

April 2022

# Funding Employment Services to Create Sustainable Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

## A Policy Issues Briefing for Program Funders



Centre de  
recherche sur les politiques en  
matière d'invalidité professionnelle



Centre for  
Research on  
Work Disability Policy



Institute  
for Work &  
Health

Research Excellence  
Safe Work  
Healthy Workers

If you have questions about this report, please contact us at:

Institute for Work & Health  
400 University Avenue, Suite 1800  
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1S5

[info@iwh.on.ca](mailto:info@iwh.on.ca)  
[www.iwh.on.ca](http://www.iwh.on.ca)

For reprint permission, contact the Institute for Work & Health.

© Institute for Work & Health, 2022

Institute for Work & Health

# Funding Employment Services to Create Sustainable Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

A Policy Issues Briefing for Program Funders

Authors: Emile Tompa, Dan Samosh, Heather Johnston, Emma Irvin, Rebecca Gewurtz, Kathy Padkapayeva and Cindy Moser

Partners and Contributors: Maureen Haan (Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work), Michael MacDonald (Jazz Aviation LP) and Bob Vansickle (Disability Employment Consultant)

Date: April 2022



**Contents**

Background ..... 1

Objective of the Briefing ..... 2

Insight from the Literature and Field Knowledge ..... 2

Key Messages ..... 4

Policy Solutions for System Actors’ Barriers and Challenges ..... 5

Employment Service Providers ..... 6

    Barriers and Challenges ..... 6

    Proposed Solutions ..... 7

Employers ..... 10

    Barriers and Challenges ..... 10

    Proposed Solutions ..... 11

Stylized Case Study Example A ..... 13

Stylized Case Study Example B ..... 14

Job Seekers and Workers with Disabilities ..... 15

    Barriers and Challenges ..... 15

    Proposed Solutions ..... 17

Stylized Case Study Example C ..... 19

Stylized Case Study Example D ..... 20

References ..... 21



## Background

The work disability policy arena is complex. It involves many actors, multiple programs, and diverse stakeholders with differing interests, objectives and time horizons. It is characterized by gaps in knowledge and skills, intense competitiveness in some areas, and navigational challenges for persons with disabilities. Additionally, persons with disabilities have different life situations, needs and aspirations. Their disabilities can be of different types, have different intensities of impacts, and have different types of proven supports. These and other contextual factors all add to the complexity of this policy arena.

This policy issue briefing focuses on one part of the work disability policy arena; specifically, on the services and supports provided by third parties to employers seeking to fill jobs and to persons with disabilities seeking employment. These third parties are usually employment service providers who specialize in matching persons with disabilities with gainful and ideally, sustainable paid employment opportunities. These services and supports are often funded through federal, provincial and municipal government programs, and in some cases, by private foundations.

In this policy issue briefing, we consider how incentives provided through employment service funding packages can influence the behaviours of the key system actors; that is, third-party service providers, employers, and persons with disabilities. Incentives are often used to create opportunities by offsetting real and perceived costs, supporting learning and skills development, and promoting attitudinal and cultural change in a variety of contexts. Given the complexity of the policy arena noted above, the design and packaging of service and support funding programs play an important role in how actors engage in this arena.

We use the term “financial incentives” to refer to all types of mechanisms, both positive and negative, used to incentivise employers to recruit, retain, and promote persons with disabilities, although we recognize the term “financial incentives” may not be familiar to all the actors in the system. Our use of the term encapsulates all employment services and supports funded by third parties, including the time employment service providers spend identifying employment opportunities and

matching persons with these opportunities. Incentives come in a variety of forms including wage subsidies, tax credits or benefits for incurred expenses, penalties for not achieving target employment rates, reimbursement of costs associated with accommodation, and provision of human resources services such as training and coaching. We note that the views of system actors about some uses of financial incentives, especially wage subsidies, are very polarized.

Many different services are funded through the various funding envelopes in the employment services policy arena, and all are in scope for this policy issue briefing. Our approach in this briefing is to provide insight on how and when different types of financial incentives appear to work well or not work well, and why, based on evidence from peer-reviewed studies and field knowledge gathered from system actors. Essentially, we seek to provide insights for policymakers to inform the design and administration of funding for employment services for persons with disabilities.

