



CALEDON
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL POLICY

Disability Policy Highlights

by

Sherri Torjman

April 2014

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ISBN 1-55382-620-5

Published by:

Caledon Institute of Social Policy
1354 Wellington Street West, 3rd Floor
Ottawa, ON K1Y 3C3
CANADA
Tel./Fax: (613) 729-3340
E-mail: caledon@caledoninst.org
Website: www.caledoninst.org
Twitter: @CaledonINST

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Preface

From the time that the Conservatives came to power in 2006, they have introduced an impressive array of disability-related initiatives. This overview makes clear that these diverse measures are concerned primarily with preparation for and entry into the paid labour market. Unlike earlier governments, the Conservative record focuses mainly upon employment and has placed somewhat less emphasis on the broader goals of citizenship and inclusion.

Despite this more targeted focus, there is no question that the current government has paid significant attention to disability issues. In fact, the late Finance Minister Jim Flaherty took great personal interest in the needs of Canadians with disabilities and sought to ensure, through the many actions discussed here, the active participation of these individuals in the paid labour market and in society, more generally.

The following paper is the text of a speech delivered to the Ontario Cluster of the Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy, which is housed at the Institute for Work and Health in Toronto. The Centre was funded as part of a pan-Canadian research effort on work disability policy supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Because the work being undertaken for this project is national in scope, the highlights in this report focus mainly upon federal disability policy. However, there are also selected references to Ontario as the presentation was made to the group of researchers comprising the Ontario Cluster.

Introduction

When I was asked to make a presentation on recent policy developments on disability, I thought that it would be appropriate to review the highlights of the current government's record. The starting point for this discussion is 2006-07. I will be focusing my remarks primarily upon major changes at the federal level and will mention only briefly some relevant policy developments in Ontario.

In some ways, it is difficult to choose a starting point for disability policy in that there has been a long history, over the past 30 years, of noteworthy advances in the disability story in Canada. The past three decades have seen countless committees, task forces and reports on disability. Taken together, they represent a substantive policy evolution in many important areas including human rights, education and communications. I will be presenting today only the most recent developments in disability policy.

On a *substantive* level, disability issues tend to mirror the same thread that weaves its way through all other aspects of the current federal government's agenda. The aim is to promote economic activity and labour market participation to the greatest extent possible. Financial self-sufficiency is deemed a top-priority, highly desirable goal. The role of government is to create the framework and conditions to help the non-governmental sector – employers, employees, communities and individuals – reach that outcome.

Within the overarching framework of labour market participation, two sub-themes have emerged in recent years. The first is the notion of *demand-driven programming* when it comes to employability interventions. This means that any government-funded initiatives must be designed to be relevant to the local labour market. Ideally, employers are involved directly or in an advisory capacity in the design and/or management of these programs.

The second sub-theme is *accountability and outcomes*. There is a significant focus on assessing progress relative to the achievement of outcomes. Measurement and evaluation are two crucial components of any federally supported initiative. But despite the fact that accountability is a signpost of this government, the results of these evaluations are not always publicly available.

On a *process* level, there has been a shift away from collaborative federal-provincial/territorial initiatives, such as the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Disability Issues. The Working Group produced in 1989, for example, the report *In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues* in which all governments worked together to articulate a common set of priorities related to inclusion, employment and supports. The commitment to its principles was reinforced in a follow-up report *In Unison 2000: Persons with Disabilities in Canada*.

The current federal government, by contrast, tends to do things on its own or to act directly with employers or with provinces and territories on a bilateral basis. It prefers to employ direct approaches that send cheques to or give tax breaks for individual Canadians.

Multilateral approaches involving joint discussions among federal, provincial and territorial governments have been replaced by one-on-one deals. Some recent measures that had been announced unilaterally by the federal government, such as the Canada Job Grant and the draft *Aboriginal Education Act*, originally had not been well received by provinces and territories, and by First Nations leadership, respectively.

