



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

EXPLORING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**Report of the Standing Committee on
Human Resources, Skills and Social Development
and the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

**Ed Komarnicki
Chair**

JUNE 2013

41st PARLIAMENT, FIRST SESSION

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Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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41st PARLIAMENT, FIRST SESSION

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**THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS
WITH DISABILITIES**

has the honour to present its

TWELFTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the Committee has studied employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and has agreed to report the following:

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EXPLORING THE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

INTRODUCTION

On 31 January 2013, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (hereafter, the Committee) agreed on the following motion: “That the Committee [...] begin a new study titled: “Exploring Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities”; That this study focus on employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in Canada available through both existing and proposed resources offered by the private sector, as well as by federal, provincial and territorial governments; That the Committee begin this new study [...] with a briefing from departmental officials; and That at least eight meetings be scheduled for this study before the summer adjournment.”¹

This study follows the release early in 2013 of the report from the Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.² It found that there are 795,000 persons with disabilities, 340,000 of those with post-secondary education, whose disabilities do not prevent them from working but who are without employment.

This is a valuable talent pool that is waiting to be included fully into Canadian society and its labour force. Current skills and labour shortages in certain regions of Canada as well as the aging of the population present opportunities for persons with disabilities to find employment. Their integration into the labour market will also support Canada’s economic growth. According to a report prepared for the Council on Rehabilitation and Work, “[it] is estimated that persons with disabilities represent an estimated \$25 billion in spending power in Canada alone.”³

The Committee, as per the adopted motion for this study held eight meetings between 26 February 2013 and 25 April 2013, which included the testimony of organizations representing persons with disabilities, business representatives, service delivery and front-line staff, researchers and persons with disabilities, among others. The Committee also received a number of briefs that were all taken into consideration in the drafting of this report. Members of the Committee want to sincerely thank everyone

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- 1 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, *Minutes of Proceedings*, Meeting No. 63, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 31 January 2013.
 - 2 Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, [*Rethinking Disability in the Private Sector, Report from the Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*](#), 2013.
 - 3 Erin Hall, Liam McGuinty and Thomas Vogl, *Barriers Faced by Small and Medium Sized Enterprises when Hiring Persons with Disabilities*, A Report for the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work, School of Public Policy and Governance, University of Toronto, 19 April 2011, p. 1.

who contributed to this study. We heard your voices and hope that you will see your testimony reflected in this report.

The report includes a first chapter with a background presenting statistical data and definitions of disability followed by another chapter on barriers to employment raised by witnesses. The third chapter deals with measures to promote opportunities for employment of persons with disabilities at the federal level as well as initiatives taken by some employers who either wish to or have hired job seekers with disabilities. Chapter 4 examines the legal and policy framework within which those employment programs operate. Before we conclude this report, we present only a small sample of the inspirational testimony that members of the Committee had the privilege of hearing during this study. The conclusion highlights important testimonies and mentions the way forward to increase employment for persons with disabilities.

CHAPTER 1 — BACKGROUND

1. Situation

Today, in Canada, working-age adults with disabilities are less likely to attain higher levels of education and to be employed and are more likely to live on a lower income than Canadians without disabilities. Why? The reasons are complex and vary according to each individual but barriers to employment discussed in this report are certainly a major factor.

Accessibility to infrastructure is an overarching issue that impedes the liberty of movement of persons with disabilities. Accessibility, however, is much broader than physical access. Witnesses suggested that barriers to social, economic, cultural and political citizenship must be lifted for persons with disabilities to be fully included in all aspects of Canadian society. Persons with disabilities are a significant talent pool that is often being overlooked by too many employers. Just like other Canadians, they should have the opportunity to earn a living through paid employment at a fair wage.

2. Statistics

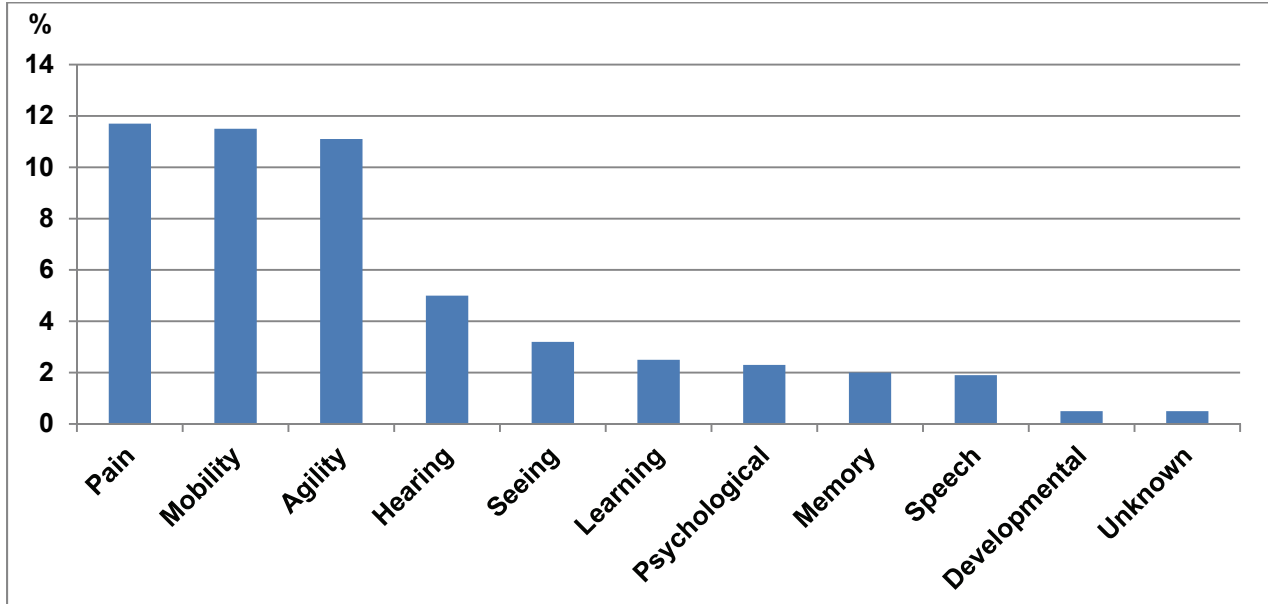
According to Statistics Canada's Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) conducted in 2001, about two million Canadians (aged 15 to 64) reported some form of a disability, which represented a disability rate of 10% of the total working-age population.⁴ According to the latest data taken from the 2006 PALS, about 2.5 million of working-age Canadians (aged 15 to 64) reported some form of activity limitation, representing a disability rate of 14.3% of the total population. As Canada's population is aging, we can expect the incidence of disability to continue to increase.⁵ Figure 1 shows the different

4 Statistics Canada, *Education, employment and income of adults with and without disabilities – Tables*, Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 2001, Catalogue no. 89-587-XIE, September 2003.

5 Statistics Canada, [Participation and Activity Limitation Survey 2006: Labour Force Experience of People with Disabilities in Canada](#), Analytical Paper, Catalogue no. 89-628-X no. 007, 2008.

types of limitations reported by adults with disabilities in 2006. Figure 2 presents the proportion of adults with disabilities by gender and age.

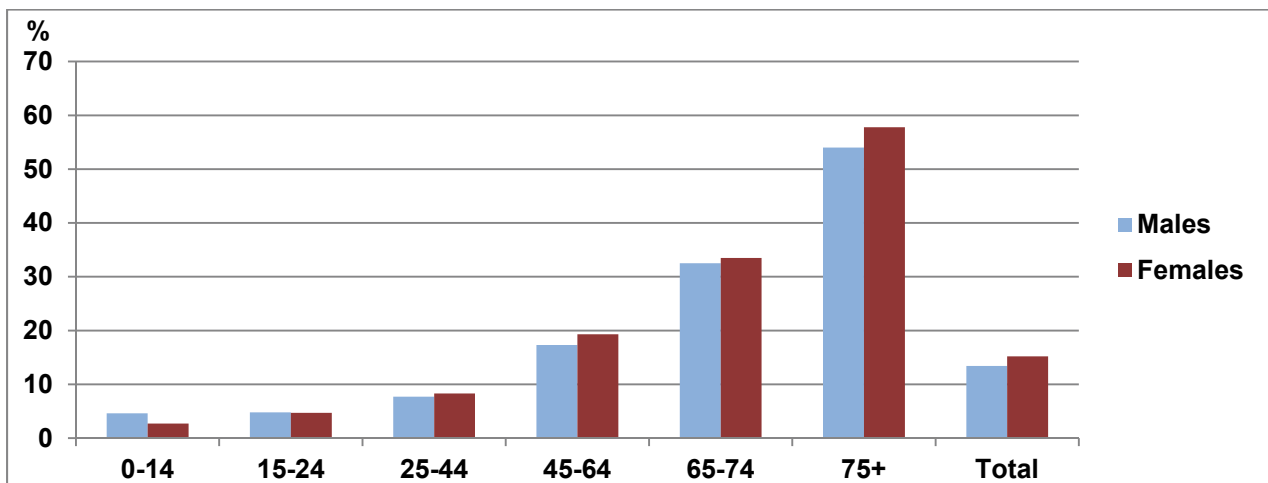
Figure 1 – Proportion of the Adult Population with a Disability, by Type, Canada, 2006, in %



Source: Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-628-XIE, no. 3.

Note: Total for Canada excludes Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon.

Figure 2 – Proportion of the Adult Population with a Disability, by Gender and Age, Canada, 2006, in %



Source: Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-628-XIE, no. 3.

Note: Total for Canada includes Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon.

The rate of disability is even higher among Aboriginal peoples. According to a 2007 federal disability report, it was estimated that about 30% of Aboriginal peoples may have a disability.⁶ It is clear that the disability rate among Aboriginal peoples is higher than that of the non-Aboriginal population and may be well above 30% today.

According to the 2001 PALS, 44% of persons with disabilities (aged 15 to 64) were employed compared to 78% of those without disabilities. In 2006, there were 51% who were employed compared to 75% of persons without disabilities. The employment rate varies considerably depending on the type of disability. For example, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) indicated that the 2006 PALS found that:

[...] approximately 450,000 Canadians between the ages of 15 and 64 were blind or partially sighted. The employment rate for this segment of the population is only 35% compared to 56% for people with disabilities. The low employment rate costs the Canadian government \$886 million annually in social transfer payments, forgone taxation revenue and lost productivity.⁷

According to research done by one witness, based on the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID), the employment rate of persons with disabilities has dropped following the recession.

Based on the most recent version I could get my hands on, which has data for 2010, the SLID shows that 47% or thereabouts of people with disabilities were employed full-time all year in 2010, compared with 67.2% of people without disabilities. The lag has consistently been at about three-quarters of the employment rate for people without disabilities.

While there have been some improvements over the last number of years for people with disabilities, in the very recent few years, coming out of the recession, there has actually been a fall-off in the employment rate of people with disabilities. So there is a struggle.⁸

Cameron Crawford
Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society

It is well documented that persons with disabilities are more likely to live in low-income households than persons without disabilities. There is also a wage disparity between women and men. According to an official representing Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC),

6 Human Resources and Social Development Canada, *Advancing the Inclusion of People with Disabilities 2007*, Federal Disability Report, 2007, p. 85.