## **Objective of the Briefing**

Drawing on research evidence from a synthesis of international, peer-reviewed literature and field knowledge gathered from system actors in the Canadian work disability policy arena, we seek to:

*Provide insight for policymakers to inform the design and administration of funding programs for employment services for persons with disabilities that promote gainful and, ideally, sustainable paid employment opportunities.*

These programs fund employment services that offset real and perceived costs, support learning and skills development, and promote attitudinal and cultural change among system actors in the labour market. As such, how these programs are designed and packaged have a substantial impact on system actors.

## **Insight from the Literature and Field Knowledge**

This briefing is based on published evidence, including a scoping review, and field knowledge collected through interviews with over 30 professionals, many of whom

have years of relevant experience in sustainable employment for persons with disabilities. Following are the key insights drawn from these sources:

- Providing employment service providers with “customizable funding”—i.e. flexibility in how they use the monies in their funding envelopes—allows them to tailor the supports they offer to meet the needs of employers and persons with disabilities—is associated with better outcomes.
- Customizable funding allows employment service providers to provide contextualized supports that address the specific needs of, and challenges faced by, persons with disabilities and employers.
- Customizable funding also allows service providers to provide comprehensive supports, from the beginning to the end of the journey to gainful, and ideally sustainable employment.
- The types of supports that can help achieve sustainable employment include help with job searches and applications, job matching, accommodation within an employment opportunity, clothing and equipment, onboarding, training, benefits counselling, job coaching, affordable and inclusive early learning and child care spaces and more.
- Access to transportation is critical, and funding support may be needed to offset transportation costs.
- Collaboration among service providers is a way to provide a breadth of support expertise and access to different funding packages that will best ensure successful employment outcomes.
- Offering wage subsidies that are uniquely targeted to persons with disabilities can be problematic in that it directly or indirectly suggests that persons with disabilities are of lesser value and/or more problematic hires than others. If training subsidies are required, persons with disabilities and employers should be supported to access wage subsidies through mainstream employment initiatives (e.g., youth employment initiatives, where disability itself is not featured as the qualifier).
- Claw-backs from social assistance and other disability benefits programs can create disincentives for persons with disabilities to explore employment opportunities to their fullest. Therefore, minimizing the negative effects of transitioning from social assistance to employment is critical.

- Benefits counselling from services providers can help address the concerns of persons with disabilities about losing support program benefits when transitioning to employment.

We note that, though funding supports are intended to serve all job seekers/workers with disabilities and employers, the literature and field knowledge available focuses largely on entry level positions. Consideration of how fundings might be used to support professional and more advanced career opportunities is a knowledge gap warranting substantial research inquiry.

## **Key Messages**

A broad definition of financial incentives includes not only wage subsidies, but also the full range of critical services and supports offered by employment service providers to help employers with recruitment, hiring, onboarding, retaining and promoting persons with disabilities. Job matching, customized employment, job coaching, retention and wrap-around supports are critical for successful employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. It is important that funding for employment supports allows for flexibility (what we term “customizable” funding) so that service providers can meet the diverse needs of employers and persons with disabilities. Customizable funding gives service providers the flexibility and capacity to assess and tailor their services to promote gainful and sustainable long-term employment. Customizable funding allows service providers the flexibility to both “contextualize” services to the unique needs and circumstances of the persons they are working with, and provide “comprehensive” services to ensure that needs and circumstances are addressed throughout the employment journey. Essentially, customizable funding allows for contextualized and comprehensive supports. We call these the “3Cs” of funding design for sustainable employment.

## Policy Solutions for System Actors' Barriers and Challenges

The key system actors in the work disability policy arena encounter varied barriers and challenges related to funding access and use. In this section, we highlight these barriers and challenges, as well as potential solutions grounded in the “3Cs” of funding design for sustainable employment, as described above. Barriers, challenges and solutions are organized by system actor: employment service providers, employers and persons with disabilities.

1. **Employment service providers** include non-profit, for-profit, social enterprise organizations and educational institutions that work to promote sustainable employment of persons with disabilities through the provision of various services, such as job searching, job matching, employer disability confidence training, and ongoing coaching services. These organizations often work directly with persons with disabilities and employers.
2. **Employers** range from small and medium-sized enterprises to large multinational corporations across all sectors. They include non-profit, for-profit, social enterprise and government entities that seek to recruit, retain and promote persons with disabilities. Some employers connect with job seekers via employment service providers, and they may benefit from various services in this process, such as human resources support and disability confidence training.
3. **Persons with disabilities** in this policy issue briefing are persons seeking to secure, maintain, or advance in careers, jobs and work. They are diverse, with a wide range of work experiences, skill sets, educational backgrounds, motivations, interests, impairments and disabilities. We specifically focus on persons with disabilities who seek out the services of employment service providers.

