointment of a People with Disabilities Officer, with accountability for conducting a review of legislation, regulations, policy and priorities across government to align and remove conflicting policies that create barriers to employment for Ontarians who have a disability. This role would also review the myriad of agencies and funds-transfer recipients that provide services to people with disabilities, to align objectives and ensure consistent employment- and employer-oriented services.

Ultimately, however, our intention is that a full senior Minister and Deputy Minister would assume these duties over time, and see this transition and culture change through to sustainable success.

### Engage employers to effect cultural change, through an integrated marketing campaign heightening awareness of the value of employing, retaining and promoting people with disabilities.

Despite the clear and oft-cited advantages of employing people with disabilities, many employers have been slow to "get" this message. The Council believes the Ontario Government should plan and launch an ambitious, sustained marketing campaign aimed primarily at small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with the following objectives:

* inform employers of the many benefits of hiring employees who have a disability
* put to rest the most common myths and misconceptions about the risks or drawbacks of hiring people who have a disability
* encourage face-to-face interaction with local champions of recruiting people with disabilitie
* lay out an easy path for employers to connect with jobseekers with disabilities, or with specialized employment agencies that can assist them
* track impact where possible to measure results and continually optimize marketing strategy

Given the positive return on investment associated with increased employment of people with disabilities (reduced dependence on social assistance; value to employers; economic growth and increased income taxes), the Council is confident that a sustained marketing campaign will more than pay for itself. The more resources invested in such a program, the more benefits are likely to accrue.

Although this recommendation speaks of "business leadership," it should be noted that employers in other organizations, such as the public sector, not-for-profits, health-care and cultural organizations, should also be among the broader targets of this campaign.

#### Why 'culture change'

According to Statistics Canada, small businesses (firms with one to 99 employees) account for more than 98% of all businesses in Canada, and created 77.7% of all private jobs from 2002 to 2012. As the saying goes, small business is big business: Together, small firms and medium-sized businesses (100-499 employees) generate about 53% of private-sector GDP.

The Council recommends that the Government's marketing campaign supporting the employment of people with disabilities focus on these small and medium-sized employers. Most larger businesses have already heard the story of the advantages of inclusiveness, and have sophisticated human-resources leaders who understand specialty employment markets. So we urge government to focus on SMEs – especially since 70% of Canadian small business owners say they have never hired someone with a disability. The Council believes this target market provides the greatest opportunity for attitudinal change and economic growth.

However, we are also aware of the difficulties of reaching this market. SMEs are a diverse group, resolutely self-reliant and often elusive. But the experience of Council members in this sector convinces us that these employers can be reached. They are actively looking for ways to solve business problems, and tend to be highly influenced by success stories from their peers –especially from their neighbours in the local business community. As one advisor to the Council told us, "It's not government that is going to reach business – it will be engaged leadership in the private sector."

#### Tactical recommendations

For the above reasons, the Council recommends that an integrated marketing program supporting the hiring of Ontarians with disabilities include the following components:

Active and ongoing support for direct outreach to employers through live events and seminars promoting the business case for hiring people who have a disability. Ontario has produced a number of tireless advocates for this cause. We call on the government to develop and train more advocates to increase the number and impact of these informational seminars. For maximum effectiveness, these seminars should take place all over the province, generally leveraging existing business associations and community events (e.g., local chambers of commerce, business improvement areas, Rotary clubs and industry associations, and local trade shows and job fairs). The local angle is essential. Council members' experience is that programs such as these are most effective when they include three elements:

* a charismatic, credible, voice, representing business, advocating for the hiring of people with disabilities
* a local "champion," an employer within the home community who has his or her own success stories regarding employees with disabilities
* trained local experts, such as social-service providers and not-for-profit employment agencies, who build on the momentum by connecting immediately with employers and assisting with "next steps"

Council member Mark Wafer cites numerous examples of successful community "road shows", including the "Rotary at Work" initiative that created 1,000 jobs for people with disabilities over five years, and even garnered an invitation to present at the 2014 Rotary International Convention in Sydney, Australia. He also cites events where he and other speakers had lineups of business people waiting 45 minutes afterward to speak to them. "The road-show model is a success," says Wafer. "The challenge is how to scale this so that many employers are involved."

