

# DISABILITY AND THE WORKPLACE: CHALLENGES, TRENDS, AND BEST PRACTICES AMONG SMES IN CANADA

February 13, 2023

## Research Objectives

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- Identify best practices, challenges, and emerging trends on disability and the workplace in Canada, particularly related to SMEs.
- Part of the CBDC's Restigouche's Hire for Talent initiative, a national awareness campaign that increases employer confidence hiring people with disabilities.
- Led by Restigouche CBDC in partnership with the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC).
- Research was carried out between January 2022 and June 2022.



## Key Research Questions

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- What are the opportunities, needs and challenges of SMEs related to recruiting, hiring, supporting, and retaining people with disabilities?
- What challenges do people with disabilities face entering and succeeding in the workforce?
- What are the challenges experienced by employers and people with disabilities related to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How do challenges faced by people with disabilities interact with or are compounded by other social identities and life conditions?

## Research Methodology

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- Literature review and scan
- National survey of SMEs
- National survey of people with lived experience of disability
- Focus groups with representatives of SMEs

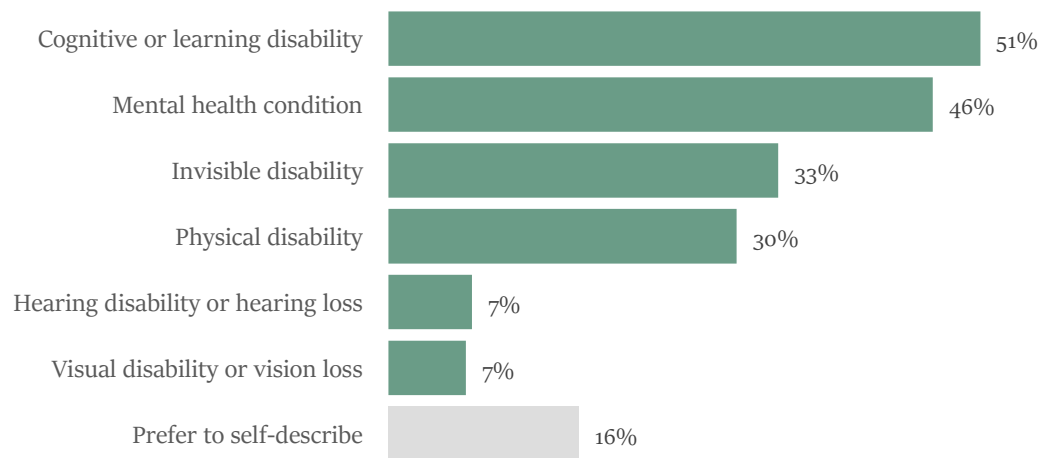
Participants were recruited by CBDC Restigouche through service provider partners and the Community Futures Network of Canada.

# PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES SURVEY

## Survey respondents were relatively diverse

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- **Gender:** 47% men, 48% women, 5% other
- **Sexual orientation:** 18% LGBTQ2S+
- **Racial identification:** 70% white, 20% visible minority, 10% Indigenous
- **Type of disability**



## Challenging financial and employment situations, but also high job satisfaction

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- **Low income:** 90% earned less than \$29 000; 10% reported no income
- **Precarious employment:** 45% not currently working; 7 % never worked
- **Weak attachment to labour market:** 53% in position less than a year; 63% have been unemployed in last 5 years
- **Challenges advancing:** 72% reported that it was difficult advancing in their career
- **High job satisfaction:** 71% reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with their job

## The COVID-19 pandemic greatly exacerbated employment and financial hardships

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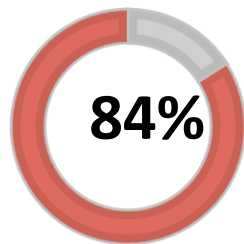
- Half of respondents reported that their employment situations were greatly impacted by COVID-19.
- Challenges faced: mental health, isolation from social or family connections, and personal finances.
- One-quarter of respondents mentioned positive outcomes such as self-development, more work, and strengthened social connections.
- Challenges accessing services: medical appointments, diagnostics and medication, in-person medical appointments, and employment services.

“I got hired at a company in the early stages of the pandemic and a few days after I was hired the company was shut down due to COVID-19 so I didn't get the chance to start working at that job.”