In short, Ottawa has clear preferences when it comes to both agenda and process. In order to highlight recent policy developments, I have divided this overview into three major categories related to legislative, program and data/research initiatives.

A. Legislative Initiatives

Perhaps the most important legislative initiative taken by the current government was the ratification on March 11, 2010, of the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. The disability community considered this action to be a landmark achievement.

This international convention sets out a human rights framework for redressing the persistent exclusion from society of persons with disabilities. As in the case of any legislative initiative, the power of such documents lies in the extent to which the provisions are monitored and enforced.

There are a few selected areas that would be of interest to this SSHRC research project. They relate to accessibility, education, and work and employment.

Article 9 on accessibility requires signatory nations to (among other actions):

- provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public
- promote access for persons with disabilities to new information and communications technologies and systems, including the Internet.

Article 24 of the Convention obliges signatory states to recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure that (among other actions):

- persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live
- reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided.

In terms of work and employment, Article 27 requires States Parties to (among other actions):

- recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others. This provision includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities
- prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability with regard to all matters concerning all forms of employment. These include conditions of recruitment, hiring and employment, continuance of employment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions.

B. Program Initiatives

Program initiatives comprise the second major category of policy highlights. While there are a few significant income and educational measures (described below), the centrepiece of this government's activity involves employability and work-related measures.

i. Income security

a. Registered Disability Savings Plan

The Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) is a long-term savings vehicle to help Canadians with disabilities and their families save for the future. The primary beneficiary of the RDSP is the individual who will receive the money down the road.

A person may establish an RDSP if he or she is eligible for the federal Disability Tax Credit, is a Canadian resident, is under age 60 and has a social insurance number. Parents or legal representatives of a minor may open an RDSP on their behalf.

The lifetime contribution limit for an RDSP is \$200,000, with no annual ceiling. Anyone can contribute to the RDSP with the written permission of the plan holder. While contributions are not tax-deductible, investment income earned in the plan accumulates tax-free. However, grants, bonds and investment income earned in the plan are considered taxable income when paid out of the RDSP.

The federal government may provide a matching Canada Disability Savings Grant of up to \$3,500 a year on contributions. Ottawa may also pay a Canada Disability Savings Bond of up to \$1,000 a year into the RDSPs of low- and modest-income Canadians. The bond may be directed to an RDSP even if no personal contributions were made on behalf of a given individual.

The RDSP is administered by the Canada Revenue Agency. Its Grant and Bond components are delivered by Employment and Social Development Canada.

It will take years for the Registered Disability Savings Plan to grow into a significant part of the income security system for people with disabilities. For individuals who do not have regular salaried work that provides access to employer-triggered programs, social assistance is often the only available program of income support. Caledon has outlined our concerns about the limitations of the disability income system. We have proposed a major restructuring involving both income security and disability supports [Mendelson, Battle, Torjman and Lightman 2010].

b. Working Income Tax Benefit

Ottawa introduced the Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) in 2007. Its purpose is to help low-income individuals currently employed in the paid labour market by supplementing low *earnings*.

While promising in theory, the WITB in its first year (2007) delivered a meagre payment of up to just a maximum \$500 annually for single workers and \$1,000 for single parents and couples. In addition, the initial design of the program was targeted so far down the income scale that it excluded many of the working poor.

The Caledon Institute praised the federal government's announcement of this initiative and advised it to boost the WITB by increasing its amount and extending it higher up the earnings scale in order to assist more working poor Canadians. Ottawa responded in 2009 by enhancing the benefit by a substantial 85 percent for singles and 68 percent for families, and by expanding its reach.

However, the Working Income Tax Benefit in 2014 still pays a modest maximum \$998 for a single worker per year (\$1,813 for a family) and cuts out at a low net income of \$17,985 (\$27,736 for a family). Even with the 2009 hike, the benefit still excludes almost all single minimum wage workers.

