



How Employers Can Use the Canadian Survey on Disability Data

Data and measurement are valuable tools for employers. Long-term consistent measurement of employee data can improve a company's decision making and ability to meet business goals. However, understanding how a company is doing in a broader context, and in comparison to others in its sector, requires consulting external data sources.

What is the Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD)?

If you are an employer looking to improve your employment of people with disabilities, [the Canadian Survey on Disability \(CSD\)](#) is a key source of external data available in Canada.

Conducted every 5 years following the census, the CSD gathers information from "all Canadians aged 15 years and over who answered 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' to any of the components of the activities of daily living question on the Census. The question on activities of daily living (ADL) provides information on the number of people in Canada who may have difficulties doing certain activities, including those who may have a long-term physical, cognitive, mental or other health condition." Statistics Canada (StatCan) [explains in greater detail](#) how they gather this data from Canadians.

How employers can use the CSD data

If you are already tracking demographic data within your own workforce, you can compare your internal statistics on disability with national or provincial data collected through the CSD, to assess performance and set targets. The CSD can provide data on the incidence of different types and severities of disability by province, labour force participation rates, and employment rates of people with disabilities by sector and province, as well as common requirements for accommodations at work. As of 2022, the CSD also collects information on accessibility, found in the [Reports on Disability and Accessibility in Canada catalogue](#).

Where to find the data and using different formats

All of the CSD data is available on the StatCan website in a variety of formats. Depending on your goals as an employer, you may rely more heavily on one source or reference the data in several different ways.

Dashboards and tables

CSD data dashboards and tables are one of the most customizable ways to access the data and can be used to generate different statistics for Canada or individual provinces. For instance, the ["Employment and labour characteristics of persons with disabilities, 2017 and 2022: Interactive dashboard"](#) can pull up the percentage of people in each province with disability in the labour force, their work potential, and their labour force status by gender. Such data can provide important metrics to gauge how your company is doing in a broader context. The data used in the dashboard also links to various contributing, more



specific data tables. There is also a dashboard on ["Barriers to accessibility among persons with disabilities in Canada."](#) As an employer, you can reference data related to Labour Market Availability in order to inform your D&I targets, as you aim to build a representative workforce. You can also see [Canada-wide data for your industry](#), in order to compare your performance against competitors'. If you want to access industry data specific to your province, it is possible to submit a paid request for this information.

Infographics

StatCan also uses the CSD data to produce [infographics](#) that provide a snapshot of patterns to help educate the population on how disabilities appear in the real world. The infographics are a quick way to absorb key pieces of information and can easily be used in your internal presentations.

As an example, the 2023 infographic "[New data on disability in Canada, 2022](#)" provides an overview of disability rates across all the provinces and territories and how it rose since the previous census, as well as the prevalence of 11 categories of disabilities, and disability rates compared to age and gender.

There are numerous infographics on different groups within the disability community, including ["Racialized persons with disabilities, 2022,"](#) ["Mental health-related disabilities, 2022,"](#) ["Dynamic disabilities, 2022"](#) and ["Employed persons with disabilities or long-term conditions."](#)

Reports

The Canadian Survey on Disability Reports take an in-depth look at a specific issue. An advantage of consulting reports is that they include an interpretation of the data and the trends it shows.

In particular, employers might be interested in reports such as the ["Barriers to accessibility related to behaviours, misconceptions or assumptions."](#) The report highlights that attitudinal barriers—including from workplaces—remain a significant equity issue affecting inclusion, participation, and well-being, reinforcing the need for systemic change in how organizations understand disability. This increases the more severe one's disability is, and impacts over a third of Canadians with disabilities.

Employers might also be interested in ["Examining work potential and overqualification among persons with disabilities,"](#) ["Changes in the Population and Employment Rates of Persons with Disabilities, 2017 to 2022,"](#) and ["Earnings pay gap among persons with and without disabilities, 2019."](#)

Things to keep in mind

If your organization is already asking staff if they identify as having a disability, it's important to note that StatCan determines a survey respondent's disability status without asking them to self-identify. Through a series of questions on a respondent's experience of barriers to their full participation in society, the CSD determines whether or not an individual is counted as a person with a disability.

Employers, on the other hand, typically use a self-identification method (i.e. asking directly whether or not an employee has a disability) when measuring for disability in their workforce.



The difference in methodologies may result in discrepancies between your survey results and CSD results. Employee data may appear lower, because people may not consider themselves to have a disability or be unwilling to disclose their status to their employer. As you build trust within your organizational culture and conduct consecutive annual surveys, your internal data will become a more reliable source to use for planning purposes.

While the CSD can be a valuable source of data for employers like yourself, its usefulness is also limited by the frequency of surveying. While most organizations are working off quarterly and annual business cycles, the CSD is conducted every 5 years. The most recent data we can access is from 2022 and we will not have updated information until 2027.

The lack of up-to-date government collected data is a key reason why employers need to be gathering their own data.

It's also a key reason Accessible Employers launched our Pledge to Measure in 2021.

The Pledge to Measure is an effort to encourage employers across the country to measure and report publicly the number of people with disabilities, and the number of senior leaders with disabilities, they employ.

Each year, tens of thousands of Canadian employees are surveyed and asked to anonymously self-disclose if they have disabilities. As employers implement inclusion initiatives throughout the year to increase disability confidence and psychological safety in their workplaces, they can use their benchmarked data to see the impact of their EDI (equity, diversity, and inclusion) efforts.

[Learn more about the Pledge to Measure.](#)