## Employment Service Providers

### Barriers and Challenges

1. **Constraints in funding requirements.** Service providers face an array of concerns related to funding. Restrictive funding—such as requiring the use of wage subsidies—can limit service providers’ ability to best support the unique needs of persons with disabilities and employers. Such requirements result in money being spent to meet funding requirements rather than supporting clients (i.e., persons with disabilities and employers). In addition, funding envelopes are often built on short-term metrics of success (e.g., 13 weeks of employment) that often do not align with the goals and circumstances of persons with disabilities or employers, and can result in employment service providers directing their efforts at negotiating short-term placements in low paying, precarious employment rather than in longer-term, well paying, sustainable employment opportunities. Another type of constraint is created by limits as to the eligibility of clients that can be served, such as requirements that clients must have certain types of disabilities, or must have been unemployed for a minimum period of time.
2. **Challenges engaging with funders.** Many funding envelopes have complex application processes that service providers find cumbersome. These processes, along with time-consuming reporting obligations, can result in service providers opting out of funding competitions. This is particularly a concern among small service providers. Limited communication between service providers and funders can further diminish the engagement of service providers in funding competitions. In some cases, service providers opt out of competitions because they find application criteria and decisions are not communicated with clarity and transparency.
3. **Heightened competition for limited funds.** Competition for funding is a barrier to service providers collaborating with their peer organizations. Rather than sharing knowledge and resources to support the success of persons with disabilities and employers, some service providers work in siloes to safeguard their funding sources. As a result, service providers are reluctant to share their innovative practices and expertise out of fear of losing their competitive advantage in funding competitions.

4. **Funding uncertainty and talent loss.** Some service providers find that the uncertainty of a short-term funding cycle results in precarity for service agency staff, who are often forced to seek employment opportunities elsewhere as funding streams end. As a result, service providers' ability to support persons with disabilities is often disrupted and diminished with the ebb and flow of funding cycles and the loss of expert knowledge and experience.
5. **Good practice guidance gap.** Limited data collection and research on employment services has left a gap in evidence-informed practice guidance in the field. Given the diversity and complexity of disability and employment services, this has resulted in siloed knowledge and a lack of shared expertise and innovation in the field. These issues are heightened in areas with fewer service providers—where individual service providers have smaller networks and are expected to support a wider range of employers and persons with diverse needs, skills and interests.
6. **Barriers from new technologies.** With the widespread use of artificial intelligence (AI) and applicant tracking systems (ATS), service providers are confronting new barriers being created by technology such as challenging online application processes, algorithms that screen out application based on generic and irrelevant criteria, and online interview platforms that are difficult to navigate and do not offer an opportunity for candidates to profile their skills and abilities.

## Proposed Solutions

1. **Provide flexible funding.** Service providers work with a wide range of persons with disabilities and employers, each with their own unique circumstances, needs and goals. In order to be effective, service providers require flexibility to best address the needs of workers and employers, rather than being constrained by funding arrangements that require they offer specific services. When considering specific services (e.g., wrap-around supports, job coaching, disability confidence training), allow service providers the flexibility to apply them selectively to address the unique needs of persons with disabilities and employers. For instance, rather than requiring service providers to use funds for wage subsidies, funders should provide the

option of deploying funds to cover training supports or other expenses which may be more appropriate for the circumstances at hand.

2. **Engage with service providers.** Service providers should be part of funding and policy decision-making processes. Clarity about application processes, criteria and decisions should be communicated to service providers to build capacity and trust.
3. **Foster collaboration.** Funders can foster cooperation and collaboration among service providers through various means. First, resources can be channelled to promote service provider consortia, networks and job platforms. Second, funding requirements can be fine-tuned to incentivize service providers to share their expert knowledge, resources and innovative practices. Service providers should transfer job seekers to other service providers as appropriate to ensure a good match between the expertise of the service provider and the needs of the job seeker. Third, in some cases, funders might permit applications from groups of service providers to promote collaboration in the sector.
4. **Share feedback over the tenure of a funding envelope.** Funders can provide feedback on service provider performance well before the conclusion of the funding envelope, and up until its conclusion, in order to mitigate disruptions to service provision at the end of funding cycles. With performance feedback, service providers will have a better idea of whether they should expect to receive funding going forward, which they can communicate to their staff and, ultimately, give rise to smoother transitions during regular funding cycles.
5. **Make the application process accessible and customizable.** Facilitate service providers' access to and use of funding opportunities by providing accessible format and facilitate identification of variables that may create a point of imbalance or unfairness for smaller or lessor known organizations, or those facing capacity challenges. Improving access can minimizing the time and resource commitments required to apply for and maintain funding, allowing service providers to use their time more effectively. This can be especially beneficial for smaller service providers that often opt out of funding competitions due to limited internal human resources.
6. **Use longer-term performance metrics.** Reporting obligations should focus on longer-term outcomes for workers with disabilities and employers (e.g.,

