



Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario

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“Together We Are Stronger”

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Together We Are Stronger

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The Council of Canadians with Disabilities

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Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario

Executive Summary

This is the fourth of six reports to the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) from Citizens With Disabilities - Ontario (CWDO). This report builds on the findings from our first three reports (found at www.cwdo.org) with a focus on the consumer perspective of employment programs and services in Ontario. The information presented in this report comes from data collected during individual interviews and focus groups with people with various disabilities across the province. We also spoke with representatives from organizations representing persons with disabilities, primarily disabled people's organizations.

Overall, the findings presented in this report reflect familiar themes in previous research and literature on the topic of disability and employment in Ontario, Canada and internationally. What is different about this research is that it was facilitated by an organization of people with various disabilities and designed according to their interests.

Key Findings

The findings of this report focus on what is working well, what is not working well and what is missing in the employment system for consumers to effectively meet their individual employment goals. For example, according to participants, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) has raised some public awareness and increased dialogue about disability and accessibility within and beyond the workplace. Some consumers were appreciative of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) that allowed them to earn employment income and maintain some income support. For some consumers we spoke with, the Assistive Devices Program (ADP) provides them with new equipment that meets their disability-related needs every five years. A few participants suggested that consumers of support from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) are better positioned to gain employment because they have previous work experience, in comparison to those without experience.

However, most consumers described a myriad of challenges they experienced when encountering various laws, policies and programs that are intended to support them. For example, several consumers and key informants commented that there is not enough enforcement of the AODA which results in a lack of penalties for employers who fail to meet accessibility requirements under the law. Several consumers said that monthly income reporting processes under ODSP were tedious and time consuming that only added to the work of their jobs and/or the efforts associated with their disability. In addition to these challenges, many consumers described encountering caseworkers and employment service providers who appeared to lack appropriate knowledge and understanding of disability issues; and the needs and interests of job seekers.

Several consumers and key informants said that eligibility criteria under ADP is limited and inadequate. According to participants, eligible expenses under ADP is restricted to low-quality devices that do not effectively meet consumer needs. This

meant that some consumers were limited in their capacity to gain greater independence to participate in community life and obtain competitive employment. Other consumers suggested that WSIB presents barriers for employers to hire people with disabilities because employers are worried about liability for the health and safety of workers with disabilities. According to participants, all workers, including workers with disabilities, are expected to be increasingly productive in the workplace. Work teams may receive rewards for producing more goods or services which facilitates peer pressure on workers with disabilities to perform to particular standards. Further, health and safety goals put pressure on workers to avoid reporting injuries.

Suggestions and Advice

With these comments in mind, we asked consumers and key informants to share their suggestions related to the system of disability supports and services in Ontario. The majority of consumers argued for better income support for basic needs, reflective of the current cost of living, and untied from employment status. Thus, some consumers said they are hopeful, yet skeptical of the potential of Ontario's Basic Income pilots (see also [Report #3](#) for a description of the Basic Income pilots).

Other suggestions focused on the need to unburden individuals with disabilities from responsibility for system navigation and access to employment. Consumers said they are struggling to navigate the current maze of programs and services; and they want the system to change. Many consumers suggested that Ontario's system of policies, programs and services can cause individual distress. As such, there is need for more ongoing emotional support and empathy from employment service providers working with job seekers and workers with disabilities. Some consumers proposed that disability employment service providers should hire more people with disabilities as employees because they have intimate knowledge of the experience of disability and can relate well to service users.

We also asked participants to share advice for CWDO in terms of addressing some of the issues discussed during interviews and focus groups. This advice focused primarily on the need to raise awareness of the organization through marketing and promotion. Participants consistently commented the need to develop collective approaches to employment issues through strategies of resistance, education and advocacy. Many consumers said that at the very least they want CWDO to "do something with the information" they have shared about their experiences.

Next Steps

Currently, CWDO board members have been discussing opportunities to address some of the issues identified in this research project. Specifically, CWDO has been actively seeking funding opportunities to support actions that reflect the expressed needs of Ontarians with disabilities who took part in this study.

Our next report will present an intersectional perspective on disability and employment in Ontario from the viewpoint of people with disabilities from diverse social locations. Stay tuned at www.cwdo.org.

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Introduction

This is the fourth of six reports to the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) from Citizens With Disabilities - Ontario (CWDO). This report builds on the findings from our first three reports (found at www.cwdo.org) with a focus on the consumer perspective of employment programs and services in Ontario. This report is another piece of the puzzle about how the Ontario government and other stakeholders are creating, or limiting, employment opportunities, participation and inclusion of Ontarians with disabilities.

