

AD HOC COMMITTEE

On Barriers Faced by Disabled Members

Report to
Provincial Council 2025

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Acknowledgements

Defining and conceptualizing the needs of a specific group of Members requires expertise, authentic contribution of lived experience, as well as significant research and resource gathering that this committee has only begun to unearth.

Even the formation of the committee was problematic, and was done with caution and care for some of, but not limited to, the following reasons:

- Not all members have enrolled in My Profile.
- Members can choose not to identify on My Profile.
- Some members do identify need for accommodations on My Profile, but this does not mean they consider themselves as disabled/having a disability.
- Committee members were contacted after conversations and recruitment through the Provincial Executive (PX) Chair, MTS Staff and Local Presidents.

It was immediately evident that a major barrier is that... we don't know, who we don't know.

The committee realized early on that the scope of the resolution was too vast, and that the entire body of work was beyond the capacity of a small group in place for only one year. Committee members contributed significantly with their own research, writings and findings, and they openly shared their personal life-stories and experiences to shape what is only the beginning of the work required.

Thank you first and foremost to the committee members... For sharing your stories, stumbles and successes, and for re-visiting the discrimination and trauma of your journey. You have cracked open a door to advocacy that the Society must now explore.

To our MTS staff support, DBP Department Head, Karen Wurr... We are forever grateful for your expertise, passion and the human way you held space and grace for our conversations. Your sharing of ideas and knowledge of a department that many members never have to understand or experience was invaluable. Thank you to you and your staff of case managers and support staff for all you do for members.

To our members who live and work every day with a mental, physical or psychological disability... we see you, we hear you, and we will endeavor to better understand and support your needs on the job and within the Society. You are the definition of courage and resilience, and we must do better.

"Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen." — Brené Brown

Ad Hoc Committee Members



Sarah Anderson

Sarah Anderson is a published author, motivational speaker, disability advocate, and one of few lifelong wheelchair users serving on the frontlines of education. She has been teaching for three (3) years at the high school level and is passionate about helping students of all abilities find their voice in the classroom.

"A disadvantage of living life in a wheelchair is that my disability is forever my most obvious trait. It has simultaneously gifted me the privilege of never fearing disclosure; a reality for many individuals with invisible disabilities. We can't let members continue to dread requesting support in concern of jeopardizing their employment."



Michael Baker

Dr. Michael Baker holds a PhD from the University of Manitoba specializing in Inclusive Education and Disability Studies. He is a K-12 educator and a sessional lecturer at the University of Manitoba (Faculty of Education) and the University of Winnipeg (Disability Studies). He is currently a member of the Equity and Social Justice Standing Committee of MTS.

He is a former member of the Human Rights Committee of Council (2024) and former chair of the Inclusion and Accessibility sub-committee of council for the city of Winnipeg. He has consulted for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Canada History Magazine, and Barrier-Free Manitoba.

His most recent publication is: Transinstitutionalisation in Canadian K-12 schools is the rule, not the exception, in Research in Teacher Leadership in Canada: Transformative and Contextualized Agency. Canadian Association of Teacher Education (2025).

"This committee can and must result in the creation of actionable goals to guide MTS in protecting human rights that are egregiously not being met."



Finn Helstrom

Finn Helstrom holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communications and History from the University of Winnipeg and a Bachelor of Education from Brandon University. They have been teaching since 2021 and are currently substitute teaching in Seven Oaks and Pembina Trails School Divisions. Their goal is to teach high school ELA and Humanities. They are a proud member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and have lived with a mental health disability since the age of 16.

"We need to protect the rights of members working and living with disabilities. The sense that you are unhirable is causing members with so much to give, to give up on the profession all together."



Natashia Herring

Natashia Herring has been an educator for fifteen (15) years, beginning her career in Northern Manitoba. She attended Brandon University and attained an M. Ed in Guidance and Counselling, and a second in Inclusive Education. Presently she is a student services teacher with Louis Riel School Division, President of the Manitoba School Counsellors Association, and a member of the Student Services and Inclusive Education Committee with MTS. She has been accepted to The University of Manitoba PhD in Education Program. She is passionate about supporting individuals with diverse needs, which includes her students and the adults she works alongside. She is a mother of three, one being ADHD and autistic, which contributed to her awareness and later, her identical diagnosis.

“Not everyone fits the stereotypes of disability, which can lead to misunderstandings of what an individual needs as supports. It is critical to eliminate stigma, barriers and limitations faced by individuals with disabilities in education. Accommodations for some often improve conditions in the workplace for everyone.”



Cathy Pleskach – Provincial Executive Chair

Cathy Pleskach is a classroom math and science teacher and President of the Interlake Teachers’ Association. She holds a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Manitoba, along with a Post Baccalaureate in Special Education. She is a proud member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and hopes that the work of this Ad Hoc continues to normalize an equity and Member first mindset within all aspects of the Society.

“There are so many directions to go; so many Members whose livelihoods depend on this work. To hear this group say, ‘basic human rights not being met’, ‘privilege in having a physical disability’, ‘feeling unhirable’ and ‘the exhaustion is in fighting in isolation’, is both humbling and inspiring.”

Meetings and Focus

The committee met four (4) times (September 26, 2024, October 21, 2024, January 14, 2025, and February 19, 2025) with a primary focus to identify barriers experienced by disabled Members, both in the workplaces and in accessing the Society. A secondary focus was placed on recommendations, definitions, data and resources to support member awareness and possible next steps for the Society.

Considerations

After discussion and deliberation, the committee decided to endorse the use of identity-first language. This approach, established by the global disability community, recognizes the importance of community voice, autonomy, and leadership. It also accentuates the fact that a disability identifier connotes community, identity, culture, and in some instances, a distinct language that should be celebrated and nurtured in public education. This committee recognized the value of person-first language and directs individuals to advocate for their preferences in their context. Following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) this committee hopes to establish the obligation to promote positive perceptions and greater social awareness towards the disability community and challenge customs and behaviour based on stereotypes, prejudices, harmful practices and stigma.

