

# DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

## Creating a more inclusive workplace



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POSTMEDIA CONTENT WORKS

Having employees with disabilities on your staff can lead to greater productivity and a more well rounded workforce, according to a new guide prepared for The Pan Disability Connection.

The guide, written by University of Alberta PHEc candidate Kaylyn Juchli, lays out a business case for inclusive hiring and seeks to puncture some of the myths surrounding workers with disabilities.

"When you're hiring inclusively, people have different perspectives, so it's a huge value around innovation in organizations when you have all those different perspectives," said Renate Burwash, a member of The Pan Disability Connection.

It is no secret people with disabilities are under-represented in the workforce. And there are many reasons cited why businesses will, at the very least, hesitate to hire someone who has a disability.

However, the "Employing the Ability" guide prepared for The Pan Disability Connection, an Edmonton organization dedicated to identifying and eliminating barriers to employing people with disabilities, outlines

several of those reasons and explains why those reasons are unfounded.

**MYTH 1: "THE COSTS OF ACCOMMODATION ARE PROHIBITIVE"**

One of the myths identified as a hindrance to hiring disabled persons is the cost involved in accommodating that employee in the workplace.

While it is true some workers will require some form of accommodation, those costs in many cases are a one-time expense of less than \$500. And in those cases, the provincial government's Disability Related Employment Supports program is available to assist in making the workplace accessible.

In the majority of cases, however, there is no cost to incorporating a worker with a disability into the fold.

**MYTH 2: "EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES ARE UNRELIABLE"**

Another myth often discussed is that disabled persons are unreliable as employees and will be absent from the workplace at higher rates than their non-disabled coworkers.

To the contrary, studies have indicated people with

disabilities are more often as reliable, if not more so, than their non-disabled colleagues.

**MYTH 3: "EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES WILL ALWAYS NEED HELP"**

A third myth is that workers with disabilities cannot function on their own in the workplace, and will always need assistance.

The "Employing the Ability" guide states that due to having lived with their disabilities for years, disabled people have adapted their abilities to perform daily and necessary tasks.

**ACCOMMODATING DISABILITY**

One factor that cannot be ignored is that disabilities come in many forms, and not all are readily apparent when meeting someone.

Commonly, disabilities are viewed as physical issues, like decreased mobility or non-functional or missing limbs. However, impaired vision and decreased hearing are also disabilities, as are various intellectual and mental impairments.

Each of these types of disabilities can be compensated for without any reduction in the quality of work the

employee performs. In fact, adapting the workplace to allow an employee with a disability to do his or her job can end up benefiting the entire staff as well.

As an example, workers who may have intellectual disabilities may need checklists to help them perform certain tasks correctly every time. Those checklists can be shared with all employees so no steps are missed during crunch time.

Another example is work-

ers with physical disabilities who may not be able to use the phone and take notes or use a computer at the same time. Incorporating hands-free headsets to the workplace will allow those workers to be more efficient, and giving other employees that option as well could also boost productivity.

In recent years, many employers have made the commitment to hire more people with disabilities. The results are a better office culture,

with teams consistently reporting that they are proud to be part of an inclusive workplace.

Through only minor changes to help accommodate their new employees, and using methods that benefit the entire workforce, these employers have seen the advantages to making their workplaces inclusive.

"When you reorganize your company to be more inclusive, it's helping everybody," Burwash says.

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