7 CNIB, *Increasing Employment Opportunities for Canadians who are Blind or Partially Sighted*, to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, 24 February 2013, p. 2.

8 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 74, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 16 April 2013, 1105.

[...] the average total income for persons with a disability is about \$27,000, compared to nearly \$38,000 for those without a disability. Women with disabilities earn even less, an average of about \$22,000, compared to \$31,000 for men with disabilities.⁹

Yves Gingras
Department of Human Resources and Skills Development

3. Defining disability

Defining disability is a difficult task. Today, many rely on the definition included in the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), which was ratified by Canada on 11 March 2010.¹⁰ The Preamble recognizes “that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”¹¹ The CRPD further refers to “persons with disabilities” as including but not being limited to “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”¹²

The federal government’s 2011 Federal Disability Report is based on the definition of disability set by the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO’s framework of disability is “provided by the International Classification of Functioning (ICF). This framework defines disability as impairment, activity limitation or participation restriction that is the result of the interaction between contextual factors (personal and environmental) and health conditions. The ICF is a multi-dimensional classification that takes into account both the medical and social model of disability.”¹³

For this report, the definition of disability in section 3 of the *Employment Equity Act* seems appropriate to the study of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities:

“persons with disabilities” means persons who have a long-term or recurring physical, mental, sensory, psychiatric or learning impairment and who

(a) consider themselves to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment, or

(b) believe that an employer or potential employer is likely to consider them to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment,

9 Evidence, Meeting No. 68, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 26 February 2013, 1105.

10 United Nations, [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

11 Ibid., Preamble.

12 Ibid., Article 1.

13 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, [Federal Disability Report](#), Seniors with Disabilities in Canada, 2011, Section 1, p. 4.

and includes persons whose functional limitations owing to their impairment have been accommodated in their current job or workplace.¹⁴

CHAPTER 2 — BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

This chapter provides evidence from witnesses regarding barriers to employment encountered by persons with disabilities. The barriers are numerous. Some were raised by a majority of witnesses and are recognized as particularly challenging in the current literature. They include the negative attitudes and misconceptions of some employers toward the idea of hiring persons with disabilities and the lack of access to practical training, work experience and soft skills (e.g., communication, language, ability to interact effectively with employers, co-workers and customers) on the part of job seekers with disabilities. Obstacles faced by youth with disabilities during the difficult transition from high school to post-secondary education or employment also received a lot of attention. Other systemic barriers were mentioned by some witnesses; barriers such as access to housing and transportation.

1. Lack of soft skills and basic training

The Committee heard a lot about the lack of soft skills and basic training of job seekers with disabilities who may only have a high school diploma or who may have a post-secondary education but have not had the opportunity to acquire work experience to be ready for the workplace. Many working-age persons with disabilities have not had the opportunity to have a summer job or a part-time job to learn these critical skills which is a major barrier to employment.

The Committee was told that the teaching of soft skills to job seekers with disabilities is vital to their success. Service providers of employment supports must properly assess the skills and training needed by persons with disabilities and develop an action plan that may include pre- and post-employment supports and experience gained through real world on-the-job training. A capacity to follow-up once a person is employed to ensure that a proper match between employee and employer has been made is essential. The Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, discussed in chapter 3, is an example of a successful program that offers funding to employment agencies for the teaching of soft skills and basic training.

The opportunities fund, which is now going to be moved up to \$40 million as of 2015, is an excellent source of resources for companies that do want to hire people with disabilities, but it has to be used in a more constructive fashion. We need to be able to use that money for accommodations that could be costly and also for any extra training, because as we know, people with disabilities, even if they're Ph.D.s, quite often get into the workforce and they're lacking soft skills.

So there is extra training and extra mentoring that is required. That is an expense to a company, so we need the opportunities fund and other funds like it to take that step

14 [Employment Equity Act](#), S.C. 1995, c. 44, s. 3.

back from the work subsidy mentality and get into using that money in a more constructive fashion.¹⁵

Mark Wafer
Tim Hortons

All youth must develop key skills through career readiness education and hands-on experience in the workplace. For some, this skill development happens quickly; for others, it is a gradual process that may take years.

The nature of what employers demand in the 21st century workplace is also changing. High school and post-secondary students must not only master basic academic skills, but must also master “soft skills” such as teamwork, critical thinking, and communication.¹⁶

Southeast Advocates for Employment

2. Access to education and difficulties encountered during the period of transition from secondary to post-secondary education or to the workplace

The Committee was told that children with disabilities, depending on the type of disability they have, do not receive the quality of education essential to shed light on their abilities and get them ready for life beyond school. A lot of attention was paid to youth with disabilities and the critical transition period from secondary to post-secondary education or to the workplace.

It is documented that the employment rate of working-age persons with disabilities increases if they have completed some post-secondary education, but the rate is still lower than that of persons without disabilities. Persons with disabilities with post-secondary education can find it difficult to enter the workforce. According to a representative of HRSDC, education may have an impact on leveling the playing field but the completion rate of post-secondary is much lower among persons with disabilities. He told the Committee that “[a]n estimated 14% of working-age adults with disabilities have a university degree, compared to 24% for those without disabilities.”¹⁷

The Committee heard many witnesses on this topic who indicated that an important factor in determining if youth with disabilities will be able to transition to paid employment is whether they had a part-time job while in high school or during the summer. However, depending on the type of disability, only a few may have the opportunity to find employment while in school and acquire valuable experience one only gets from a work environment. The Committee was told that youth with disabilities during that critical transition period need a lot of support from effective youth services to ensure that they will not fall between the cracks and like too many end up receiving social assistance rather

15 *Evidence*, Meeting No.74, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 16 April 2013, 1120.

16 Southeast Advocates for Employment, “Transition Services for Youth”, Brief to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, 7 March 2013, p. 7.

17 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 68, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 26 February 2013, 1105.

than reaching their full potential in the academic setting, in the workforce and the broader social environment.

We need teachers, principals, employers who are willing to support youth to be in a cooperative education workplace, summer employment. We have some great examples of using the Canada summer employment program to support youth with intellectual disabilities to get part-time jobs.¹⁸

Michael Bach
Canadian Association for Community Living

Our organization's research indicates that as much as 65% of the deaf populace may be considered functionally illiterate. It's not because they're stupid. It's because they're trying to learn a spoken language that they cannot hear.

Unfortunately, for the past century the education of deaf people in Canada has been obsessed with trying to teach us to “hear” and speak instead of actually teaching us academic and practical subjects in the one language that we can and do easily master: sign language.

Is it any wonder that less than 5% of deaf Canadians go on to post-secondary education, or that as much as 91% of them leave high school without a certificate, or a degree, or a diploma?¹⁹

James Roots
Canadian Association of the Deaf

Youth with disabilities or youth at risk often do not do as well as their peers in traditional classroom settings, in the work world, or in social settings. Adding to these challenges, these youth often experience social isolation and lowered self-expectations.

When provided with support, youth are capable of becoming successful in any environment—academic, work, and social. Youth services play a critical role in providing guidance and representation for youth to ensure they are able to reach their potential in school and the world beyond.²⁰

Debbie Hagel
Southeast Advocates for Employment

The federal government provides assistance for youth with disabilities through some of the programs discussed in chapter 3. Education is a provincial and territorial responsibility. However, the Government of Canada will transfer \$12.2 billion to provinces and territories through the Canada Social Transfer in 2013-2014.²¹ This federal block transfer is provided in support of post-secondary education, social assistance and social services, early childhood development and early learning and childcare.

18 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 69, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 28 February 2013, 1240.

19 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 70, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 5 March 2013, 1115.

20 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 71, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 7 March 2013, 1215.

21 Department of Finance Canada, [Federal Support to Provinces and Territories](#).

Access to post-secondary education for persons with disabilities is also supported through the Canada Student Grants program which includes grants to students from low- and middle-income families, students with dependants, part-time students and students with permanent disabilities.

The Canada Student Loans Program also has measures to assist persons with permanent disabilities in the repayment of a student debt. In its response, HRSDC informed the Committee about its Repayment Assistance Plan for Borrowers with a Permanent Disability:

In repayment, students with severe permanent disabilities may qualify for compassionate cancellation of their Canada Student Loans (CSLs) under the Severe Permanent Disability Benefit. Borrowers with a permanent disability experiencing financial difficulty repaying their loans may qualify for the Repayment Assistance Plan for Borrowers with a Permanent Disability (RAP-PD), which ensures repayment of their CSLs is affordable, is limited to ten years, and accounts for permanent disability-related expenses.

In 2010-2011, CSLP disbursed nearly 30,000 Grants for Students with Permanent Disabilities and approved 7,000 applications for RAP-PD. Approximately 300 borrowers had \$3.9 million worth of loans cancelled under the Severe Permanent Disability Benefit.²²

Other student award programs are offered throughout the country. The Committee learned about the national student awards program offered by the National Educational Association of Disabled Students, better known as NEADS, which received funding from the private sector. According to the representative from NEADS, the program “has given out 57 scholarships of \$3,000 to outstanding Canadian college and university students with disabilities in undergraduate, diploma, and graduate programs.”²³

As well, Skills Link, a component of the federal Youth Employment Strategy, provides the flexibility to develop personalized employment measures to help youth (ages 15 to 30 inclusive) overcome barriers to employment. The Committee was told that “youth with disabilities account for about 17% of skills link clients.”²⁴ According to an official from HRSDC,

22 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Follow-Up Response from the Appearance of HRSDC Officials Before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA), *Exploring Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*, 26 February 2013, p. 7.

23 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 74, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 16 April 2013, 1225.

24 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 68, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 26 February 2013, 1145.

The youth employment strategy provides over \$300 million annually, which in 2011-12 supported about 60,000 young Canadians, including those with disabilities. In particular, the skills link component is targeted to youth facing barriers to employment, including youth with disabilities.²⁵

Yves Gingras
Department of Human Resources and Skills Development

The Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) called for more investments in youth with disabilities making the transition from school to employment. Other witnesses agreed that this period of transition is crucial and that it should be a priority of the government as it reviews its spending on employment programming for persons with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Committee recommends that the federal government review existing programming provided under the Youth Employment Strategy to ensure its inclusiveness of youth with disabilities, and assess the need for programming dedicated specifically to youth with disabilities in transition from school to work.

3. Social and employment-related stigma

Social stigma is a serious issue with a critical and long lasting impact on persons who are being discriminated against and treated unfairly. It is well documented that some disabilities can bring about more severe discrimination than other types of disability. For example, witnesses told the Committee that compared with individuals with physical disabilities, persons with mental illness and/or psychiatric disabilities as well as persons with intellectual disabilities are more likely to experience social and employment-related stigma.

The Committee heard many witnesses share their experience about the social and employment-related stigma faced by persons with mental health and intellectual disabilities and the barriers they have to overcome to be fully included in Canadian society. The Committee was also told of cases where social stigma led to bullying, a situation condemned by members of the Committee.