The committee considered several other major factors. There are multiple forms of disability: Mental, Physical, and Psychological. Where is the more immediate need, supporting members in the workplace, in accessing the Society, or both? Are all of these ideas intersectional? Intersectionality itself came into view as many psychological disabilities intersect with being a member of an equity-deserving group. Are these causal in nature or do they often simply coincide? The complexity of these considerations lends itself to the idea that more time, member input, data curation and analysis are required.

The direction of the committee ironically became clearer the more it muddled... simply identify and report the barriers, identify more Members from this group, suggest that more detailed work be done, and reference examples and experiences of other organizations and historical MTS documents to provide and support the recommendations.

The vision moving forward... seek out the voice of more members of this group and focus the work through their stories. Initial work began this year to try to host a virtual townhall, but it was felt that more time was needed to ensure all disabled Members could be contacted and have the opportunity to participate. This work should continue, and include but not be limited to a survey, time and space for Members to come together, and connection with stakeholders to discuss what role they have in this work.

Definitions

Disability:

The Canadian Human Rights Act defines disability as:

"A physical or mental condition that is permanent, episodic, ongoing, or of some persistence that is significant enough to limit a person's ability to carry important life activities."

The World Health Organization defines disability as:

"An umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. Impairments are problems in body functions or structures while activity limitations are difficulties encountered by an individual in executing tasks or actions. Problems experienced by an individual in life situations are called participation restrictions."

In other words, disability is not just one health problem. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives."

The Ontario Human Rights Commission defines disability in far more detail as:

- 1. any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,*
- 2. a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,*
- 3. a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,*
- 4. a mental disorder, or*
- 5. an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.*

Physical Disability:

"A physical disability is a limitation on a person's physical functioning, mobility, dexterity, or stamina. Other physical disabilities include impairments which limit other facets of daily living, such as respiratory disorders, blindness, epilepsy, and sleep disorders."

Mental Disability may refer to:

- Developmental disability, a chronic condition due to mental or physical impairments arising before adulthood.*
- Disabilities affecting intellectual abilities, medical conditions affecting cognitive ability including:
 - Intellectual disability, also known as general learning disability, a generalized neurodevelopmental disorder.*
 - Learning disability, where a person has difficulty learning in a typical manner.**
- Mental disorder, also called mental illness or psychiatric disorder, a behavioral or mental pattern that causes impairment of personal functioning.
 - Neurodevelopmental disorder, a disorder of brain function**
- Emotional or behavioral disorders, a disability classification used in education.*

Psychological Disability:

"A psychological disability is a disorder that negatively affects an individual's ability to function in their life due to difficulties with disturbances in cognitions, emotions, and/or behaviors."

Neurotypical:

"Having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within what is considered "typical" by societal standards. That is, thinking, behaving, or learning in ways that are in line with these standards."

Neurodivergent:

"Having a style of neurocognitive functioning that is significantly different from what is considered "typical" by societal standards. That is, thinking, behaving, or learning differently than these standards. For example, some people may need to do some kind of repetitive movement (often called "stimming") to pay attention. Neurodivergence generally includes people with autism, ADHD, OCD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, or Tourette's, but others may also identify with the term."

Ableism:

"A system that places value on people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence, and productivity. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on a person's appearance and/or their ability to satisfactory [re]produce, excel and 'behave.'" (TL Lewis in conversation with Disabled Black and other negatively racialized folk; updated January 2020.)

Domains and Self-Regulation:

Self-regulation is one's ability to:

- adjust one's "level of energy to match the situation,"
- ability to "monitor, evaluate and modify one's emotions,"
- "Shift attention" or ignore various stimuli,
- engage in social interactions in a "sustained way" and,
- connect and empathize with other people.

Self-regulation is divided into five domains: biological, emotional, cognitive, social, and prosocial. If people have strong self-regulation skills but spend time in an environment that does not support their needs in a physical or interpersonal way, then their balance may be thrown off, and ability to function put at risk. (Shanker, 2013, pp. xii, xiii, 19).

Committee's Approach to Defining Disability

The Committee recognized from the outset that the most inclusive way to gather feedback from disabled Members was to rely on self-identification, rather than adhering to strict, predefined criteria for participation.

The Committee acknowledged different models of disability, each providing a unique perspective on Member's experiences. We primarily considered:

The **social** model views disability in the context of the interaction between individuals with impairments and societal barriers that limit their participation. This model highlights the importance of removing environmental and attitudinal barriers to achieve full inclusion.

The **medical** model views disability as residing within the individual. It focuses on diagnosing, treating, and managing the impairment or condition. The goal is often to cure or mitigate the impairment, with less emphasis on changing societal structures or attitudes.

It was also important for the Committee to recognize that Members have a robust Disability Plan where Members who are approved for benefits are considered disabled. This follows an **insurance** model where disability is narrowly defined based on the insurer's terms and conditions. It views disability by the inability to work due to a physical or mental condition and focuses on its economic impact.

The Committee agreed that participation through self-identification allowed the most comprehensive feedback and consideration of the most diverse experiences of Members.

Supporting Documents

[Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)

Equality before and under law and equal protection and benefit of law

- **15 (1)** Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.
- **Affirmative action programs**
15 (2) Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of ... mental or physical disability.

[Canadian Human Rights Act](#)

- **2** The purpose of this Act is to extend the laws in Canada to give effect ... the principle that all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated, consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society, without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices...

[Employment Equity Act](#)

Employer's duty

5 Every employer shall implement employment equity by

- **(a)** identifying and eliminating employment barriers against persons in designated groups that result from the employer's employment systems, policies and practices that are not authorized by law; and
- **(b)** instituting such positive policies and practices and making such reasonable accommodations as will ensure that persons in designated groups achieve a degree of representation in each occupational group in the employer's workforce that reflects their representation in

Manitoba Human Rights Commission – [Reasonable Accommodation in the Workplace](#)

– [Your Rights and Responsibilities: A Guideline Developed Under the Human Rights Code.](#)

"Failing to provide reasonable accommodation is a form of discrimination."

