



# Understanding Public Sentiment on Disability and Employment through Social Media Analysis

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## How to Cite This Report

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## Executive Summary

Employment is essential for both individuals and society. For persons experiencing disability, work offers financial independence, a sense of purpose, and social connection. However, employment rates remain significantly lower for people experiencing disability compared to those without disability. In Canada, only 47.1% of persons experiencing disability were employed in 2023, compared to 66.9% of those without disability. Many people experiencing disability also face unemployment, underemployment, lower wages, job instability, and fewer career advancement opportunities.

Research shows that one of the main reasons for lower employment rates among persons experiencing disability is employer attitudes. Negative assumptions about abilities, stereotypes, and concerns about workplace accommodations contribute to hiring barriers. Many employers believe individuals experiencing disability lack ambition or are unable to handle demanding jobs, leading to discrimination in hiring, promotion, and workplace practices. Public perception plays a crucial role in shaping employment outcomes for people experiencing disability, as employer attitudes and workplace policies are influenced by broader societal views.

### **Studying Public Attitudes through Social Media Analysis**

Most studies on disability and employment rely on surveys and interviews, which have limitations, including social desirability bias and the inability to capture real-time public sentiment. Social media provides an alternative method for studying public attitudes, offering a real-time view of discussions on disability and employment. By analyzing social media conversations, this research identifies how disability and employment are framed in different spaces and how these perspectives impact workplace inclusion.

This study analyzed social media conversations about disability and employment using qualitative content analysis and sentiment analysis. Over 2,500 social media posts were collected from LinkedIn, X, Facebook, Instagram, and Threads over the past year. Posts were selected based on keywords, hashtags, and engagement levels, ensuring a broad representation of perspectives.

Discussions were examined from various perspectives, including job seekers experiencing disability, employers, HR professionals, and advocacy groups. The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes, public attitudes, misconceptions, and biases influencing workplace inclusion. Sentiment analysis categorized posts as positive, negative, or neutral to track how public attitudes fluctuated over time and across different groups.

Discussions about disability and employment varied significantly between professional and general social media platforms. LinkedIn provided insights into workplace policies, corporate DEI strategies, and the business case for inclusion. Conversations on X, Facebook, and Instagram, however, were more personal, reflecting firsthand experiences with ableism, discrimination, and workplace challenges.

## Key Themes on LinkedIn

Key Themes from LinkedIn Discussions:

- Disability in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)
- Performative Inclusion versus Real Change
- Debate over Remote Work
- Misconceptions about Workplace Accommodations
- The Business Case for Inclusion

### Disability in DEI

Disability in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) remains a significant issue in professional spaces. Many professionals expressed frustration that disability is often overlooked in DEI conversations, which tend to prioritize gender and racial diversity. Some posts pointed out that while corporate policies discuss inclusivity, disability remains an afterthought in many organizational initiatives.

Employees experiencing disability shared concerns that despite public commitments to diversity, companies do little to ensure meaningful inclusion of workers who experience disability. Many professionals emphasized the need for companies to integrate disability into their DEI efforts in a substantial way, ensuring policies address both visible and invisible disabilities.

### Performative Inclusion versus Real Change

Performative inclusion versus real change was another major topic of discussion. Many professionals shared the perception that companies treat disability inclusion as a symbolic gesture rather than a genuine commitment. While organizations may promote inclusive hiring and disability-friendly policies, employees experiencing disability reported that these efforts often do not translate into actual support in the workplace.

Several LinkedIn users recounted experiences of being denied promotions or reasonable accommodations despite their employers' public commitment to inclusion. This ongoing gap between corporate messaging and tangible outcomes led to growing calls for accountability, with many professionals advocating for tracking real employment and advancement outcomes for workers experiencing disability.

### Debate over Remote Work

The debate over remote work as an accessibility solution was another prevalent theme. While many professionals experiencing disability praised remote work for providing greater flexibility and accessibility, some employers continue to view it as a temporary solution rather than a necessary workplace adjustment. Some discussions emphasized that remote work should not replace physical workplace accommodations such as ergonomic workstations, accessible office spaces, and inclusive hiring practices.

Workers experiencing disability expressed mixed feelings about remote work—some found it essential for maintaining employment, while others worried that it could lead to professional

isolation and fewer career growth opportunities. Many professionals agreed that hybrid work models offer the best balance, allowing employees experiencing disability to benefit from flexibility while remaining engaged with their teams.

### **Misconceptions about Workplace Accommodations**

Misconceptions about workplace accommodations persist, often leading to barriers in hiring and career advancement for people experiencing disability. Many employers assume that accommodations are costly or difficult to implement, even though research shows that most accommodations require little to no expense. Several professionals shared experiences of being denied workplace adjustments due to employer misconceptions about cost or workplace disruption.

Discussions also highlighted how employees with non-apparent disabilities often struggle to receive accommodations due to skepticism from management. LinkedIn users emphasized the need for greater employer education on accommodations, legal obligations, and best practices to create more inclusive workplaces.

### **The Business Case for Inclusion**

The business case for inclusion was frequently discussed among professionals on LinkedIn. Many posts reinforced that disability inclusion is not just an ethical obligation but also a strategic advantage. Professionals pointed out that diverse teams, including employees experiencing disability, lead to increased innovation, productivity, and financial performance.

Some posts emphasized the long-term benefits of hiring employees experiencing disability, such as improved workplace culture, lower turnover rates, and enhanced company reputation. Leadership accountability was another key aspect of this conversation, with many professionals calling on CEOs and HR departments to move beyond statements and take concrete actions to hire, support, and promote workers experiencing disability.

### **Key Themes from Facebook, X, and Instagram**

Key Themes from Facebook, X, and Instagram Discussions:

- The Reality of Ableism and Workplace Bias
- Concerns about Anti-DEI Movements
- Debate over Remote Work
- The Importance of Intersectionality in Disability Discussions

### **The Reality of Ableism and Workplace Bias**

The reality of ableism and workplace bias was a dominant theme in public social media discussions. Many individuals shared personal experiences of being denied job opportunities, facing discriminatory hiring practices, or experiencing workplace stigma. Some posts called out companies that promote inclusivity in their public statements but continue to exclude workers experiencing disability in hiring and promotions.

Emotional and deeply personal testimonials highlighted the impact of workplace ableism on mental health, financial stability, and career progression. Many individuals expressed frustration that despite laws protecting persons experiencing disability from discrimination, they still encounter significant barriers to fair treatment at work.

### **Concerns about Anti-DEI Movements**

Concerns about anti-DEI movements emerged as another key theme. Many discussions reflected anxiety over the growing opposition to DEI policies, particularly in the U.S., and how such rollbacks might impact Canada.