Caledon has argued that this measure needs a healthy, multi-year injection of funds before it can become a major weapon in the war on poverty and inequality. But at least a solid foundation is in place. We have called upon the federal government to build the Working Income Tax Benefit into a much more powerful instrument, both in terms of increasing benefits and extending the program higher up the income scale [Battle and Torjman 2012].

For the purposes of the SSRCH research, it is important to note that the Working Income Tax Benefit comes with a disability supplement worth in 2014 a maximum \$499, over and above the basic \$998. The disability supplement cuts out at net income of \$21,315 (\$31,064 for a family). To be eligible for the disability supplement, working income must exceed \$1,150 and the employee must have on file an approved Disability Tax Credit Certificate.

It is not clear how many Canadians benefit from this provision – let alone even know about it in the first place. The disability supplement has not been highlighted in government announcements and appears to be a well-hidden policy secret. At such a low level, the supplement likely acts not so much as a work incentive but rather as a modest offset for additional employment-related costs, such as special equipment or transportation.

ii. Assistance for post-secondary education

The federal government currently invests more than \$10 billion a year in support of post-secondary education, which includes financial assistance in the form of Canada Student Loans and Canada Student Grants. Several additional measures have been put in place to enable access to post-secondary education for students with disabilities.

Under the Canada Student Grant for Students with Permanent Disabilities, a full-time student with a permanent disability and total assessed need of \$14,000 may be eligible to receive \$2,000 in grant funding and \$7,140 in repayable Canada Student Loans. The remainder of the assessed need may be met through provincial/territorial student financial assistance. This measure is delivered by Employment and Social Development Canada, and replaces the Canada Study Grant for High-need Students with Permanent Disabilities.

There is no separate application for this grant. Eligibility is determined by the provincial/territorial student financial assistance office within the province of residence during the assessment of the student loan application.

Ottawa has also introduced the Canada Study Grant for Services and Equipment for Students with Permanent Disabilities. This grant of up to \$8,000 per loan year is intended to help cover exceptional education-related costs associated with disability, such as a tutor, interpreter (oral or sign), note taker, reader or braille, attendant care for studies, specialized transportation to and from school, or 75 percent of the cost of a learning disability assessment up to a maximum of \$1,200.

In order to qualify, students must meet the eligibility criteria for a full- or part-time loan. They must have a permanent disability, supported by appropriate medical documentation, which limits their ability to participate fully in post-secondary studies. They must also require exceptional educational-related services or equipment in order to participate in these studies.

A separate application for the Canada Study Grant for Services and Equipment for Students with Permanent Disabilities must be submitted to the appropriate provincial/territorial office along with the application for student loan assistance. Eligibility for the Canada Access Grant for Students with Permanent Disabilities is considered automatically during the assessment of loan eligibility.

Many of the expenses for which the Canada Study Grant for Services and Equipment of Students with Permanent Disabilities may be used, such as attendant care or a device to enable a blind person to read or use a computer (e.g., optical scanners or large print-on-the-screen devices), also qualify for tax assistance under the Medical Expense Tax Credit (METC).

The METC recognizes the effect of extraordinary medical expenses on an individual's ability to pay tax. While the Canada Study Grants must be included in income for tax purposes like other bursaries and scholarships, the tax payable on these grants may be offset by relief provided through the METC. The only catch is that the individual must have taxable income that is high enough in the first place to benefit from claiming the METC.

iii. Economic Action Plan

The centrepiece of this government's activity takes the form of its Economic Action Plan, which acts as the umbrella theme for virtually all of its initiatives. Within the context of the Economic Action Plan, there are several federal programs that promote the employability and labour market participation of persons with disabilities:

- Labour Market Agreements
- Opportunities Fund
- Enabling Accessibility Fund
- Labour Market Panel on Persons with Disabilities and the subsequent Employers Forum on Disability
- Connecting Canadians with Available Jobs.