[Federal Disability Reference Guide](#)

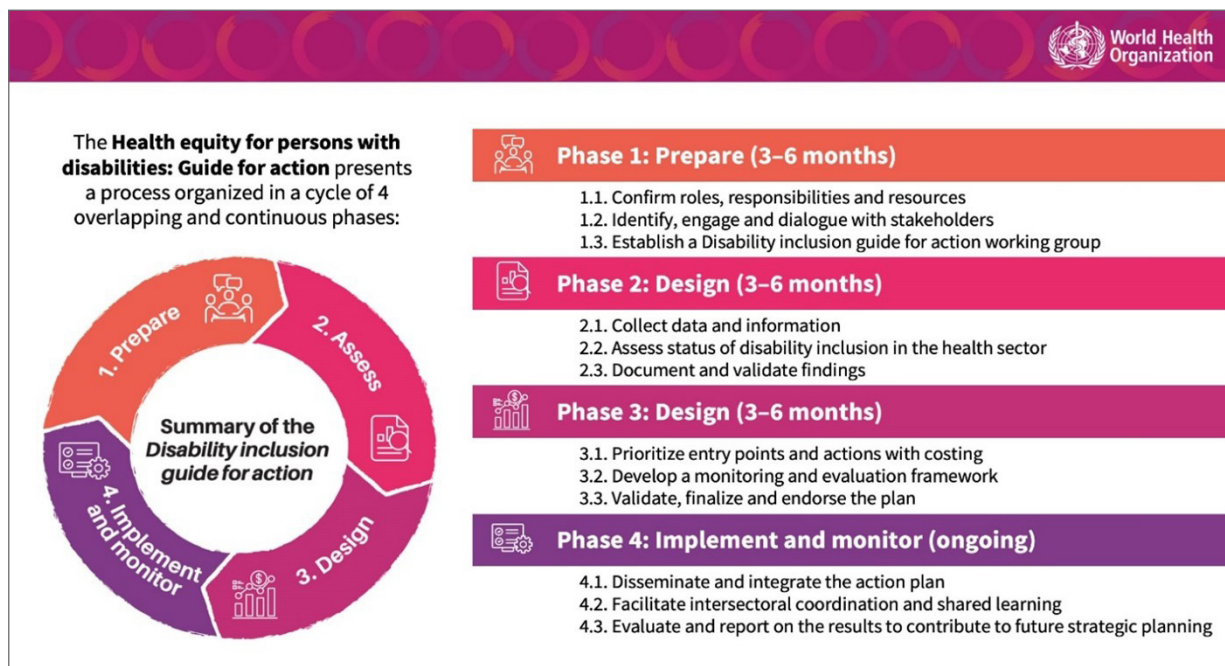
"Because of its complexity, there is no single, harmonized "operational" definition of disability across federal programs."

Statistics

World Health Organization – [Health Inequity Report](#)

- An estimated 1.3 billion people – or 1 in 6 – experience significant disability.
- Persons with disabilities die earlier, have poorer health, and experience more limitations in everyday functioning than the rest of the population.
- These health inequities arise from unfair conditions that affect persons with disabilities disproportionately, including stigma, discrimination, poverty, exclusion from education and employment, and barriers faced in the health system itself.
- Compared to persons without disabilities, some persons with disabilities:
 - die up to 20 years earlier.
 - have more than a double risk of developing depression, asthma, diabetes, stroke, obesity, or poor oral health.
 - find inaccessible health facilities up to six times more hindering; and,
 - are up to fifteen times more limited by inaccessible and unaffordable transportation.

The World Health Organization (WHO) published a toolkit to guide governments in building health systems that are inclusive of persons with disabilities. Titled [Health equity for persons with disabilities: guide for action](#) (or Disability inclusion guide for action), the new resource outlines a process culminating in concrete actions to advance health equity for persons with disabilities. Although the guide was meant to develop Health systems, it could provide next steps for assessing and reducing barriers to the Society.

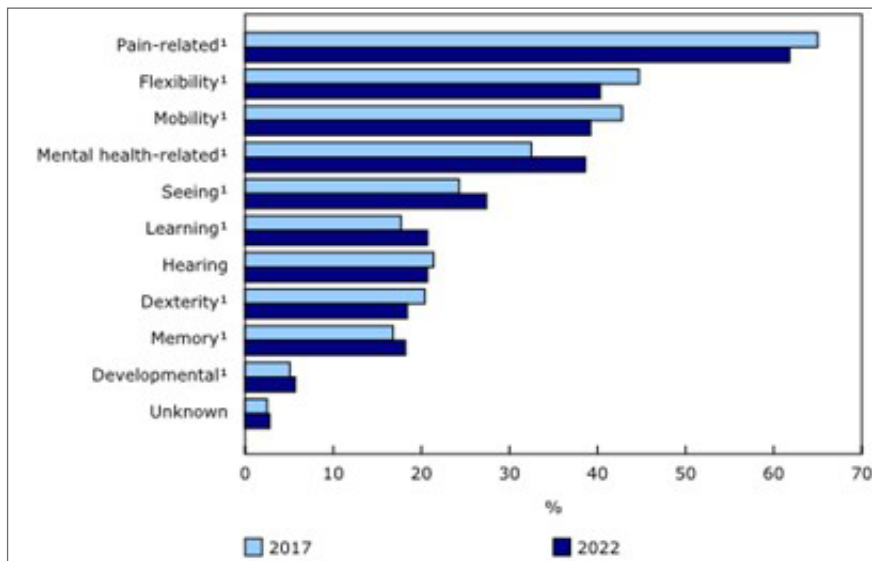


Statistics Canada – 2022 Canadian Survey on Disabilities (CCPA)

- 27% of Canadians aged 15 years and older, or 8.0 million people, had one or more disabilities that limited them in their daily activities.
- The rate of disability in Canada has increased by 5 percentage points since 2017.
- In 2022, the rate of disability was higher among women (30%) than men (24%).
- Nearly one-quarter (24%) of working-age adults had a disability in 2022.