Users expressed fear that as companies scale back DEI commitments, people experiencing disability will be among the first to be affected. Some posts criticized corporations for reducing inclusion efforts while continuing to market themselves as diversity-friendly workplaces. Many social media users worried that without DEI commitments, hiring practices would become even less equitable, reducing opportunities for workers experiencing disability.

### **Debate over Remote Work**

The debate over remote work was more polarized on these platforms than on LinkedIn. While some workers experiencing disability expressed gratitude for remote work as a necessary accessibility tool, others felt that it led to increased invisibility and exclusion from workplace opportunities.

Many discussions emphasized that remote work should not be treated as a one-size-fits-all solution for accessibility. Instead, social media users argued for multiple accessibility solutions, including improved workplace accommodations, inclusive hiring practices, and flexible work policies tailored to individual needs.

### **Importance of Intersectionality in Disability Discussions**

The importance of intersectionality in disability discussions was a recurring theme. Many social media users pointed out that disability cannot be considered in isolation from race, gender, and economic status. Persons experiencing disability who belong to multiple marginalized groups often face compounded discrimination and employment barriers. Some posts expressed frustration that corporate DEI strategies fail to address these intersecting challenges, leaving many individuals without adequate workplace support.

This research provides a real-time analysis of public sentiment on disability and employment in Canada. The findings reveal important differences in how disability is discussed across professional and general social media platforms, shedding light on ongoing challenges and opportunities for improving workplace inclusion. Addressing misconceptions, increasing employer awareness, and strengthening DEI efforts will be critical in ensuring that people experiencing disability can fully participate in the workforce and achieve economic and social independence.

## Introduction

Employment offers many advantages for both individuals and society. For persons experiencing disability, work can provide a sense of purpose, financial independence, and emotional well-being. Employment also plays a key role in overall health, mental well-being, and social connections, making it an essential part of a fulfilling life (Carmichael and Clarke, 2022).

However, around the world, people experiencing disability have lower employment rates than those without disabilities.

In Canada, there is a significant “disability employment gap.” The “disability employment gap” is the difference between the percentage of people experiencing disability who have jobs and the percentage of people without disabilities who have jobs. In 2023, only 47.1% of people experiencing disability were employed, compared to 66.9% of those without disability, a gap of 19.8 percentage points. Many persons experiencing disability are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, meaning they may work in jobs that don’t match their skills, don’t pay enough, or don’t offer stable hours and benefits. They are also less likely to have opportunities for career growth (Statistics Canada, 2024).

The 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD),<sup>1</sup> the most recent CSD, found that 42% of unemployed working-age individuals experiencing disability, over 741,000 people, could work if workplaces were fully inclusive (Statistics Canada, 2024). In other words, if workplaces removed barriers and provided the right support, hundreds of thousands of people experiencing disability could have jobs.

### **Negative Attitudes and Stereotypes Contribute to Employment Gap**

Research shows that one key reason for the lower participation rates and underemployment of people experiencing disability is negative attitudes from employers, especially hiring managers, business owners, and HR personnel (Bonaccio et al., 2020).

A comprehensive review by Bonaccio et al. (2020) found that many hiring managers hold negative assumptions about the abilities of people experiencing disability, creating barriers to employment. According to this research, some hiring managers hold false assumptions and believe that individuals experiencing disability lack ambition, don’t want challenging jobs, or can’t handle demanding tasks. Others believe they don’t want to work at all or cannot perform specific tasks (Bonaccio et al., 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> The Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) is one of the most important surveys for gathering information about persons experiencing disability in Canada. It provides data on youth and adults whose daily activities are limited by a long-term condition or health-related issue. The survey is conducted every five years, following the Census of the Population and is sponsored by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC).



The review also found that some employers stereotype job seekers experiencing disabilities as lacking skills or worry about workplace safety, the need for workplace accommodations, or how other employees might react. Many managers also think employees experiencing disability are less productive, more likely to be absent, or challenging to discipline due to legal protections.

### **Perceptions and Attitudes Directly Influence Employment**

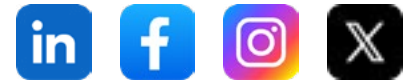
Understanding public perception is crucial because public and employer attitudes shape hiring decisions and workplace policies (Burge, Ouellette-Kuntz, and Lysaght, 2007). In other words, it is important to understand how people view disability and work because employer attitudes and public perceptions directly influence hiring. Negative perceptions can make it harder for persons experiencing disability to find jobs, advance in their careers, and gain economic and social independence.

Public and employer attitudes play a big role in whether people experiencing disability can find and keep jobs. However, there isn't much research on this, especially in Canada, and the research on employer and public attitudes that does exist relies on surveys and interviews (Domzal et al., 2008; Østerud, 2022; Price-Guthrie, 2022). These methods have limitations. For example, people may not always give honest answers in surveys or interviews because they want to appear socially acceptable or follow legal expectations; this can be called social desirability bias (Kaye, Jans, and Jones, 2011). Additionally, surveys can only capture a snapshot in time. They may not reveal hidden biases or show how attitudes are expressed or changed in everyday conversations.

Because of these limitations, there is a need for alternative ways to study public attitudes toward disability and employment. Social media analysis is an alternative way to study public attitudes toward disability and employment. Social media offers a real-time view of public sentiment and allows people to express opinions more openly than in a survey or interview.<sup>2</sup> Analyzing social media posts can provide researchers with large amounts of data on how disability and employment are discussed online (Nip and Berthelie, 2024).

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to suggest that social desirability bias does not exist online. In fact, user self-presentation and impression management are significant areas of social media research. People often curate their online presence to align with social norms, gain approval, or avoid criticism, which can influence how they express their views. This means that while social media can provide more candid insights compared to traditional surveys, users may still filter their opinions based on their audience and the platform's social dynamics.



With over 31.9 million social media users in Canada, platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) have become a significant part of daily life. According to Statistics Canada, 78 percent of internet users actively engage with these platforms, making them a valuable space for understanding public opinions. People of all ages use social media, meaning that social media analysis can provide a broad and diverse range of perspectives.

While younger individuals living in Canada are more active online, older users also participate, meaning that the data collected represents a broad cross-section of the population and not just young people or frequent internet users. This means the data includes insights from a wide range of individuals living in Canada, including older adults, those with varying levels of digital skills, and people from different backgrounds and communities.

This research examined real-time conversations on social media to explore how people talked about disability and employment. It investigated what people were saying, whether their opinions showed bias or support for workplace inclusion, and what common ideas appeared in these discussions. By analyzing social media posts, this study uncovered public attitudes, misconceptions, and biases that could influence workplace inclusion in Canada.