* Development of specific information products (e.g. research reports and pamphlets, distributed both in print and digitally) targeting SME employers. The Council was supportive of using an ongoing publication of the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, the annual "Leading Growth Firms" report, to explicitly communicate the advantages of hiring people with disabilities, along with specific case studies and empowering information on how to get started. The content compiled for this report could be repurposed at low cost to provide shorter bursts of information on specific aspects of the issue, such as the business case, individual success stories, best practices and lists of resources.
* These efforts should be supported by an integrated advertising/promotion campaign using a variety of media: mainstream print, radio, television (including TV Ontario), digital, and social media. The Council recommends a bold, creative approach, noting the success of specific social-change campaigns such as [ongoing efforts against "drinking and driving"](http://www.marketingmag.ca/brands/canadas-anti-drunk-driving-ads-strike-effective-balance-study-10016), and the recent Ontario Government campaign, "#WhoWillYouHelp," [urging viewers to take action against incidents of sexual harassment and violence](http://www.marketingmag.ca/brands/the-list-ontario-government-163455).

The Council notes the opportunity to leverage print and conventional broadcast media by creating an ongoing content archive using digital media. This could include ongoing campaigns through Twitter and Facebook, backed by authoritative and easily accessible information through a customized web-based "mini-site," or dedicated pages on LinkedIn or other professional sites.

While we believe nothing can drive employers to action more than hearing directly from credible business peers, the Council also believes that the issue of recruiting people with disabilities lends itself particularly well to video. Videos bring the issue to life by giving people who have a disability faces and voices. Video gives viewers a rare opportunity to judge people not by their disabilities, but by their abilities, their intelligence and their "heart." Short, well-produced videos focusing on the workforce success of Ontarians with disabilities could be a major factor in raising awareness of this group's capabilities, and the importance of including them in the workplace. The Council notes that many such videos already exist, through websites such as the Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy. The Council urges the Minister to partner with other organizations to develop an inventory of inspiring and eye-opening video content that could be shared among partner organizations and distributed widely through YouTube and other social platforms.

The Council also recommends that the government make use of panels or focus groups of business leaders and experienced employers of people with disabilities when planning awareness campaigns and ads. This would ensure that the content resonates with the target market and reflects the needs and sensitivities of Ontarians with disabilities.

In general, we also urge the government to partner with or continue to support the work of effective like-minded organizations, such as Canadian Business SenseAbility, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, HRCouncil.ca, and others. There are many effective players in this sector, and the government should strive to complement their efforts rather than duplicate them.

#### Linking employers and people with disabilities

In an ideal world, employers would immediately see the value of hiring people with disabilities. And it could be argued that these changes are being legislated anyway, through the gradual introduction of Employment Standard policies, Customer Service Standards, and Information and Communication Standards under the AODA. In the real world, these are complex issues for which few small and medium-sized employers are prepared. They need help understanding the issues, and assistance moving forward step by step. Sarnia is considered one of Ontario's most progressive cities when it comes to promotion of hiring employees with disabilities. The Council met with Bob Vansickle, Manager of Employment Services at Community Living Sarnia-Lambton. We were impressed by his experience and passion in explaining why he believes government must actively invest in "funding the demand side": helping employers learn why and how to hire people with disabilities.

* Employers need assistance finding good candidates, managing orientation and on-the-job training, and handling workplace accommodation needs
* Employers need help "trouble-shooting" when problems arise
* Subsidies to help employers do the above are not sufficient; most employers don't have the capacity or expertise
* To promote to local business about benefits of hiring [[8]](https://www.ontario.ca/#foot-8)

The Council was disappointed, although not surprised, to see that Community Living Sarnia-Lambton finances programs such as these through a changing and precarious "patchwork" of federal and provincial employment and social-services funding. This essential work should not be "patchwork".

To help employers better understand, hire and support employees with disabilities, the Council recommends the following tactics:

##### Recognize the importance of helping business engage with job candidates with disabilities

The Ontario Government should work with the federal government and other appropriate agencies to develop and fund specific programs to help employers manage the processes of engaging, onboarding and ongoing support (and career advancement) of employees who have a disability. Also included in these programs should be resources to support pre-employment preparation for job-seekers with disabilities.

##### Become more business-friendly

We recommend the Ontario Government develop more "business-friendly" ways to interact with employers and encourage them to build more inclusive workforces. For instance, the government could make it easier for small business to comply with the province's accessibility requirements by improving communications tools and empowering small-business organizations to provide more support where needed.

##### Support mentorships

Research indicates that one of the most effective ways to overcome the "stigma" often associated with mental-health issues is to enable decision-makers to spend time with a person with a history of mental-health challenges. Stereotypes are most effectively broken down by personal experience. Accordingly, the Council recommends that the government investigate supporting mentorship programs in which business leaders with experience employing people with disabilities would work with employers who have no experience in this issue. These mentor relationships might also include participation by a person who has a disability, or by representatives of employment agencies that serve people with disabilities. The aim would be to help employers better understand the process of recruiting, accommodating and managing a more diverse workforce.