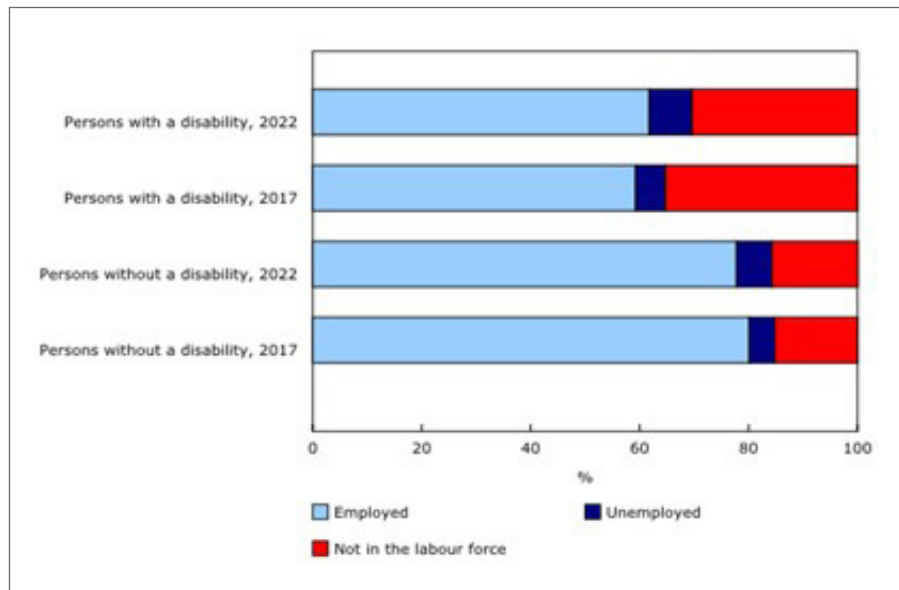
| | 2022 | 2017 |
|--|------|------|
| Total, aged 15 years and older | 27.0 | 22.3 |
| Youth, aged 15 to 24 years | 20.1 | 13.1 |
| Working-aged adults, aged 25 to 64 years | 24.1 | 20.0 |
| Seniors, aged 65 years and older | 40.4 | 37.8 |

- Mental health related disabilities experienced the largest increase from 2017-2022.
- The most common disability type in 2022, was pain-related disability; 62% of persons with a disability reported this type of disability. Flexibility (40%), mobility (39%) and mental health-related (39%) disabilities were next most prevalent.
- Among the working age population with disabilities, pain-related (63%), mental health-related (46%) and flexibility (36%) were the most common disability types.



- In 2022, 29% of Canadians with a disability had one disability type, 37% had two or three, and 34% had four or more. As individuals age, they are more likely to experience a higher number of co-occurring disabilities.

- In 2022, 62% of working-age adults (25 to 64 years of age) with disabilities were employed, while 78% of persons without disabilities were employed.



- Persons with disabilities are more likely to be employed in 2022 than in 2017. This stresses the importance of having more supports within the Society as more of our membership is working and living with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities are at a financial disadvantage compared with persons without disabilities.
- In 2022, the median personal after-tax income of persons with disabilities was \$32,870, compared with \$39,490 for persons without disabilities. The median personal after-tax income for persons with more severe disabilities (\$28,110) was lower than that for those with milder disabilities (\$36,900).
- The [Accessible Canada Act](#) (ACA) was passed in 2019 with the intention of creating a barrier-free Canada by 2040.
- 72% of persons with disabilities reported that they experienced one or more barriers to accessibility because of their condition in the last year.

Statistics Canada – Canadian Labour Force Survey, 2023 (CCPA)

- In 2023, the overall employment rate for men with a disability (48.9%) was 21.9 percentage points below the rate for men without disabilities (70.8%). The employment rate of women with a disability (45.6%) was 17.2 percentage points below the rate of women without disabilities (62.8%).
- The employment rate of persons with a disability in Manitoba was 48.1% in 2023 (Canada = 47.1%), while for persons without was 70.1% (Canada = 66.9%).
- The gap between the employment rates of persons with and without disabilities tended to be lower at higher levels of educational attainment.
- Persons with a disability are less likely to work in professional services.
- Employment rate of those with a disability varies across racialized populations.

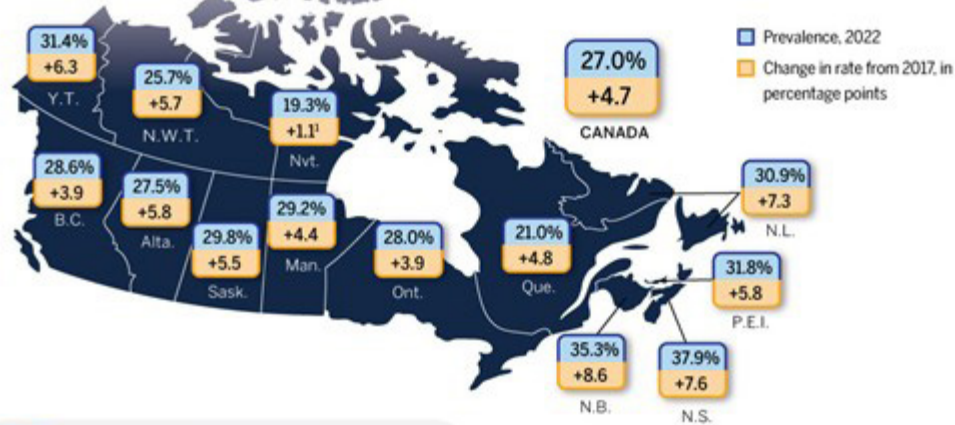
NEW DATA ON DISABILITY

in Canada, 2022

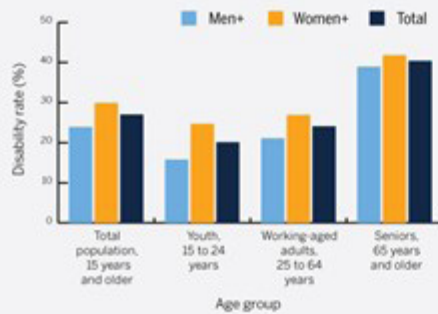
In 2022, 27.0% of Canadians aged 15 and older, or 8.0 million people, had at least one disability. This represents an increase of 4.7 percentage points from 2017.