Report #1 laid the foundation of our research by presenting information on the Ontario context for people with disabilities, our overarching methodological framework, and a description of earlier and recent CWDO activities from September to December 2016. Report #1 also included a brief description of most provincial and federal disability employment policies and programs available to Ontario residents. With this context in place, Report #2 provided information about government and non-governmental programs and services that affect the labour market attachment of Ontarians with disabilities. Report #2 also included a description of other CWDO activities taking place from January to April 2017.

Report #3 focused on CWDO activities from May to August 2017. This last report presented some of the current debates on disability and employment in Ontario, including the official perspectives of government, service providers, and consumers with disabilities. It also introduced recent (2017) initiatives of the Government of Ontario to develop policies and programs that reflect the changing nature of the labour market and promote greater inclusion of people with disabilities.

The present report builds on the preliminary analysis of the consumer experience of employment policies, programs and services in Ontario. The findings of this report focus on what is working well, what is not working well and what is missing in the employment system for consumers to effectively meet their individual employment goals. In addition, this report includes a description of CWDO activities taking place from September 1 to December 31, 2017.

About CWDO

CWDO is a non-profit organization committed to the rights of all persons to participate fully in the civil, cultural, economic, political and social life of their communities. CWDO is a volunteer-run organization with no paid staff. Currently, there are 14 board members located across the province and over 2,000 members in almost every electoral district in Ontario. The organization

actively promotes the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of persons with disabilities through community development, social action, member support and referral. Primary activities include public education and awareness about the social and physical barriers that prevent the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in Ontario.

About this project

Over the course of the project, from September 2016 to March 2018, CWDO has committed to provide the Council of Canadians with Disabilities with:

1. A list of Ontario programs and services, currently in existence and those that are missing which will improve or limit the labour market attachment of persons with disabilities in the province.
2. A list of provincial activities related to the areas of CCD formal sub-committees including: Human Rights, Transportation, Social Policy, Access and Inclusion Legislation, Technology, International, and Ending of Life Ethics.
3. A description of activities related to the development of CWDO's organizational capacity in terms of finances and/or increased partnerships with other community organizations and sectors.

To meet this commitment, CWDO has hired an independent contractor, Alexis Buettgen, to support the investigation, research and report writing tasks. The contractor is working in collaboration with CWDO board members, who provide feedback and contribute to the development of all final reports to CCD. All documents submitted to CCD are created with accessibility best practices, as outlined in the Accessible Digital Office Documents project website at adod.idrc.ocad.ca.

Employment is defined here in terms of wage labour that includes financial remuneration paid by an employer (either public or private) to an employee. Self-employment is generating one's own income as opposed to being an employee. Unemployment includes people who are without paid work but actively seeking employment. Those who are out of the labour force include people who are without paid work and are not seeking employment. Underemployment refers to a situation in which the wages earned are insufficient for the worker; perhaps because they are working part-time and would prefer full-time work, or their education, skills and experience make them overqualified beyond the requirements for the job. Volunteering refers to un-waged work that is not financially remunerated.

Methodology

The information presented in this report derives from the following sources:

- Individual interviews and focus groups with adult consumers with disabilities (n=44), and
- Individual interviews with key informants from organizations representing persons with disabilities, primarily disabled people's organizations (n=18).

Data collection is ongoing. As such, the findings presented in this report are a partial analysis of data collected to date. Qualitative data were summarized using thematic analysis to identify dominant themes and issues identified by participants.

Participants

Consumers included adults with disabilities from the north, east, south, central and western regions of the province including Thunder Bay, North Bay, Ottawa, the Greater Toronto Area, and London. Many of these participants included people who identified with multiple disabilities. This included people who were Deaf and hard of hearing, people with visual, learning, psycho-social, physical, intellectual and mobility impairments. Most participants were unemployed, underemployed, volunteering or out of the labour force. Some participants were employed in retail, social services, human resources, education, transportation, public services, sheltered workshops; as well as positions in the legal or accounting professions. A few participants were self-employed. Some participants were post-secondary students in university or college programs. Participants did not include children or youth under the age of 18.

Participants also included key informants from organizations across the province such as CWDO, CCD, the Canadian Hearing Society, Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, People First Ontario, and the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups. We have conducted interviews with representatives from various non-profit employment service providing organizations, and the provincial and federal government.

All participants were asked to share their experiences, thoughts and ideas at the intersection of disability and employment in Ontario. Specifically, we asked participants about their experiences with employment services and supports in terms of what worked well and what did not work well for them. We also asked consumers about their experiences gaining and keeping employment. We asked all participants to share their suggestions related to the system of disability supports and services in Ontario.

Findings

Overall, our findings indicate that Ontario policies, programs and services for people with disabilities are putting pressure on individuals to fit into a labour market that was not designed for them. Some consumers internalized these pressures as individual deficiencies. These consumers expressed a sense of self-blame, low self-confidence, anxiety and hopelessness for opportunities that could lift them out of chronic poverty and/or unemployment.