##### Provide additional support for entrepreneurs with disabilities

While the mandate of the Council is to deal with "employment," we reiterate the importance of promoting self-employment for Ontarians with disabilities. In meeting with public-sector service providers supporting the entrepreneurial community, the Council learned that providing such services to people with disabilities can produce very positive results, but often takes longer and requires more one-on-one effort than working with members of the general population. Accordingly, the Council recommends that the province develop and fund specific self-employment programs for entrepreneurs with disabilities, to reflect the specific difficulties they may face or additional resources they may need. The Council also notes that the province has an opportunity to deliver these services through its network of Small Business Enterprise Centres, although some additional training may be required for employees who have not previously served people who have a disability.

Council members have decades of experience working with employees and people with disabilities. We understand employers' questions and concerns, and believe that education and peer modelling are key to creating more inclusive workplaces. While many business leaders understand this opportunity, the Council still believes aggressive government intervention is required to get the message across. Behaviour change takes time and effort. Everyone knows the advantages of wearing seatbelts or flossing their teeth, but healthy behaviours don't happen overnight. The Council believes that an integrated, multi-year campaign supporting employment of people with disabilities can result in permanent culture change – and more inclusive, productive workplaces.

## Other recommendations

### Government must lead

To credibly champion the hiring of employees with disabilities, the Government of Ontario must lead by example. It must become a model employer of Ontarians with disabilities. The government needs to lead by example through engagement of people with disabilities throughout the Ontario Public Service and the broader public sector (agencies, hospitals, etc.).

As Mayo Moran suggested in her 2014 review of the AODA, accessibility should "become part of the Government's DNA." And with accessibility, of course, comes equal commitment to employment.

As well, government must be more purposeful in using its influence to encourage businesses and other organizations to adopt more inclusive employment policies. When the government procures services, provides grants or supports business financing, it must show a positive preference to organizations that support employment of people with disabilities.

The Council recommends the following:

* ensure representation of people with disabilities within its own workforce. At a minimum, the percentage of the Ontario Public Service who have disabilities should be the same as the percentage of people with a disability within the working-age population of the province
* give priority R&D funding to the development of innovative technologies, tools and services to support people with disabilities in the workplace and daily living
* require vendors of record with the Ontario Government and private-sector grant recipients be AODA-compliant and demonstrative employers of people with disabilities
* ensure that employment-related announcements specifically reference people with disabilities
* challenge municipalities, regions and all provincially regulated agencies across the province to develop policies and procedures which achieve measurable outcomes resulting in greater opportunities for employment of Ontarians with disabilities

### Eliminate policy barriers

The Partnership Council's focus is on creating employment for Ontarians with disabilities. However, the experiences of employers indicate that there are significant barriers to employment inadvertently created by government policies. The most significant involve people supported through social assistance.

Above all, it is essential that government eliminate policies that discourage people with disabilities from seeking or accepting employment; what one Council member referred to as "perverse disincentives." People with disabilities who receive ODSP income-support payments are penalized if they work; put simply, for every $2 they make above $200 a month, their ODSP benefits are reduced by $1. This is a very real deterrent to many people accepting full-time employment. If cut off from ODSP, they can also lose other important benefits, such as subsidized access to mobility devices, hearing and visual aids, medical supplies and respiratory devices, or transportation allowances.

The Council recognizes that ODSP and other programs have been revised many times to reduce the disincentives to work. But much more can be done. Of particular concern is the occasionally abrupt nature of recipients' disqualification; one Council member knows of an ODSP recipient who has been cut off from support ODSP payments seven times over the past 12 months, due to issues around employment income. Overturning each of these decisions took significant time and effort, causing much frustration for the recipient's caregivers. It's little wonder that, according to a briefing to the Council by ODSP leaders, only 9% of the 335,599 ODSP "caseloads" participate in the labour market. The average recipients receive ODSP payments for 10 years. We were disappointed to learn that most recipients only go off the ODSP roll when they "age out" at 65 and no longer qualify for ODSP support.

Council members met with the ODSP delegation in March 2016 to discuss these issues. We were pleased to find they are still investigating better ways to serve their clients without perpetuating their dependence on social assistance. We were delighted to hear such statements as:

* "we're not here to defend the [ODSP] program or the policies. We know much more has to be done to improve the program"
* "we know the system is fraught with contradictions. ... Many policies run counter to attaching people to the labour market... We go through a whole process to get people [recipients] to prove they can't make it in the system – and then we ask them if they want to look for work!"
* "we have mostly been 'supply-side.' We know we have to spend more attention on the demand [employer] side. So we're not necessarily very effective"
* "we want to be a leader in a 'whole of government' approach"
* "there is no easy solution. Should there be an incentive to move off social assistance?"
* "we need to stimulate the demand side of the equation"
* "ODSP is only one piece of the puzzle"

To which one Council member replied, "The missing puzzle piece is employer support and engagement."