The 2013 Economic Action Plan noted Ottawa's intention to increase opportunities for persons with disabilities by helping them gain the skills and training they need to better participate in Canada's labour market. It states that:

Supporting people with disabilities is an essential part of ensuring that they have bright and promising futures, especially when it comes time for them to find employment. The Government of Canada is taking steps to ensure that people with disabilities meet their career goals, through the Canadian Economic Action Plan.

a. Labour Market Agreements

Economic Action Plan 2013 announced federal transfers of \$2.7 billion per year to support labour market programming for several groups of vulnerable workers. The total investment was broken down as follows:

- \$1.95 billion annually to provinces and territories through Labour Market Development Agreements
- \$500 million annually to provinces and territories through Labour Market Agreements
- \$218 million annually to provinces only through Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities.

Starting in the late 1990s, Ottawa entered into Labour Market Development Agreements with the provinces and territories. The purpose of these agreements is to help unemployed Canadians return quickly to work, and to develop a skilled labour force that meets current and emerging needs of employers. Through these arrangements, federal funding enables provinces and territories to design, deliver and manage skills and employment programs for unemployed Canadians. These programs are intended primarily for workers eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) benefits.

Labour Market Development Agreements are complemented by *Labour Market Agreements*, which were announced in the 2007 federal Budget. They provide funding for provincial and territorial labour market programs and services, particularly for low-skilled workers and unemployed Canadians who are not eligible for EI benefits.

The purpose of these Labour Market Agreements is to enhance the employability and skills of groups that are under-represented in the workforce and to increase their labour market participation. These include workers with no high school diploma or recognized certification, or who have low levels of literacy and essential skills, including persons with disabilities.

These accords were introduced in 2007 with an investment of \$3 billion over six years. Annual funding of \$500 million is distributed among provinces and territories on a per capita basis. To ensure greater support during the economic downturn, the Economic Action Plan provided an additional \$250 million a year to the Labour Market Agreements through a two-year Strategic Training and Transition Fund for 2009-10 and 2010-11.

The Labour Market Agreements permit provinces and territories to determine their allocation priorities relative to the needs of their respective labour markets. Funding must be directed toward one or a combination of the following services:

- *Employment services*: interventions may include generic employment information and assistance services, for both employed and unemployed clients

- *Skills development and upgrading*: interventions include all types of formal training, such as in a classroom setting, with a set curriculum, for unemployed clients
- *Work experience*: interventions may involve on-the-job employment supports in a workplace, such as wage subsidies, job placements or project-based job creation, for unemployed clients
- *Combination of skills development and work experience*: interventions may consist of a combination of skills development and work experience for unemployed clients
- *Workplace-based skills development*: interventions may include training for employed clients offered by employers (at the workplace or off-site), or skill development initiatives for employees who lack a high school diploma or recognized credential.

Under the Labour Market Agreements, funds transferred to the provinces and territories have enhanced funding for existing programs or supported the creation of new programs, such as *Workplace Essential Skills New Brunswick*, the *Second Career* program in Ontario, *Labour Education Centre* and *Workplace Essential Skills Training Centres* in Manitoba.

The agreements require provinces and territories to publish detailed annual plans, outlining their priorities, objectives, intended activities and projected expenditures for the year. In addition to the provincial and territorial reports, Ottawa is expected to compile a national report on Labour Market Agreement activities and results. The most recent summary posted to the federal government website is dated 2008-09.

With the Labour Market Agreements set to expire in March 2014, Economic Action Plan 2013 announced the federal government's intention to renew these arrangements with provinces and territories in 2014 with investments of \$500 million per year. At the same time, Ottawa noted its plans to substantially reform these agreements with the introduction of a new initiative.