For example, some consumers commented that many people with disabilities feel “*less than* able-bodied people” in the labour market. One consumer said they believed they may never gain employment and will live on social assistance permanently. For this consumer, this meant that “sometimes you can’t help but feel bad about yourself”. Consumers across the province indicated that many people with disabilities are seeking employment but are often rejected by employers and then feel punished through policies, programs and services that expect them to gain employment. Upon reflection of Ontario policies, programs and services, one key informant remarked:

“Why are we beating up people with disabilities when the economy [labour market] doesn’t want them?”

In this way, many consumers described challenges to obtain and maintain employment due to attitudinal, structural and legislative barriers. Consumers described feeling insecure in the labour market due to low levels of income support coupled with limited accessible work opportunities.

Many people also described a lack of formal and informal supports in their lives to cope with issues of poverty and disability. One consumer commented that, “People don’t understand why you can’t just ‘man up’...So it makes me feel inadequate because I can’t just snap out of it.” This consumer felt that the general public, including employers, do not understand the lived experience of disability.

The following sections will present consumers’ perspectives on legislation, followed by employment related programs and services that were identified during interviews and focus group discussions. Where applicable, we also include perspectives from other key informants to lend additional insights on the data. This data is aggregated to present an overview of what is working well, what is not working well and what is missing in Ontario for consumers with disabilities.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

Regarding access to employment, some consumers shared their perspectives on the AODA. Some participants referred to this legislation in broad terms, while others focused on the employment standard.

The AODA is a statute enacted in 2005 by the government of Ontario for improving accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities to all public establishments by 2025. The purpose of the AODA is to:

benefit all Ontarians by, (a) developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards in order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises on or before January 1, 2025; and (b) providing for the involvement of persons with disabilities, of the Government of Ontario and of representatives of industries and of various sectors of the economy in the development of the accessibility standards. (see Part 1, section 1 of the AODA)

The employment standard requires organizations to establish processes that provide for accessibility across the employment life cycle. It focuses on such areas as recruitment, job accommodation, return to work, performance management, career development, redeployment, and access to workplace and job-related information as well as customized emergency response information.

According to participants we spoke with, the AODA has raised public awareness and increased dialogue about disability and accessibility in Ontario. A key informant from Brantford commented that the AODA employment standard has made it “a bit easier” for individuals to discuss their disability at work because the legislation places responsibility on employers to accommodate a person who has disclosed a disability. This informant also said that since the creation of the AODA, there are more procedures in place to support employment of people with disabilities.

However, several consumers and key informants commented that there is not enough enforcement of the AODA. Several participants said that the legislation “lacks teeth” meaning there are insufficient penalties for employers who fail to meet accessibility requirements under the law. One consumer in Ottawa said, “the AODA’s reputation has been kind of a joke...Do employers even take it seriously?” A Toronto consumer expressed frustration with employers who note their compliance with AODA standards but do not appear to hire people with disabilities, nor have an accessible

interview process. This consumer said, “Companies shouldn’t be writing down that [they are implementing the AODA] if they’re not actually doing it!”

Another Ottawa consumer critically observed that the AODA explicitly recognizes the employer’s potential hardship when accommodating employees with disabilities. The AODA requires accommodation of the needs of people with disabilities up to the point of undue hardship, considering the cost, sources of available funding, and health and safety requirements. This consumer said,

“Unfortunately, the [legal] test [for undue hardship] doesn’t look at the stress or costs for the employee making the request [for accommodation]. So, there’s that tension between what do I need [to do my job] and how far am I willing to go to get what I need? Even if an employer cannot provide the best option for accommodation, they can provide the second-best option. Unfortunately, employees get tired and give up on it”.

This consumer indicated that there is an unrecognized burden on employees to determine and request accommodations in the workplace. Sometimes this burden is so heavy that employees may not request or receive the accommodations they need at work.

Several Toronto consumers told us that there is a lack of education for human resource staff on how to provide inclusive employment opportunities and accommodations for people with disabilities. Consumers said that many human resource staff are not well informed on how to implement the AODA, nor do they learn about disability issues well enough during their education and training.

A key informant from Thunder Bay suggested that there is a need for more education for employers and employees about accessibility at work and how to accommodate people with disabilities. This informant said it is not enough to just provide staff with information about the AODA; there needs to be practical action plans to accommodate and include people with disabilities in the workplace.

Indeed, other participants also commented that there are many misunderstandings in the general public about the AODA accessibility standards. Despite legal requirements, some participants said that employers do not see accommodation as a necessary part of doing business.

Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)

Most consumers we spoke with talked at length about their experiences with ODSP. ODSP offers income and employment support as two separate but intertwined programs. Income support includes monthly financial assistance for individuals with disabilities to help with the costs of basic needs, such as food, clothing and shelter. Income support also includes health and medical benefits. Employment support includes community services to help individuals with disabilities find and keep a job, and advance their careers.