### **Collecting Posts and Responses**

For this study, we manually collected over 2,500 social media posts from LinkedIn, X, Facebook, Instagram, and Threads, all written by people in Canada over the past year. We searched for posts using specific keywords and hashtags related to disability and work. We also followed key people and organizations involved in disability rights, workplace inclusion, and employment equity. By looking at both their posts and the responses they received, we were able to get a broad view of public opinions and conversations on this topic. This helped us spot common themes, misunderstandings, and patterns in how people talk about disability and work online.

To gather meaningful data, we looked at discussions from different perspectives, including posts from job seekers experiencing disability, employers, HR professionals, and advocacy groups. We focused on posts with lots of engagement and many likes, shares, or comments since they often reflect widely shared opinions. To get a well-rounded view, we included both personal stories and policy discussions to understand how people talk about real-life experiences and broader workplace issues.

We also specifically looked for and included posts from users who expressed highly biased or critical views about disability and employment. This was important because these perspectives influence hiring decisions, workplace policies, and public attitudes. Understanding these opposing viewpoints also helps highlight common misconceptions and barriers that persons experiencing disability face in the job market.

## Qualitative Content and Sentiment Analyses

Once we gathered the posts, we analyzed them using two key methods: qualitative content analysis and sentiment analysis. Qualitative content analysis is a flexible way to study text data (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). It involves carefully reading the text and sorting the information into different categories based on patterns or themes. In other words, researchers look for common ideas or topics in the text and group them together to better understand the meaning behind the data.

Using qualitative content analysis helped us identify common themes, patterns, and key issues that repeatedly came up in the online conversations. This method allowed us to not only understand what people were saying but also the deeper meanings behind their words.

Manual sentiment analysis was the second method used. Social media posts were categorized, or labelled, as positive, negative, or neutral based on the interpretation of the message in the text. This helped us track how attitudes and emotions about disability and employment changed over time and across different groups.

Combining these steps and methods ensured that our research captured a broad and accurate picture of public attitudes toward disability and employment in Canada. This approach allowed us to go beyond traditional surveys and interviews, offering a real-time, unfiltered look at how these topics are discussed in everyday online conversations.

## Results

Discussions about disability and employment occur in many different spaces, from professional networks like LinkedIn to more public platforms such as X, Facebook, and Threads. These conversations reveal important differences in how disability and work-related issues are understood and discussed.

In this section, we will analyze these online discussions in two parts. The first part looks at professional discourse, including posts from LinkedIn, where discussions often focus on policies, workplace inclusion, and corporate responsibility. The second part examines public opinions and perceptions from other platforms, where a wider range of personal experiences, frustrations, and social attitudes emerge.

By comparing these perspectives, we gain a clearer understanding of how different spaces frame disability and employment and how this impacts workers experiencing disability as they navigate the job market.

## LinkedIn

LinkedIn is one of the world's most popular professional networking platforms, designed to connect employees, employers, and businesses. Unlike other social media sites, which focus on personal interactions and public debates, LinkedIn is centred around career development, industry insights, and workplace discussions (Merckx, 2024).

With over 1.15 billion monthly active users worldwide and 27.4 million users in Canada as of January 2025, LinkedIn is a key space for professionals to share experiences, discuss policies, and engage with trends shaping the job market. According to the LinkedIn website, most LinkedIn users are between 25 and 34 years old, making up the largest age group on the platform. Younger users aged 18 to 24 account for about 20%, while nearly 18% are between 35 and 54. Only a small percentage of users are 55 and older. LinkedIn has a different age demographic than other social media platforms, with a strong focus on working professionals and career development.

The LinkedIn platform allows users to create professional profiles, connect with colleagues, post job opportunities, and publish articles. This structure makes it a unique barometer for industry trends and workplace conversations, providing insight into how businesses and professionals view disability and employment.

According to Merckx (2024), LinkedIn is built for professional use, unlike most social media platforms, which focus on entertainment and casual interactions. People use it to apply for jobs, share career updates, and network. A LinkedIn profile functions like a résumé, presenting an idealized version of a person's professional identity rather than their everyday reality. While platforms like Instagram allow for casual or personal posts, LinkedIn encourages a polished and professional image, with profile photos often featuring formal attire. Because LinkedIn is designed for professional networking, discussions on the platform typically reflect institutional perspectives, employer priorities, and corporate responsibility rather than personal frustrations or unfiltered public opinions (Clode, 2022). Since users engage with their professional identities, conversations are often more formal. This makes it a valuable source for analyzing professional discourse on disability and employment. It allows us to see how these issues are framed in more formal or workplace settings.

Most LinkedIn posts analyzed consisted of long-form statements written by individuals, often sharing personal insights, professional experiences, or industry perspectives. These posts were followed by responses from other professionals, contributing additional viewpoints, endorsements, or constructive discussions.

The analysis revealed several key themes in LinkedIn discussions about disability and employment. Key themes included the lack of disability representation in DEI efforts, frustration over performative inclusion without fundamental change, debates on whether remote work is an effective accessibility solution, the need for an intersectional approach, persistent misconceptions or misunderstandings about workplace accommodations, and the business benefits of disability inclusion.

## Disability as Integral to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Recent changes in the United States regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)<sup>3</sup> have made DEI an especially relevant topic for many professionals across Canada. As the U.S. shifts its approach to DEI, the conversation has sparked increased interest and concern in Canada. Since January 21, when Trump signed the executive order, social media posts with the terms “DEI” or “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” by individuals in Canada have seen over 285,000 weekly engagements.<sup>4</sup> This trend continued until the analysis for this research in late February 2025, with over one million engagements in the month following the executive order’s signing.

The recent challenges to DEI initiatives in the U.S. have led many professionals in Canada to express concerns about disability being left out of DEI conversations. These concerns align with a growing body of research that shows mainly focusing on gender and race in DEI discussions can unintentionally ignore other important aspects of diversity, like disability (Pitkänen, 2024). Disability is the world’s largest “minority group” (World Health Organization, 2020, as cited by Wright, n.d.); however, it is often overlooked in DEI efforts. Studies have found that disability is rarely considered a significant diversity factor in employer DEI efforts and strategies (Gould et al., 2020).

Our sentiment analysis showed that most reactions on LinkedIn were negative, reflecting a lot of concern, frustration, and dissatisfaction. Following the changes in the U.S., many individuals living in Canada turned to LinkedIn to talk about DEI, with many expressing disappointment that disability wasn’t being included in the conversation, which, from their perspective, seemed to mainly focus on gender, race, and sexual orientation.

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<sup>3</sup> At the time of analysis, February 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump had recently signed an executive order titled “Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity,” effectively ending diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in the public sector.

<sup>4</sup> These analytics were generated using Hootsuite, which provides real-time social listening and analytics. However, it’s important to note that Hootsuite does not and cannot monitor LinkedIn. Therefore, these results reflect the broader conversation across other social media platforms, offering insights into how the discussion unfolded.