In its March 2013 Budget, the federal government proposed a new employment skills training program called the Canada Job Grant. The new program would provide cash grants of up to \$15,000 for training sponsored by employers. Its purpose would be to train unemployed and underemployed Canadians for available jobs. The federal government would fund one-third of the cost, with equal shares coming from the provincial or territorial governments and employers.

The new program would be financed by cutting \$300 million annually (60 percent of the current \$500 million total) from federal funding to provinces and territories under the Labour Market Agreements. The proposed federal program would place added pressure on provincial and territorial budgets by requiring them to come up with new funding – a further \$300 million – to match federal contributions [Mendelson and Zon 2013].

The extent to which the changes will affect programs for persons with disabilities is unclear at this time. The *Globe and Mail* reported in January 2014 that provinces that do not sign on to the

Canada Job Grant will make their programs vulnerable [Curry 2014b]. [Author's note: Subsequent to this presentation, Ottawa reached an agreement with all provinces and territories except Quebec. The new arrangement will help reduce the potentially negative consequences of the original design. The former Labour Market Agreements are now being referred to as the Canada Job Grant Agreements.]

While these negotiations were under way, a distinct pool of funds intended for persons with disabilities was not affected. These funds flow to provinces (only) through a separate set of accords, known as the *Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities*. These agreements also expire in March 2014. A new generation of these accords is being negotiated on a bilateral basis and will be in place by 2014.

The Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities (LMAPD), in particular, was signed in May 2004. Under the Canada-Ontario LMAPD, Ottawa agreed to share up to 50 percent of the cost of programs and services that meet the objectives of the Agreement, up to a maximum federal contribution of \$76.4 million. In 2011-12, Ontario spent \$229.1 million on programs and services funded under the LMAPD. Provincial spending exceeded the federal investment by \$152.7 million for that period.

The purpose of the Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities is to improve the employment status of persons with disabilities. Its objectives seek to:

- enhance the employability of persons with disabilities
- increase employment opportunities available to persons with disabilities
- build on the existing knowledge base of research, best practices, data collection and program evaluation.

The current agreement covers a wide range of labour market initiatives. In Ontario, funds are allocated among several core departments including the Ministry of Community and Social Services; Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities; and the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care.

The *Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services* administers the Ontario Disability Supports Program (ODSP), which pays benefits to persons with severe and prolonged disabilities who do not qualify for other programs of income support. ODSP includes an Employment Supports component that provides employment assistance to people with disabilities who are interested in preparing for, obtaining and maintaining competitive employment.

The Income Support component of ODSP pays a Work-Related Benefit of \$100 per month to eligible recipients, who are employed or who have net positive self-employment income. In 2011-12, an estimated 5,453 ODSP recipients got the Work-Related Benefit.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services also operates Supported Employment Programs to help persons with physical and developmental disabilities who may need extra support in adjusting to employment. This accommodation may include physically adapting to a workplace,

responding to new stresses and challenges on the job, or requiring assistance with the daily demands of working.

In 2005-06, Ontario created the Passport program in order to enhance opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities who have left school and are seeking community participation supports. A key goal of this program is to provide supports that focus on individual goals, work activities and community participation.

A broad range of programs and services at the post-secondary level are delivered through the *Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities*. These programs and services assist students as they work towards the successful completion of their post-secondary education.

Under the Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities, support is provided to colleges and universities. The funds help them meet their obligations under Ontario's *Human Rights Code* to make their programs and services accessible to students with disabilities. This financial support is intended to supplement expenditures that colleges and universities make from their general revenues to meet their legal obligations. In 2011-12, more than 45,000 students with disabilities were served at Ontario colleges and universities. Services include tutors, note takers, equipment and technology acquisition, sign language interpreters and diagnostic services.

The *Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care* funds a variety of programs that provide employment services to people with serious mental illness. Services are delivered directly, in the case of mental health hospitals, or through third parties that include general hospitals and community mental health agencies.