Income Support

The majority of consumers we spoke with were receiving ODSP income support. For most of these consumers, managing and keeping their ODSP income support and benefits was a prominent factor in their decisions about employment.

ODSP directives encourage income support recipients to gain employment — while keeping 50 cents of each dollar earned following a \$200 per month exemption — and continue to receive assistance, such as health benefits, without time limitations. Some ODSP consumers we spoke with said that they were glad to be able to keep their income support while earning some employment income. For example, one consumer from London told us,

“I think one small positive is...even with the challenges with ODSP, at least people can earn a little bit of money before their cheque is deducted.”

However, as one Toronto consumer said about her experience seeking employment “I don’t hear that I’m getting more money, I only hear that they [ODSP] are going to take money from me.” Overall, most participants told us that the 50% earnings clawback is perceived as a disincentive to employment. Several consumers commented that they have chosen part-time work to earn a very low income, or have chosen to opt out of the labour market to avoid the 50% clawback.

Several consumers said that monthly income reporting processes under ODSP were tedious and time consuming that only added to the work of their jobs and/or the efforts associated with their disability. Consumers described the work of managing their health and personal care needs, as well as the rules and regulations associated with receipt of ODSP income support and employment earnings.

For a detailed discussion of the challenges of being disabled within Ontario's rule bound social assistance system please read Michelle Kungl's journey recently published in the Toronto Star:

www.thestar.com/news/gta/2017/09/02/michelle-kungls-incredible-journey.html

Most consumers indicated that ODSP does not reflect the realities of an increasingly precarious labour market. Consumers described the ODSP income reporting process as cumbersome and challenging to manage for short term and contract positions. This is because contract employment income can fluctuate from month to month making it difficult to track over time. Several consumers said they would avoid short term employment opportunities because they were concerned about overpayments from ODSP that can take months or years to re-pay.

For example, one consumer in London said that she was frustrated with "silly overpayments that have been a challenge for years and years" in the ODSP income support system. Another London consumer responded that this is because "The system is broken!" Similarly, consumers indicated that ODSP income support does not reflect the current cost of living thereby forcing some consumers into employment that could exacerbate their impairment or cause injury. A consumer in London said,

"The amount we get from ODSP is such a pittance...The cost of living is going up and this isn't reflected in how much we get [from ODSP] every month...So, I am forced to go out and look for work even if I'm not sure I can perform the work"

Continuing in this discussion, another consumer said,

"I realize I'm not contributing to society and I'm still getting something...So I feel stuck...I'm in between all the time. Should I ask for more [income support]? I'm trying to do something to get off [ODSP income support] but I can't. It's like a catch 22 that a majority of us are stuck on...The people who are on the system because they need the system are trying to better themselves but yet they're getting pulled backwards."

This consumer referred to the 50% clawback and his failed attempts to gain employment in London. He described many efforts to obtain and maintain employment which negatively affected his health and has led him to opt out

of the labour market. In response to his comments, another consumer replied,

“Once you get on ODSP you’re stuck. You can’t earn enough to get off and you don’t have quite enough to live.”

In addition to these challenges, many consumers described negative experiences with ODSP caseworkers. They described encountering caseworkers who appeared to lack appropriate knowledge and understanding of disability issues; and the needs and interests of job seekers. As one Toronto consumer commented, “They do not know disability”. Another Toronto consumer said ODSP workers “call us ‘them’”. Overall, consumers described ODSP as a fractured system that left them feeling worried, frustrated and angry. Consumers described the need for more streamlined, user-friendly, accessible reporting process. They also described the need for more effective communication with consumers about the impacts of employment income for individuals’ ODSP income support and benefits.

Employment Support

The ODSP employment support program is the primary employment program for people with disabilities in Ontario with more than 100 service providers operating across the province. Services are administered by community service providers approved by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Employment support funding is provided to community service providers based on the number of people with disabilities they support to obtain or retain employment. Funding contracts are based on quantitative outcomes achieved for competitive job placement and retention targets. Job placement targets are established annually for each regional ODSP office. These offices negotiate targets with individual community service providers based on outcomes achieved the previous year and to meet the overall regional target. Funding is earned when the service provider is successful in meeting their agreed upon targets.

As described in our last report (Report #3), some consumers told us they have found it helpful to work with providers who were knowledgeable about the challenges and barriers faced by people with various impairments. Consumers consistently told us that there is inconsistency in the quality of employment services from provider to provider. As one Toronto consumer commented,

“The level of commitment to [service users] varies from employment service to employment service...some are good at some things, and not good at other things”

Another consumer from London remarked,

"To be honest, from my experience, they [employment service providers] get you on, they're getting paid but they're not doing anything for you...It's like they don't care because they have a job...I don't know how it works, but it feels like they're getting paid for having you on their books but they're not really doing anything for you."

