

Canadians with Developmental Disabilities are being left behind and Policy Makers need to pay attention. New School of Public Policy Report

For Immediate Release

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Calgary – Despite the supports that have been put in place, Canadians with developmental disabilities (DD) continue to face obstacles in gaining and maintaining employment- much worse than for any other disability group.

Today, The School of Public Policy with authors, Stephanie Dunn, Krystle Wittevrongel and Jennifer Zwicker released a report that highlights the individual and external barriers to employment that neurodiverse Canadians face with solid policy recommendations for their future.

According to co-author, Jennifer Zwicker “Neurodiversity highlights how neurological differences like DD are the result of normal and natural variation, rather than a disease or a disorder. In 2012 two out of three Canadians with DD were out of the workforce and not looking for a job. This dismal statistic means that a large number of capable people are chronically unemployed, a situation that leads to poorer quality of life, with accompanying declines in cognitive function and general well-being. “

Labour market activation programs, welfare reforms and equality laws have so far failed to make a difference in the unemployment numbers. A recent study reveals that the top three barriers to unemployment for neurodiverse Albertans include employers’ knowledge, attitude, capacity and management practices; a late start to the concept of work among people with DD; and the stigma of their disability.

One policy could entail changing the design of income assistance programs like Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) to remove disincentives to work, such as ensuring continued access to important health benefits. Governments could also offer financial incentives such as wage subsidies and tax credits to employers who hire neurodiverse people, as well as provide monetary incentives for neurodiverse Canadians who wish to be self-employed.

Putting the proper supports in place in the early years would assist neurodiverse high-school youth to participate in career planning, work internships and job training. Helping Canada’s neurodiverse population to get and keep jobs provides benefits to the economy in terms of increased GDP, to employers in terms of talent and ability, and to people with DD who will enjoy a higher quality of life, greater self-esteem and reduced stigma and isolation.

The paper can be downloaded at <https://www.policyschool.ca/publications/>

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