From 2017 to 2022, the disability rate rose in all provinces and most of the territories



The disability rate increases with age. Growth of Canada's senior population between 2017 and 2022 contributed to the overall increase in the disability rate.



Women of all ages are more likely than men to have a disability²

From 2017 to 2022, mental health-related, pain-related, and seeing disabilities had the largest increases, contributing the most to the rise in the Canadian disability rate.

Prevalence among the total Canadian population, 2022
Change in rate from 2017, in percentage points



*Updated image

¹ The change observed since 2017 is not statistically significant at a 5% significance level, meaning that it is likely due to sampling variability.

² The category "Women+" includes women and some non-binary persons, while the category "Men+" includes men and some non-binary persons. Given the small size of the non-binary population, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is most of the time necessary to protect the confidentiality of the responses provided.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

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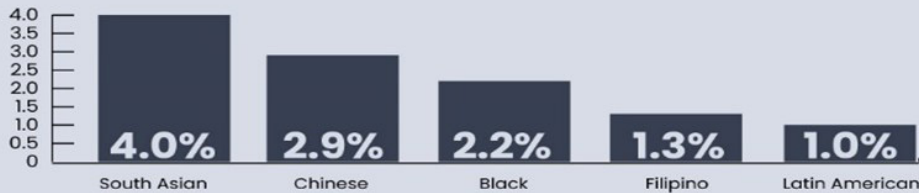
The Visible Minority Population with a Disability in Canada:

Employment and Education



Among Canadians aged 15 years and older with a disability, **14.3%** are a member of a group designated as a visible minority.

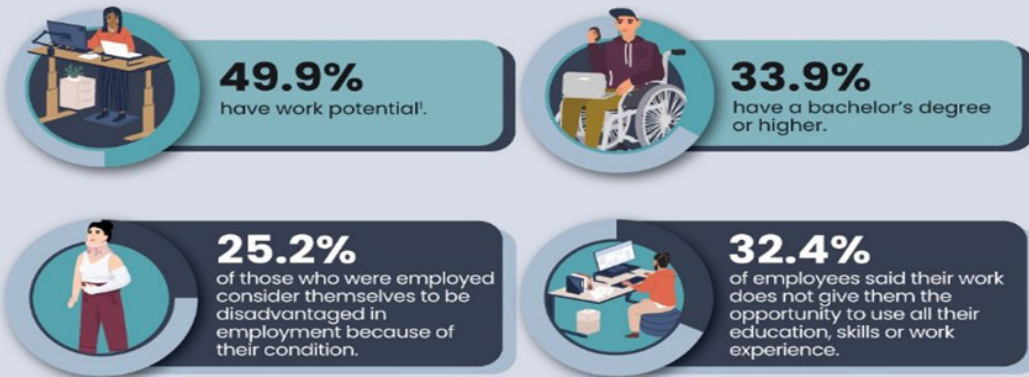
Breakdown by select visible minority group:



Visible minorities with a disability by sex and age group:



Among visible minorities with a disability aged 25 to 64 years:



¹ Work potential describes non-employed persons with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years, not currently working who might be able to enter paid employment, in an inclusive labour market without discrimination, with full accessibility and accommodation.

Notes: The Canadian Survey on Disability covers Canadians aged 15 years and older who experience limitations in their daily activities because of a long-term condition or health-related problem.

The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour."

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017.

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Barriers Identified Within the Workplace

This list of barriers is by no means exhaustive. Many are questions and issues faced through the lived experiences of committee members.

Initial Employment

- Finding success in the hiring process to even enter the profession is the biggest challenge. Employer trepidation is real, regarding the hiring of an employee who may require support. Accommodations are often considered costly or not even possible in many work sites. Old, compartmentalized or extended campuses mean that certain jobs are not accessible to members of this group.

Suitability of Position

- Permanent positions are often filled through a lens of ableism, and what remains are piecemeal, term, multi-site, itinerant or substitute positions. These types of jobs do not provide for consistency of accommodations, and therefore often set disabled Members up for failure from the beginning.
- Many disabled Members have challenges taking on fulltime workloads and work as substitute teachers. Having to re-explain their disability and required accommodations each time just to be able to work can be difficult. How are school divisions prepared to support the accommodations of substitutes on the day they are employed? A simple solution would be advocacy that divisions be directed to provide/post on their websites, the accessibility of each school or work site.

Employer misconception/lack of education

- Statement from interview feedback: *“We can’t use an EA to support you.”*
- There may only be certain schools at which these members can work in a division. An accommodation could be to ensure they are assigned or given priority to jobs in specific buildings over other substitutes.
- Many of these accommodations are small and once in place can benefit all. The struggle is often that as a temporary or term employee, advocating for support feels like rocking the boat or having an asterisk by your name as you look for future work.
- Even when employers do have policies, they may be for certain disabilities. Consistent policies and definitions of disability across divisions would help.
- Advocate that all schools and sites improve on their adherence to the Accessibility Standards Act.
- If these conversations were about students, we wouldn’t even be having them.

“It’s not the people; it’s the way things are done.” – Committee Members

Peer misconception and lack of education

- Visible versus invisible disabilities – *“You don’t look disabled.”*
- Fighting myths that members with mental disabilities are faking, not hard workers, *“Just be normal”, “Take a day and you’ll feel better.” “Everyone’s hard is hard.”*
- Mandatory post-secondary courses related to disability to help teachers support not only their students, but also their interactions with disabled colleagues.
- The intersectionality between disability and equity-deserving groups needs to be acknowledged and school staffs need training.
- Principals/school leaders lack training on their responsibilities and obligations in supporting

staff. Human rights versus labour rights. People versus policy.