The Council believes the Ontario Government should be encouraging and aggressively supporting ongoing reforms of the ODSP program.

In response to their own similarly entangled social programs and agendas, more than 30 U.S. states have voluntarily defined themselves as "Employment First' jurisdictions. Based on a set of standards coordinated by the federal government, "Employment First" encompasses a consensus that government support programs and policies should be designed around the assumption that "employment" is the No. 1 preferred option for people with disabilities.

The Ontario Disability Employment Network believes Ontario needs a clear "Employment First" policy framework for people with disabilities. The Council agrees that such a direction would be useful in focusing policy reform and erasing current barriers.

The Council recommends the following:

* the Ministry of Community and Social Services continues to review ODSP with a view to reorient the program so it provides clear financial incentive to get – and keep – a job. The mantra should be that people with disabilities, like everyone else, are "Employable until proven otherwise"
* particular emphasis should be placed on youth employment. The program's funding of employment services should be reviewed and tied to how well it achieves the goal, focusing on job market needs and getting people with disabilities permanently into the workforce. Employment will help raise people out of poverty, reduce their dependency on social assistance and ensure they are contributing to the tax base
* do not pursue or allow sub-minimum wage permits for workers with disabilities under any circumstances
* help stimulate employment through a focus on supporting the sourcing of people with disabilities, accessibility in the workplace, and continued training and support of people with disabilities once in the workplace, rather than through direct wage subsidies

### Engage youth with disabilities

There is substantial research demonstrating that workforce success for people who have a disability is positively correlated with their engagement with employment at an early age. By supporting programs and policies that draw more youth with disabilities into the workforce, the government has a golden opportunity to enhance the employment of generations of people who have a disability.

Co-op programming in high school and post-secondary school presents an opportunity to expose more businesses to the potential of employees who have a disability. Students with disabilities should leverage co-op terms while in high school to gain needed work experience, as well as the "soft skills" that employers demand today. This early engagement with the labour market helps prepare students for permanent job placement, and helps employers appreciate the value created by these individuals, dispelling old myths and barriers to hiring job applicants with disabilities.

Where these programs can be implemented, they should not be optional. Fear or lack of understanding around these programs may encourage school boards or post-secondary institutions to opt out, but for culture change to succeed, these actions must be consistent across the board. The Council has heard that students with disabilities are often the last to be chosen for co-op placements – if they are chosen at all.

The Council concurs with the Canadian Association for Community Living's "Position Statement on Employment":

"Currently, youth with intellectual disabilities lack the education and training of their peers without disabilities, and are ill-prepared to transition from school to employment... Negative employer attitudes and misperceptions continue to be a challenge. A strategic initiative targeting youth with intellectual disabilities in transition could have transformative impact on the future employment status of working-age adults with intellectual disabilities."

All students with disabilities should be allowed equal opportunities for co-op placements. Finding employers to take on these co-ops may require additional effort, education and stronger engagement with business, at least in the first few years. Over time, however, businesses, educators and students will develop the experience and awareness that allows them to focus on individuals' abilities rather than any disabilities they might have.

One barrier to hiring young people who have a disability is their relative inexperience in the labour market. (According to Community Living, nearly 40% of working-age people with an intellectual disability have never worked.) Government can assist by doing more to connect youth with disabilities to employment opportunities, especially summer/part-time/after-school jobs. This initial job experience and resume-building activity is key to making individuals more attractive to employers. The government, non-profit and business sectors must partner to create these experience opportunities together.

Similarly, creating apprenticeship opportunities for individuals to gain specific skills will also help people with disabilities create strong job-entry résumés. Many companies currently offer mentoring and apprenticeship activities as a way to engage in the community or "give back". Expanding these programs will enhance young people's skills and go a long way toward breaking down perceived myths and barriers.

Any government activity in the education sector should be driven by thorough understanding of the demand side of the supply chain. This includes close consultation with the employment sector, knowing the skills employers are currently seeking, and understanding the emerging skill sets employers will need in future. All educational and training activities should be related to skills required for known and available jobs.