Those who live with a mental illness face the highest degree of stigmatization in the workplace and the greatest barriers to employment. There are many employment obstacles facing adults with psychiatric disabilities, including: gaps in work history; limited employment experience; lack of confidence; fear and anxiety; workplace discrimination and inflexibility; social stigma; and the rigidity of existing income support and benefits programs.

The unemployment rate for persons with serious mental illness reflects these obstacles and has commonly been reported to range from 70% to 90%, depending on the severity

25 Ibid., 1105

of the mental health issues. These statistics are very damaging, given the fact that productive work has been identified as a leading component in promoting positive mental health and in paving the way for a rich and fulfilling life in the community. Indeed, it's very difficult to be mentally well without it.²⁶

Jean Beckett
National Network for Mental Health

Included under the broader heading of attitudinal barriers are bullying and harassment. These are alive and well in workplaces and educational institutions. This is a huge barrier faced by people with disabilities. I've heard many horror stories of harassment and bullying to such a degree that the person with a disability was unable to complete school and was afraid to go into the workforce for fear the experience in the workplace would be similar to the school environment. Personally, I have experienced both harassment and bullying in the workplace due to my disability. I recall I was told to seek counselling for my problem in the workplace. Never underestimate the power and negative impact bullying can have on the individual with a disability. The scars left by bullying remain with you forever. Anyone who has lived with bullying knows exactly what I mean.²⁷

Lisa Tara Hooper
L. Tara Hooper and Associates Inc.

The Committee was pleased to learn that the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) makes the promotion of workplace anti-stigma programs. It also "introduced the world's first psychological health and safety standard for the workplace."²⁸ The MHCC is supported by grant from Health Canada and has been raising awareness about mental health issues and researching the effectiveness of the housing first approach which will be discussed further below.

4. Negative attitudes and misconceptions of employers

The progress made on improving access to employment of persons with disabilities in the last three decades is important. However, misconceptions, attitudinal and systemic barriers still make it difficult for many persons with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment in Canada.

The Committee was told by a majority of witnesses that to change these negative attitudes, a business case must be built showing the benefits of hiring job seekers with disabilities (e.g., loyalty, reliability, hard-working, innovative and improved morale in the workplace) and that the cost of accommodation for employees with disabilities will likely be far lower than employers imagined it to be, often less than \$500.

26 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 70, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 5 March 2013, 1210.

27 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 71, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 7 March 2013, 1235.

28 Mental Health Commission of Canada, "Brief Submission", Submitted to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA), 18 April 2013, p. 2.

Witnesses talked about the need for employers to learn about the abilities of job seekers with disabilities, some of who may need assistance from the hiring process to the integration of the employee in the workplace. Service providers who assist persons with disabilities in finding work could help debunk the misconceptions some employers may have such as the myth that persons with disabilities are less productive than their able-bodied counterparts in the workplace or that they are more likely to be absent frequently from work. Some programs financially supported by all levels of government are in place to provide that type of assistance.

Employers are not always aware of the benefits of employing persons with disabilities, and they state concerns that in reality rarely occur. These myths include high cost and the complex nature of disability-related accommodations, higher than usual sick time, safety issues, and low work output. Employers taking a risk-averse perspective, dwelling on the myths, and not recognizing the benefits greatly diminishes the hiring opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Solutions include further developing and promoting the business case for hiring persons with disabilities through business and industry umbrella organizations or peer-to-peer discussion, and eliciting the support of business leaders with real experience that can support researched realities.²⁹

Judy Quillin
March of Dimes Canada

The fact of the matter is, providing for a fully accessible future won't cost money; it will save money. By getting more and more people with disabilities into the workplace so they can become taxpayers and off social assistance, we expand the public purse. By having more and more people with disabilities able to pursue employment, we make our workplaces more competitive. By having more and more organizations able to provide accessible customer service, we broaden their customer base so that they can make more money.³⁰

David Lepofsky
Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance

Members of the Committee believe that more needs to be done to dispel the misconceptions surrounding the hiring of persons with disabilities and to raise awareness about accommodations and the federal government services available to some businesses to assist in the whole process, from pre- to post-hiring supports.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to raise awareness about the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities and the extent of services available to support businesses.

29 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 76, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 23 April 2013, 1105.

30 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 71, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 7 March 2013, 1230.

5. Different types of disabilities and accommodations

As mentioned earlier, there are very different disabilities and it is important for service providers and employers to have knowledge and some understanding of various types of disabilities to properly identify with the job seekers what type of training and accommodation, if any, are needed for them to be hired. It is not an easy task. For an employee to show their full potential, a perfect match must be made between their skills, their need for accommodation and the expectations of their employer.

That struggle is particularly difficult for people with some types of disabilities. I'm thinking here of disabilities in the area of the cognitive and the emotional domains. People with developmental disability, communication disability, learning disability, or mental health issues have had very low employment rates for many years, and lots of people want jobs.³¹

Cameron Crawford
Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society

The Committee heard a great deal about the unique challenges faced by persons with a disability related to mental health and persons with episodic disabilities and/or chronic illnesses. Their labour market attachment may be more sporadic and they may require flexible work hours to maintain employment. In some cases, where appropriate, the option to work from home can be a form of accommodation. The Committee was also told that Employment Insurance (EI) sickness benefits may not provide adequate support for persons with episodic disabilities. Some thought that the duration of EI sickness benefits was too short and that the rules regarding eligibility to these benefits did not serve persons with episodic disabilities who may need to access sickness benefits for less number of weeks at a time but the total of their benefits throughout a longer period of time.

People with episodic and chronic illnesses often do not have enough time to qualify for benefits. There's a lack of flexible supports for chronic illnesses not deemed severe enough. Very often we see people who are struggling to maintain employment while undergoing cancer treatment, or they have MS [Multiple Sclerosis] and again they're struggling. If they take a lighter schedule, then their funding for their disability is cut to that lighter schedule. Other people have talked about being considered too disabled for one program or not disabled enough for another.³²

Carmela Hutchison
DisAbled Women's Network of Canada

That's the challenge with EI. EI has a real problem with those people who have episodic disabilities, mental health concerns, MS, those people who are well at periods of time in their life and can work, and then cannot work at certain times. They cannot establish eligibility. We can't find a way of doing benefits for EI. EI sickness benefits are only 15 weeks. We think they should be increased to recognize people with episodic

31 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 74, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 16 April 2013, 1105.

32 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 74, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 16 April 2013, 1215.

disabilities, particularly people with mental health concerns who at points are in the labour force and at some points are out.³³

Laurie Beachell
Council of Canadians with Disabilities

It may be possible to transform weeks of EI sickness benefits and turn them into days or hours. The existing work sharing benefits already divide weeks between days when employers pay their employees and others when EI regular benefits are being paid.³⁴ But this is somewhat simpler, as this is done through an agreement between Service Canada and an entire firm experiencing temporary financial difficulties. In the case of EI sickness benefits, this would have to be done on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, it is possible that this could be done at no or little cost, by spreading the maximum amount of EI sickness benefits (15 weeks) into days (75) or hours (600), for example, which would not likely increase the benefits paid.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Committee recommends that Human Resources and Skills Development Canada study the feasibility and cost of allowing persons experiencing an episodic illness to spread the maximum amount of weeks during which Employment Insurance sickness benefits may be paid, currently set to 15 full weeks, into an equivalent number of days or hours of unemployment due to their episodic illness when these benefits would be paid.

Furthermore, the Committee was told that employers need support in finding and recruiting employees with disabilities as well as finding information on job accommodations. Employers who consider hiring a person with a disability also require assistance as they may be concerned with the potential cost of accommodations. However, many witnesses indicated that they may find that employers need to invest very little to gain a loyal and productive employee.

Accommodations can be a job redesign, physical access, assistive devices, software and hardware to perform tasks on a computer etc. For example, witnesses told the Committee about the importance of innovation in information and communications technologies. The Committee learned that persons who are blind or visually impaired may gain easier access to information if they can afford new technology such as tablets for which many applications have been created to assist persons with vision loss. Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing can benefit from simply having a computer with access to internet services which make it feasible for them to work outside their own community, whether for someone else or for themselves.

33 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 69, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 28 February 2013, 1250.

34 Service Canada, [Work-Sharing](#).

The Internet is proving to be potentially the greatest ever self-employment outlet for deaf people. It is the greatest ever tool for making it feasible for deaf people to work outside their own community, whether for someone else or for themselves. It is the ideal way for us to overcome systemic workplace barriers, discriminatory attitudes and practices, and the tyranny of the voice telephone.³⁵

James Roots
Canadian Association of the Deaf

[...] The technology now is so amazing. People with disabilities are doing so many things. I know in the United States there's a medical doctor who is visually impaired. We have two partially sighted researchers in Canada working in research for cancer. There's really no limit to what someone with a visual disability can do if the technology is there to help.³⁶

Diane Bergeron
Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Witnesses told the Committee that in some cases the cost of accommodations can be a deterrent for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that may want to hire a person with a disability but cannot cover the cost of accommodations. The national director of government relations and advocacy at the CNIB, for example, talked about employers having “limited resources and time to investigate the workplace capabilities of people with visual impairments.”³⁷ She indicated that “there is very little support for employers and potential employees to access the adaptive technology for their accommodation needs in the workplace, i.e. screen readers and screen magnification software for computers.”³⁸

However, HRSDC informed the Committee that under the Economic Action Plan of 2012, a new stream of funding, valid for three years under the Opportunities Fund, targets SMEs and allows for expenses up to \$2,000 on workplace accommodation. More information on the Opportunities Fund can be found in chapter 3 under federal programs.

6. Access and portability of disability-related supports

Witnesses told the Committee that the lack of access to and mobility of disability-related supports is a major barrier to employment. It should be noted that the question of access to disability supports (mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies, and programs and services that facilitate the integration of persons with disabilities into society) is essentially under provincial and territorial jurisdiction and forms part of their mandate in relation to health care, education and community services. None of the provinces and territories provides public coverage for the full range of disability supports. The availability,

35 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 70, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 5 March 2013, 1125.

36 *Ibid.*, 1240.

37 *Ibid.*, 1225.

38 *Ibid.*

portability and mobility of supports for people with disabilities are also limited as the provision of supports is often tied to a designated location or a particular income program.

The Government of Canada provides financial resources to provinces and territories through the Canada Health Transfer and the Canada Social Transfer,³⁹ which can be used to fund disability supports. It also offers tax relief to persons with disabilities (e.g., disability tax credit, disability supports deduction, medical expenses) and informal caregivers. The federal government is also directly responsible for regulating disability supports for the First Nations and Inuit people, as well as for veterans and members of the Canadian Forces.

The main concern raised by witnesses is the fact that disability supports for the most part are attached to income security programs such as social assistance which benefits may also include housing and transportation subsidies and medical supports essential for a person's daily living and ability to work. However, these supports are often clawed back when an individual finds employment and has some earnings. It is widely documented that because of the way earnings and income-tested disability supports provided by provincial and territorial governments are treated, the combined loss of income-tested benefits and disability supports outweighs the earnings obtained from work and for some persons with disabilities acts as a strong disincentive to find or return to work.