For example, one LinkedIn user wrote<sup>5</sup>:

Disability is frequently overlooked in discussions about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), but genuine inclusivity requires that all individuals are represented and heard. With more than 15% of the global population living with a disability, this is far from a niche issue—it's a crucial aspect of creating a truly inclusive workplace. By acknowledging and addressing the needs of people with disabilities, we move closer to a DEI approach that reflects the diversity of the entire workforce, ensuring equal opportunities and access for all.

Another person expressed concern about the lack of disability inclusion in DEI discussions, saying:

Not including disability in DEI efforts is a glaring omission. Disability inclusion is still very rare, and in some companies, it's virtually non-existent. People with disabilities have so much to offer and can bring incredible value to organizations. It's crucial that this issue is addressed and highlighted as a major concern in the conversation around diversity, equity, and inclusion. True inclusivity means ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their abilities, have the opportunity to contribute and thrive in the workplace.

Similarly, another LinkedIn user wrote:

Initiatives face budget cuts, support is wavering, and the conversation around DEI is becoming more divided. For employees with disabilities, who already face significant challenges in the workplace, this shift isn't just a step back—it's isolating. Disability is often treated as an afterthought in DEI discussions, and here in Canada, we must push back against this toxic, anti-DEI shift. It's a dangerous trend that could make our workplaces less safe and fair for people with disabilities, as well as others who have long been marginalized by traditional ways of designing and managing work.

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<sup>5</sup> To protect individuals' privacy and anonymity, the examples referenced in this research are composite, combining multiple posts to capture the broader sentiments and concerns expressed by social media users across Canada. These composite examples represent the real-life experiences and opinions shared online, allowing us to reflect on the ongoing discussions while safeguarding individual identities. This approach ensures that the research remains rooted in actual social media conversations while maintaining the confidentiality of those involved.

Our sentiment analysis showed that the written replies to posts like these were overwhelmingly positive, indicating that people generally supported the message shared in the posts. This positive sentiment highlights a strong push for recognizing the value of hiring people experiencing disabilities and including disability as a vital aspect of DEI efforts.

Overall, the recent changes to DEI programs in the United States have sparked much discussion in Canada, particularly about the inclusion of people experiencing disability in these efforts. Our analysis shows that as DEI programs face increasing challenges, LinkedIn users feel that disability is at greater risk of being left out of the conversation despite it being an important aspect of workplace inclusion.

## The Need to Move Beyond Buzzwords

Another key theme shared by individuals living in Canada on LinkedIn was the worry that disability inclusion in DEI efforts, when it is included, is often just a buzzword. Many professionals shared their experiences with disabilities in the labour market, expressed concerns about what they see companies doing, and even showed frustration with their organizations.

Our sentiment analysis once again showed that most reactions on LinkedIn were negative, reflecting widespread concern and disappointment. Many users noted that while many companies mention disability in their DEI statements or policies to seem inclusive, they often fail to implement real policies and practices to support employees experiencing disability.

Following the murder of George Floyd and other acts of political and social violence, between March 2020 and August 2022, many companies quickly adopted new DEI initiatives. However, nearly three years later, professionals on LinkedIn have expressed concerns about the gap between words and actions regarding DEI. LinkedIn users pointed out what they perceive as a disconnect between DEI statements and promises and real, meaningful policies and practices in the workplace.

For example, one professional on LinkedIn shared some of his experiences as someone who experiences disability in the workplace:

Diversity has now become a buzzword, euphemism, and a cliché. Inclusion is more than a buzzword—it's a practice. Too often, organizations celebrate diversity and disability inclusion in their statements, but the reality tells a different story.



**Disability rights on paper**



**Disability rights implementation**

I have experienced firsthand how workplaces can claim to be inclusive while still failing to provide real support. Whether it's inaccessible technology, a lack of accommodations, or policies that look good on paper but don't translate into action, the gap is real. Are we genuinely building workplaces where everyone belongs or just scratching the surface? It's time to move beyond statements and start making real change.



Similarly, another person wrote:

Did you know the “I” in DEI stands for Inclusion? And that “Diversity” includes people with disabilities? Many organizations now add “A” for Accessibility to their DEI policies—but are they actually making workplaces more inclusive?

With so many organizations claiming to have robust DEI policies, why did 1 in 3 employed individuals living in Canada with disabilities report unmet accommodation needs in 2022? Inclusion isn’t just a statement.

Likewise, another individual noted:

Too often, corporate disability inclusion is treated as a checkbox instead of a commitment. Companies celebrate their DEI initiatives, but when it comes to actual accessibility and support, many employees with disabilities are left behind.

Policies exist on paper but don’t translate into action.

Accommodations are seen as burdens, not necessities.

Disability is treated as separate from other DEI efforts rather than interconnected with race, gender, and class.

I’ve seen firsthand how a workplace can claim to be inclusive while making it difficult for disabled employees to succeed. True inclusion means listening, adapting, and ensuring every employee has the tools to thrive.

In a similar vein, one individual highlighted how remote work arrangements may allow for greater labour market participation for workers experiencing disability, with at least some of the employment barriers faced by workers reduced by working from home. They wrote:

I’ve applied for over 100 jobs—and nothing. Nearly every job posting I’ve seen talks about diversity and inclusion, whether in their mission statement, in the job posting itself or in DEI commitments. But you know how I can tell many companies don’t actually mean it? They don’t offer remote work.

For people with health conditions or disabilities, remote work isn’t just a perk; it’s a necessity. It allows those with chronic conditions to stay near essential medical equipment and treatment. It gives people with mental or cognitive health challenges the ability to work in a low-stress environment. It helps employees with frequent medical appointments or unpredictable flare-ups keep working without fearing losing their jobs. A company that claims to support inclusion but refuses to offer flexibility is not inclusive at all.



In another example:

I'm autistic. Some workplaces see this as a strength. Others treat it as a liability. I've experienced both. The difference? In one, I thrive. On the other, I constantly have to prove my worth. Too many companies claim to prioritize diversity and inclusion yet overlook disability entirely. They make big promises but fail to provide real support. They talk about accessibility, yet employees are left to fight for basic accommodations. A company that ignores disability isn't just excluding talent—it's creating barriers that don't need to exist.

Some LinkedIn users in Canada shared similar concerns, saying that even when companies truly support DEI and disability inclusion, they often forget about neurodiversity. They explained that because many neurodivergent conditions aren't visible, employees may have difficulty getting the support and accommodations they need to do well at work.

As many companies change their DEI plans, LinkedIn users believe that neurodiversity is still being overlooked. They argue that without real efforts to support neurodivergent employees, DEI initiatives may end up excluding a valuable part of the workforce.