In this way, many consumers felt that employment service providers lack accountability to service users. These participants said that this was due, in part, to the problematic nature of current funding agreements for service providers. These agreements emphasize economic priorities over individual choice and control. Participants indicated that this funding model results in more service provision for consumers with fewer barriers to employment (e.g., people with mild disabilities) in comparison those with more barriers (e.g., people with severe disabilities).

Critically, many consumers across the province felt that service providers focus on low-waged entry level job opportunities for people with disabilities. They suggested that service providers may focus on entry level jobs because they are easier to obtain and help providers to "get you off their books" and into a job. These consumers felt that services providers are unsure of how to support service users with post-secondary education and seeking higher level positions or a career. For example, a consumer from Ottawa with two professional graduate degrees described her experience with employment service providers:

"When people look at my resume they don't see why I should be having any problems...From my experience with employment supports, the approach is 'how do we solve the problem of you?' They look at my resume and see that I have two masters degrees...So, there's not much they can do for me. Services aren't geared for people like me. But I say to them 'OK but I can't find a job, so?... Services do not support people who are over educated and over qualified but [because of their education] nobody will hire them at entry level."

This consumer indicated that service providers viewed her disability as an individual problem that needed to be overcome in order to obtain and maintain employment. This consumer expressed frustration at the lack of explicit recognition of systemic barriers and challenges for people with disabilities to gain work.

Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB)

The WSIB is mandated to promote health and safety in the workplace, facilitate return to work and recovery from workplace injury or illness, facilitate the re-entry into the labour market for workers, and provide compensation and other benefits to workers "in a financially responsible and accountable manner". The WSIB also has the authority to collect premiums from employers to fund Ontario's workers' compensation system.

Some participants said that consumers of WSIB may have greater opportunity to gain employment because they have employment experience, in comparison to many of those on ODSP without experience. In this way, some participants suggested that WSIB can support injured workers to return to the workforce.

However, several participants argued that WSIB is failing to meet the needs and interests of many workers. For example, an employment service provider in Thunder Bay described WSIB as a highly structured and limited program for employment service provision. This participant said that, "WSIB is a whole other kettle of fish" in comparison to service provision delivered through other provincially funded employment programs. This is because WSIB determines job goals for the consumer, rather than supporting the person throughout their personal employment journey.

Like many other programs, participants told us that there is a lack of accountability measures to consumers within WSIB. One Toronto consumer argued that there should be stronger legal mechanisms to hold WSIB to account to consumers needs and interests for employment or adequate income support. One key informant commented that WSIB is missing the opportunity for consumers to receive ongoing long-term income support for basic needs. This informant suggested that a permanent income support program, regardless of an individual's employment status, could support consumers to explore various employment options without fear of losing income to cover their basic needs.

Other consumers suggested that WSIB presents perceived barriers for employers to hire people with disabilities. One consumer in Thunder Bay described his efforts to gain employment through an unpaid work experience and said,

"My [trial work] placement...was good until I fell down...I hit my head on a board. I really screwed up my placement. The supervisor was scared and didn't know what to do with me... After my placement was over [I was let go] ... I think they were scared [about health and

safety]. It wasn't my fault, my foot just got caught.... So, if you have an accident they won't do nothing for you."

Another consumer said he believed that employers are worried about WSIB liability for the health and safety of workers with disabilities. As such, this consumer said, "if the insurance is blocking opportunities for employment of people with disabilities then that's an area that can be looked into". This consumer indicated that WSIB policy and program directives contradict their mandate to support injured workers and promote inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.

Similarly, a key informant observed that all workers, including workers with disabilities, are expected to be more and more productive in the workplace. Work teams may receive rewards for producing more goods or services which facilitates peer pressure on workers with disabilities to perform to particular standards. Further, health and safety goals put pressure on workers to avoid reporting injuries. This is evident in workplaces that display counts of safety incidents and celebrate zero injuries in the workplace.

According to some participants, there is limited research on the real number and characteristics of people with disabilities who require or could qualify for support from WSIB. According to participants, this is important because WSIB rates are decreasing while ODSP rates are increasing. This may indicate that WSIB recipients are being forced back to work quickly or onto social assistance and off of WSIB. A lack of sufficient research that reflects the needs and interests of people with disabilities, specifically injured workers, potentially means that the number of cases of people who are re-injured upon returning to work are under-reported and unrelated to early return to work practices.

For an analysis of the "welfareization" of disability incomes in Ontario, see John Stapleton's thought provoking report at: metcalfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Welfareization-of-Disability-Incomes-in-Ontario.pdf

Further during our focus group discussions, some consumers raised concerns and considerations for access to workplace accommodations and adaptive equipment or technology to support their employment goals. These comments led to discussions about Ontario's Assistive Devices Program.