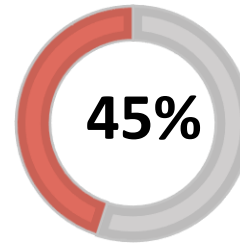


## People with disabilities generally request accommodations; however, equity-deserving groups are less likely to request and/or receive accommodations

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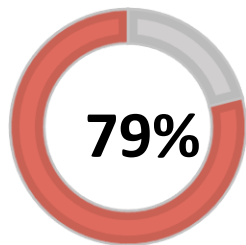


*stated that their employer is aware of their disability.*

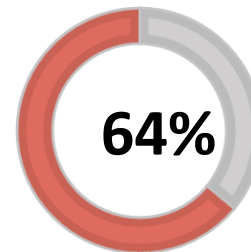


*require accommodations.*

Most common accommodations: modified or different job tasks and responsibilities, and modified hours or days or reduced work hours.



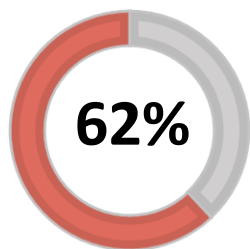
*have asked for accommodations.*



*of accommodation requests were fulfilled.*

**Members of equity-deserving groups are less likely to request and/or receive needed accommodations.**

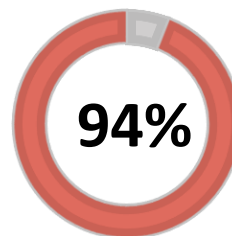
## People with disabilities face a number of employment-related challenges, particularly equity-deserving groups



62%

*reported that they face job-related challenges.*

- not knowing what services are available
- discomfort disclosing disability
- lack of job security/permanency
- factors related to discrimination were least common challenges



94%

*experienced challenges finding work.*

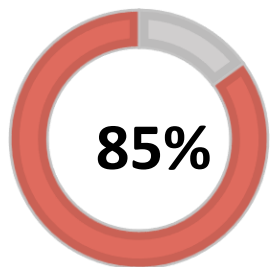
- finding jobs that fit qualifications
- finding jobs that align with interests
- finding jobs that offer flexibility/accommodation
- finding employers with experience hiring people with disabilities.

When specifically asked what challenges their disability plays related to finding work, most respondents mentioned anxiety, depression and/or mental health.

**Equity-deserving groups are more likely to report facing challenges**

## Most respondents found both employer and service provider supports to be helpful

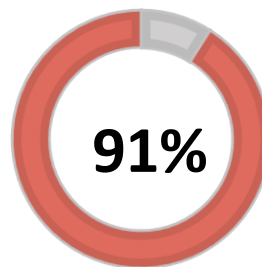
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**85%**

*found employer support helpful.*

- regular check-ins/feedback from supervisor
- inclusive workplace policies, practices, and training resources
- discussions about workplace accommodations