For example, one person noted:

For a DEI statement to be more than lip service, workplaces must go beyond acknowledgment and take real action. Companies that are committed to disability inclusion must also be committed to neurodiversity. True inclusion means recognizing and addressing the unique needs of neurodivergent employees, not just physical accessibility. Organizations that genuinely support neurodiversity implement policies that provide targeted accommodations—whether through flexible work arrangements, adapted communication methods, or changes to the work environment.

By embracing diversity and taking a proactive approach, businesses can harness the strengths of neurodivergent individuals and create a workplace where everyone can contribute equitably and thrive.

Our analysis reveals a major concern among professionals in Canada: many LinkedIn users feel that disability inclusion in DEI efforts is more of a buzzword than a genuine commitment. While companies frequently highlight diversity and inclusion in their policies, employees experiencing disability often report seeing little real change. They continue to encounter barriers to accommodations, inaccessible workplaces, and a lack of meaningful support, even as their employers promote DEI initiatives.

Most LinkedIn discussions on this topic reflected frustration and disappointment. Many users pointed out that companies make big promises but fail to follow through. Others noted that even when disability is included, neurodivergent employees are often left out and struggle to get the support they need. According to LinkedIn users, organizations need to do more than just talk about inclusion; they need to take real steps to make workplaces accessible and supportive. Without meaningful action, DEI efforts may exclude people rather than include them.

## Misconceptions and Myths about Workplace Accessibility and Accommodations

Another main theme that emerged from our analysis of LinkedIn posts was that many professionals in Canada believe there are still many misunderstandings about workplace accommodations and accessibility for employees experiencing disability.

According to Saltes (2020), accommodation policies recognize that not all spaces and workplaces are naturally accessible to everyone, so some people may need specific adjustments to participate fully. DePoy and Gilson (2014) explain that accommodations involve changing existing systems to meet individual needs.

Accessibility is different from accommodation because it does not rely on individual adjustments (Saltes, 2020). Instead, accessibility takes a proactive approach by designing spaces, programs, and services to be inclusive from the beginning so barriers do not exist. In contrast, accommodation is a reactive approach that finds ways to remove barriers after they have already been identified (Saltes, 2020).

Canada has several laws to support inclusion and accommodation for persons experiencing disability. Important federal laws include the [Canadian Human Rights Act](#), the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#), the [Employment Equity Act](#), and the [Accessible Canada Act](#). Canada has also signed the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), showing its commitment to disability rights.

Each province and territory also has its own human rights laws that require employers to accommodate employees experiencing disability. According to the [Canadian Human Rights Commission](#), treating everyone the same isn't always fair. Employers must create policies, procedures, and workplace practices that remove barriers for people experiencing disability. They also need to adapt workspaces, equipment, and rules to ensure all employees can fully participate.

These laws are based on social equality, which means that true inclusion isn't just about removing barriers but making proactive changes so everyone can participate fully in society. The goal is to prevent intentional and unintentional discrimination and create workplaces, services, and public spaces accessible to all (Capurri, 2022).

Workplace accommodations can take many forms, helping employees experiencing disability fully participate in their jobs. According to Statistics Canada, in 2022, the most common accommodation need was modified work hours (16.3%), followed by modified job duties (11.6%), working from home (10.9%), ergonomic workstations (10.7%), and special chairs or back support (10.3%).

Even though there are legal protections, many employees in Canada still don't get the accommodations they need. In 2022, over one-third (35.4%) of working individuals living in Canada experiencing disability said they needed workplace accommodations. However, just as many didn't receive them. As many professionals on LinkedIn have noted, misunderstandings and myths about accommodations continue to make it harder for workers experiencing disability to get the support they need.

For example, some LinkedIn users pointed out the ongoing myth that workplace accommodations are costly for employers to implement. One person shared:

Let's bust a common myth: "Accommodations are expensive and difficult to implement." The reality is that most accommodations cost nothing and those that do cost money typically cost less than \$500. Compare that to the cost of replacing an employee, which can range from 16–75% of their annual salary for small businesses. The real challenge isn't the cost—it is the lack of awareness about the wide range of disabilities and the simple, adequate accommodations that can support employees. Investing in accessibility isn't just about compliance or doing the right thing; it's a smart business decision that reduces turnover, improves productivity, and fosters a truly inclusive workplace.

Under Canadian law, employers must make every reasonable effort to accommodate workers experiencing disability, including those with mental health conditions. However, some LinkedIn users pointed out that a common myth still exists: many people mistakenly believe that accommodations are only for physical disabilities.

A common misconception is that workplace accommodations only apply to physical disabilities, overlooking the needs of employees with mental health conditions. In reality, accommodations can support a wide range of disabilities, including anxiety, depression, ADHD, and PTSD. Simple adjustments, stuff like flexible work schedules, quiet workspaces, or additional breaks, can make a significant difference. Recognizing and addressing mental health-related accommodation needs is just as important as making physical spaces accessible.

Many LinkedIn users pointed out a common misconception—the belief that workplace accommodations are a form of favouritism or special treatment. For example, one professional shared:

When employees see a coworker getting an accommodation—especially if their disability isn't visible—they may feel it's unfair. But accommodations aren't about special treatment; they're about ensuring equal opportunity for everyone to do their best at work.

For example, an employee may take more frequent breaks, which might seem like bending the rules. What others may not know is that the break schedule is a necessary accommodation for a medical condition, allowing them to work effectively while managing their health.

Accommodations help level the playing field, not create advantages. A truly inclusive workplace recognizes that fairness isn't about treating everyone the same—it's about giving people the support they need to succeed.

In a similar vein, another LinkedIn user noted:

Accommodations are often misunderstood as “extra help” or giving some employees an unfair edge. In reality, they remove barriers that wouldn't exist if workplaces were designed to be inclusive from the start.

A screen reader isn't a luxury for a blind employee—it's how they access the same information as everyone else. Flexible hours aren't a special privilege for someone with a chronic illness—they allow them to manage their health while staying productive. Providing interview questions in advance doesn't give someone an unfair edge—it ensures neurodivergent candidates can effectively showcase their skills.

Accommodations aren't about favouritism; they ensure all employees have what they need to succeed. When we see them as tools for equity, not advantage, we create workplaces that are fair, inclusive, and better for everyone.

Our sentiment analysis revealed a noticeable difference in reactions. When people shared their experiences of hearing or witnessing misconceptions about accommodations, their initial posts were generally positive, suggesting a willingness to engage in discussions and educate others.

However, responses to these posts were primarily negative, as many of the replies reflected a lack of understanding and reinforced common misunderstandings about workplace accommodations.