The Committee believes that the federal government could open a dialogue with provincial/territorial governments to discuss initiatives that would address barriers to the labour market participation of persons with disabilities, specifically the issue of disability-related supports that are attached to income security programs. This collaborative work could take place through the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee.

The intergovernmental dialogue could then be followed by a discussion with self-representational organizations of persons with disabilities to seek their input on how to resolve this problem. The Committee was told that the Office for Disability Issues at HRSDC organized in 2012 a meeting with stakeholders representing persons with disabilities to get their views on employment barriers for persons with disabilities. Such discussions are positive and should be encouraged.

The future dialogue could raise a question related to the effectiveness of the Working Income Tax Benefit, a federal measure introduced in Budget 2007 with the objective to help with the costs of supports no longer covered by social assistance and

39 In 2013-2014, provinces and territories will receive \$30.3 billion through the Canada Health Transfer and \$12.2 billion through the Canada Social Transfer. Department of Finance Canada, [Federal Support to Provinces and Territories](#).

similar income security programs and to assist low-income workers.⁴⁰ However, this measure was overlooked by witnesses who testified before the Committee.

Persons with disabilities who are eligible for the disability tax credit and have a working income over \$1,150, are eligible to receive the Working Income Tax Benefit and an annual disability supplement. The maximum supplement varies by province, income and family situation.

7. Housing and transportation

The Committee was told that there is a significant number of persons with disabilities lacking accessible and affordable housing. For those without adequate housing, it becomes the priority; it is thus difficult for them to spend the time and energy required to get job-ready and search for employment. According to a report from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, in “2006, about 34,000 people aged 15 or older with a mobility/agility disability lived in a household in core housing need.”⁴¹

Some witnesses talked about housing subsidies and how they are linked to income security payments such as social assistance and can be withdrawn if a person with a disability earns more than a certain amount per month. These subsidies and the monthly earnings allowed are a matter of provincial and territorial responsibility.

At the federal level, the Committee heard about the new investment for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) announced in Budget 2013: “\$119 million per year over five years for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy using a ‘*Housing First*’ approach.”⁴² The HPS is delivered by HRSDC in partnership with communities, stakeholders, provinces and territories and other federal departments. This community-based program aimed at reducing homelessness offers funding to 61 designated communities across the country.⁴³ Its budget in 2013-2014 is \$134.4 million.⁴⁴

Witnesses who discussed housing paid more attention to the issue of homelessness among persons with mental health problems than any other housing issue. The new investment in the housing first approach was welcomed by these participants. It follows a five-year research project launched in November 2009 and ending in

40 Canada Revenue Agency, [Working income tax benefit \(WITB\)](#).

41 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, [2012 Canadian Housing Observer](#), Chapter 6, Sustainable Housing and Communities — Flexible Housing, Fast Facts, p. 6-1. “A household is in core housing need if its housing does not meet one or more of the adequacy, suitability or affordability standards and it would have to spend 30% or more of its before-tax income to pay the median rent (including utility costs) of alternative local market housing that meets all three standards.”, p. 5-16.

42 Government of Canada, [Budget 2013, Chapter 3.5: Supporting Families and Communities](#), Supporting Jobs Opportunities for all Canadians, 2013.

43 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, [Homelessness Strategy](#).

44 Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, [“Supplementary Information Tables in 2013-14 Reports on Plans and Priorities”](#) in Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, [Report on Plans and Priorities - 2013-14](#).

March 2013 called At Home/Chez Soi overseen by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. Some witnesses praised this project which showed evidence that when persons with mental health problems who are homeless are provided housing and the supports they need, they can reintegrate society and in some cases find and maintain employment.

From a research perspective, with regard to mental health housing, it's very important to speak not simply of housing, but of housing with supports. It's the combination of the right housing and the right supports for the person in the place and time where they're at with regard to their disability that makes it possible for the individual to succeed in housing. Housing is absolutely one of the most important social determinants of mental health. That it is there is absolutely integral to mental health recovery, but it has to be accompanied by proper mental health system supports.⁴⁵

Dr. Susan Eckerle Curwood
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

We linked arms with different agencies and said that we should form a program where we can give these people hope coming out of homelessness. Our mission statement is to prevent homelessness by supporting the most vulnerable members of our community. In providing the skills-based training and work program, individuals living with mental health issues are empowered—and that's the key word, ladies and gentlemen, “empowered”—to overcome their barriers to employment, succeed, and live a fruitful, normal, independent life.⁴⁶

Marilyn Gunn
Community Kitchen Program of Calgary

Another barrier to employment which does not fall strictly within federal jurisdiction is transportation or the lack thereof for persons with disabilities to get to and from work. Some witnesses told the Committee about problems with accessible public transit that accepts persons with only some type of disabilities, mostly physical, as well as the complete lack of transportation for persons with disabilities in many rural areas.

It is wrong to think about accessibility and employment for people with disabilities or equal opportunity for employment for people with disabilities in isolation. You can't get a job if you can't get to the job. The federal government spends a lot of money helping provinces and municipalities fund infrastructure. How about making it a condition of any province or municipality that takes that money, that creates infrastructure such as public transit, that not one dime of it will be used to create an inaccessible public transit? Don't make things worse.⁴⁷

David Lepofsky
Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance

Without the creation of more freedom of transportation mobility for Canadians with disabilities, they will continue to face high unemployment rates. Canadian employers

45 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 75, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 18 April 2013, 1140.

46 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 76, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 23 April 2013, 1115.

47 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 71, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 7 March 2013, 1230.

experiencing labour shortages will be unable to utilize this untapped pool [of persons] who are able and willing to work.⁴⁸

Meenu Sikand
As an Individual

8. Community capacity

Some witnesses mentioned that employment services delivered by not-for-profit organizations, from pre- to post-employment supports, are critical to the integration of persons with disabilities in the labour market. Yet, the service delivery system at the community level is based for the most part on short-term funding that does not allow for the flexibility needed to respond to the needs of persons with disabilities who may seek to be employed for the very first time. For example, the CCD recommended that funding should be three to five years, with long-term support dedicated to persons facing multiple barriers to employment. As it now stands, the current system penalizes clients with complex needs who may not get the attention they need for the sake of better reporting on impacts and outcomes.

The one area I want to wrap up with is program administration. We use a lot of the Service Canada programs. The most difficult part of administration is the short duration of contracts and having to renew every year or every six months. The contract periods never coincide with our year end or with our staff contracting periods. Sometimes we have 42 weeks; sometimes we have 38 weeks. There's always a gap between finishing one project and getting renewed for another project. It's hard to retain experienced staff.⁴⁹

Linda Soulliere
Coalition for Persons with Disabilities

A lot of the programming, I would say more recently, over the past five or so years, has been more and more targeted. You've probably heard other witnesses talk about "creaming". That's a real problem. It's funding that's focused on helping to get back to the workforce those who happen to have a disability and who probably need the least amount of help. It's not that they shouldn't be served, but for those with more complex, multiple barriers, or longer-term disabilities involving more barriers to overcome, because of the way the funding is set up—they are paid by the milestone or whatever—those folks are not getting the same opportunities. I think it has become a big problem. I see the programming becoming more and more like that.⁵⁰

Gary Birch
Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

48 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 76, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 23 April 2013, 1210.

49 *Ibid.*, 1230.

50 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 74, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 16 April 2013, 1135.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Committee recommends that the federal government examine the feasibility of offering multi-year funding of two to five years to community not-for-profit organizations who deliver employment services to persons with disabilities who face multiple barriers to employment. These service providers should have demonstrated an ability to provide comprehensive, effective, high-quality programming, and have a positive track record of connecting persons with disabilities with employment.

The Committee was also told of another aspect of community capacity which is the ability of community organizations to meet with employers and sector councils as well as representatives of the federal government to have a better understanding of what services are needed to lead to a better match between job seekers with disabilities and employers.

There aren't effective partnerships between those community organizations and employers and employer councils. This piece keeps coming up, as I said, in the labour market panel, in the research. That community partnership, that community capacity is critical. I think it's important, as in other areas, that the federal government see that community capacity as integral to its goal to achieve an effective and inclusive labour market.⁵¹

Michael Bach
Canadian Association for Community Living

Some specific initiatives that we see could address those gaps include establishing a systemic mechanism for knowledge exchange, again taking into consideration all four sectors: the disability sector or community, academia, governments, and the private sector.⁵²

Olga Krassioukova-Enns
Canadian Centre on Disability Studies

CHAPTER 3 — PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

1. Federal programs

Shedding light on the abilities of persons with disabilities is key to successful employment programming. The rules of employment programs should be flexible enough for service providers to be able to adapt various employment measures to the needs of the individual seeking assistance. Some witnesses talked about the fact that many persons with disabilities who want to work do not necessarily know how to go about their search or where they can get go for assistance in the process. Often, they lack the interview skills to make it past this first hurdle. For less visible disabilities, they may not know if they should

51 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 69, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 28 February 2013, 1250.

52 *Ibid.*, 1125.

divulge their disability and ask for accommodation. These are just a few examples of the vast needs of job seekers with disabilities. Labour market integration programs are in place to respond to these needs and to assist persons with disabilities overcome employment barriers.

Numerous federal programs are in place to promote employment for persons with disabilities. Among others, HRSDC offers a number of programs to assist persons with disabilities in securing and maintaining employment. Programs vary depending on whether an individual is or is not eligible for EI benefits.⁵³

However, some witnesses, including the CCD, believe that there “are shortcomings in how employment policy is developed and in the employment programming that is made available to people with disabilities....”⁵⁴ According to the CCD, some of the criticisms include:

- policy making occurs in silos;
- a lack of coordination between federal and provincial benefit and service programs;
- a lack of client-centred programming;
- a fragmentation of services; and
- a lack of rapid intervention to prevent labour market detachment.⁵⁵

The CCD, supported by other witnesses representing national organizations for persons with disabilities, recommended that the federal government develop a five-year strategic plan to enhance employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The Committee agrees and makes the following recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada develop a strategic plan to ensure employment programs for persons with disabilities are demand driven and meeting the needs of persons with disabilities and employers. The plan should include approaches for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to systematically engage persons with disabilities, employers, service providers and the provinces and territories to ensure program relevance.

53 Service Canada, *Employment for Persons with Disabilities*.

54 Council of Canadians with Disabilities, “People with Disabilities: Getting Beyond Being the Population in Waiting”, *Key Messages and Commentary*, CCD Presentation to House of Commons HUMA Committee, 28 February 2013, p. 13.