Self-Advocacy

- Members may be able to access accommodations but are not sure how/who to ask.
- Where do they start if hired, and who do they ask at the division? at the Society?
- Who do they talk to if they feel they are not getting hired and how can they be supported to have success with the interviewing and hiring process?
- Often several staff officers deal with the same division on behalf of separate Members. Different divisions are often asked to do similar work but independently. How can more consistent communication and collaboration between employee, employer and MTS to do this work more effectively and efficiently?

Peer-Advocacy

- Colleagues with increased knowledge of advocacy and accommodation processes are key relationships that can help. Lack of allies feels like being the only one in the school or even the division. Self-advocacy is isolating and exhausting.
- Having to teach the teachers. Disable Members often do much of the peer-education. While these connections are good, the benefit of time for staff education on disability, accommodation, and how to be supportive would be valuable.
- Some members do not want their colleagues to know their personal needs or information. How can this be discreet but improve peer support capacity?
- Drop off of support
- Members of the committee observed the inequity that schools support students through K-12, and universities continue this into post-secondary. But the moment individuals become employed, they are "dropped off a cliff to adulthood." There needs to be increased support from the Society upon entering the profession.

Drop off of support

- Members of the committee observed the inequity that schools support students through K-12, and universities continue this into post-secondary. But the moment individuals become employed, they are "dropped off a cliff to adulthood." There needs to be increased support from the Society upon entering the profession.

Barriers Identified Within the Manitoba Teachers' Society

Representation

- *"Nothing about us without us."*
- There is a lack of representation amongst MTS Staff and Leadership.
- Societal representation should be reflected in our industry.
- Member engagement suffers when Members don't see themselves in their union.

Member Services

- What level of service should disabled Members expect from MTS, their Local, or the employer? Who does what and when? Are grievances the only way or could this happen in a more consistent, proactive, or collaborative way from the onset?
- What limitation does Society capacity put on Member support and advocacy?
- Often Society departments can be on different sides over an accommodation.
- Are staff officers trained on types of disabilities and the resources Members may need, or is it on a case-by-case basis? Do they learn only when they need to know?
- Training for Local leadership to hold divisions accountable or support new hires.
- Disabled members have to work harder on the job just to do their job. What other proactive work or advocacy can MTS do that is specific to this group?

Direction of Communication

- Members enter the radar of MTS only once they, the Member, register in My Profile.
- The committee felt that as ALL new teachers become employed, the Society should be initiating the communication. This would increase member engagement and benefit all Members, not just those seeking accommodation.

Consistent Communication

- Member experiences are individual, and each case may be handled by a different staff officer. Multiple cases could be similar, accommodations from one case could help another, divisions can learn from each other, but cross-case sharing may not occur. Creating a staff portfolio dedicated to accommodations may reduce duplicity of work, increase efficiency, and leverage gains won in other divisions.

Cautious Activism

- There is fear of reprisal for participating. It may have been difficult for disabled Members to gain employment in the first place. Unionism may make it more difficult to remain employed, gain permanency or be considered for advancement.
- Some disabled Members don't want to draw attention to themselves. Disability is extremely individual, thus using a broad approach may cause discomfort for some.

Connections to Colleagues:

- Disabled Members are often the only one on their staff causing isolation.
- The lack of affinity spaces for disabled Members and the time to connect and have focused conversations creates further feelings of working on an island.

- Are there other folks out there to connect with either in-person or virtually?
- What are their experiences? What were their pathways to support in the workplace?
- What are the experiences of other disabled Members in engaging with the Society?

The Physical Space

- McMaster House and Bradley Square - What are some changes that could benefit all? Are the lights an issue? Is the concrete building ok for sound and sensory issues? What about the layout of the departments and accessing Staff or parts of each building?
- The Annual General Meeting and other events held off site can have challenges with accessibility. This can limit or nullify Member engagement in the political process.
- Can folks see themselves in a variety of Society spaces and if not, why not?

Disability Benefits

- Group Short- and Long-Term Disability Plans are designed to offer financial assistance for periods of disability from work. The scope is intentionally narrow and structured to be reactive to loss of work ability, rather than to support and advocate for disabled members navigating the workplace or MTS.
- Insurance plans contain pre-existing conditions limitations which may impact eligibility.



Historical MTS Reports and Past Recommendations:

WELCOM REPORT (2018):

Below are some of the recommendations from the WELCOM report that, if considered in the scope of disabled Members, would parallel the recommendations of this Ad Hoc.

- Dedicate Society staff to women's issues.
- Advocate with school divisions to develop strategies and specific leadership programs for women.
- Create Women in Leadership support networks.
- Use the political office to bring equity issues to the forefront with stakeholder groups and government.
- Deliver presentations to university classes about The Manitoba Teachers' Society services which should include information regarding opportunities for women and leadership.
- Offer a professional learning session at FAB 5 about women and educational leadership.
- Collect and report annually on data related to:
 - o Gender distribution on Society and Local committees.
 - o Gender distribution and attendance at Presidents' Council.
 - o Gender distribution of delegates to Provincial Council.
 - o Gender breakdown of participation at Provincial Council, specifically debate at the microphone and the development of and speaking to resolutions.

Recommendations For MTS: (Page 55)

- Consistent communication with members about professional learning opportunities.
- Offer professional learning opportunities specifically geared to women, such as women in leadership events and formal development programs.
- Promote wellness opportunities and training on maintaining work/life balance.
- Use of online courses and webinars to increase access to leadership training.
- Create collaborative relationships beyond specific regions to maximize the use of resources including regional delivery of leadership courses or workshops.
- Mentorship programs for those new to the profession and for women new to leadership roles.
- Create women in leadership support networks.
- Create gender neutral leadership profiles.

2STLGBQIA+ AD HOC COMMITTEE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EQUITY (2022):

Below are some of the recommendations from the 2STLGBQIA+ report that, if considered in the scope of disabled Members, would parallel the recommendations of this Ad Hoc.