The Council recommends the following:

* development of enhanced strategies to ensure youth with disabilities gain labour-market attachment at an earlier age
* the Ministry of Education should ensure provincial school boards do not allow schools to opt out of co-op placements for students with disabilities. Internal co-ops within school should be discouraged
* employment should be a key focus in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) planning process
* put increased effort into helping youth with disabilities obtain summer and after-school jobs. Current restrictions that limit employment agencies from engaging in youth employment based on the notion of "school attachment" need to be lifted
* develop strategies through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to encourage businesses to increase work placement and co-op opportunities for students with disabilities. The strategy should be developed with the direct involvement of local businesses, and flexible enough to adapt to regional employment variations. It should also be promoted through business channels (chambers, business improvement areas, etc.)

### Proactively involve employers in planning

Employers know what skills they're going to need in the future. Government needs to engage employers and their associations across the province to identify future employment needs, and this should inform publicly funded education curriculums.

The Council recommends the following:

* engage employers and their associations directly in addressing the barriers and challenges they face in hiring people with disabilities
* designing transformational training services to ensure they are demand-driven, i.e., they train for the real jobs of the 21st Training should also include work environment socialization where needed
* foster the identification, development and means of sharing effective practices across employer networks

### Create an employment strategy for people with disabilities that aligns with the spirit and recommendations of this report

The Partnership Council was thrilled to see that the government's commitment to increasing the connection of people with disabilities to the labour markets formed a part of the February 2016 provincial budget.

In Section E, "Towards a Fair Society," it is noted that "As Ontario's economy grows, the government remains committed to leaving no one behind." As part of its larger effort to "reduce poverty and ensure inclusion in communities and the economy," the budget pledged to develop a new, made-in-Ontario employment strategy for people with disabilities. The strategy builds towards the objective of a fully-accessible Ontario by 2025.

According to the budget, the provincial employment strategy will:

* establish a cohesive made-in-Ontario vision with goals, priorities and desired outcomes to ensure Ontarians have access to a continuum of employment and training services
* provide a better service experience through streamlined access to employment and training services that recognize the varied needs and employment goals of individual clients, and
* engage employers as active partners in breaking down employment barriers for people with disabilities and promoting inclusive workplaces

The Council hopes that the observations and recommendations throughout this report will assist in the formation of this strategy. This report represents the distillation of hundreds of hours of discussion and collaboration involving leaders from disability communities, government, business, not-for-profits and social-service providers, all of them familiar with the needs of people with disabilities and eager to create more diverse, inclusive and vibrant workplaces.

Specifically, however, Council members wish to propose eight basic principles to those who will pick up this torch and create the employment strategy for Ontarians who have disabilities.

* Dedicated leadership is key. We repeat our contention that success will best come from the government appointing a dedicated senior minister and deputy minister of people with disability issues, to oversee the coordination of social service, health, education, youth and economic-development programs and policies into one overall strategy aimed at inclusion of ontarians with disabilities into the community and employment mainstream
* It is an unacceptable failure of human rights for people with disabilities to be so underrepresented in our ontario labour markets
* No one is without disability. As individuals, employers, government, and as a society, we must look deeper and treat people according to their abilities, not their disabilities
* Assume everyone is employable until proven otherwise. There are some observers who consider this a cold, harsh statement, condemning certain people to expending their energies in low-paying, unproductive jobs. We believe the opposite is true: that for most people, work is a social necessity, providing purpose, a place, companionship, monetary reward, the satisfaction of accomplishment, and the opportunity for economic independence. People of all ages, conditions and abilities want to work; for them, work is not a burden but an essential component of a well-balanced life. There may well be some people who are incapable of working, but that will be up to experts to determine, working one-on-one with persons with disabilities. It should not be the job of government, business, or social-assistance programs to deem anyone "unemployable;" everyone deserves a chance to learn for themselves what they can do, in businesses, organizations and communities that honour and accommodate diversity
* Work must be paid. Employees with disabilities can create tremendous value for their employers. No one should be expected to work for below-market wages. And just in case it goes without saying: no sheltered workshops. As the council's joe dale has noted, low-wage "workshops" are relics of a failed training program at a time when it was not understood that people who had a disability were capable of holding regular paid jobs
* Be wary of subsidies, quotas and other market-rebalancing mechanisms. People with disabilities are qualified, capable workers and deserve to win jobs of their own accord. Creating artificial incentives can undermine their self-respect or devalue them in the eyes of employers, and is strongly discouraged
* Invest in the demand side. Build strong linkages between employers, persons with disabilities, government agencies and social-service providers. Government should act boldly and swiftly to encourage employment of people with disabilities by eliminating the most common sources of friction: individuals' lack of experience in paid work and labour markets, and employers' misconceptions and fears regarding employment of people with disabilities. The council is confident that this nervous, prolonged transition period will not last forever. We expect ontario employers will quickly pick up on the benefits of hiring people who have a disability, and will soon be sharing the good news with all their peers. In the meantime, we are confident that funds invested in working with employers will produce a very positive return on investment
* Work closely with employers. Understand how they are motivated and driven to achieve financial results. Appreciate their concerns about risk and cultural changes. Understand what nudges and incentives they need to embrace new attitudes and processes. Don't leave them hanging once they hire a person with a disability; ensure that on-going support for accommodation changes or other needs are readily available. And never stop telling the inspiring stories of ontarians of all levels of abilities, and the amazing things they are capable of accomplishing