For example, some LinkedIn users questioned whether workplace accommodations create an unfair advantage. One person argued:

Accommodations are meant to create equal opportunities, but where do we draw the line? Some adjustments, like providing interview questions in advance, raise concerns. Isn't that like giving someone the exam questions ahead of time? How is that fair to other candidates?

At what point do accommodations stop being about levelling the playing field and start giving some applicants or employees an edge over others? If workplaces are indeed about merit, shouldn't everyone be held to the same standard?

Similarly, another LinkedIn user noted:

Workplaces are supposed to be fair, but accommodations often give certain employees extra flexibility, extended deadlines, or adjusted job duties. In contrast, others are expected to meet the exact demands without exceptions. If a job requires strict deadlines, consistent attendance, or specific physical tasks, accommodations can sometimes override those expectations.

Overall, our analysis of LinkedIn discussions found widespread misunderstandings about workplace accommodations and accessibility for people experiencing disability. Many professionals shared their concerns about how accommodations are often misinterpreted, leading to barriers in securing necessary workplace support. LinkedIn users across Canada highlighted several common misconceptions about accommodations, including the belief that they are too expensive, only apply to those experiencing physical disabilities, or give unfair advantages. Some posts attempted to debunk these myths, explaining that most accommodations cost little or nothing and that mental health-related accommodations, such as flexible work schedules, are just as important as physical ones.

However, responses to these posts were often negative, with some questioning whether accommodations create unfair advantages or compromise workplace expectations.

Overall, LinkedIn users see a need for more education about workplace accommodations and believe workplaces should focus on accessibility from the start instead of trying to fix barriers later. While many expressed frustration with how accommodations are handled, they noted that the willingness to discuss and challenge misconceptions suggests a growing awareness of the importance of workplace inclusion for persons experiencing disability.

## The Business Case for Inclusion

It's widely understood that having a diverse workplace is beneficial and that not having diversity can hurt a company's success and bottom line and negatively affect society in the future (Fires and Sharperson, 2018).

Our analysis of LinkedIn data showed that many professionals across Canada believe including people experiencing disabilities in the workplace is "good for business." Our sentiment analysis showed positive views around the idea, with many highlighting the strong business case for inclusion.

In addition to the justice rationale, also known as the moral motive, which focuses on equal access, fair treatment, and workplaces free from discrimination and harassment, many LinkedIn users pointed out that there is also a strong business case for diversity (Dover et al., 2020). While early diversity programs were built on eliminating discrimination and ensuring legal compliance, professionals on LinkedIn argue that a diverse workforce can benefit a company in many ways. The business case for diversity focuses on using diversity as a competitive advantage to improve a company's economic position and enhance its reputation. It emphasizes that diversity is not just about people, but also about the variety of talents, skills, ideas, and perspectives contributing to an organization's success. By embracing and valuing diversity in all areas of the business, companies can improve their performance and profitability (Byrd and Sparkman, 2022).

Many LinkedIn users across Canada shared insights highlighting the powerful connection between diversity and business outcomes. For example, one user said:

In recent months, I've observed several high-profile companies scaling back their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, often citing political shifts and cost concerns. However, based on my own research and experiences, particularly during my time at Business School, I firmly believe that dismantling DEI programs is not only a setback ethically but also a strategic mistake. Through my research, I've found that diverse teams consistently outperform homogeneous ones, especially in decision-making, innovation, and financial success. In fact, studies show that companies in the top quartile for diversity can outperform those in the bottom quartile by as much as 36% in profitability. Diverse teams also tend to be more adaptable, which is crucial in navigating market shifts and industry changes.

One key insight from my work was that diversity alone isn't enough to guarantee high performance. While diverse teams have immense potential, psychological safety is essential for them to thrive! For me, the evidence is clear: DEI isn't just a "nice-to-have," it's a critical driver of business success. If companies genuinely want to thrive, they need to embrace and invest in diversity.

In another example:

How inclusive is your workplace, especially for people with disabilities? While profitability is always a priority, effective leadership knows that creating a diverse and inclusive culture is key to long-term success. By welcoming a range of perspectives, including those from disabled individuals, organizations can drive innovation, enhance productivity, and create a more dynamic work environment for everyone. Diversity isn't just a value—it's a strategy for business growth.

Similarly, a Canadian logistics firm posted:

Diverse teams bring fresh perspectives, drive innovation, and boost efficiency—giving companies a real competitive edge in logistics. But how exactly does diversity in logistics impact business success?

At our Canadian logistics firm, we've seen firsthand how diversity strengthens our operations. Research shows that diverse supply chains are 35% more resilient to global crises, helping businesses adapt quickly to market disruptions. Embracing inclusive practices doesn't just improve internal operations; it opens up opportunities for global expansion and fosters a more sustainable, equitable global economy.

Diversity also leads to better decision-making. Companies with inclusive policies are 74% more likely to outperform their peers, and those with diverse teams are better equipped to innovate and solve problems. By connecting with a broader range of suppliers and diversifying our supplier network, we're positioning ourselves to thrive in today's interconnected global economy. Our approach ensures diversity standards in every part of the process—from supplier qualification to automation. This enhances our competitiveness and operational efficiency and helps us meet the evolving demands of global markets.

Likewise, another LinkedIn user wrote:

Diversity in hiring is not about lowering standards; it's about removing the barriers that limit access to top talent, including those from disabled communities. Contrary to the belief that diversity hiring means compromising on qualifications, the data consistently shows that diverse teams—across gender, race, and disability—drive stronger performance, innovation, and profitability. The most diverse businesses consistently outperform their peers. Diverse teams are more likely to create new products, innovate, and achieve higher profitability. Hiring for diversity isn't about compromising quality—it's about broadening the pool of qualified candidates and embracing untapped potential, including those with disabilities.

Research shows that diverse teams perform better. Companies prioritizing gender, ethnic, and disability diversity are more likely to outperform their competitors in profitability. Organizations with diverse executive teams are more likely to excel in business outcomes.

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Innovation also thrives in diverse environments. Teams with diverse perspectives, including those from disabled individuals, generate more revenue from new ideas, and employees consider workplace diversity an important factor when evaluating job offers. The actual risk isn't hiring diverse talent but ignoring the proven business benefits of diversity and holding on to outdated biases. Embrace diversity—it's not just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing for your business.

These views align with much of the literature showing that “diversity pays.” This literature shows that diversity leads to better outcomes than having a group of people who are all the same because progress and innovation rely more on diverse groups working together and using their different perspectives. Research shows that teams with various skills and experiences can overcome communication challenges and perform better. Diversity also boosts creativity and improves teamwork. It can influence consumer behaviour, as people favour those they identify with (Byrd and Sparkman, 2022).