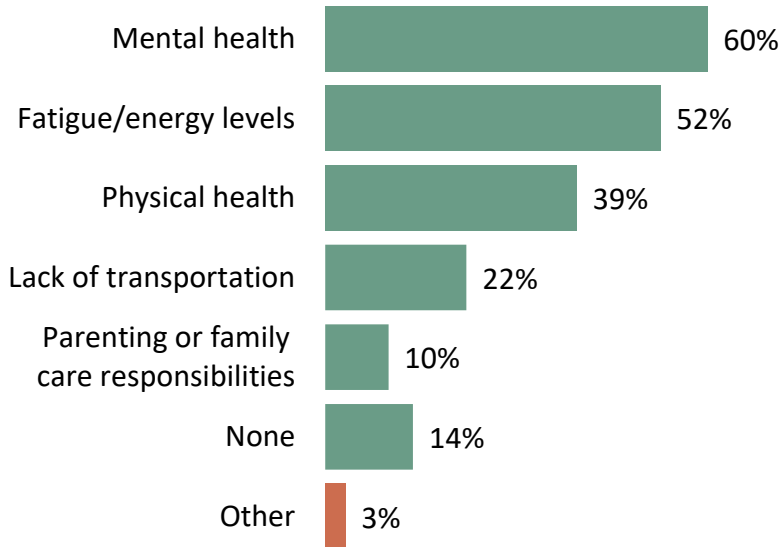
**91%**

*found service provider support helpful.*

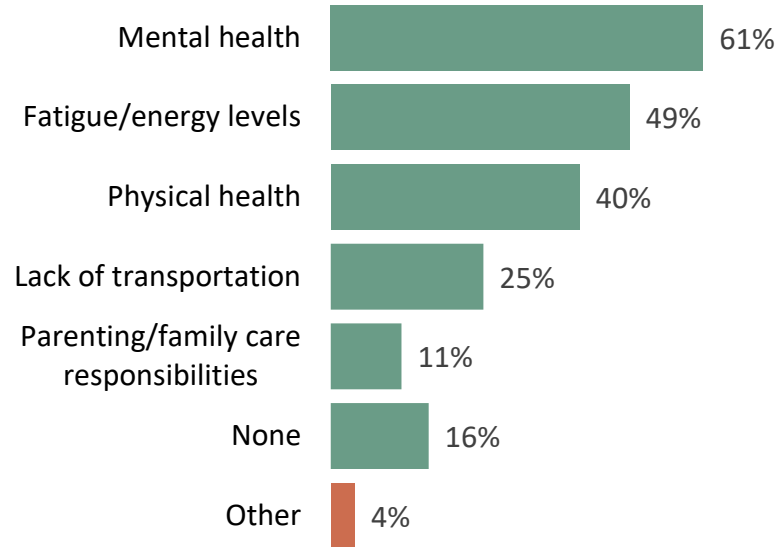
- assistance with accommodations
- assistance with the job transition through check-ins and mentoring or coaching

# Mental health and fatigue are key life factors that impact the employment of people with disabilities

Aspect(s) of life impacting job (n=314)



Life challenge(s) finding work (n=383)



## FINDINGS – SMES

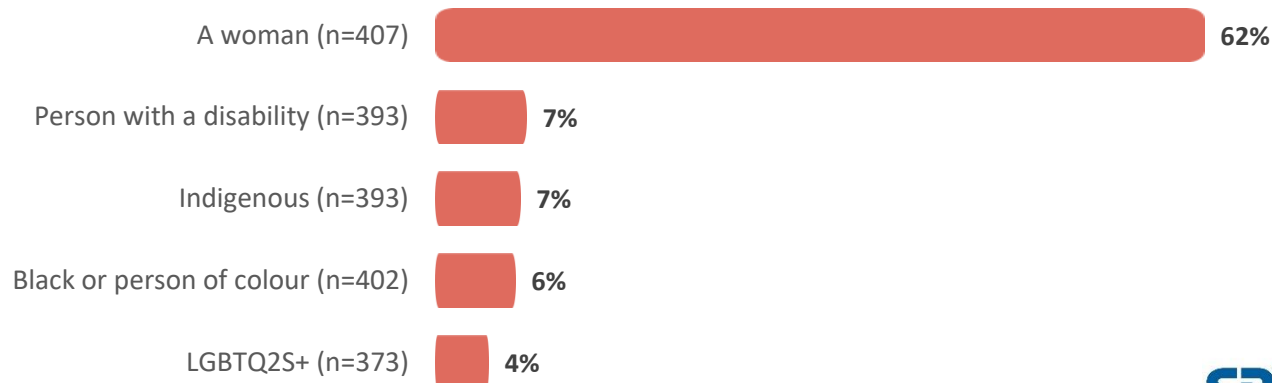
## SME Survey Participants

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**410** surveys were included in the analysis.

- **67%** of respondents were owners of their organization.
- **94%** of organizations had less than 99 employees.
- **58%** organizations made less than \$500,000 total gross revenue in the last fiscal year.
- **75%** of the organizations are for-profit businesses.

Percentage of organization leads belonging to an equity-deserving group:

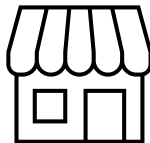


## Focus Group Participants

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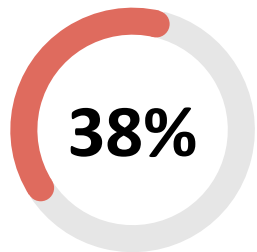
A total of **30 SMEs** participated in the focus groups.

- 8 focus groups: 3 French, 5 English (2 to 7 participants in each)
- Representation from all provinces except PEI
- Most located in rural communities
- A variety of business or organization types



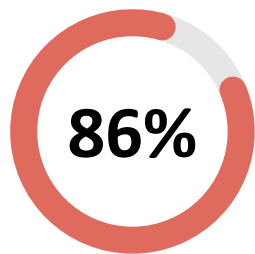
## Most SMEs engage in inclusive employment practices; however, few have adopted formal policies

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*of organizations had a written inclusive workplace policy.*

Of organizations that do not have a written inclusive workplace policy, half plan to develop a policy in the future.