Alcohol and drug programs, for example, are funded by the Mental Health and Addiction Branch of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. All programs are financed through transfer payments to independent agencies. Services include:

- non-medical withdrawal management services that allow clients to participate in other supports along the continuum of addiction treatment
- non-residential services, including individual and group counselling and programming, which assist clients to develop the skills required to manage their addictions, related problems and lifestyles.

b. Opportunities Fund

The Opportunities Fund is another major disability-related measure within the federal Economic Action Plan. The purpose of the fund is to break down barriers that prevent Canadians with disabilities from reaching their full potential.

The Opportunities Fund provides support for local, regional and national projects that assist persons with disabilities who have little or no labour force attachment to prepare for, obtain and keep jobs or to become self-employed. Eligible applicants include businesses, organizations, individuals with disabilities, public health and educational institutions, band or tribal councils, and municipal governments.

The Opportunities Fund helps finance the following activities:

- skills for employment
- wage subsidies
- work experience
- self-employment
- enhanced employment assistance
- employer awareness
- community coordination.

Project outcomes must focus on the labour market participation of persons with disabilities and the level to which the program enhances their employability. Expected results for Opportunities Fund projects include the number of clients who return to school or whose employability prospects were improved.

Capital costs for the construction of a building – other than repairs or renovations to enable the participation of persons with disabilities – or the purchase of land or buildings are not eligible under the program. These types of projects may be supported through the Enabling Accessibility Fund discussed below and selected provincial measures.

Ottawa has invested an annual \$30 million in this program since 2006. Budget 2013 announced the reform and extension of the Opportunities Fund with an additional \$10 million a year. Starting in 2015-16, the federal government will provide ongoing annual funding of \$40 million in order to “help deliver more demand-driven training solutions for persons with disabilities.”

c. Enabling Accessibility Fund

The Enabling Accessibility Fund was announced in the 2007 federal Budget, which committed \$45 million over three years toward this program. The Fund was renewed in Budget 2010. Economic Action Plan 2013 subsequently extended the Enabling Accessibility Fund on an ongoing basis at a value of \$15 million per year.

Its purpose is to provide financial assistance to community-based projects involving construction and renovations that improve physical accessibility for persons with disabilities. More than 1,000 projects have been supported through this program.

Applications to the Enabling Accessibility Fund must be submitted during Calls for Proposals. In December 2013, Ottawa announced a new stream of financing within the program – with grants of up to \$50,000 per project – for eligible small businesses and social enterprises. Proposals were required to support employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through construction and renovation that improve workplace accessibility.

d. Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

The Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities was announced in Economic Action Plan 2012. Its mandate was to identify private sector successes and best practices with respect to the labour market participation of persons with disabilities.

The Panel consulted widely across the country with Canadian firms of all sizes in a range of sectors. Its report *Rethinking DisAbility in the Private Sector* was released in January 2013.

Labour force participation among people with disabilities is low. Only 59.6 percent of persons with disabilities are active in the workforce (i.e., they work or are actively searching for employment) compared with 80.2 percent of working-age adults without disabilities. An estimated one million people with disabilities are not in the workforce at all. Nearly 65 percent of this group are prevented from working by their disabilities.

The report found that workers with disabilities are dramatically under-represented in private-sector companies governed by the *Employment Equity Act*. They are over-represented, by contrast, in the public service.

The Panel argued that there is a good business case for hiring persons with disabilities, and set out tangible steps that employers could take in the hiring and employee support processes. Its report noted that:

- many companies recognize that hiring and accommodating persons with disabilities is good for business
- many companies show a genuine desire to hire persons with disabilities; however, education and training are required to overcome barriers, dispel myths and put theory into practice
- the keys to success are leadership and effective community partnerships with organizations that fully understand the talent needs of business.

The Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities recommended the creation of an Employers' Forum to enhance opportunities for employment among people with disabilities. The 2013 Economic Action Plan proposed a time-limited \$2 million investment to support the creation of this Employers' Forum.