Diversity can help organizations succeed by bringing in different perspectives and making teams work better together. It can also have a big impact on a company's profits. Research has shown that diverse teams are likelier to meet or exceed financial goals. Forbes reports that organizations like Deloitte, Boston Consulting Group, and the Harvard Business Review highlight that diverse and inclusive companies tend to be more innovative and profitable (Forbes Business Council, 2022). This is because diversity brings together a range of perspectives, experiences, and ideas, which can lead to better decision-making, improved problem-solving, and increased creativity.

Our analysis of LinkedIn discussions found that many professionals in Canada believe that including persons experiencing disability in the workplace is not just the right thing to do but is also good for business. Many LinkedIn users emphasized the business case for diversity, arguing that diverse teams, including employees experiencing disability, bring new perspectives, drive innovation, improve overall company performance, and increase profitability.



## Key Themes from LinkedIn Discussions

**The analysis revealed several key themes in LinkedIn discussions about disability and employment.**

One of the most dominant themes was the growing concern that disability is frequently overlooked in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts. Many professionals expressed frustration that DEI conversations often focus primarily on gender and race while ignoring the barriers faced by workers experiencing disability. This exclusion has led to calls for a more comprehensive approach to workplace inclusion, ensuring disability is fully recognized as a core aspect of DEI.

Another significant theme was the widespread perception that disability inclusion is often treated as a symbolic gesture rather than a meaningful commitment. Many LinkedIn users highlighted the disconnect between corporate statements about accessibility and the reality of workplace barriers. Employees experiencing disability shared firsthand accounts of struggling to secure accommodations, being overlooked for promotions, or feeling isolated in work environments that fail to support their needs.

Misconceptions about workplace accommodations also surfaced as a recurring concern. Some LinkedIn users highlighted common myths, such as the belief that accommodations are costly or provide unfair advantages. Many professionals worked to counter these misconceptions by explaining that most accommodations are low-cost and essential for equal opportunity. However, despite these efforts, some discussions revealed persistent skepticism about the necessity and fairness of accommodations.

Finally, discussions frequently touched on the business case for disability inclusion. Many professionals argue that hiring people experiencing disability is both an ethical responsibility and a strategic advantage. Research and lived experiences suggest that diverse teams, including those experiencing disability, contribute to innovation, better decision-making, and overall company success.

Overall, the analysis of LinkedIn discussions reflects a growing awareness of the need for genuine, systemic change in how workplaces approach disability inclusion. While challenges remain, the conversations highlight a strong demand for action, education, and accountability to ensure that disability is recognized as an integral part of DEI initiatives.

## Facebook, Instagram, and X

Social media platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram are widely used for sharing personal interests, thoughts, and moments. Facebook is the most popular in Canada, with 26.59 million users—about 73.4% of the population. Instagram follows with 20.65 million users (57%), and as of January 2024, X had around 14 million active users in Canada.

These platforms gave us a lot of valuable data because they show a wide range of public opinions and conversations. Unlike LinkedIn, which is mainly about careers and professional networking, Facebook, Instagram, and X focus more on personal interactions and public discussions. This difference helps us understand public opinions from a broader social and cultural perspective.

The analysis revealed several key themes in discussions about disability and employment. Key themes included the persistent reality of ableism and the challenges of bias and stigma, the growing fear that recent anti-DEI movements will reduce protections and opportunities for workers experiencing disability, the debate over remote work as an accommodation for workers experiencing disability, and the need for an intersectional perspective when it comes to discussions about work and disability.

## The Reality of Ableism and the Challenges of Bias and Stigma

One of the most dominant themes in our analysis was the widespread experiences of negative attitudes, bias, and stigma shared by persons experiencing disability, both in society in general and in the workplace specifically. Many Facebook, X, and Threads users described being dismissed, doubted, or unfairly judged, whether in hiring processes, workplace accommodations, or how others perceive their abilities.

Social media users across Facebook, Instagram, and X shared their experiences of ableism, highlighting how negative attitudes, stereotypes, and stigma toward people experiencing disability continue to shape their daily lives and workplaces. Ableism is a belief system that devalues potential and limits opportunities. Like racism, sexism, or ageism, ableism treats people experiencing disability as less capable, less deserving of respect, and less able to contribute (Law Commission of Ontario, 2012). Ableism considers “disability” as abnormal compared to “non-disability,” which is considered normal. Ableism places a lower value on people experiencing disability while giving higher status to those without disabilities. It reinforces inequalities by justifying why non-disabled individuals have greater access to resources, opportunities, and rewards based on the societal value assigned to disability (Shifrer and Frederick, 2019).

These firsthand accounts highlight the ongoing barriers persons experiencing disability face, not just in securing employment but also in being treated with basic respect and dignity.

For example, one X user shared:

I work twice as hard as my colleagues just to be seen as equal! This is the reality for many people with disabilities in the workplace. Whether it's being denied fair pay, promotions, or basic accommodations, discrimination keeps many disabled workers underpaid, undervalued, and underemployed. Yet, despite these barriers, many still face harmful stereotypes, being labelled as lazy, unmotivated, or unwilling to work. These misconceptions ignore the real struggles disabled employees face just to be treated fairly.

A Facebook user shared their story:

I was passed over for a promotion—again. I've been at my job for five years. I have the same qualifications as my colleagues, I meet my deadlines, and I take on extra work. But when a leadership position opened up, my manager told me, "We just don't think you can handle the extra responsibility with your condition."

I've heard it before—assumptions about what I can't do instead of recognition for what I have done. Meanwhile, my non-disabled colleagues with less experience are promoted without question. And when I push back, I'm told I should be grateful just to have a job.

This is what workplace ableism looks like. It's not just about accommodations—it's about being taken seriously, given opportunities, and not having your disability define your potential.

Ableism is widespread across Canada, affecting many aspects of life for people experiencing disability. The experiences shared on social media about bias, stereotypes, and exclusion are consistent with existing research. For example, a report by Statistics Canada (Hachouch et al., 2022) found that almost 37% of people experiencing disability face barriers caused by misconceptions, assumptions, or harmful behaviours from others. These attitudes can come from workplaces, schools, service providers, and even within personal relationships, reinforcing systemic barriers to inclusion and equal opportunities.