one-year employment continuity), in order to promote sustainable employment opportunities that ensure client service and support needs are addressed throughout the employment journey. Long-term metrics are best aligned with client goals and circumstances. Examples of longer-term performance metrics include measures of employer disability confidence, worker skills development, worker job/job search satisfaction, and worker employment status beyond the 13-week probationary period. Qualitative measures can also be very informative.

7. **Provide funding beyond the probationary period.** Similar to metrics, envelopes with funding arrangements that emphasize long-term, sustainable employment allow service providers to focus on worker and employer needs throughout the employment journey—from recruitment, hiring and onboarding to employment maintenance and skills advancement. Short-term funding packages that end at the probationary period can be incongruent with client needs and sustainable employment opportunities, whereas having the flexibility to fund supports when they are needed can result in more sustainable employment.
8. **Support development and dissemination of evidence-informed guidance.** Funders can fill knowledge and practice gaps by supporting data collection and evidence synthesis on the use of financial incentives and their longer-term impacts in different contexts, as well as the evaluation of innovative “home-grown” practices and solutions developed by service providers in specific circumstances.
9. **Promote a “no wrong door” approach.** Job seekers with disabilities may work with service providers that are not disability-focused. A “no wrong door” approach, where employment support needs are accessible regardless of access point, can ensure all job seekers have the opportunity to receive needed services for multiple intersecting identities that might affect the employment journey. For instance, employment service providers working with populations such as newcomers and youth should be provided with information and resources on disability and employment when possible, and they should have knowledge of and access to disability service providers who can support job seekers with needs outside their skillset. Fostering collaboration between service providers with diverse mandates is an important approach to increase ease of access to services. Another option is

to provide a “navigation service” or central resource with easy to access information on available services to more efficiently connect job seekers with appropriate supports. Navigational services could also be of benefit to employers seeking to fill job vacancies who are unfamiliar with the work disability policy arena and employment services landscape.

10. **Ensure job-seeker access issues are addressed.** Given the growing use of AI and ATS, funders need to focus on how service providers can promote accessibility in areas such as resume submission, the provision of information in alternative formats, and flexible and individualized interview formats and supports.

## Employers

### Barriers and Challenges

1. **Lack of confidence in hiring and working with persons with disabilities.** Many employers lack “disability confidence.” That is, they may have limited knowledge about how to tap into the talent pool of persons with disabilities. They may also have stereotypical perceptions of persons with disabilities, unfounded concerns about accommodation costs and complexity, and a fear of litigation if a worker with a disability is dismissed. Prior negative experiences with recruitment, hiring and onboarding of workers with disabilities can create additional apprehension on the part of employers.
2. **Strong reliance on wage subsidies.** Some employers have come to expect, and even rely on, wage subsidies. This is especially problematic when wage subsidies overshadow the more fundamental offerings of employment services, such as job matching, onboarding support, skills training and disability confidence training.
3. **Fear of complex application processes and invasive audits.** Some employers who could benefit from specialized employment services avoid them due to time-consuming application and reporting processes, as well as a fear of surveillance and invasive auditing practices.
4. **Challenges associated with employer size and region.** Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) generally encounter different challenges than those of large employers. SMEs often have limited in-house human

resources capacity, which can result in constraints with recruitment, hiring and onboarding, as well as with advancing their disability confidence. Such challenges can be exacerbated in rural areas where very few disability employment service providers are available. At the same time, management at SMEs often have personal relationships with and commitment to workers which is missing in larger, sometimes more impersonal organizations, and which can be very beneficial to providing accommodations and flexible work arrangements. While larger organizations may not as often have these same resource constraints, they may face other difficulties, such as differing priorities at the corporate and local levels of the organization. This can result in inflexibility with the recruitment, hiring and onboarding of workers, thus constraining how talent pools are accessed.