*of organizations have implemented concrete measures to support an inclusive workplace.*



## SMEs engage in a range of inclusive employment practices

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- SMEs focus more on **practices that they engage in to encourage inclusivity**, as opposed to formal policies.
- SMEs engage in **inclusive employment practices** for recruitment and hiring, onboarding, and retention:
  - Case-by-case planning
  - Adapting the work environment and/or the job description
  - Building trusting relationships with all employees
  - Adopting a strengths-based perspective
  - Moving away from traditional recruitment and hiring practices

## SMEs differ in relation to their inclusive policies.

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- Inclusion **policies are diverse** in terms of stage, focus, and depth
- SMEs are at **different stages** of policy development:
  - Unsure of need for formal policies
  - Early stages of policy development
- SMEs have policies focused on **different aspects** of inclusion:
  - Broad focus
    - Detailed inclusive workplace policy covering multiple aspects of inclusion
  - Narrow focus
    - Accessibility policy for clients
    - Policy for disability and religious accommodations
    - Anti-harassment policies
  - Generic and outdated inclusion policies

# SMEs are motivated to be inclusive due to their value system and recruitment needs

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## 1. Values system

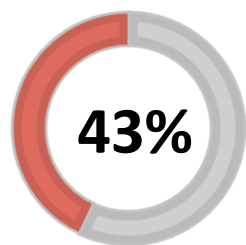
- For some SMEs, the desire to employ people with disabilities was motivated by an **equity-based lens**.

## 2. Recruitment needs

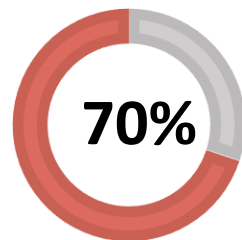
- For others, the desire to employ people with disabilities was due to **difficulties recruiting** employees.
- For other SMEs, their motivation for employing people with disabilities stems from **both their value system and recruitment needs**.

## Most SMEs have either hired or are interested in hiring people with disabilities

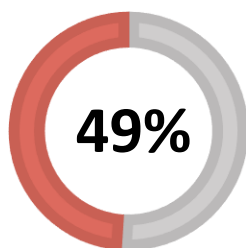
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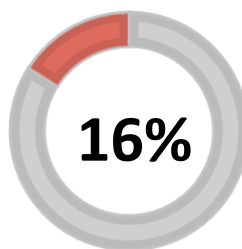
*of SMEs have hired people with disabilities*



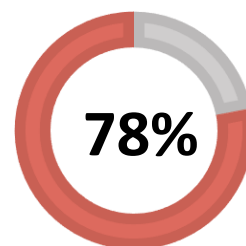
*of SMEs have people with disabilities working for their organization*