### Measuring impact

The stage is set for an economic revolution. Creating more inclusive workplaces will help employers overcome their frustrating talent shortages by accessing a willing and capable labour force, expand economic output, and improve quality of life for hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who have a disability.

The Council is thus pleased to provide guidance, as requested by the Minister, on meaningful and consistent metrics for calculating the current state of employment for Ontarians with a disability, and measuring the government's progress in promoting cultural change in the workplace.

Council members were themselves frustrated with the long timelines required to both understand the current data available on Canadians with disabilities, and conduct customized studies. We were unable to complete this work during our mandate. But we have, as requested, determined many of the right questions to ask.

To measure its success in expanding employment opportunities for Ontarians with disabilities, the Council recommends that the government begin tracking the following key performance indicators:

#### From Statistics Canada

1. What is the difference between the unemployment rate of people with disabilities compared to people without disabilities, both provincially and nationally?
2. How many people with disabilities receive social assistance while working, in comparison with those who do not (both provincially and nationally)?
3. How does the average employment income of working people with disabilities compare to that of working people without disabilities (both provincially and nationally)?
4. How does the level of educational attainment of people with disabilities compare to that of people without disabilities (both provincially and nationally)?
5. How many adults with disabilities are of working age, and how many are currently working, full-time and part-time (both provincially and nationally)? It is important to filter out those who are earning less than a competitive wage, e.g. in "sheltered" workplaces.
6. What is the number of people with disabilities who have no attachment to the labour force (both provincially and nationally)?

#### Ontario government metrics

1. How many Ontarians with disabilities are currently on ODSP? How many ODSP recipients are employed, and how many leave the ODSP program due to employment?
2. How many Ontarians with disabilities are in the Ontario Works program? How many Ontario Works recipients are employed, and how many leave the Ontario Works program due to employment?
3. Total annual amount spent by government and public agencies on persons with disabilities (includes social assistance, costs of health care, aids and accommodation, employment and social services, etc.).
4. How many members of the Ontario Public Service have self-declared as having a disability?

## Conclusion

"Accessibility is a journey we all share. "From the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, “Response to Recommendations from Mayo Moran's Review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act," June 3, 2015.

The Partnership Council thanks the Minister for the opportunity to take part in this important work. We are pleased that the Ontario Government has confirmed its commitment to creating more inclusive workplaces, and we hope that our report and recommendations will help the government move forward quickly on this file.

Expanding the role of Ontarians with disabilities in employment and entrepreneurship is important work. It can create positive outcomes for employers, government, and most significantly, persons with disabilities. There is no time to waste. Our work in this sector tells us that many other jurisdictions are progressing quickly with similar efforts to bring people with disabilities into the mainstream of economic and community life. Now is the time for Ontario to show committed leadership.

By aligning its own multiple programs for serving persons with disabilities under a single vision, while also encouraging culture change in business, the Government of Ontario will demonstrate vision and daring. Ontarians with disabilities deserve nothing less.

## Appendix: Council member biographies

**Bob Stark** (Chair) is an independent consultant and specializes in business strategy. Bob retired from the Ontario Public Service in 2012 as Deputy Minister and CEO of ServiceOntario. Prior to this, he worked in the private sector as an executive at Scotiabank and Rogers Communications. Bob joined the Ontario Public Service as CEO, ServiceOntario, where he led innovative changes through the centralization and modernization of fast and friendly government services, using integrated in-person, contact centres and online service channels. ServiceOntario has won a number of awards for its services and solutions and is internationally recognized as a leading, innovative public-service provider. At Scotiabank, Bob launched debit point-of-sale, telephone and internet banking, among many service innovations. At Rogers Communications, he managed the centralization and integration of contact centres, introducing telephone sales, bundled products and single billing statements. Bob is a leader dedicated to effective customer service and establishing workplace cultures that embrace people with disabilities.