5. **Lack of knowledge about funding supports.** In general, there is a lack of knowledge amongst employers about the supports available and how to access them. Given the time constraints and other pressure employers experience in maintaining their operations, they are often limited in the ability to search for employment support opportunities.

### **Proposed Solutions**

1. **Provide flexible funding to service providers.** Funding packages should not only be flexible to meet the diverse needs of job seekers and workers with disabilities, but also the diverse needs of employers. Each employer is different, and funding envelopes need to allow service providers the flexibility to build relationships, be nimble in the field, and support employers' unique needs.
2. **Emphasize the business case.** Corporate social responsibility, charity and subsidized labour models should be replaced with an emphasis on the individual strengths of the worker/job seeker and their match with a potential employment opportunity. The business case should not be about a worker's attendance or loyalty, but rather their talent and fit.
3. **Empower service providers to say "no."** When employer disability confidence deficits are too high, service providers need to be supported to say "no" to an employer's recruitment request. One avenue to enable service providers is to provide funding even when a job match is unsuccessful. In addition, service providers can be funded to direct their attention toward

employer disability confidence training, rather than relying on wage subsidies, as a way to develop future sustainable employment opportunities.

4. **Tailor funding to the unique circumstances and needs of employers.** An array of factors, such as in-house human resources capacity, differences in corporate and local priorities, level of disability confidence and regional context, need to be considered when determining how funds are best used. In some cases, funding can be channelled to support the work of employer champions and employer networks. Funding applications and reporting processes can be simplified to ensure smaller employers benefit from funding opportunities by reducing their concerns about complex, bureaucratic processes.
5. **Focus on the long-term.** Sustainable employment often requires multi-pronged, long-term solutions. Funding envelopes should include wrap-around supports for persons with disabilities and a focus on developing disability confidence among senior leaders, supervisors, co-workers and other workplace parties. Human resource supports from service providers should also be included throughout the employment journey. The trust and connections that service providers build and maintain with employers provide foundations for innovation. These efforts take time and resources to develop, but the payoff can be immense. These relationships are essential to creating new employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and for ensuring successful job matching.
6. **Acknowledge the diversity amongst persons with disabilities.** Funding should be disbursed with the understanding that the identities of persons with disability and their experiences are diverse. The resources needed to address this diversity of experiences vary widely. Employers should be supported to hire persons with different types of disabilities.
7. **Support broad dissemination of available services.** Promote multiple avenues of information dissemination about programs and services available (e.g., various social media platforms and print) in accessible formats to ensure a broad reach.

## Stylized Case Study Example A

### Case Example

Jack, owner of Sunny's 2-4 Convenience, is considering contacting an employment service provider to fill a stocking position with someone from the disability community. However, Jack is uncertain about whether he wants to move forward on the plan. **Previously, he had difficulty laying off a worker with a disability after the person was consistently late for their shift. The worker was very conscientious on the job, but had personal time-management challenges. Jack is also concerned about accommodation costs** given his tight budget, even though the previous worker did not require any costly accommodations. Further, **without a human resources department, Jack is also worried about spending too much time on recruitment** if he has to oversee the recruitment process on his own.

In order to develop a program that supports small organizations like Sunny's 2-4 Convenience, a funder could develop a program that **allows flexibility for employment service providers in the use funds**. This would allow a service provider to focus on **educating the employer on the facts and myths about disability and employment, and on the generally low cost of most accommodations**. Further, flexible funding could allow the service provider to **prepare the worker for the interview process and assist the employer with accommodation options to make up for the employer's limited in-house human resources capacity**. After hiring, **funds could be made available for sustainability supports for both the worker and employer**. Any challenges that a worker might experience, such as getting to work on time, could then be quickly addressed before becoming an issue for the employer. The employer could also benefit from counselling on how best to handle challenges with a worker before being driven to consider dismissing the worker.