Assistive Devices Program (ADP)

The ADP is designed to assist people with disabilities to pay for customized equipment, like wheelchairs and hearing aids. The ADP may cover 75% of the costs for an approved piece of equipment, but does not pay for equipment that will be used exclusively for employment. Social assistance recipients of Ontario Works or ODSP may be eligible for 100% of the ADP Approved Price of equipment. Other eligible consumers may seek help with the leftover 25% of the cost from various volunteer and charity organizations.

For some consumers we spoke with, ADP provides them with new equipment that meets their disability-related needs every five years. These consumers described how they will advocate for their needs in order to receive the appropriate equipment because there are strict limitations on what ADP will fund.

Several consumers expressed appreciation for the 75% coverage of equipment and technology through ADP. However, the additional 25% can be difficult to obtain for some consumers. According to participants we spoke with, some community non-profit organizations will provide financial support; but this does not usually cover the full cost of the 25%. Often, service users will need to fund raise from multiple organizations to cobble together the additional 25% of the costs of equipment.

Several consumers and key informants said that eligibility criteria under ADP is limited and inadequate. Key informants from Thunder Bay told us that eligible expenses under ADP is restricted to low-quality devices that do not effectively meet consumer needs. This meant that some consumers were limited in their capacity to gain greater independence to participate in community life. Without access to appropriate, quality devices, this also meant that some consumers were limited in their capacity to seek and obtain competitive employment in the community. According to participants, without access to effective assistive devices, many consumers may not be able to show their abilities to work productively and independently. In this way, participants argued that ADP fails to enable people with disabilities “to increase their independence through access to assistive devices responsive to their individual needs”¹ as it is intended to do.

¹ ADP is governed by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care. According to this ministry’s website: “Devices covered by the program are intended to enable people with physical disabilities to increase their independence through access to assistive devices responsive to their individual needs” (see: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/adp/>)

In general, consumers and key informants indicated that the cost of adaptive equipment is too high for most people with disabilities to financially afford. Key informants from Thunder Bay commented that they believe vendors sell equipment according to profit margins and not necessarily according to what works best for individuals (e.g. vendors will sell mostly lower quality equipment because they have a higher profit margin due to lost cost materials). Several participants commented that ADP operates according to low standards and expectations of the abilities and capacities of consumers with disabilities because it does not effectively facilitate access to high quality, updated technology and devices.

According to participants, a major challenge with ADP is the lack of support for devices that support workplace accommodations. Further, there is a lack of training for devices purchased via ADP. This has become a challenge for consumers to learn to use device, as well as a challenge for consumers who may also use their devices at work. One Toronto consumer commented that there is a need for employer and employee training on assistive devices in the workplace. This was identified as a gap in ADP with suggestions to include the costs of training with the purchase of equipment as well as greater support for workplace accommodations.

Suggestions for Improving Disability Supports and Services

We asked consumers and key informants to share their suggestions related to the system of disability supports and services in Ontario. Suggestions focused on the need to unburden individuals with disabilities from responsibility for system navigation and access to employment. Consumers said they are struggling to navigate the current maze of programs and services; and they want the system to change. A consumer from North Bay suggested that the system is traumatic, such that:

"A lot of people [with disabilities] have experienced some form of systemic trauma...I think the system and people working in the system need to be more trauma informed. I think people need to understand that when someone starts working again or takes on a job or takes on more stress in their lives, it's going to bring up trauma and bring people into a place where they might not be able to cope."

This consumer suggested that the system of policies, programs and services in Ontario can cause individual distress. As such, this consumer proposed the need for more ongoing emotional support and empathy from employment service providers working with job seekers and workers with disabilities.

While many consumers reflected a sense of self-blame for their challenges with employment, many also recognized that their challenges were systemic and wide reaching. As one consumer from London put it:

"Since I've been working, I haven't gone through the hell that everyone else has gone through. It just makes me mad and makes me constantly say, what can we do to change this? This isn't right. We are supposed to be in one of the best countries in the world and yet we're being given lies that everyone has an opportunity...Canada portrays itself as a country where we will take care of people and a lot of people do get taken care of but a lot of people fall through the cracks and the politicians don't seem to see it as an issue unless something happens to them and then it becomes a pet project...From what I'm hearing it sounds like we should just strip it all down and start fresh... We need [to start by] taking a look at our own organizations."

This consumer suggested that system change could start by examining the employment practices of organizations that serve people with disabilities.

Many consumers suggested that employment service policies and programs need to "bring service providers to account" for service users. One consumer argued,

"If the providers themselves are not practicing disability inclusion, how can they serve us?"

