

Tips For Employers: Understanding Disability



People with disabilities represent a significant portion of our population, including students in our post-secondary institutions entering our current and future workforce.

According to the research conducted by the David C. Onley Initiative in 2019, more than 50% of students registered with disability service offices across the four Ottawa post-secondary schools had a primary diagnosis of either a learning disability or a mental illness.

The term 'disability' is a complex and continually evolving concept that covers a range of different conditions, and there is no single, all-encompassing definition. Disability is not a static or linear concept, it can be:

- Visible or not visible
- Mild, moderate, or severe
- Permanent, long-term, short-term or episodic
- Present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time



Visible Disability

A Visible Disability describes the nature or degree of disability is visible to others (e.g. mobility-related impairments).

Non-Visible Disability

A Non-Visible Disability describes the nature or degree of disability is invisible to others (e.g. chronic fatigue syndrome, mental health condition, learning disability). Conditions could simply be non-visible or might remain hidden because they are episodic (e.g. epilepsy, environmental sensitivities). Other disabilities may only become apparent through interacting with an individual and could take multiple interactions to notice (e.g. hearing loss, learning disabilities). Other disabilities may never be apparent (e.g. mental health diagnoses).

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Common types of disabilities and their associated impacts on the job include:

DISABILITY TYPE	FUNCTIONAL IMPACT	EXAMPLES OF DIAGNOSES
Physical and Mobility	Can affect a person's motor skills and may require the use of a mobility aid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cerebral Palsy • Epilepsy • Narcolepsy
Sensory	Can affect a person's senses: vision, hearing, smell, touch, or taste.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deafness • Blindness • Chemical Sensitivities
Intellectual and Developmental	Can affect a person's ability to learn and use information, creating limitations in reasoning, learning, and problem solving, as well as social and practical skill-building known as adaptive behaviours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autism Spectrum Disorder • Down syndrome • Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
Learning	Can affect the way a person takes in, stores, or uses information. Learning disabilities can affect a person's oral and written language, reading skills, mathematics skills, organization, or social skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dyslexia • Dysgraphia • Auditory Processing Disorder
Mental Health	Can affect a person's mental alertness, concentration, organization, and anxiety levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety Disorders • Depression • Post-traumatic Stress Disorder • Obsessive Compulsive Disorder • Bi-polar Disorder • Schizophrenia

Sources:

Discover Ability Network: Business, Roadmap — www.discoverability.network/business/roadmap/

Ontario Human Rights Commission: 2. What is a Disability? — www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability/2-what-disability

Hire for Talent: Tool#1: The Benefits of Hiring People with Disabilities — www.hirefortalent.ca/main/toolkit/business-case

Conference Board of Canada: Business Benefits of Accessible Workplaces — www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/91d8fc8e-a4f3-4f09-b8ce-f672a521c69e/6264_AccessibleWorkplaces_BR_AV.pdf

Discover Ability Network: The Benefits of Hiring — www.discoverability.network/the-benefits-of-hiring/

Accessible Employers: Disability-Related Language and Tips — www.accessibleemployers.ca/members/presidentsgroup/activity/203/

Employment & Social Development Canada, Accessibility Resource Centre: A Way with Words and Images — www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/words-images.html

Humber College: Inclusive Language in Media, A Canadian Style Guide — www.humber.ca/makingaccessiblemedia/modules/01/transript/Inclusive_Language_Guide_Aug2017.pdf

Canadian Association of Broadcasters: Recommended Guidelines on Language and Terminology - Persons with Disabilities — www.cab-acr.ca/english/social/diversity/disabilities/pwd_guidelines.htm

Canadian Mental Health Commission: Language Matters — www.mhfa.ca/sites/default/files/safer_language_reference_guide.pdf