55 Ibid.

a. Multilateral Framework for Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities

Federal funding is distributed to provinces and territories under the Multilateral Framework for Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities (LMAPDs) to contribute to the costs of a variety of programs and services that improve the employment situation of persons with disabilities. The Government of Canada contributes an average of 50% of the costs of the programs, up to the amount identified in each bilateral agreement. According to the EI Monitoring and Assessment Report 2011, “[i]n 2010-2011, approximately \$218 million was transferred to provinces through the LMAPDs for programs and services that assisted over 300,000 clients.”⁵⁶ From 2011-2012 to 2014-2015, the planned spending is \$222 million annually.⁵⁷

Some witnesses raised concerns with the terms and conditions of LMAPDs as well as with the labour market agreements discussed below.

While the labour market development agreements have been devolved to the provinces, it's critically important that the federal government continue to stay very much involved in how those agreements are worded, what criteria are included, and how people are scored for success. The definition for success for every Canadian is different, but what we do know is that the inclusion of people in citizenship includes a real job with real pay in a real community.⁵⁸

Sean Wiltshire
Canadian Association for Supported Employment

b. Labour market agreements

Through labour market agreements (LMAs), the federal government transfers \$500 million annually to provinces and territories to support unemployed individuals who are not eligible to EI, including persons with disabilities. Persons with very low literacy skills who may not have completed high school may also receive support from employment services. It is up to provincial and territorial governments to design employment programming that meets the needs of their citizens.

Although persons with disabilities who meet the criteria can benefit from the employment programming offered under these bilateral agreements, the Committee was reminded that the latter are not a targeted transfer to support persons with disabilities.

56 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, [EI Monitoring and Assessment Report 2011](#), Chapter 4.

57 Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, “[Supplementary Information Tables in 2013-14 Reports on Plans and Priorities](#)” in Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, *Report on Plans and Priorities – 2013-14*.

58 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 71, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 7 March 2013, 1125.

The LMAs have the objective to increase the labour participation of all under-represented Canadians. Forecasted spending for 2012-2013 is \$517.8 million.⁵⁹

Some witnesses, including the Canadian Association for Community Living, called for targets and performance indicators for employment measures regarding persons with disabilities to be set within LMAs with the provinces and territories.

The labour market agreements provide funds to provinces and territories to address the needs of those who are labour market disadvantaged. The bulk of those dollars are going into that generic system that doesn't have the capacity or the expertise to adequately serve people with intellectual or other disabilities.⁶⁰

Michael Bach
Canadian Association for Community Living

According to HRSDC, the Government of Canada indicated in Budget 2013 that it has the intention to renew the LMAs with investments of \$500 million per year. However, the terms and conditions of these agreements are up for renegotiation with provincial and territorial governments. In a follow-up response to the Committee, HRSDC wrote:

The Government will negotiate the transformation of the Agreements to ensure that skills training funds are being used to help Canadians obtain the qualifications they need to get jobs in high-demand fields. The Agreements will be reformed to directly connect skills training with employers and jobs for Canadians with the Canada Job Grant—the centrepiece of the new Agreements.

Upon full implementation of the Canada Job Grant, nearly 130,000 Canadians each year, including persons with disabilities, are expected to have access to the training they need to fill available jobs.⁶¹

c. Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities

The Opportunities Fund was launched in 1997 as a contribution program with an annual budget of \$30 million. Its objective is to help persons with disabilities who are not eligible for EI employment benefits and support measures to find, obtain and maintain employment. The director of the Youth and Labour Market Programs for Persons with Disabilities at HRSDC indicated that following the 2008 evaluation of the program, an employer awareness component was added to the terms and conditions of the Opportunities Fund to increase knowledge of the abilities of persons with disabilities.⁶²

59 Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, "[Supplementary Information Tables in 2013-14 Reports on Plans and Priorities](#)" in Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, *Report on Plans and Priorities – 2013-14*.

60 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 69, 1st Session, 41st Session, 28 February 2013, 1225.

61 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Follow-Up Response from the Appearance of HRSDC Officials Before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA), *Exploring Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*, 26 February 2013, p. 5.

62 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 68, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 26 February 2013, 1115.

As the Committee heard from witnesses, raising awareness of the need to focus on abilities rather than disabilities is essential to breaking down barriers.

In addition to eligible expenses similar to EI employment benefits and support measures (e.g., wage subsidies, work experience, skills development and self-employment assistance), the Opportunities Fund offers financial assistance for workplace accommodation, special computer software, adapted work stations, job coaching, interpreting fees, and more.

Service providers who appeared before the Committee indicated their appreciation for the flexibility of measures offered under the Opportunities Fund. This allows them to develop and adapt a plan of action with each participant that responds to their specific skills development and employment needs. The Committee was told by a representative of HRSDC that approximately 5,400 clients were served in 2011-2012, “1,400 found employment, 300 returned to school, and 3,300 enhanced their employability.”⁶³

Budget 2012 promised an additional \$30 million for three years. This additional funding will be targeted at helping persons with disabilities gain experience working with small- and medium-sized enterprises, and at highlighting the invaluable contribution these workers can make to businesses and the Canadian economy.⁶⁴ The Committee, as previously mentioned, was also informed that financial support for workplace accommodations can be provided up to a maximum amount of \$2,000. In exceptional cases, where a person’s disability is very severe and workplace accommodation would allow that person to work, the cap can be exceeded with the permission of HRSDC.

Budget 2013 proposes to make the Opportunities Fund permanent with ongoing funding of \$40 million per year starting in 2015-2016. According to HRSDC, “[t]he program will also be reformed to provide more demand-driven training solutions for persons with disabilities and make it more responsive to labour market needs. Employers and community organizations will be involved in project design and delivery.”⁶⁵

I would like to acknowledge that there are some positive steps taken in the area of employment of people with disabilities. The opportunities fund has been a huge asset in providing funding for programs such as ours and funding to individuals with disabilities, assisting them to reach their goals. It is important to build on what’s already there.⁶⁶

Lisa Tara Hooper
L. Tara Hooper and Associates Inc.

63 Ibid., 1105.

64 Government of Canada, “Improving Labour Market Opportunities for Canadians with Disabilities” in [Jobs Growth and Long Term Prosperity](#), 2012, Chapter 3.3.

65 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Follow-Up Response from the Appearance of HRSDC Officials Before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA), *Exploring Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*, 26 February 2013, p. 5.

66 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 71, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 7 March 2013, 1235.

d. Employment benefits and support measures

Employment benefits and support measures are available to EI active claimants and former claimants to assist them in finding, obtaining and maintaining employment. In addition, non-insured clients are eligible to employment assisted services (support measures). Employment benefits include interventions that fall within the following categories: skills development, targeted wage subsidies, self-employment, job creation partnerships, and targeted earnings supplement (Quebec only). Support measures can be quick interventions to help those interested prepare for, find and obtain employment, such as assessing needs, building resumes, taking additional training or developing other skills. This type of activities comprises the majority of interventions under the category “support measures”. Others are group services, labour market partnerships and research and innovation. According to the most recent EI Monitoring and Assessment Report:

Persons with disabilities participated in 55,580 [Employment benefits and support measures] EBSM interventions, which was 14.3% lower than the number in 2010/11. Despite the decline, this client group represented 6.0% of all participants in 2011/12, its highest share since 2007/08.⁶⁷

(i) Debate over targeted wage subsidies

Throughout the course of the Committee’s study, one issue raised some very strong opinions pro and con, which is whether wage subsidies are a positive employment measure or one that is being abused by some employers in search of free labour. One very interesting point of view relates to the way service providers use wage subsidies. According to some witnesses, if the subsidy is used to “create” a position, it may be more likely that the position will disappear at the end of the wage subsidy period. However, if a wage subsidy is offered to an employer who has an existing opening for an employee and presented as financial support for the initial adaptation phase of the employee with disabilities, it is much more likely that following the time invested to train the person that fills a void in that business, that person will maintain their employment once the subsidy ends. Here is a sample of what the Committee heard on wages subsidies.

There was a program where restaurant owners could bring someone in on a subsidy, and that's exactly what happened: it became a revolving door. They didn't end up keeping them—even though they had, by their own admission, fantastic talent—because they could get someone else for free. It became an issue, which was addressed.⁶⁸

Jill Ramseyer
Tim Hortons Inc.

In some cases, a wage subsidy for a short work placement can be beneficial. For example, an employer may create a position for a specified period of time to give the

67 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, *EI Monitoring and Assessment Report 2012*, Chapter 3.

68 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 75, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 18 April 2013, 1230.

individual work experience. This can also increase the person's self-esteem and confidence, and they're able to get a work-related reference from the employer.⁶⁹

Lisa Tara Hooper
L. Tara Hooper and Associates Inc.

One thing that we spoke about was that we do not agree with subsidization of people with disabilities. We believe there can be forms of assistance to different groups or individuals, but at the end of the day the employer gets the benefit associated with a long-term, committed, engaged employee, and that's a private-sector opportunity.⁷⁰

Kenneth Fredeen
Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

We're not looking at creating a job for someone with a disability; we're looking for a legitimate job that is open because someone has quit, or there's an expansion in the company, so it's a vacancy that needs to be filled anyway. This is something that when we put our client in there, the wage subsidy occurs, and if our client can't continue, perhaps because they haven't met the skill requirement, they simply have to hire someone else.

We are looking for legitimate work, and when the wage subsidy ends, that client has learned the skills of the job and will continue on.⁷¹

Judy Quillin
March of Dimes Canada

A representative of HRSDC acknowledged the problem and mentioned that the Department was already looking at different options and would make recommendations in that regard to the Minister of HRSDC.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Committee recommends that Human Resources and Skills Development Canada consider the effectiveness of wage subsidies for employers that hire persons with disabilities and submit such findings to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

e. Canada Pension Plan — Disability

The Canada Pension Plan (CPP) Disability program, established in 1966, is the largest single long-term disability income security program for working-age persons with disabilities in Canada. It provides income protection by replacing a portion of the earnings of CPP contributors who cannot work because of a disability. Children of a beneficiary, including youth aged 18 to 25 who are enrolled in full-time post-secondary education, are

69 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 71, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 7 March 2013, 1235.

70 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 74, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 16 April 2013, 1115.

71 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 76, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 23 April 2013, 1140.

also be eligible to benefits. In 2010-2011, there were 321,000 persons with disabilities receiving CPP Disability benefits. As well, 85,000 children of contributors with disabilities were eligible to CPP Disability benefits. CPP Disability benefits represented 12.6% of the total of CPP benefits paid that year. The average monthly payment was \$813.51 in 2010-2011, with the addition in some cases of a flat-rate amount of \$218.50 per month per eligible child.⁷²

For the purposes of this study, the interesting component of the CPP Disability program is the opportunity to support return-to-work attempts while still receiving benefits, which provides a financial safety net and reduces the risks associated with the loss of benefits. Vocational rehabilitation services offer assistance to facilitate a return to work for those who may be able to do so. It is well documented that the earlier a person is supported in his efforts to return to work, the more likely that person is to re-engage in paid employment.

