

While many employers are making headway in recruiting and hiring people with disabilities, they often report less success with advancing and retaining them in their organizations. Given the current state of the labour market, it is not only imperative to the success of employers that they continue to improve their recruitment and onboarding practices, but they also enhance retention.

According to new findings from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD), the rate of disability in Canada has increased by 5 percentage points since 2017. This increase can be partially attributed to both the aging population and to a large increase in mental health-related disabilities among youth and working-age adults.¹ For employers, this means that they need to be ready to engage the emerging talent pool, as well as meet the evolving needs of their current one as well.

The members of EARN (Employment Accessibility Resource Network) – employers, service providers, and other stakeholders – highlighted the following tips to improve retention rates of people with disabilities in workplaces.

1. **Nothing About Us Without Us:** Involve people with disabilities in the decision-making processes and policy development that directly impact them. Create multiple ways for individuals with disabilities to share their perspectives, concerns, and insights to ensure decisions made are informed by and recognize the needs and experiences of persons with disabilities.
2. **Start Retention Efforts Early:** Establish a safe environment for candidates to disclose their disabilities and provide accommodations from the beginning of the recruitment process to ensure a positive candidate experience. Customize recruitment tools to cater to individuals with disabilities, considering their unique needs in the hiring process.
3. **Embrace New Norms:** Remember trivial things can have a significant impact. Individuals may need to move positions often, may be impacted by certain kinds of lighting, or be sensitive to sound. Create a safe space for practices that may contribute to the comfort of employees such as dimming or changing the lights, being open to people sitting or reclining on the floor or on yoga mats, stretching during meetings, etc.
4. **Representation Matters:** Establish mechanisms for meaningful participation and representation of persons with disabilities at all levels within the organization, including

¹ Statistics Canada (2023), *Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017 to 2022*, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231201/dq231201b-eng.htm>

in leadership roles. Make all promotional opportunities equally accessible and engage in open discussions with employees with disabilities regarding these opportunities. Make efforts to identify and address barriers to advancement for people with disabilities. Make a safe space for anyone at any level throughout the organization to disclose and discuss their own lived experience of disability.

5. **Foster a Culture of Well-being:** Prioritize the well-being of employees which is integral for fostering a positive work environment. A sense of well-being enhances employees' dedication and tends to lengthen their stay with the organisation. Encouraging people to be themselves authentically at work improves overall performance and fosters a stronger sense of connection. Ensure that your well-being programs and practices – formal and informal – are accessible. Flexibility also demonstrates a commitment to the holistic well-being of employees.
6. **Be Flexible:** Embrace flexible work arrangements whenever possible. For example, provide the opportunity to work virtually or in office, whatever is most accessible for the individual while meeting the needs of the team. Offer flexibility in time to accommodate medical appointments, therapy sessions, or any specific needs related to disabilities.
7. **Provide Mentorship and Learning Opportunities:** Acknowledge the diverse ways individuals learn and chart developmental pathways that accommodate people with disabilities. Ensure that all employees have access to mentors through either formal or informal mechanisms.
8. **Learn About Available Tools, Technologies, and Other Available Supports:** Embrace the integration of assistive technologies, ensuring that employees are not only aware of their existence but also equipped with the knowledge and resources to leverage them effectively. Tap into the network of service providers who can assist both employers and employees to navigate career advancement opportunities and to address barriers that may impact retention.
9. **Be an Ally and a Champion:** Speak up both publicly and privately in support of employees with disabilities in your workplace. Be vocal in your support of accommodations. Articulate the value of people with disabilities and the contributions that they make.