- Examine the processes and structure of Provincial Council.
- Provide professional learning to all Society staff and Provincial Executive on 2STLGBQIA+ realities and rights, understanding of and consistent messaging, intersectionality, anti-oppression, and advocacy strategies.
- Provide at minimum ½ day professional development session to Local Association Presidents and Local Executives on 2STLGBQIA+ realities and rights with an emphasis on local contexts.
- Develop a Queer/Trans FAQ for Staff and for Local Presidents, reviewed and updated on a quarterly basis or more frequently if required.
- Collaborate with Council of School Leaders (COSL) to develop training for principals and vice principals to provide language and advocacy strategies to better support 2STLGBQIA+members, students, and families.
- Develop strategies to support the hiring, recruitment, and retention.
- Designate one Staff Officer as the primary contact for Queer/ Trans members experiencing employment related issues.
- Create an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Team to address equity issues, support member engagement and increase the voice of members from equity seeking groups at The MTS.
- Offer networking circles for Queer and Trans teachers through targeted events in person and virtually at least four (4) times per year.
- Create a representative video on the Union and Unionism.
- Collect Teacher Welfare tracking data related to the number of cases involving Queer/Trans members.
- Establish a review and reporting process to support the implementation of recommendations on an ongoing basis.
- Advocate for the consistent implementation of policy and administrative procedures to ensure they are uniformly applied to staff and students, align with human rights and other related legislation, and are meaningfully enforced.
- Work with post-secondary education programs to develop a mandatory course on equity issues.

MTS Equity Scan 2022-23:

Dedicated sections from the EDI Scan show work to be done in the scope of this Ad Hoc.

Page 62 – *“This affinity group includes persons who identify with a physical, mental/psychological, chronic, visible, invisible disability, neuro diversity including learning disabilities who may or may not require accommodation. The vast and complex area of disability was a dominant theme raised in individual sessions, focus groups and in the survey. Persons who identified with a disability felt that the organization was grounded in an ableist foundation.”*

“They shared experiences of stigma from when they disclosed their disability to the school leaders/school division/MTS in which they felt affected their career options including leadership opportunities. They felt judged that they are limited in their capacity to work (longer hours). Following this identification as a person with a disability, navigating the system was problematic from dismissal of concerns with comments such as, “Take a sick day, you’ll feel better” to getting information about the process and available resources and supports to receiving accommodation. Many of the responders described the accommodation process as

exhausting. They say that accommodation support varies depending on the school, the school division, and MTS staff; their knowledge and understanding of disabilities and the legal requirements of accommodation in the workplace. They provided many examples of the lack of and inconsistent information.”

Page 63 – *“There were examples of some good accommodation when the school division/PEX/MTS collaborated. MTS has the benefit of the self-insured plan office on-site with a team of experts in healthcare, disability, and wellness. Clarification of the roles and responsibilities of this office with MTS utilizing a collaborative model would address some of the issues related to the misinformation that members are experiencing. This collaborative partnership puts employees first, validating the value they bring to the workplace, and demonstrating that MTS is an inclusive workplace. The tone and tenor of being proactive in the approach to supporting accommodation is a critical factor.”*

Recommendations from the EDI scan (Page 64):

- Increase awareness of disability issues for all leaders and MTS.
- Develop expertise, knowledge, lived experience on the MTS HR team.
- Develop clear processes and consistent information at all levels-school, school division and MTS.
- Develop clear roles and responsibilities between offices that deal with disability.
- Develop a flow chart of the process that can be shared with all members including training of the process.
- Define the union’s role in accommodation.
- Increase understanding and training (awareness of legislative requirements) for all leaders and MTS staff.
- Develop policies on disability support, procedures on implementation, consistent everyday practices.
- Develop clear and multiple formats of communication and availability of information and resources.
- Consider collaborative and joint accommodation committees.

National Teacher Union Scan

The Committee sought to understand whether other teacher unions in Canada are doing similar work in learning about the experiences and needs of disabled Members. Organizations were asked to share strategies, policies or programs that have been implemented to support disabled Members, and lessons learned during the work.

The Committee heard from 6 provincial counterparts and from those who have embarked on this work, most are in the early stages of information gathering specific to disabled Members. While overall there are efforts to support and advocate for individual Members, the findings highlight the need for more targeted initiatives and systemic approaches to address disabled Member's unique challenges. Common themes amongst the organizational feedback were that the issue was complex, extremely individual and that disabled Members have long been overlooked as an equity seeking group.

Key Observations:

- **Listening Circles and Advisory Groups:** Organizations must learn about the experiences of disabled Members, specifically. Plan to integrate into broader diversity and equity networks.
- **Conferences and Training:** Education and opportunities to network are important areas where members can focus on supporting colleagues with disabilities.
- **Dedicated Support:** Many discussions surrounding the merit of dedicated staff to assist disabled Members, though support is often provided only upon request.
- **Accessibility Challenges:** Physical accessibility and lack of individual accommodations are common barriers shared amongst the various organizations.
- **Research and Policy:** Some organizations have conducted research and policy work to support under-represented groups, but specific initiatives for disabled Members are limited.
- **Education on Accommodations:** There is a recognized need for more education on accommodations and undue hardship due to misinformation.