Lack of disability confidence

Limited in-house human resources capacity

Provide flexible funding to service provider

Emphasize the business case

Tailor funding to the unique circumstances and needs of the employer and worker

Focus on the long-term

## Stylized Case Study Example B

### Case Example

Akiyo has been in and out of employment. She experiences significant challenges in her current job as a retail display merchandiser with a large department store chain. She has trouble working with customers, becomes particularly uncomfortable when customers ask her questions, and will often feel overwhelmed and not come in for her scheduled shifts. Akiyo does not feel comfortable calling to let her supervisor know that she will be missing a shift. Akiyo's job coach, Sal, gained access to Akiyo's supervisor through a human resources manager at the corporate level. Although Sal has a strong relationship with this manager, he has had trouble interacting with Akiyo's supervisor. **Sal found that at the corporate-level there is openness to collaboration, whereas the conversation with Akiyo's supervisor is generally rushed and less productive.** These experiences are in line with Akiyo's experiences with her supervisor, which she has mentioned to Sal. **Both Akiyo and Sal have tried to express that customer interaction is difficult for Akiyo, but the supervisor's response has been that this is not an issue for other workers and nothing can be done.**

Lack of disability confidence

Provide flexible funding to service provider

Empower service provider to say "no"

Differing priorities at corporate and local levels

Tailor funding to the unique circumstances and needs of the employer

Akiyo's situation presents an opportunity to build disability confidence at the local level, narrowing the gap between corporate values and what occurs at the store level. **A funder could provide flexible funding to ensure that not only Sal has the time to support Akiyo, but also Akiyo's supervisor. The supervisor could receive training and learn about ways that enable Akiyo's success.** This funding might also include opportunities for Sal to enter the workplace and come up with solutions to accommodate Akiyo. **For instance, Sal might suggest that Akiyo wear plain clothes instead of company attire at work to reduce customer interaction.** After spending time with Akiyo's supervisor, Sal may also find that the supervisor is simply not ready to work with Akiyo. **In that case, a funder should focus on ensuring that Sal has the resources and time needed to engage with other supervisors in Akiyo's workplace, or other employers, to secure Akiyo a position in a more accommodating workplace.**

## Job Seekers and Workers with Disabilities

### Barriers and Challenges

Persons with disabilities experience a broad range of barriers as job seekers and workers. Barriers arise during the recruitment, hiring and onboarding process, during the employment experience itself, and during daily life outside work that can also impact work engagement. The degree to which these barriers are visible to employers, service providers and funders will vary.

1. **Challenges in seeking employment:** Inaccessible, automated application platforms, technological requirements for preparing and submitting applications, and inflexible interview formats are just a few examples of the barriers that job seekers with disabilities may encounter. Previous work experience requirements are also a hurdle for many persons with disabilities, especially for those newly entering or re-entering the labour market. Job histories characterized by intermittent employment that gives rise to large gaps in resumés are also a barrier when seeking work.
2. **Challenges accessing resources:** In some jurisdictions access to resources is contingent upon a formal diagnosis of impairment or disability. However, a diagnosis can often take time to acquire, be costly, and stigmatizing. This is a major barrier for many job seekers with disabilities and can result in limited or no access to required services. Moreover, given the spectrum of disabilities, a variety of resources are needed and certain populations may experience greater challenges than others in accessing resources. The multiplicity of service providers and programs can also be a barrier to persons with disabilities in accessing resources. They may be sent from small program to small program, each with a waiting list and a limited mandate. There is no guarantee of a program that will meet their needs.
3. **Challenges sustaining and advancing career:** Varied barriers harm workers' ability to maintain employment and develop their careers, such as stereotypes about the competence of persons with disabilities and inflexible organizational policies. Due to the short-term focus of most funding envelopes and a general emphasis on accessing entry-level employment, minimal support is provided for maintaining and developing workers' careers.

4. **Disclosure challenges:** Job seekers may fear disclosing a disability or may not know how and when it is best to do so. Unpleasant experiences with disclosure in the past, or simply fears of unfair treatment and exclusion, may add to concerns. Further, some job seekers may not have a clinical diagnosis to substantiate their identity as a person with a disability. By not disclosing a disability to a service provider and employer, persons with disabilities risk missing out on accessing needed supports. Many persons with disabilities also note that they are unaware of available supports or do not know how to access them.
5. **Poor worker-job match:** A poor fit between the worker and the employment opportunity is one of the most common concerns noted by system actors. In their haste to place persons with disabilities, inexperienced service providers may pigeonhole them into entry-level jobs that are not a good match for person' interests and skills. This can give rise to frustrations for both the worker and employer, and often results in a failure. It is not uncommon for persons with disabilities to cycle through multiple short-term, entry-level jobs, leaving them with a patchy resumé and discouraged from seeking new employment opportunities.
6. **Costly work gear:** Job seekers and workers are often required to wear certain types of attire (e.g., dress clothes) or protective wear (e.g., work boots) when attending interviews and at work. Clothing and equipment can be costly, and persons with disabilities often do not have access to the funds needed to purchase them. Without such gear, job seekers may choose to avoid interviews or not be selected for the position, or workers may lose their jobs for not complying with workplace requirements.
7. **Inaccessible transportation:** Like any worker, workers with disabilities need reliable and affordable transportation to be able to get to work on time. Reliance on public transportation can be especially challenging for workers with disabilities for reasons such as congested travelways, physical barriers and inconvenient schedules. In some areas there may be no public transit at all. Further, specialized transportation services are not always available and when available, not always sufficient to serve the breadth of workers with disabilities needing such services. These barriers are often exacerbated in rural communities with fewer resources and transportation options.