This consumer proposed that disability employment service providers should employ more people with disabilities as employees. She suggested that service providers with disabilities have intimate knowledge of the experience of disability and can relate well to service users. This suggestion resonates with comments from other consumers across the province; who told us that they found it helpful to work with service providers who were knowledgeable about the challenges and barriers faced by people with various impairments.

Specifically, some consumers indicated there is opportunity to fill a gap in services and supports for people with disabilities to access post-secondary education with accommodations; as well as transitional services for employment of recent secondary and post-secondary students. Consumers in Toronto suggested separate streams of employment services and supports for those with and without work experience and education. One of these consumers said the current model of "mixing services together in a blender and trying to be everything to everyone" is not working well and should be transformed.

Many consumers said that job seekers with disabilities are excluded from the hidden job market which includes jobs that are not publicly advertised and often considered the best route to successful job searching. The exclusion of job seekers with disabilities from this market was linked to experiences of isolation, poverty and marginalization in social and community life. Isolation is a barrier to accessing social connections. This isolation can be due, in part, to the nature of disability programs and policies that limit financial resources for people to participate in community activities and meet new people. Exclusion is also due to discrimination, prejudice and a lack of acceptance of people with disabilities in their communities, as well as a lack of physical accessibility. Some consumers suggested the need for employment service provision that works to address these challenges and create an effective conduit for people to access hidden jobs.

The majority of consumers argued for better income support for basic needs, reflective of the current cost of living, and untied from employment status. For example, many consumers expressed frustration with low levels of income support from ODSP and WSIB such that they are “stuck in extreme poverty”. This frustration was compounded by complicated employment monthly income reporting mechanisms for ODSP consumers.

Thus, some consumers said they are hopeful, yet skeptical of the potential of Ontario’s basic income pilots. A consumer in London said that the basic income pilots are a “start in the right direction...[But] it feels like an olive branch that is too short”. This consumer suggested that a basic income should reflect inflation and the cost of living. This consumer was concerned that the pilot projects are too long and will not reflect changes in minimum wage and the rising cost of living.

As described in our last report, Ontario’s 2016 Budget announced a commitment to create a Basic Income Pilot Project. The pilot will test if a guaranteed basic income program will effectively reduce poverty. The Government of Ontario describes Basic Income as a payment to eligible families or individuals that ensures a minimum income level, regardless of employment status. Basic Income is different than social assistance because it can be given to anyone who meets the income eligibility criterion including those who may be working but earning below the Basic Income level.

Suggestions for CWDO

We asked participants to share advice for CWDO in terms of addressing some of the issues discussed during interviews and focus groups. This advice focused primarily on the need to raise awareness of the organization through marketing and promotion. Specific suggestions included:

- Develop an annual communications plan
- Better advertise webinars and other information sharing events
- Facilitate a public awareness and education campaign for employers and include working people with disabilities as role models
- Continue with the electronic newsletter that presents information clearly and concisely

Participants consistently commented the need to develop collective approaches to employment issues through strategies of resistance, education and advocacy. Specific suggestions included:

- Start a local chapter in Toronto for better access and advocacy to the provincial legislature and promote greater accountability to people with disabilities
- Provide disability awareness training to human resource students and professionals
- Advocate for more accessible, affordable and safe transit for people to travel to and from work or job interviews
- Create an accessible provincial directory of all disability advocacy groups and share widely
- Document and share achievements and accomplishments of the organization and the disability movement to motivate people to get involved
- Establish working partnerships with the Association of Municipalities, Association of Mayors, and the Association of Clerks and Treasurers to promote employment of people with disabilities in the public and private sectors in municipalities

Most participants had not heard of CWDO before taking part in this study but said that would go to CWDO for information and support if they knew what was available to them. Overall, many consumers said they need support to access information about employment policies, programs and services in Ontario. They said they need support to connect to the right services and programs that will meet their needs. Specific suggestions included:

- Offer targeted peer support and information for job seekers with disabilities to access the hidden and open job markets

- Start a mentorship program with peer matching based on mutual career and/or personal interests
- Establish working partnerships with employment service providers to increase awareness of the needs, interests and perspectives of consumers with disabilities; as well as promote increased employment of people with disabilities as service providers

Many consumers said that at the very least they want CWDO to “do something with the information” they have shared about their experiences. On this point, the following sections will describe activities undertaken at CWDO from September 1 to December 31, 2017.

CWDO Activities

From September to December 2017, CWDO has focused their activities on issues of employment, human rights, ending of life ethics and technology. CWDO continues to share a wide range of information related to disability issues and opportunities across the province using various mediums of communication. CWDO newsletters are a primary source of information about organizational activities and various other opportunities across the province. The following section will describe recent activities by CWDO.