The initiative will be managed by employers and is intended to support education, training and the sharing of resources and good practice around the hiring and retention of people with disabilities. Its purpose is to promote the skills of people with disabilities in order to demonstrate to employers that this population is valuable to the workforce.

e. Connecting Canadians with Available Jobs

Through Economic Action Plan 2012, Ottawa introduced several new measures to provide Employment Insurance (EI) claimants with additional supports to enable faster returns to work, while clarifying what is expected of them while looking for employment. A major purpose is to promote the availability of labour market information, including online postings to support job search activities.

C. Data and Research Initiatives

i. Disability data

Employment and Skills Development Canada, in collaboration with Statistics Canada and key stakeholders from the academic and the disability communities, recently implemented a new strategy for collecting data on persons with disabilities in Canada. This strategy is part of a larger departmental initiative to modernize its overall data portfolio.

In 2010, Ottawa appointed a technical advisory group on data to devise an alternative survey that would replace the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS). Government officials supported the work of this group by conducting an international review to determine how other countries collect data on persons with disabilities.

Canada's disability data was deemed to be in need of an upgrade for several reasons. It was not seen to provide timely information. Former data sources were not considered to be consistent, integrated or well coordinated. There was limited use of existing administrative information and few linkages with survey data. Program and tax figures were not integrated with other Statistics Canada surveys.

Ottawa contends that the new strategy on persons with disabilities will provide a more timely, effective and flexible approach to obtaining data on this population and their emerging needs. More specifically, the strategy aims to:

- make better use of existing information, including program and tax information, Statistics Canada surveys and the National Household Survey
- integrate and link more effectively different sources of information
- harmonize the disability content of existing surveys

- move from a “point in time” information system to a system providing new information on persons with disabilities on an ongoing basis
- complement the available data with various techniques – e.g., research, evaluation and modelling.

Statistics Canada launched the new Canadian Survey on Disability on December 3, 2013. Information will be based on the new National Household Survey and will be gathered and produced every five years. Labour market and education releases will be issued in 2014. Data will be available in the micro-data files in federal data centres.

In addition to the Canadian Survey on Disability, disability questions will be added to existing national surveys. While the information gathered will not be as detailed as that derived through the Canadian Survey on Disability, it will allow more opportunities for tracking various trends over time. During the recession, for example, there was no data showing the impact on the employment of persons with disabilities, in particular.

Some longitudinal data is also expected in future. The federal government contends that this information will represent an improvement over what exists right now, which basically compares ‘snapshots’ with the post-Censal survey.

The Canadian Income Survey, which replaced the now-defunct cross-sectional Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID), will be carried out every year. The new annual survey will help monitor developments over time. It will be possible to derive data by type of disability – i.e., mobility, hearing and seeing, and cognitive disability, which comprises learning, developmental and mental impairment. The Canadian Income Survey will also provide information on labour market activity, including part-time work and the unemployment rate as well as level and source of income.

ii. Disability research

The federal government has provided funds for disability research – particularly around issues that pertain to improved employability. Economic Action Plan 2013 proposed an additional \$7 million per year for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to help fund research related to the labour market participation of persons with disabilities.

Over the past few years, Ottawa has generously supported research on mental health. In 2007, it announced the creation of the Mental Health Commission of Canada as an independent, arms-length organization. It was set up in response to a key recommendation of the Senate report *Out of the Shadows at Last*, published in 2006. The Commission is leading many other initiatives, including:

- the formulation of a 10-year anti-stigma and anti-discrimination initiative

- the development of a knowledge exchange centre – a web resource to access evidence based information on mental health and mental illness
- several research demonstration projects across Canada on mental health and homelessness, looking at a housing-first model of intervention.