**Barry McMahon** has a long history of advocating for the dignity and inclusion of people with disabilities. He has served as advisor on several municipal, provincial and federal government councils and committees. Barry's main priority has been focused on encouraging systemic change so that government services and public policies include the needs and aspirations of all citizens, including those with disabilities. His career experience has been in corporate communications. He has served as a senior contract manager with the federal government's Department of Public Works and Government Services for 10 years. Prior to that, he served as co-owner and executive producer of a business specializing in audio-visual production. He was extensively involved in the creation of the Ontario Disabilities Act, 2001, and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. Barry has served as a charter member of the Accessibility Advisory Council of Ontario (now the Accessibility Standards Advisory Council) and served as a member of the Accessible Built Environment Standards Development Committee. Barry is from Ottawa.

**Caroline Arcand** has a Bachelor of Arts from Université du Québec, Montréal, a Certificate in Communications from St. Paul University, a certificate in Human Resources Management and one in Business Administration from Universitė du Québec, Québec. Trained by Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger at Syracuse University, she is a proponent of social role valorization: enhancing the status of marginalized people in society. She is currently enrolled in the Masters in Community and Economic Development program at the University of Victoria. She is cofounder and Executive Director of Groupe Convex, a network of social enterprises. She has served as a director on the Eastern Ontario Training Board over the past 12 years. She was awarded Economic Development Woman of the Year in 2008, the 2011 Canadian Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award by the Trico Foundation, and the 2014 Excellence Award from Conseil de Cooperation de l'Ontario.

**Deanna Matzanke** is a strategic human resources professional and lawyer. Most recently, she acted as Director, Global Human Resources, at Scotiabank, where she was responsible for a wide range of employment strategies that included fostering and integrating the bank's global diversity and inclusion strategy and implementing the bank's global human resources policy and compliance framework. This framework addressed a large number of key areas such as privacy, occupational health and safety, human rights, flexible work, accommodation and accessibility. Deanna is an active committee member on the Workplace Action Team for Partners for Mental Health and the Episodic Disabilities Advisory Committee of the [Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation](http://www.hivandrehab.ca/EN/episodic_disabilities/documents/The-Business-Case-for-Actively-Recruiting-and-Retaining-People_with_Episodic_Disabiliti.pdf). She holds a BA (Honours) in Romance Languages from the University of Alberta, and common-law and civil-law degrees from McGill University. She is a recipient of the Nathan Cotler Human Rights Award. She is also a certified global professional in human resources through the Society for Human Resource Management, and a certified human capital strategist with the Human Capital Institute.

**Ian T. Howcroft** is the Vice President (Ontario Division) of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME). He is responsible for all aspects of the CME Ontario Division, including business development, membership and policy, and is chief advocate for the Ontario Division. He holds an Honours B.A. from McMaster University, and a law degree from the University of Western Ontario. He is a member of the Law Society of Upper Canada. Mr. Howcroft has also had the pleasure of sitting or serving on numerous boards, steering committees, organizations and other committees.

**Jodi Butts** is the Executive Director of Rise Asset Development, a charity that provides small business loans, training and mentorship to individuals with a history of mental health issues or addiction challenges. She holds a Master's degree in Canadian History and an LLB from the University of Toronto. She was called to the Bar in 2000, after which she helped to found a boutique litigation firm, Brannan Meiklejohn Butts, LLP. Her practice primarily focused on assisting clients with health conditions that impacted their relationships with disability insurance carriers, employers and/or healthcare providers. Jodi left private practice to join Mount Sinai Hospital, where she served for eight years in progressively more senior roles, her final being Senior Vice-President of Corporate Affairs and Operations. She is a member of the Board of Directors and serves as Chair of the Governance Committee of the Wellesley Institute, a research and policy institute established to advance urban health.

**Joe Dowdall** is the Vice President and Director of Training and Apprenticeship for Local 793 of the International Union of Operating Engineers. He has been a member of this union for 42 years and holds a certificate of qualification for Tower and Mobile cranes for the Province of Ontario. Joe also serves on the divisional board for construction at the Ontario College of Trades and has also served on many health and safety committees. He sustained a spinal cord injury in a construction accident in Toronto in 1987. After spending 14 months in rehabilitation, he decided to help raise money for spinal cord research and served as Co-Chair of the Barbara Turnbull Golf Tournament for 20 years, raising approximately $1.3 million for spinal cord research. Joe continues to volunteer at Spinal Cord Injury Ontario and served as a board director when it was called the Canadian Paraplegic Association of Ontario.