8. **Insecurity of basic needs.** Persons with disabilities are often so marginalized that gaining or maintaining access to basic needs is a fundamental concern. These basic needs include adequate food, shelter, clothing, education and healthcare. Over and above these basic needs, some persons with disabilities also require costly pharmaceuticals, assistive devices, specialized transportation, and other such supports and services. Costs associated with meeting these needs can be challenging when living on income benefit programs that are well below the poverty line. Though in some cases disability support programs provide for such needs, there can be challenges in coordinating continuity of basic needs when transitioning from income benefits to a paid employment opportunity.

### **Proposed Solutions**

1. **Fund services throughout the employment journey.** Funders and service providers should consider the full employment cycle, from employment discovery to skills training, recruitment, retention, and career advancement. A long-term perspective is required to navigate the challenges of seeking and maintaining employment. Some of examples of services that are often overlooked include disclosure and communications training, on-the-job training, ongoing job coaching, regular service provider check-ins, and mentorship opportunities.
2. **Shift from “medical” to “social” model thinking.** Rather than requiring a diagnosis to access services, funders should move towards acknowledging self-identification of disability. Granting access to job seekers who self-identify as having a disability results in the opportunity for job seekers and service providers to work together to build sustainable careers in a way that is respectful of the diversity of persons with disabilities, and not limited by medical definitions and labels.
3. **Focus on long-term and person-centred metrics.** Funding envelopes should use metrics that evaluate long-term outcomes for sustainable employment and career advancement when applicable, as well as the quality of employment experiences. Metrics might include 12-month employment continuity, wage rates, promotion experiences, worker and employer job match satisfaction, and comfort with disclosure.

4. **Emphasize compatibility and relationship-building between worker and employer.** Funders should prioritize the match between workers and employers, and support service providers with building positive relationships between them. A worker may find their ideal job but be unsuccessful if they are not well-matched with their employer. Bi-directional commitment and trust are needed for sustainable employment. It takes time and effort to build these. Job matching is an ongoing process that can include practices such as job shadowing, job task analysis and social environment assessment.
5. **Fund wrap-around supports.** Many costs associated with acquiring and maintaining employment are often not recognized by funders as work-disability relevant, such as the purchase of work attire and personal protective equipment. Workers may also require support when facing crises in areas such as housing, legal matters, child-care, and family issues, food security, and mental health. Supports to navigate crises circumstances require funding. Such supports can make the difference between employment maintenance and unemployment for persons with disabilities. Wrap around supports available through services in the same location or connected with each other can facilitate access and enhance the possibility of a successful job placement.
6. **Factor in transportation costs.** Reliable transportation is essential for getting to and from work in a timely manner. Providing funding to support transportation that is reasonable, reliable and affordable will help ensure that persons with disabilities can access and maintain employment.
7. **Support benefits counselling.** Job seekers who encounter challenges meeting basic needs may require benefits counselling as part of their transition into employment. Benefits counselling can help ensure that job seekers feel confident in their decision to transition to employment and do not lose required supports unknowingly. In some cases, benefit counselling should also be provided to job seekers' family members, with prior permission from the job seeker. This is particularly the case when a family member relies on the supports provided to a job seeker through a disability benefits program

## Stylized Case Study Example C

### Case Example

Fatima has just accepted a new job as an online customer service agent for a national bank after several years without work. She enjoys working with people, so she is excited about this new opportunity.