In the past, many people receiving benefits because of a severe and prolonged disability believed that they were permanently out of the work force. Today, new technology, medical treatments and skills training are making it possible for some people with severe disabilities to become part of and remain in the work force. That is why the Canada Pension Plan is making vocational rehabilitation available to those who can benefit from it the most.⁷³

According to HRSDC, the CPP Disability measures to facilitate a return to work include an annual level of allowable earnings (\$5,100 in 2013), a 3-month paid work trial, the automatic reinstatement of CPP Disability benefits for a period of up to two years and fast tracking re-applications (i.e., exemption of three months waiting period if a person reapplies within five years of termination of their benefits).⁷⁴

f. Enabling Accessibility Fund

The Enabling Accessibility Fund was created to support community-based projects that improve accessibility, remove obstacles, and enable persons with disabilities to work and participate fully in the activities of their communities across Canada.⁷⁵ Over 800 projects have been funded thus far.

As of 2010, the financial commitment was \$45 million over three years. The program was to terminate in March 2013. However, Budget 2013 proposed ongoing funding for the fund at \$15 million per year. Funding can support “capital costs of

72 Government of Canada, [Annual Report of the Canada Pension Plan 2010-2011](#), 2011, pp. 7-10.

73 Service Canada, [Disability Vocational Rehabilitation Program](#).

74 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Follow-Up Response from the Appearance of HRSDC Officials Before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA), *Exploring Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*, 26 February 2013, pp. 12-13.

75 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, [Funding: Enabling Accessibility](#).

construction and renovations to improve physical accessibility for persons with disabilities, including workplace accommodation.”⁷⁶

The Committee heard from many witnesses about the need to improve accessibility in the infrastructure and much more about the necessity of workplace accommodation if persons with disabilities are to take advantage of employment opportunities in the labour market.

RECOMMENDATION 7

The Committee recommends that Human Resources and Skills Development Canada monitor closely the spending under the Enabling Accessibility Fund to ensure that financial support is sufficient to meet the objectives of the fund and the expected outcomes. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada should examine options to use the Fund to leverage more not-for-profit organizations and private sector funding.

g. Social Development Partnerships Program — Disability Component

The Social Development Partnerships Program — Disability Component offers funding to support the activities of not-for-profit social organizations whose goals are to respond to the need to include persons with disabilities into Canadian society and integrate those who can and want to work into the labour market. Planned spending for the Social Development Partnerships Program as a whole for 2012-2013 is \$20.1 million, and the amount is the same for 2013-2014 and 2014-2015.⁷⁷

The Disability component supports a wide range of community-based initiatives that provide effective approaches in addressing social issues and barriers that face people with disabilities. More specifically, the component supports projects designed to: establish and maintain partnerships, alliances, networks and collaboration with communities, stakeholders and individuals; explore, test and develop innovative solutions, best practices and tools related to social development; increase the capacity of not-for-profit organizations in the areas of governance, policy and program development, and community outreach; and develop and share knowledge on existing and emerging social issues.

This is a grant and contribution program with non-repayable contributions in general. Under certain circumstances provisions may specify repayment terms.⁷⁸

76 Government of Canada, [Budget 2013, Chapter 3.1: Connecting Canadians with Available Jobs](#), Supporting Jobs Opportunities for all Canadians, 2013.

77 Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, “[Supplementary Information Tables in 2013-14 Reports on Plans and Priorities](#)” in Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, *Report on Plans and Priorities – 2013-14*.

78 Ibid.

h. Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program

The Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program (EDP) targets persons with disabilities living in western Canadian urban and rural communities and offers services such as assistance with developing business plans, mentoring and counselling, training in business management, and accessing business loans.⁷⁹ One witness recommended that more programs, such as the EDP, be developed to meet the needs of persons with disabilities who wish to start their own business.

Western Economic Diversification started a government program to support access for people with disabilities to business opportunities with funding of up to \$18 million. This program is active still. It's very successful in providing tools to transition from school to work with employment services and opportunities for work experiences.⁸⁰

Olga Krassioukova-Enns
Canadian Centre on Disability Studies

i. Continuing to innovate

Some witnesses told the Committee that social enterprises could be explored as opportunities for co-op placements and employment for persons with disabilities. The rewards of working for a social enterprise can be considerable.

One of the issues facing our youth is not just finding a job, but finding a career and something meaningful. A social enterprise that is based on green energy, on solar installation, on technology would be exciting and rewarding for many of our youth who deserve more than to think they will only be able to get minimum wage jobs.⁸¹

Linda Soulliere
Coalition for Persons with Disabilities

On social enterprise, it's interesting that community economic development is an area of activity where people take control of their own economic destinies, and yet people with disabilities have really not been on the radar in a major way. Arguably, that would be something where government could pay some attention and try to foster the involvement of disabled people in community economic development initiatives.⁸²

Cameron Crawford
Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society

Another topic raised by some witnesses is the lack of knowledge concerning the employment of persons with disabilities. The most recent statistical overview dates back to data in the 2006 PALS. Since then, Canada lived through a recession and is now

79 Western Economic Diversification Canada, [Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program](#).

80 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 69, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 28 February 2013, 1120.

81 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 76, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 23 April 2013, 1225.

82 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 74, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 16 April 2013, 1155.

rebuilding its economy. The nature of work for persons with disabilities may have changed but it is not well researched.

CCD [Council of Canadians with Disabilities] calls for more research, including research done in partnership with organizations of persons with disabilities, to address knowledge gaps concerning employment and people with disabilities. CCD identifies the need for research on the changing nature of work and whether new barriers are being created for people with disabilities, as well as why the participation rate of persons with disabilities in social assistance programs is increasing.⁸³

RECOMMENDATION 8

In addition to the research being done by the Office for Disability Issues at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, the Committee recommends that the Government of Canada examine the need to develop a targeted research funding stream to undertake research with respect to best practices on the economic integration of persons with disabilities in the Canadian workforce in the current economic climate.

2. Employers' initiatives

The Committee heard from some employers who talked about recruiting and hiring strategies, workplace training and accommodations, and how these measures vary depending on the size of the business. SMEs, which have the largest number of employers across the country, may need assistance in hiring persons with disabilities. Those who have hired persons with disabilities can build a business case and share it with other business owners. Raising awareness and dispelling myths can go a long way to improving employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities. The Committee also learned that visible commitment from top management is essential to the successful integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market.

Employers listen to other employers. If the government were to formally support the concept of employer champions, we think it would be beneficial to highlight successes and take away some of the fear and ignorance. Employer champions could provide sessions or information to their peers, meaning other employers. Sessions, workshops, even testimonials could be given by employers who hire people with disabilities to discuss the business case and the successes experienced from hiring people with disabilities.⁸⁴

Jill Ramseyer
Tim Hortons Inc.

83 Council of Canadians with Disabilities, "People with Disabilities: Getting Beyond Being the Population in Waiting", *Key Messages and Commentary*, CCD Presentation to House of Commons HUMA Committee, 28 February 2013, p. 3.

84 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 75, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 18 April 2013, 1210.

With respect to employer engagement, through the Rotary at Work initiative we've learned two very important lessons. First, we must make a solid business case for hiring people who have a disability. We can no longer soft-sell on the basis of it being the right thing to do, or by appealing to charitable and feel-good notions. Second, we've learned that the peer-to-peer method of delivering that message works best.

People respect and listen to their peers. In the broadest sense, this is evident when we use the business-to-business approach. Business operators speaking to other business operators in the same language and understanding each other's motivation of profitability gets traction.⁸⁵

Joseph Dale
Ontario Disability Employment Network

The federal government is in agreement with witnesses as it announced in its Budget 2013 the creation of "a time-limited \$2-million investment to support the creation of the Canadian Employers Disability Forum, recognizing the importance of engaging with employers who are committed to promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace."⁸⁶ The forum will allow employers to share best practices in recruiting and hiring persons with disabilities and explore avenues to further develop their employment opportunities.

In their report, the members of the Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities elaborated on positive success stories that serve as examples to other employers and which send the message that hiring a person with a disability is not only feasible but may also come with rewards.⁸⁷ The members of the Panel present numerous best practices and state in their report that:

...flexibility and open-mindedness are the cornerstones of accommodation. Modifications to facilities and equipment can also improve the accessibility of a workspace for employees, clients, customers and guests.⁸⁸

The members of the Panel, some of whom contributed to our study, concluded that it is time for Canadian employers to step up and hire more persons with disabilities. They believe this will benefit all parties involved, including the Government of Canada, who may find itself once again in a leadership role with respect to disability issues.

85 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 71, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 7 March 2013, 1115.

86 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Follow-Up Response from the Appearance of HRSDC Officials Before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA), *Exploring Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*, 26 February 2013, p. 8.

87 Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, [*Rethinking Disability in the Private Sector, Report from the Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*](#), 2013.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

CHAPTER 4 — LEGISLATIVE MEASURES AND POLICIES TO ACHIEVE EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

1. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Throughout history, persons with disabilities have been viewed as individuals who require societal protection and evoke sympathy rather than respect. In order to achieve respect and equitable employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, Canada has enacted a number of legislative measures, policies, programs, and practices. The Government of Canada has also signed and ratified a number of treaties and conventions and has the responsibility to implement and respect the content of these international measures.

One of the most important international pieces, as mentioned earlier, is the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*⁸⁹ (Convention) which was adopted on 13 December 2006 and came into force on 3 May 2008. Canada has ratified the Convention on 11 March 2010 but has not ratified the Optional Protocol. The latter allows citizens in countries that ratified the Protocol the possibility of launching an individual complaint to a Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities if there are no other national options left. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is responsible for monitoring the Convention's implementation. Countries that ratify the Convention will need to report regularly on their progress to this Committee. To date, there are 155 signatories and 127 ratifications of the Convention, and 90 signatories and 76 ratifications of the Optional Protocol.

The Convention is a complement to existing international human rights treaties. It does not recognize any new human rights of persons with disabilities, but rather clarifies the obligations and legal duties of States to respect and ensure the equal enjoyment of all human rights by all persons with disabilities. The Convention identifies areas where the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities must be reinforced because those rights have been routinely violated. It also establishes universal minimum standards that should apply to everyone and that provide the basis for a coherent framework for action. To quote the CCD:

With the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), we believe we are entering a new era where the focus, attention and action is on promoting, protecting and ensuring the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and promoting respect for their inherent dignity. CRPD is our new expectation.

We know things cannot change all at once. The CRPD talks about progressive realization and we are well aware that our rights will not be realized all at once. But equally true is our belief that we must move to this realization faster than we have over the past 50 years — relentless incrementalism just won't cut it anymore.

89 United Nations, [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

The CRPD ensures a disability focus beyond traditional departments and so all must have a disability lens. Beyond the inter-departmental focus, let me be very clear — disability is absolutely non-partisan. It transcends the lines we define as political; the platforms which define each party from each other. It is our collective responsibility to make social, economic, cultural, and political citizenship accessible and inclusive of all citizens of our country.⁹⁰

Article 27 of the Convention is particularly important to this study since it addresses the right to work and to employment for persons with disabilities in great details. Among other particularities, it recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others and without being discriminated. It safeguards and promotes the right to work by assuring access to vocational training, career opportunities and advancements. It promotes employment of persons with disabilities in the private and in the public sectors and protects the ability to exercise labour and union rights similarly to other workers where applicable.

