

DISABILITY BENEFIT CASELOADS IN 4 PROVINCES

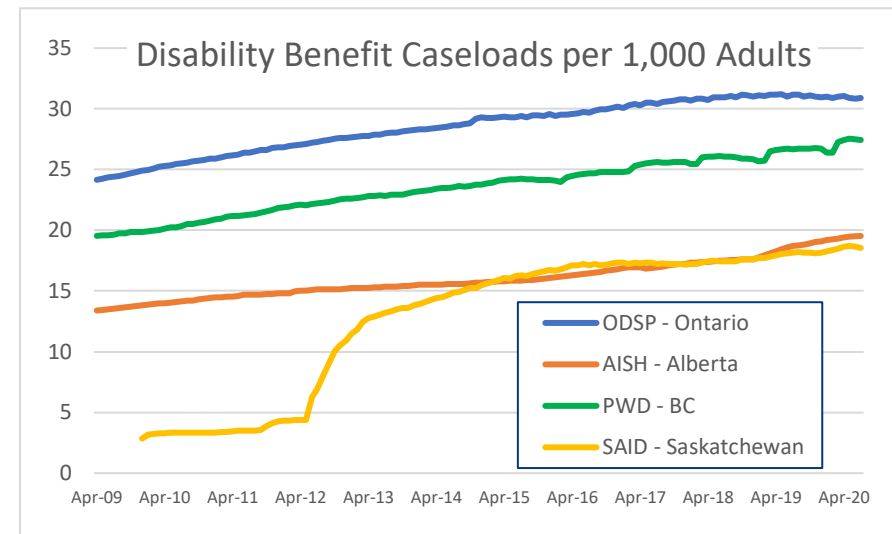
The incidence of disabilities is likely similar across provinces; the number of Disability Benefit caseloads is not.

Four provincial governments provide income and other benefits specifically designed for people dealing with disabilities that severely limit their ability to maintain full-time employment. In British Columbia, the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) program was introduced in 2002 and provides benefits to an adult shown to have a severe physical or mental impairment that is expected to continue for more than two years. The Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program in Alberta was first introduced in 1978 and provides assistance to adults with a permanent disability that limits their ability to earn a living. The Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) was introduced in 1998 to provide benefits to someone with a disability or impairment that is continuous or recurrent and results in a substantial barrier to employment. The Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) program, introduced in 2009, provides income support for people with significant and enduring disabilities.

Differences in levels and rates of growth in disability caseloads per 1,000 adults suggest differences in eligibility requirements or the strictness with which those requirements are enforced.

The lines in the figure show, over the period April 2009 to August 2020, monthly data on the number of disability income support cases per 1,000 adults living in each of BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario. In 2012, eligibility for the SAID program was expanded causing the notable jump in cases in the years following.

Evidence from 2012 (Statistics Canada [Table 13-10-0343-01](#)) shows that the incidence of disability is not very different across these four provinces. The differences in caseloads per 1,000 adults must therefore mainly reflect differences in how the programs define what types of disabilities are eligible to receive benefits, differences in the severity of disability required to receive benefits, and/or differences in the



Sources: Data on provincial caseloads are publicly available for [Alberta](#), [BC](#), and [Ontario](#). Data for the SAID program kindly provided by the Government of Saskatchewan. Population data from Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0017-01.

strictness with which eligibility requirements are enforced.

Differences in the rate of growth across provinces would similarly be most likely due to relative changes in program design or enforcement. Since 2009, caseloads per 1,000 adults have grown at the slowest pace in Alberta and Saskatchewan and most quickly in BC. In Ontario there has been little change in cases per 1,000 adults since 2018 suggesting a recent tightening of eligibility requirements.

Assuming the incidence of disabilities is not very different across provinces, the evidence in the figure would seem to suggest that the SAID and AISH programs are significantly more restrictive, in terms of eligibility and/or enforcement, than the PWD and ODSP programs. Programs like these must strike a balance between generosity of benefits and maintaining incentives for returning to employment. [Research](#) on this [issue](#) shows that it is a challenging problem.