The strategy is organized into the following six streams, each with own designated priority areas:

- promote mental health across the lifespan in homes, schools and work places, and prevent mental illness and suicide wherever possible
- foster recovery and well-being for people of all ages living with mental health problems and illnesses, and uphold their rights
- provide access to the right combination of services, treatments and supports, when and where people need them
- reduce disparities in risk factors and access to mental health services, and strengthen the response to the needs of diverse communities and Northerners
- work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis to address their mental health needs, acknowledging their distinct circumstances, rights and cultures
- mobilize leadership, improve knowledge and foster collaboration at all levels.

In 2012, the Commission released its report *Changing Directions-Changing Lives: The Mental Health Strategy for Canada*. The report recommended that the proportion of health spending that is devoted to mental health increased from seven to nine percent over 10 years. Selected existing investments should be reallocated to improve efficiency and achieve better mental health outcomes. The private and philanthropic sectors should be engaged in contributing resources to mental health [Torjman and Makhoul 2013].

With respect to employment, in particular, *Changing Directions-Changing Lives* proposed the widespread adoption of psychological health and safety standards in Canadian workplaces. Mental health problems and illnesses are the leading cause of short- and long-term disability in Canada. The Commission recommended that the standard be seen as a key measure of progress in promoting workplace mental health.

The national standard entitled *Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* subsequently was formulated. The document outlines a systematic approach to developing and sustaining a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. It focuses on the prevention of mental illness and the promotion of mental health.

The document is a voluntary standard for application in the workplace. The standard includes information on the:

- identification of psychological hazards
- assessment and control of the risks associated with hazards that cannot be eliminated – e.g., stressors due to organizational change or reasonable job demands
- implementation of practices that support and promote psychological health and safety
- growth of a culture that promotes psychological health and safety
- implementation of systems of measurement and review to ensure sustainability of the overall approach.

[Author’s note: Subsequent to this presentation, Economic Action Plan 2014 announced its intention to connect persons with developmental disabilities with jobs by providing \$15 million over three years to the Ready, Willing & Able initiative of the Canadian Association for Community Living. The initiative focuses upon the unique employment barriers faced by persons with intellectual disabilities and persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders.]

A note about Ontario

Several policy discussions related to disability are currently under way in Ontario. In the interest of time, I will present only a few summary highlights.

There are problems related to Workers’ Compensation. Employers have expressed concern about rising costs, with an unfunded liability of close to \$12 billion [Nixon 2009: 1]. They point out that while employers and employees have reduced accident rates by 40 percent over the past 10 years, average Workers’ Compensation claim costs increased by 119 percent. Successful efforts to reduce accidents have been cancelled by runaway average claim costs.

Other groups, including injured workers, note the serious concerns related to eligibility changes that have had the effect of restricting access to Workers’ Compensation, especially in the post-2010 period [Stapleton 2013: 17]. The result of these and many other changes has been a so-called “welfareization” of disability income. There has been a substantial increase in the number of Ontario Disability Supports Program (ODSP) recipients.

In terms of persons with developmental disabilities, Ontario struck a Select Committee on Developmental Services in October 2013. The committee is holding province-wide hearings on community-based services for persons with developmental disabilities. The availability of appropriate housing with associated supports is of major concern to the community.

Finally, Ontario introduced the *Accessibility of Ontarians with Disabilities Act* in 2005. Starting January 1, 2012, the accessible customer service standard came into effect for all Ontario businesses and organizations with one or more employee. The requirement for these organizations to comply with the law will certainly focus attention on disability issues – though will likely be of greatest

help to individuals with mobility or communication impairments. Persons with any form of cognitive impairment or emotional problems will continue to face a wide range of barriers to participation.

Conclusion

There is still a long way to go in Canada to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate actively in the paid labour market and in society, more generally. Services and supports are underfunded relative to demand, and significant physical, procedural and attitudinal barriers remain rigidly in place.

But there can be no argument about the fact that the current federal government is well aware of the needs of Canadians with disabilities. Over the course of its mandate, it has taken a number of significant steps toward advancing inclusion.

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