**Joseph Dale** has worked in the field of disability for over 35 years, spending much of that time addressing issues related to employment for people with disabilities. Currently, Joe is the Executive Director of the Ontario Disability Employment Network and the Network's Centre for Excellence in Employment Services. Previously Joe was the principle of Vision Consulting, providing leadership training and assistance to both businesses and employment agencies related to creating effective strategies to engage people who have a disability in the workforce. Joe is also the founder of the Rotary at Work initiative, which helps people with a disability find meaningful work. He was a member of Ontario's Lieutenant Governor's accessibility team, and participates on several provincial consultation teams with a focus on policy and disability. He is a recipient of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Award, the Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award, and Ablework's Advocacy for Inclusive Employment Award.

**Laura McKeen** is a litigation lawyer and a partner at Cohen Highley LLP in London, Ontario. Cohen Highley has been a leader in accessible employment for several decades, and was the recipient of the first Ontario Leader in Accessible Employment Award from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Laura practises in the area of administrative law, including condominium, residential tenancies, municipal, planning and zoning, and expropriations. Laura also serves as the firm's accessibility officer, and provides advice to businesses and organizations in Ontario about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Laura holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) and Juris Doctor from Queen's University. She also serves on a variety of committees and boards, including, the Board of Directors for Homes Unlimited (London) Inc. and a member of Community Living London's "Night of Heroes" Committee.

**Lisa Foster** is an innovative and committed leader in working with people who experience disabilities. She has worked with people who live with intellectual disabilities for over 25 years and currently serves as Executive Director of Community Living Thunder Bay. In this role, she is committed to promoting full inclusion for everyone, and she is a dedicated and enthusiastic community developer. She brings a strong commitment to helping people with intellectual disabilities have their voice and vision front and centre in conversations. She is also an active Council member of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Service Workers.

**Mark Wafer** is the owner of six Tim Hortons restaurants in Toronto. Over the past 21 years Mark has employed 130 people with disabilities in all aspects of the business including management, all in meaningful and competitively paid positions. Mark sees a clear business case for inclusion; today, 46 of his 225 employees have a disability. Mark is an internationally recognized speaker on inclusion, one of four members of the federal government's panel of marketplace opportunities for people with disabilities, co-author of the report [Rethinking Disability in the Private Sector](http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/disability/consultations/rethinking_disabilities.pdf), and a member of the Ontario Lieutenant Governor's accessibility team. He is a co-founder of Canada's national strategy for employing people with disabilities, which evolved into Canadian Business SenseAbility. Mark is an advisor to governments in Canada and internationally in the area of inclusion and accessibility.

**Shannon MacDonald** is a senior partner and Vice Chair with Deloitte Canada. Shannon has spent most of her career at Deloitte. With over 26 years of audit and consulting experience, she has been the lead client service partner or advisory partner serving Deloitte's most important clients in Canada. A diversity champion, Shannon was a founding member of Deloitte's diversity council. She is often honoured for her contributions to business and community leadership, and has twice been named one of Canada's 100 most powerful women by the Women's Executive Network. Shannon has established a reputation as a thought leader and popular speaker on topics ranging from productivity and governance to the financial implications of forecasted spending on provincial government programs and health care systems. Shannon's community and philanthropic efforts include serving with the Atlantic Board of Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. She is also the CEO's designate to the Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited board of directors.

**Steve Sharpe** is CEO of Sharpe Foods Limited, operating as Sharpe's Food Market in Campbellford, Ontario. He is a member of the Ontario Disability Employment Network's Champion's League. He is an inclusive employer with 90 employees who actively promotes the Rotary at Work program, making a business case for hiring people with disabilities, both in his community and in industry. He has served as president of the Campbellford's Chamber of Commerce, Business Improvement Association and Rotary Club. Steve is also a past chair of the Campbellford economic development committee, past director of the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers, and past chair of Distribution Canada Inc., a national buying group.

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## Related information

* [Related](https://www.ontario.ca/)

[Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities: Initial Report](https://www.ontario.ca/page/partnership-council-employment-opportunities-people-disabilities-initial-report)

[Ontario’s accessibility laws](https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-laws)

Ontario's [10-year Accessibility Action Plan](https://www.ontario.ca/business-and-economy/path-2025-ontarios-accessibility-action-plan)

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[Accessibility: Legislative reviews, committees and councils](https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-legislative-reviews-committees-and-councils)

## Footnotes

* footnote [1] [^](https://www.ontario.ca/#ref-1) [The Path to 2025: Ontario's Accessibility Action Plan](https://www.ontario.ca/page/path-2025-ontarios-accessibility-action-plan)
* footnote [2] [^](https://www.ontario.ca/#ref-2) [Working with employees with an episodic disability: information sheet for managers](http://www.hivandrehab.ca/wp-content/uploads/EpisodicDisabilitiesFactSheetFinalLeon.pdf)
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