2. Other legislation protecting persons with disabilities

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982)⁹¹ (Charter) guarantees under section 15 the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination to individuals in Canada with a mental or physical disability. The Charter also provides every Canadian with equal opportunity of employment, services and reasonable accommodation that cannot be denied to an individual on the basis of a disability. The Charter is entrenched in the Constitution of Canada and, therefore, applies to all levels of government.

The *Canadian Human Rights Act*⁹² (sections 2 and 15) further requires the federal government and federally regulated employers to provide workplace accommodations unless doing so would result in undue hardship. The duty to accommodate employees is a central principle of equality rights for persons with disabilities that has been reinforced through successive judicial decisions.

The federal public service, federally regulated employers and private sector employers are all subject to the *Employment Equity Act*⁹³ that aims to achieve equality in the workplace for four designated groups: women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities. The Canadian Human Rights Commission audits departments and agencies for compliance with the *Employment Equity Act*; however, its jurisdiction is limited to federally regulated industries (e.g., banking, communications, and transportation).

90 Council of Canadians with Disabilities, "People with Disabilities: Getting Beyond Being the Population in Waiting", *Key Messages and Commentary*, CCD Presentation to House of Commons HUMA Committee, 28 February 2013, pp. 10-11.

91 [Constitution Act, 1982](#), c. 11.

92 [Canadian Human Rights Act](#), R.S.C., 1985, c. H-6.

93 [Employment Equity Act](#), S.C. 1995, c. 44.

The federal public service, federally regulated employers (including Crown Corporations with 100 employees or more) and federal contractors combined are the nation's largest employer. In 2010, persons with disabilities represented 2.6% of the workforce for all employers covered under the *Employment Equity Act*, a drop from 2.7% in 2009 and well below their labour market availability of 4.9%.⁹⁴ The level of representation of persons with disabilities in the federally regulated private sector (2.6% in 2010) was again below their labour market availability, the same is true for their representation in the federal public sector at 4.2%.⁹⁵ Persons with disabilities are more likely to be employed in the federal public service at 5.7%.⁹⁶

Finally, it is important to note that the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat has developed a Policy on the Duty to Accommodate Persons with Disabilities in the Federal Public Service⁹⁷ which has been in effect since 3 June 2002. The progress in that respect is monitored yearly in the government's report on employment equity in the federal public service, which is the responsibility of the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada.

CHAPTER 5 — INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES FROM WITNESSES

Members of the Committee received many inspiring testimonies. Here is a small sample of what we heard.

1. Employers

Norman is an incredibly hard worker who loves to come in every day. He takes pride in his work and doing well. He is punctual, reliable, and in three years has literally only been absent for three days, one due to illness, the other due to a death in the family. This far surpasses the attendance and the consistent punctuality of any other employee at our company, probably including ourselves, if the truth is known.

[...]

It's fair to say that hiring Norman was easily one of the very best business decisions we've made in our eight years of ownership. From a personal standpoint, we would all agree that Norman has enriched our lives and taught us so much about the ability side of persons with disabilities.⁹⁸

Jeannette Leigh
Brantford Volkswagen

94 *Employment Equity Act*, Annual Report 2010, [Chapter 6: Persons with Disabilities](#).

95 Ibid.

96 Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, [Employment Equity in the Public Service of Canada 2011-12](#).

97 Government of Canada, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, [Policy on the Duty to Accommodate Persons with Disabilities in the Federal Public Service](#).

98 *Evidence*, Meeting No.75, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 18 April 2013, 1215.

I own six Tim Hortons stores and one Cold Stone ice cream shop. In the last 18 years I've hired 85 people with disabilities. Every single one of those was in a meaningful and competitively paid position. Today 36 of my 210 employees have a disability, and that's in every department.

If you look at the benefits from my operation, first of all, I have the lowest turnover rate of any Tim Hortons operation in the GTA. I have 35% turnover rate versus 75% for anybody who is doing just as good a job as I am. It's not because I'm a great operator. I like to think I am, but it's because I hire people with disabilities.

[...]

There are so many benefits. There is no downside to disability employment. We have to get business owners to understand those benefits. Once they do, when they get it, believe me they're not going to go back.⁹⁹

Mark Wafer
Tim Hortons

2. Service Providers

We'll go to Winnipeg. The L'Arche community there operates the Tova Cafe. This cafe is based on a social enterprise model that provides daytime employment. The cafe offers a bistro-style menu to the general public, and also includes catering and take out. This inclusive model of employment provides not only a pleasant atmosphere, but also a place of hope both for people with developmental disabilities and their parents who may feel socially isolated and rejected in society.¹⁰⁰

Lucie Hanak
L'Arche Ottawa

First, we have worked with a number of partners and developed adapted training models. We have adapted professional training programs that are available in our educational institutions. The content, the teaching style and the length of training have been adapted. We have worked on those types of projects in the retail sector, providing training for grocery clerks and floral assistants, as well as in the restaurant industry, providing training for assistant cooks.

The model makes it possible to alternate between internships and studies. Employers whose companies welcome the interns commit to keeping the participants who complete the program employed. Seventy per cent of participants complete the program and are integrated into the labour market.¹⁰¹

Lyne Vincent
SPHERE-Québec

99 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 74, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 16 April 2013, 1125.

100 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 72, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 19 March 2013, 1220.

101 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 71, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 7 March 2013, 1105.

3. As an Individual:

I work at the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa. I've been working there for four years. I coach kids. I run a youth council. I [speak on behalf of] the Boys and Girls Club.

[...]

I went to the Boys and Girls Club, where I got to be the role model I wanted to be, to show the kids who they are, to bring out the skills in them to be exactly who they want to be, to help them become the person they want to be.

What I love about the job is that I can show them that I may have a disability, but I can do this and I can do that. They really look up to me. Half the time people don't see me with a disability because it's so natural for me. I think places need that kind of thing, especially when you're working with kids. Kids love to see that you may have a disability but it doesn't stop you.

[...]

I plan on going to school in September for child and youth studies, and later on take my skills to group homes to deal with kids with behaviour issues and possibly kids with disabilities just so that I can get the information out there and help them become the person they want to be.

Regardless of the disability, you can be the person you want to be.¹⁰²

Alex Masek
Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa

CONCLUSION

Based on testimonies received by the Committee, although some progress has been made on improving access to employment for persons with disabilities, numerous barriers still make it difficult for persons with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment in Canada. The Committee learned that it is critical to focus on youth with disabilities during their transition from high school to post-secondary education and/or employment. School counsellors, parents, teachers and service providers must encourage career development as well as assist youth with disabilities in finding part-time or summer employment while they are still in high school. It is well documented that the longer a person is out of the labour market, the more difficult it is to find and maintain employment.

The Committee was told that many employers still overlook hiring persons with disabilities because of misconceptions and negative beliefs about their work capacity and the cost of accommodations. However, witnesses indicated that with the right training and education, many persons with disabilities who are looking for work are ready to contribute to the Canadian economy. The cost of accommodations for employees with disabilities will

102 *Evidence*, Meeting No. 76, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 23 April 2013, 1205.

likely be far lower than employers think it may be. Furthermore, the benefits to employers of hiring persons with disabilities are significant and far outweigh the cost of accommodations in most circumstances.

A business case can be made showing the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities such as the point made by witnesses that they are loyal, reliable, hard-working, innovative employees and that their presence in the workplace has been shown to improve morale. The Committee was told that the best way of raising awareness among employers about disability-related issues and the duty to accommodate employees with disabilities is through peer-to-peer communication. Measures are also in place to help employers, particularly SMEs, hire persons with disabilities with the assistance of various federal, provincial and territorial programs often offered in their communities through local services providers.

A systemic change is necessary for people to see the abilities in job seekers and not focus on their disabilities. Members of the Committee believe in the importance of partnerships, better communication, coordination and cooperation between service providers, community organizations, persons with disabilities and employers.

Moving forward, the Committee, in agreement with the testimonies it received, recommends the creation of a strategic plan to address the employment needs of persons with disabilities and increase their opportunities for employment. The plan should be developed and implemented with the input of persons with disabilities, employers, service providers and representatives of provinces and territories.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Committee recommends that the federal government review existing programming provided under the Youth Employment Strategy to ensure its inclusiveness of youth with disabilities, and assess the need for programming dedicated specifically to youth with disabilities in transition from school to work. 10

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to raise awareness about the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities and the extent of services available to support businesses. 12

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Committee recommends that Human Resources and Skills Development Canada study the feasibility and cost of allowing persons experiencing an episodic illness to spread the maximum amount of weeks during which Employment Insurance sickness benefits may be paid, currently set to 15 full weeks, into an equivalent number of days or hours of unemployment due to their episodic illness when these benefits would be paid. 14

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Committee recommends that the federal government examine the feasibility of offering multi-year funding of two to five years to community not-for-profit organizations who deliver employment services to persons with disabilities who face multiple barriers to employment. These service providers should have demonstrated an ability to provide comprehensive, effective, high-quality programming, and have a positive track record of connecting persons with disabilities with employment. 20

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada develop a strategic plan to ensure employment programs for persons with disabilities are demand driven and meeting the needs of persons with disabilities and employers. The plan should include approaches for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to systematically engage persons with disabilities, employers, service providers and the provinces and territories to ensure program relevance..... 21

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Committee recommends that Human Resources and Skills Development Canada consider the effectiveness of wage subsidies for employers that hire persons with disabilities and submit such findings to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. 26

RECOMMENDATION 7

The Committee recommends that Human Resources and Skills Development Canada monitor closely the spending under the Enabling Accessibility Fund to ensure that financial support is sufficient to meet the objectives of the fund and the expected outcomes. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada should examine options to use the Fund to leverage more not-for-profit organizations and private sector funding. 28

RECOMMENDATION 8

In addition to the research being done by the Office for Disability Issues at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, the Committee recommends that the Government of Canada examine the need to develop a targeted research funding stream to undertake research with respect to best practices on the economic integration of persons with disabilities in the Canadian workforce in the current economic climate. 30

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Monika Bertrand, Director Youth and Labour Market Programs for Persons with Disabilities Sylvie Dubé, Policy Director Office for Disability Issues Yves Gingras, Senior Director Economic Policy Directorate, Labour Market Analysis</p>	2013/02/26	68
<p>Canadian Association for Community Living Michael Bach, Executive Vice-President</p> <p>Canadian Centre on Disability Studies Olga Krassioukova-Enns, Executive Director</p> <p>Council of Canadians with Disabilities Laurie Beachell, National Coordinator Vangelis Nikias, Project Manager Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</p> <p>People First of Canada Shelley Fletcher Rattai, Executive Director Shane Haddad, President</p>	2013/02/28	69
<p>Canadian Association of the Deaf James Roots, Executive Director</p> <p>Canadian National Institute for the Blind Diane Bergeron, National Director Government Relations and Advocacy Christine Robbins, Government Relations Specialist National</p> <p>Canadian Paraplegic Association Paul Cudmore, Executive Director Prince Edward Island</p> <p>National Network for Mental Health Jean Beckett, President Julie Flatt, Interim National Executive Director</p> <p>Spinal Cord Injury Canada Robert White, Executive Director</p>	2013/03/05	70
<p>Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance David Lepofsky, Chair</p>	2013/03/07	71