While Fatima is eager to start, she is nervous about her first day. **She is uncertain about how to share information about her learning disability with her manager. Fatima is afraid of being seen as a burden, and she does not want to be viewed as different by her co-workers.** However, she knows that she will be more successful if she can receive a few simple accommodations. Although Fatima wants to focus on preparing for the job, stress due to these concerns has been growing. **One stressor is that the price of bus tickets has recently increased and they were already expensive. Given her years off work, she has no savings to absorb these costs. In addition, buses are infrequent on weekends, so she may have to take a cab to get to her early morning shift on Saturday. Fatima is worried that the cost of getting to work is simply too high.**

**Given flexible funding, an employment service provider could take some time to coach Fatima about disclosure options and even do some role playing scenarios with her.** That way, Fatima will be better equipped to address disclosure in a way that best suits her needs and preferences. The service provider may also work with the employer if Fatima does choose to disclose. Critical to Fatima's success is her ability to get to work on time and without stress. Her concerns about transportation costs are serious and not uncommon. **With flexible funding, Fatima's employment service provider could offset her transportation costs as a part of the service package.** This will allow Fatima to focus on her new job with less stress.

Inaccessible transportation

Disclosure Challenges

Include transportation costs offset

Fund training on disclosure and communications.

## Stylized Case Study Example D

Challenges  
sustaining  
and  
advancing  
career

### Case Example

Dakota has volunteered at a university research lab for several months, and has now been offered a paid position with the lab. They are excited that their contributions are being noticed, since they have aspirations to advance their career in research. **However, Dakota is worried that paid employment will result in clawbacks to their ODSP benefits, which they rely on for rent and medication. Dakota's friends have suggested that they stay in a volunteer role at the lab due to these concerns.**

Insecurity of basic  
needs

Fund  
services  
throughout  
the  
employment  
journey

Dakota's job coach, Kim, has worked with Dakota through the employment discovery process and on the job when Dakota started volunteering. For the paid position Dakota will be required to take on new responsibilities. Kim feels that to succeed, Dakota will need incremental job coaching support. **Kim is concerned because there is only funding available for the first 13-weeks of Dakota's new job**, but based on Kim's assessment, she feels that Dakota will likely require brief check-ins with a job coach on a periodic basis over the first six months until the probationary period is over and they are up to full performance on the job.

**Kim is also aware of the need to provide Dakota with benefits counselling to address concerns about income security and pharmaceutical coverage.** The lab position provides a benefits package, including a pharmaceutical plan, after the probationary period. She is not an expert in the area of benefits counselling, but an agency in her catchment area, specializes in transitions from ODSP to employment and has the inhouse expertise. With such counselling, Dakota can get accurate information about the implications of transitioning from ODSP to a full-time lab position. Kim is checking in with the funder to see if they can cover the cost of the benefits counselling service.

Support  
benefits  
counselling

## References

Tompa E, Irvin E, Gewurtz R, (Co-PIs); Haan M, Johnston H, Macdonald S, Moser C, Padkapayeva K, Samosh D. Financial Incentives to Promote Employment of People with Disabilities: When and How Do They Work Best. Year 3 of Impact Grant funding prepared for the Ontario Capital Human Research and Innovation Fund (OHCRIF), administered by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. March 2021.

Gewurtz R, Tompa E, Oldfield M, Lahey P, Irvin E, Samosh D, Padkapayeva K, Johnston H. Financial Incentives to Promote Employment of People with Disabilities: When and How Do They Work Best. Year 2 of Impact Grant funding prepared for the Ontario Capital Human Research and Innovation Fund (OHCRIF), administered by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. September 2019.

Irvin E, Tompa E, Johnston H, Padkapayeva K, Mahood Q, Haan M, Gewurtz R, Samosh D. Financial Incentives to Promote Employment of People with Disabilities: When and How Do They Work Best. Year 1 of Impact Grant funding prepared for the Ontario Capital Human Research and Innovation Fund (OHCRIF), administered by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. May 2018.

Gewurtz R, Langan S, Shand D. (2016). Hiring People with Disabilities: A Scoping Review. *Work*, 54(1), 135-148.

Samosh D. (2021). Three-Legged Stool: Synthesizing and Extending Our Understanding of the Career Advancement Facilitators of Persons With Disabilities in Leadership Positions. *Business & Society*, 60(7), 1773-1810.

Tompa E, Samosh D, Boucher N. (2020). Skill Gaps, Underemployment and Equity of Labour-Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in Canada. *Public Policy Forum*.