

An Untapped Labour Market Pool

Economic Impact Assessment of Disability and Employment

Executive Summary

Persons with disabilities represent a largely untapped source of labour:

- Many persons with disabilities are able and willing to work, but experience difficulties in their attempts to do so, often due to inaccurate assumptions about their work-related abilities and/or inadequate supports (training, workplace accommodations, etc.).
- Labour force participation and employment of persons with disabilities benefit the economy and contribute their independence and sense of self-worth.

In light of these facts, there is growing interest to shift the focus of disability support programs from providing income-support to providing employment-support.

With proper accommodations and supports, over time, it is possible that persons with disabilities could participate in the labour force at a similar rate to those without disabilities. In New Brunswick, this could equate to bringing in as many as 21,318 persons with disabilities into the active labour force. Doing so could bring about total annual economic impacts within the province of up to:

- 29,705 full-time equivalent employment positions – this figure would include a) increased employment among persons with disabilities, b) increased demand for workers in the disability and employment support sector, and c) additional workers across various industries needed to keep up with the increased spending of the newly employed individuals in the two previously mentioned groups;
- \$1.97 billion in total GDP contributions; and
- over \$220 million in total provincial taxation revenues.

Moving forward is dependent upon further research, evaluation and planning:

- the specifics of the desired support framework must be detailed;
- a plan to transition to this desired framework must be identified; and
- the costs associated with pursuing this plan must be assessed and weighed against the anticipated benefits.

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Developing and implementing this framework could continue, incrementally, as more and more research is undertaken. Some points of consideration when developing a framework include:

- Disability support programs are of little value if their target audience is not aware of their existence or find them inaccessible.
- Clear and timely identification/assessment of a disability is key in developing lifestyle adaptations, rehabilitations, and new skill developments.
- Support programs must focus not only on persons with disabilities but also on the broader cultural awareness of the societies these individuals are members of.
- Education is a strong predictor of labour force participation, employment, and earnings. Disability support programs must consider that employment is not the beginning but rather the result of a personal and economic development trajectory.
- The (re-)integration of persons with disabilities into the New Brunswick labour force will depend not only upon the work-readiness of labour supply but equally upon the understandings, perceptions, and accommodations of employers.
- Effective support is dependent upon case managers and program directors in any one government department remaining fully-aware and informed of services and programs in all other departments.
- The goal of employment-support programs is not only to assist persons with disabilities in achieving employment, but also in maintaining employment.
- Individuals should not be unreasonably penalized (in terms of losing benefits and supports) for attempting to engage in the labour market.
- Needs for services/supports relating to child care, transportation, health and personal care, and so on, maybe be different for persons with disabilities compared to those without disabilities.