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>Canadian Association for Supported Employment Tracy Williams, President Sean Wiltshire, Board Member</p> <p>L. Tara Hooper and Associates Inc. Lisa Tara Hooper, President</p> <p>Ontario Disability Employment Network Joseph Dale, Executive Director Founder and Manager, Rotary at Work</p> <p>Southeast Advocates for Employment Debbie Hagel, Executive Director Community Advocates for Employment (CAFÉ) James Noble, Client Nancy Zeleny, Transition Coordinator Community Advocates for Employment (CAFÉ)</p> <p>SPHERE-Québec (Soutien à la personne handicapée en route vers l'emploi au Québec) Nancy Moreau, Director General Lyne Vincent, Development Coordinator</p>	2013/03/07	71
<p>Association pour l'intégration sociale d'Ottawa Johanne Curodeau, Vice-President Board of directors</p> <p>Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work Maureen Haan, President and Chief Executive Officer Elizabeth Smith, Manager Ontario Workplace Inclusion Program</p> <p>Corbrook Deepak Soni, Executive Director</p> <p>Houselink Community Homes Jacqueline Rankine, Program Manager</p> <p>Independent Living - Montreal Rosie Arcuri, Program Coordinator Rose-Marie Wakil, Information and Networking Agent</p> <p>L'Arche Ottawa James Cassidy, Core Member Lucie Hanak, Community Life Coordinator Emily Taylor-King, Homes Coordinator</p>	2013/03/19	72

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>DisAbled Women's Network of Canada Bonnie L. Brayton, National Executive Director DAWN-RAFH Canada Montreal Carmela Hutchison, President</p> <p>Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society Cameron Crawford, Director of Research</p> <p>LiveWorkPlay Keenan Wellar, Co-Leader and Director of Communications</p> <p>National Educational Association of Disabled Students Frank Smith, National Coordinator</p> <p>Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Gary Birch, Member Executive Director, Neil Squire Society Kenneth Fredeen, Chair General Counsel, Deloitte LLP Mark Wafer, Member President, Megleen operating as Tim Hortons</p>	2013/04/16	74
<p>Brantford Volkswagen Jeannette Leigh, Co-Owner Gregg Moore, Co-owner</p> <p>Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Mathew Wilson, Vice-President National Policy</p> <p>Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation Tammy Yates, Coordinator Episodic Disabilities Initiatives Elisse Zack, Executive Director Episodic Disabilities Network</p> <p>Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Susan Eckerle Curwood, Manager Research and Knowledge Development, Community Support and Research Unit</p> <p>Mental Health Commission of Canada Aaron Levo, Director External Affairs</p> <p>Tim Hortons Inc. Jill Ramseyer, Manager Health and Wellness, Oakville Head Office</p>	2013/04/18	75

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
As an individual	2013/04/23	76
Meenu Sikand		
Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa		
Alex Masek, Senior Youth Worker		
Coalition for Persons with Disabilities		
Linda Soulliere, Executive Director		
Peel Halton Dufferin		
Community Kitchen Program of Calgary		
Marilyn Gunn, Chief Executive Officer and Founder		
March of Dimes Canada		
Jerry Lucas, Vice-President		
Programs, National Head Office		
Judy Quillin, Director		
Employment Services, National Head Office		

APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

Organizations and Individuals

Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Council of Canadians with Disabilities

Houselink Community Homes

L'Arche Ottawa

LiveWorkPlay

March of Dimes Canada

Mental Health Commission of Canada

National Network for Mental Health

People First of Canada

Southeast Advocates for Employment

SPHERE-Québec (Soutien à la personne handicapée en route vers l'emploi au Québec)

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 77 and 87](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Ed Komarnicki

Chair

Dissenting Opinion of the New Democratic Party of Canada: “Exploring the Employment Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities”

During February, March and April of 2013, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA) examined the issue of employment opportunities for Canadian adults with disabilities.

There have been over twenty parliamentary studies on this issue in the last thirty years, yet the recommendations from these studies have mostly not been implemented. Barriers to employment for persons with disabilities are well known – but successive governments have failed to address the historical level of unemployment and underemployment of people with disabilities in Canada. In fact, an April 2008 report, entitled *Employability in Canada: Preparing for the Future*, made numerous recommendations to improve the labour force participation of persons with disabilities, but these recommendations been largely ignored by the government.

Although, the Committee heard an impressive array of witnesses who presented numerous detailed and carefully considered recommendations to the government, the recommendations in this report do not address the concerns expressed by those witnesses and do not ask for concrete action. The witnesses who appeared before the Committee nevertheless participated in the process in good faith, often travelling very long distances, in order that they might appear and participate in the study.

The NDP also deplors the fact that this study did not in any way take into account First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples who have a disability rate that is twice the national average. Aboriginal peoples face considerable obstacles in the area of employability, including severely restricted access to transportation, education, communications and health services. This report is also silent on other persons with complex needs, including women, persons living with multiple disabilities, and persons with greater experience of discrimination.

The consultations held during this study nevertheless revealed clearly that the employment programs and policies for persons with disabilities have gaps and shortcomings, lack coordination with provincial programs and services and do not include adequate performance measurements or measurable objectives. By ignoring these facts, government members of the committee demonstrated a lack of vision with regard to the complexity of the issue of the employability of persons living with functional limitations.

New Democrats recommend that the federal government work with the provinces, the territories, Aboriginal peoples and persons with disabilities to put in place an exhaustive coordinated national strategy for persons living with functional limitations. This strategy must comprise benchmarks, indicators and follow-up procedures, including measures in areas such as education, income security, employment, housing and transportation.

Education:

- Work to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to the assistance they need to complete their high school and post-secondary education, and to help them make the transition from school to the workforce.

Income:

- Take action to improve the income security of persons with disabilities, including persons at the lowest income levels, and conduct a full-scale review of programs.

Employment:

- Facilitate the development of an inclusive labour market that generates employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities must have access to the labour market information, support services and training necessary to find and keep jobs.

Housing:

- Enact a national housing strategy in legislation to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for all Canadians.
- Within the context of a national strategy, improve access to accessible and/or adapted housing that will make it possible to enhance the social integration and self-sufficiency of persons with disabilities.

Transportation:

- Improve the mobility of persons with disabilities by means of specialized transportation systems in order to facilitate the social, employment and economic integration of these persons.

Lastly, the NDP asks that the government work with the provinces, the territories, Canada's First Nations and persons with disabilities to develop a plan for the implementation in Canada of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Furthermore, the NDP recommends to the government that it appoint an independent surveillance body to monitor the implementation of the Convention, and that the government sign the Convention's optional protocol. It is time for action.

Supplementary Opinion of the Liberal Party of Canada

We would like to thank all of the witnesses that appeared before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA) during the course of the *Exploring Employment Possibilities of Persons with Disabilities* study. The Liberal Party supported the intent of the study and its recommendations; however, it feels that the final report did not address all of the key concerns or suggestions of the stakeholder groups that appeared before HUMA or submitted briefs for consideration.

The following are some areas that the Liberal Party believes the Report should have included.

Youth with Disabilities

Providing employment opportunities for youth with disabilities is very important in their transition for school to work. The Skills Link program, part of the federal government's Youth Employment Strategy (YES), is targeted, in part, towards youth with disabilities (approximately 17% of Skills Link clients)¹.

The report does recommend a review of the programming under the YES; however, it fails to address the fact that fewer and fewer youth are being served by this strategy each year, in particular the Skills Link program. For the period 2005-06 to 2011-12, the Skills Link program went from assisting 32,000 youth to 12,000 youth². That means that

¹ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 68, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, 26 February 2013, 1145

² See Human Resources and Skills Development Canada Departmental Performance Report 2011-2012, Supplementary Information Tables, Horizontal Initiatives, http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/publications_resources/dpr/dpr/dpr_2011_2012/suppl_tables/page04.shtml#hi-ih1; and

approximately 17% of these positions (i.e. 3,400) that assisted youth with disabilities were lost.

The Liberal Party recommends that funding for youth with disabilities through the YES should be increased to recover the positions that have been lost in the last seven years.

Accommodation

HUMA heard from witnesses who talked about the need to dispel the misconceptions about the cost of accommodation for employees with disabilities. Although the cost has been shown to be quite minimal (often less than \$500) the perception still persists with many employers that it is high.

The Liberal Party agrees with the Report's recommendation that the federal government continue to raise awareness; however, it also recommends that Human Resources and Skills Development Canada study the effectiveness of financial incentives to employers to overcome fears related to accommodating person with disabilities.

Access and Portability of Disability-Related Supports

Witnesses told HUMA that the lack of access to and mobility of disability-related supports is a major barrier to employment. However, many of these supports fall under the provincial and territorial jurisdiction.

One of the main concerns related to disability supports brought up by witnesses dealt with the fact that supports are mostly attached to income security programs, such as

provincial social assistance. The problem for many persons with disabilities is that these supports are often clawed back when the person finds employment.

The loss of these supports often outweigh the income from employment, and therefore acts as a strong disincentive to remain employed for low income persons with disabilities.

The Liberal Party recommends that the federal government open a dialogue with provincial/territorial governments (potentially through the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee) to discuss initiatives that would address barriers to the labour market participation of persons with disabilities, specifically the issue of disability-related supports that are attached to income security programs. And that this dialogue be followed by input from self-representational organizations of persons with disabilities.

Strategic Planning

The Liberal Party supports the recommendation of developing a strategic plan for persons with disabilities; however, it believes this plan should be done in consultation with stakeholders.

Specifically, the Liberal Party recommends the plan should be developed and implemented with the input of persons with disabilities, employers, service providers and provinces and territories.

Federal Role in Employing Persons with Disabilities

The federal government is the largest employer in Canada. In 2008, HUMA tabled a report entitled *Employability in Canada: Preparing for the Future*. This report

recommended that the federal government be a role model for employers across the country and an employer of choice for people with disabilities. The Liberal Party supported that recommendation then and still does now.

The Liberal Party, therefore, recommends that the federal government assess and enhance its role as a champion and role model in the creation and development of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, including by using its purchasing power to acquire products and services produced or provided by persons with disabilities; by extending coverage of the federal contractors program to include more employers; by reviewing and enhancing employment equity measures; and by ensuring that the full spectrum of employment opportunities of the federal government and its agencies include persons with disabilities.

Optional Protocol on Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) was ratified by Canada on March 11, 2010. In addition to the CRPD, an Optional Protocol provides for a complaint mechanism that can be launched with the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities if an individual living in a country that has ratified the protocol has exhausted all avenues for redress in his or her own country without satisfaction. Canada is not a signatory to the Optional Protocol.

The Liberal Party recommends the federal government sign and ratify the Optional Protocol on Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and fully implement both the Convention and the Protocol.