Employment

CWDO board members actively participated in this research over the past few months. Many CWDO board members participated in key informant interviews for this project. They shared their experiences, thoughts and ideas to help strengthen and increase knowledge about disability and employment issues in Ontario. Several CWDO board members also assisted with the coordination, recruitment and facilitation of focus groups conducted across the province.

In addition, CWDO collaborated with the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, Canadian Hearing Society, Centre for Independent Living in Toronto, Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Magnet and the National Educational Association of Disabled Students to assist in the coordination of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities Event on December 2, 2017. This event was focused on employment and recognized as Goal 5 of United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals, on decent work and economic growth. The event was held at Metro Hall in Toronto and included MP Adam Vaughan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister; MPP Hon. Tracy MacCharles, Minister for Accessibility; and Toronto City Councillor Wong-Tam, Chair of the Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee. The event also included employment success stories of employees of A-Way Express, Amnesty International, Magnet, Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, Silent Voice, University Health Network. Attendees had time to network with presenters and employment agencies.

Human Rights

CWDO board member, Melissa Graham, was a key organizer of the 7th Annual Toronto Disability Pride March on September 23, 2017. The march started outside Queen's Park with a crowd of people and a series of speeches from diverse people with disabilities. The March aims to bring recognition of the struggles and value of people with disabilities as they fight against ableism and other forms of oppression. The March also aims to be visible and show that people with disabilities have a voice in our community and a

right to be heard by taking to the streets. Further, the March brings diverse people with disabilities together to celebrate and take pride in themselves as a community of people with disabilities. The March starts at Queen's Park and ends at the School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University.

On November 30, 2017, CWDO board member Terry Green participated in a national meeting facilitated by CCD to discuss strategies for advancing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Canada. This meeting gathered together key stakeholders from national disability organizations across the country. Terry also represented CWDO at Minister Kent Hehr's reception for International Day of Persons with Disabilities on November 30. MP Kent Hehr is the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities.

Ending of Life Ethics

CWDO continues to monitor and report on Ontario Medical Assistance in Dying statistics. These statistics are shared via CWDO newsletters to raise awareness of ending of life ethics in the province. As of November 30, 2017, the Office of the Chief Coroner's/Ontario Forensic Pathology reported that 963 cases were completed in Ontario. Of these: 962 were clinician-administered; 1 was patient-administered; 478 were female and 485 were male; 501 were in hospital; 386 were in a private residence; 50 were in a long-term care facility or nursing home; 26 were in a retirement home or senior's residence; The youngest was 22 and the oldest was 104. The average age was 73.

About two-thirds (64%) of these cases were cancer-related; 14% were neurodegenerative; 13% were circulatory or respiratory; and 9% were for other conditions.

Technology

To promote greater access to information and resources, CWDO switched over to MailChimp for their newsletters. This provides more accessibility features such as headings which makes it possible for people who use screen readers to navigate the content. It is also easy to add alternate text to images. CWDO electronic newsletters are a primary conduit for information sharing about current technology that promotes accessibility. Since September 2017, CWDO has shared information about technological advancements such as:

- Access Now app - an interactive map that shares the accessibility status of various businesses and buildings around the world (including Ontario).

- WebAIM's screen reader user survey
- Be My Eyes – a free mobile app that establishes a live video connection between blind and visually impaired users and sighted volunteers.

CWDO Capacity Building

From September to December 2017, CWDO board members have been discussing opportunities to address some of the issues identified in this research project. Specifically, CWDO has been actively seeking funding opportunities to support actions that reflect the expressed needs of Ontarians with disabilities who took part in this study.

Currently, CWDO is working to pull together ideas and proposals for actions committed to the rights of all persons to participate fully in the civil, cultural, economic, political and social life of their communities. Thus, CWDO has been considering ways in which to promote inclusive employment supports and opportunities that recognize the contributions and inherent dignity of persons with disabilities. Member of CWDO have been focused on developing their financial capacity to sustain the momentum generated by this project. The data collection process of this research has facilitated greater awareness of CWDO among individuals and organizations across the province.

Over the past 6 months, partnership requests continue to come from various community groups and institutions in Ontario. With due process, CWDO is considering partnership with stakeholders in academia, media as well as other advocacy organizations. CWDO has also participated in federal events facilitated by the government and CCD.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this report reflect familiar themes in previous research and literature on the topic of disability and employment in Ontario, Canada and internationally. What is different about this research is that it was facilitated by an organization of people with various disabilities and designed according to their interests.

Our next report will present an intersectional perspective on disability and employment in Ontario from the viewpoint of people with disabilities from diverse social locations. This next report will present disaggregated data based on age, geographic location, ethnicity, impairment type, etc. to reflect the unique experiences of diverse groups of Ontario consumers. For more information, please contact us by email at cwdoproject@tbaytel.net, or cwdo@tbaytel.net. You may also reach us by phone at 807-473-0909.