| Association | Similar Work | Findings |
|--------------|---|--|
| ATA | <p>Established listening circle for disabled members in Spring of 2024</p> <p>"DEN's" Diversity/Equity Networks - groups can apply to be a DEN which would provide staff support for strategic planning, retreats etc. and one seat on their Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Standing Committee. ATA anticipates disabled members will become a DEN moving forward.</p> <p>Spring 2025 PD Conference for ATA will have some focus on supporting colleagues with disabilities</p> <p>2 ATA staff dedicated as "experts" to assist disabled members (this support only occurs when the member contacts ATA for support)</p> | <p>Issues are complex and very individualized</p> <p>Overarching equity work does not address the individual nuances of supporting disabled members</p> <p>"Small but mighty" group of disabled members leading the work. ++gratitude for being asked about their experiences.</p> |
| PEITF | <p>No specific work in this area</p> <p>Recognized the accessibility challenges in PEITF's office space and proposed a new location</p> | <p>Support offered to individual members but no other initiatives that include this group</p> |
| NSTU | <p>No initiatives specific to disabled members as an equity seeking group.</p> <p>2023 AdHoc Committee on Equity Seeking Members (included disabled members in data gathering but recommendations not specific to one group)</p> | <p>Disabled members had the fewest barriers to participating in NSTU when compared to other equity seeking groups</p> <p>Disabled members cited poor physical accessibility and lack of individual accommodations as barriers to participation</p> |
| STF | <p>No specific, targeted work or research in this area.</p> <p>Undertook research and policy last year aimed to hear from and support under-represented groups but nothing specific to disabled members.</p> <p>Put out a call for Advisory Groups that would focus on barriers to recruitment and engagement with STF in the following groups of membership: Racialized, Indigenous Principals and Vice Principals, Queer & Allies, Men in the Classroom (Early Years). Will consider expanding to more groups, including disability. Plan is to bring all the groups together for a fall and spring meetings/symposiums</p> | <p>Focusing on connections and forming goodwill at this stage</p> |
| NLTA | <p>No similar work</p> <p>Support and representation to individual members who need accommodation or assistance with returning to work</p> | <p>++ education required regarding accommodations and undue hardship (lots of misinformation)</p> |
| AEFO | <p>No similar work</p> <p>Mandatory training on equity matters for all staff and elected representatives</p> | <p>Internal training focus</p> <p>Supports offered to individual members</p> |

Ad Hoc Committee Recommendations

The following list of recommendations is not exhaustive.

1. MTS staff and an Ad Hoc of PX continue the work to operationalize the recommendations. Resolution to be presented at Provincial Council 2025.
2. Staff Officer portfolio that is dedicated to accommodations and advocacy for disabled Members, similar to Maternity/Parental Leave and Workplace Safety and Health.
3. Disabled Members Equity Network included in the Pilot Project.
4. Determine who we don't know. Review the self-identification process on My Profile, as well as space on the Member engagement form to identify or declare interest.
5. Conduct a survey with disabled Members of the Society. Purpose to be two-fold:
 - a. To determine further barriers in accessing the workplace and the Society,
 - b. To build a database of members from this community to help with Member engagement and population of working groups and committees.
6. Connect with outside-bodies and other stakeholders doing disability work.
7. Increase representation in three (3) ways:
 - a. In the profession – Support increased hiring of disabled Members,
 - b. In MTS – Review of hiring practices (recent workplace assessment), and
 - c. At post-secondary – Collaborate with the various Education programs to examine recruitment and acceptance practices.
8. Educate:
 - a. MTS staff – professional development and training
 - b. Employers – The Society could create one presentation for use at MSBA, MASS, local boards and other stakeholders.
 - c. Presidents, Locals and colleagues – Presidents' Council, Summer Seminar, MTS PD DAY, Local Executive or council training presentations.
 - d. Government – Advocacy in curriculum and education policy development.
9. MTS advocacy and follow up with Locals as to where they are with equity work.
10. MTS advocacy and follow up with School Boards re: EDI Audits.
11. Divisional Equity Hiring Practices: Advocate for voluntary declaration of disability and/or accommodations needed on all School Division Applications. Normalize the conversation around accommodation.
12. Advocate that divisions keep hiring data. How many Members of equity-deserving groups, including disabled members, are applying, interviewing, and getting hired?
13. MTS to explore codifying definitions/develop policy/procedures around disability.
14. Include accessibility to MTS spaces and events in the Society's strategic plan.
15. Review Society documents for ableist language.
16. MTS support/coaching for applying, interviewing and seeking accommodations.
17. Resolution to Canadian Teachers' Federation regarding the development of a national plan to investigate and report on barriers faced by disabled Members in the workplace and when engaging with and within their provincial organization.

Key Considerations moving forward (as per the [Canadian Federal Disability Reference Guide](#))

- Developing inclusive policies, programs and services requires adequate knowledge of the conditions of all Canadians, including those with disabilities. Research is needed on the social, economic and participation issues that affect the lives of people with disabilities and their families.
- When designing research projects and data collection instruments such as surveys or polls, specific issues that impact people with disabilities need to be considered. Researchers should ask themselves what knowledge gaps remain and what further research is required on the issue. The expertise of the Office for Disability Issues or recognized community organizations may be helpful in identifying potential knowledge gaps.
- It is essential that all research projects be conducted in a manner that considers the unique needs and situations of people with disabilities so that they can fully participate in the research process. This may require additional considerations and accommodation.
- People with disabilities should be able to access, interpret and benefit from the results of research and knowledge development projects. Sharing the knowledge that is gained from research is key to building an inclusive society. It is important to share research results with other branches and departments, and where appropriate, with disability organizations.

References and Recommended Resources

- Canadian Survey on Disabilities - [The Daily — Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017 to 2022](#)
- Labour market characteristics of persons with and without disabilities, 2023 - [The Daily — Labour market characteristics of persons with and without disabilities, 2023](#)
- WELCOM Report - [WEL COM Final Report – The Manitoba Teachers' Society](#)
- 2SLGBTQIA+ Report - [2STLGBQIA+ AD HOC Committee: Recommendations for Equity – The Manitoba Teachers' Society](#)
- MTS Equity Scan - [MTS Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Scan – The Manitoba Teachers' Society](#)
- Education and employment experiences of youth with disabilities, 2022 - [Education and employment experiences of youth with disabilities, 2022](#)
- Mental Health Experiences of Teachers: A Scoping Review - <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/jtl/2022-v16-n1-jtl06989/1088950ar.pdf>
- Disabled Teachers' Network (DTN) - Teachers with Disabilities: Their Challenges and Their Needs - <https://disabledteachersnetwork.weebly.com/survey-results.html#:~:text=If%20we%20apply%20the%20Labor,education%2C%20who%20have%20a%20disability.>
- The Problem with Ableism - <https://canadianteachermagazine.com/2022/09/26/11465/>
- Being a Teacher with Disabilities: Experiences from Across Five Countries - <https://www.ukfiet.org/2024/being-a-teacher-with-disabilities-experiences-from-across-five-countries/>