*of SMEs hired people with disabilities in last 5 years*

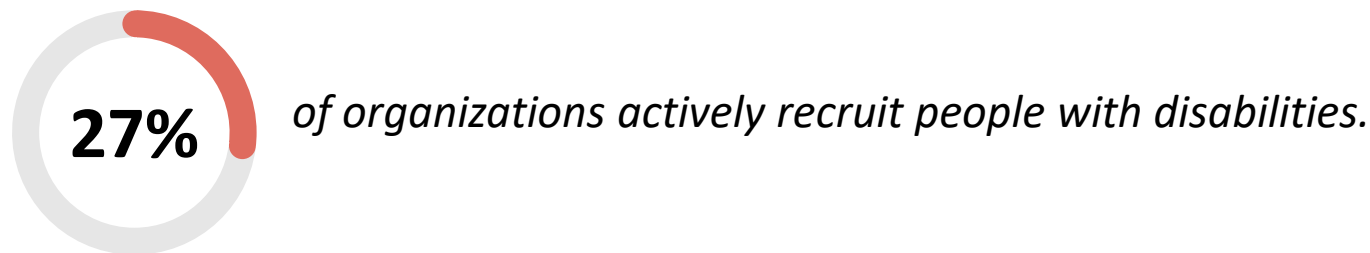


*of SMEs have people with disabilities in senior positions*



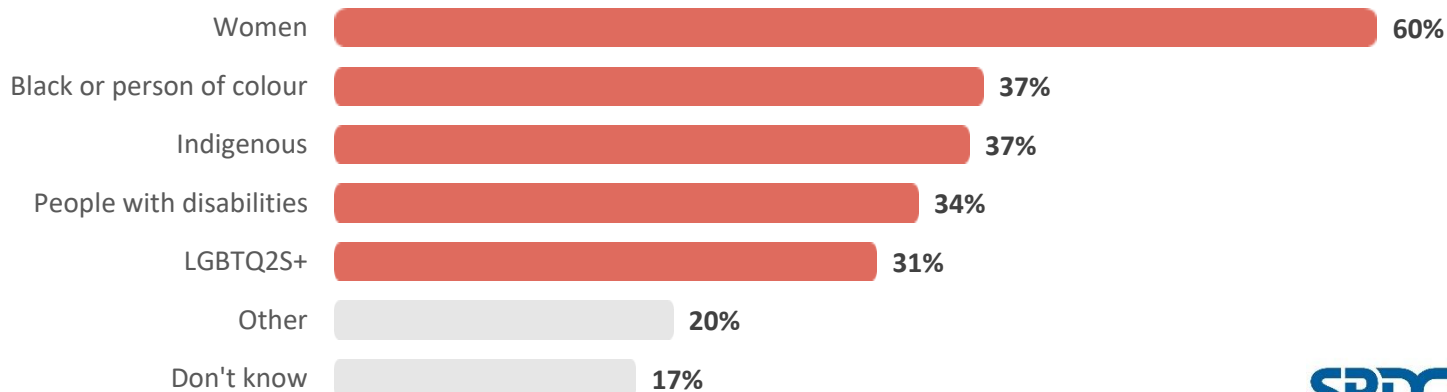
*of SMEs are likely to consider hiring people with disabilities in the future*

## Recruitment of People with a Disability



In terms of other equity-deserving groups, organizations were most likely to actively recruit women.

A third actively recruit people who identify as Black or persons of colour, Indigenous, people with disabilities, or LGBTQ2S+.



## SMEs emphasized the importance of a strengths-based focus on employees' abilities

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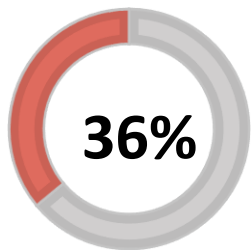
- A strengths-based perspective was identified as a **key success factor** in recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce.
  - Consistent with literature review findings
- Emphasized in focus groups by **SMEs who had experience** hiring people with disabilities.
- This involves providing a **supportive environment and listening** to employees and **being proactive** in asking about all employees' needs.

## SMEs face particular challenges to being more inclusive

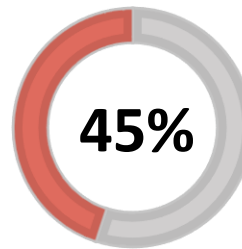
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- There is a perception that the nature of SMEs themselves leads to challenges.
- Perception that job duties associated with their business are not appropriate for people with disabilities.
- SMEs experience geographic, physical, and pandemic-related barriers.

## The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on SMEs' ability to hire and retain employees



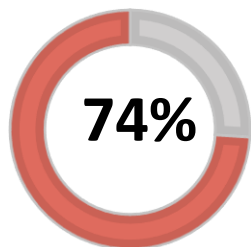
*of organizations had laid off employees due to COVID-19.*



*of organizations are planning for workforce shortages in the next five years.*

Challenges were primarily related to business uncertainty and finding skilled employees:

- CERB
- Business uncertainty
- Employee retention
- Also opportunities



*of organizations reported difficulties recruiting qualified employees.*



## SMEs illustrated a need for increased education, supports, and training to foster inclusive workplaces

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- Half of survey respondents indicated that they were not aware of resources that support organizations in hiring people with disabilities.
- Focus group findings showed:
  - Lack of awareness of where and how to access services
  - Lack of confidence and knowledge about developing and implementing inclusive workplace policies
  - Lack of knowledge and experience in providing adaptations and accommodations
  - Perceived lack of applicants with disabilities

## SMEs are interested in accessing a variety of supports and services, preferably in their community and through a single access point

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- SMEs identified a **range of services and supports**:
  - Service providers in their community, particularly matching candidates to jobs and offering advice on accommodations
  - Services to help with local recruitment
  - Recruitment-type services
  - Support for new employees
- Survey respondents identified wage subsidies and financial support for workplace adjustments and accommodations.
- Preference for accessing services through a **single access point**.

## AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

## Areas for Future Research

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- How can services for SMEs be more coordinated and integrated?
- How can SMEs leverage existing supports in their communities?
- What support do small organizations need for developing inclusive policies and what is the relationship between their established policies and practices?
- How can work schedules, duties, and work environments be adjusted to the benefit of both SMEs and people with disabilities?

## Areas for Future Research

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- What are the key components of a strengths-based approach to supporting people with disabilities?
- How can employers best support employees with disabilities given their multiple social identities?
- How can employers develop trusting relationships with equity-deserving groups?
- What supports do people with disabilities require related to mental health in the workplace, and how can services providers best support employers in this area?