A recent survey by KPMG Canada (KPMG, 2024) shows that ableism and discrimination have a significant impact on people experiencing disability in the workplace, leaving many feeling undervalued and overlooked. The results show that 60% of employed individuals living in Canada experiencing disability are actively looking for new jobs, mainly because they feel underemployed, face bias, or experience workplace ableism. Nearly half (44%) said they had personally experienced ableism in the past year, and 43% had seen it happen to

a coworker. These numbers were even higher for people with visible disabilities, with 58% experiencing ableism and 50% witnessing it. Many also said they have to work harder than their non-disabled colleagues to get the same recognition, especially women (71%), People of Colour (82%), and Indigenous people (75%) experiencing disability. On top of this, only 32% of respondents felt comfortable disclosing their disability at work, showing that stigma and exclusion are still significant problems. Many described their workplaces as stressful, isolating, and unwelcoming, and some even faced harassment for speaking out about their experiences. These findings make it clear that ableism is a widespread and systemic issue in Canadian workplaces, creating barriers that make it harder for people experiencing disability to fully take part in the workforce.

Our analysis found numerous posts filled with ableism, including hostile and demeaning rhetoric directed at people experiencing disability. Many posts accused individuals experiencing disability of not trying hard enough, “milking taxpayer dollars,” or using their conditions as an excuse to avoid work. These narratives reflect deep-seated stigma and bias and hold very negative sentiment toward people experiencing disability.

Additionally, our analysis of social media shows that the growing push to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in the United States has further fuelled vitriol against persons experiencing disability. As DEI initiatives are attacked, the conversation around disability rights has become increasingly hostile, dismissive, and exclusionary, even in Canada.

Overall, our analysis shows that ableism is widespread in Canada. Many people experiencing disability shared stories of bias, stigma, and discrimination, including being overlooked for promotions, denied accommodations, or treated as less capable than their non-disabled colleagues. Social media posts across X, Facebook, and Instagram reflected deep frustration with these ongoing barriers, and many described their workplaces as stressful, isolating, and unwelcoming.

In addition to personal experiences of ableism, our analysis found hostile narratives and misinformation about disability.

From the perspective of social media users, these findings highlight the need for urgent action to challenge ableism, improve workplace inclusion, and ensure that disability remains a key part of DEI efforts. Without real change, many persons experiencing disability will continue to face unfair treatment, limited opportunities, and systemic barriers that prevent full participation in society and the workforce.

## The Growing Fear That Anti-DEI Movements Will Reduce Protections and Opportunities for Workers Experiencing Disability

Recent changes in the U.S. regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion have many people worried. On LinkedIn, as discussed above, users say people experiencing disability are being left out of important conversations. People on Facebook, X, and Threads are also concerned that efforts against DEI could remove important protections and job opportunities for workers experiencing disability.

Our sentiment analysis across social media platforms found strong negative sentiments about these discussions. Many shared their fears and anxieties, indicating that workplaces might become less fair and inclusive without DEI policies. Some fear that hiring practices will no longer consider the barriers workers experiencing disability face, making it harder for them to get and keep jobs. Others expressed concerns that without DEI initiatives, fewer resources will be available to support accessibility and workplace accommodations.

Overall, the conversations reflect deep concerns that rolling back DEI efforts could undo years of progress, leaving workers experiencing disability with fewer opportunities and less protection from discrimination.

For example, one person on Threads writes:

Terrified of what's happening with DEI rollbacks. If companies start abandoning their 'commitments,' what happens to people with a disability? Will we just be ignored again? Will accommodations disappear? It feels like we're moving backward, and no one cares. This isn't just policy—it's our livelihoods on the line.

Similarly, a Facebook user expressed their concerns:

I'm old enough to remember what Canada was like before DEI and real protections for disabled people. And let me tell you...it wasn't good. Back then, workplaces didn't have to accommodate us. If you needed a ramp, a screen reader, or flexible work hours, too bad. You were seen as a burden, not as someone with skills and value to offer.

Now, I see people pushing back against DEI, and it scares me. I worry that we're heading right back to a time when disabled workers were ignored, shut out, or forced to fight for every little thing. Without DEI, how many of us will lose opportunities? How many will be told 'sorry, we just can't accommodate you'?

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I'm speaking up because I don't want to go back to that Canada. I want a future where disabled people aren't treated as afterthoughts but as equal members of the workforce. If you remember those times too, or if you care about fairness, now is the time to stand up and say something before we lose the progress we've made.

While some users were worried about the threat of changes to DEI, the past year has also seen a growing backlash against DEI initiatives. This is happening despite research showing that diversity efforts make workplaces fairer, help underrepresented groups succeed, boost worker morale and productivity, and make businesses more competitive and profitable.

In the past year, individuals living in Canada have engaged in over 5 million discussions on Facebook, X, and Threads about what is being called a DEI backlash.

Our content analysis found that two main groups are pushing back against DEI. The first group doesn't necessarily oppose diversity efforts. However, they feel that corporate DEI policies aren't working as intended and aren't making a real difference. The second group, much more prominent and louder on social media, strongly opposes DEI. They argue that these programs are unfair and give certain groups special advantages. This movement, which started in the U.S., challenges ideas about fairness, merit, and how things have always been done. It's closely tied to the broader "war on woke" and is actively working to undo the progress DEI has made in recent years.

Our analysis revealed a lot of misinformation about DEI and disability exclusion. For example, on X, one user argued:

DEI isn't about fairness—it's about picking winners and losers. Hard work and merit should matter, not quotas. These programs only divide us and create resentment. It's time to push back and restore true equality.

Overall, discussions on social media show that many people are deeply concerned about how changes to DEI policies, particularly in the U.S., could negatively impact workers experiencing disability in Canada. Many fear that without firm DEI commitments, workplaces will become less fair, fewer accommodations will be available, and workers experiencing disability will struggle even more to find and keep jobs. The strong negative sentiment in these conversations highlights the uncertainty many feel about the future of workplace inclusion. As debates around DEI continue, the concerns raised by workers experiencing disability suggest that without clear action to protect workplace accessibility and equity, years of progress could be at risk.

## The Debate Over Remote Work as a Disability Accommodation

**Another key theme from the content analysis was the debate over remote work.**

The COVID-19 pandemic permanently changed how and where we work (Shu and Millsap, 2022). In 2020, there was a massive shift to remote work, with businesses quickly adapting to new ways of working. By 2021, more than 25% of core-age employees in Canada were working remotely (Clarke and Hardy, 2022), showing just how much the workplace had transformed.

Remote work has many benefits. It creates job opportunities for people previously excluded due to physical workplace barriers. It also offers improved efficiency, control over work tasks, and a better work-life balance. By making jobs more accessible, remote work helps build more diverse and inclusive workplaces while allowing employers to benefit from a wider range of talent (Nowrouzi-Kia et al., 2024).

In Canada, research shows that remote workers are more satisfied with their jobs than on-site workers. Their job satisfaction is often more than 10 percentage points higher across multiple areas, including respect from coworkers, job independence, security, work-life balance, and overall well-being. Many remote workers also report feeling more hopeful, having better mental health, and being happier (Future Skills Centre, 2022).

But for some persons experiencing disability, working from home isn't just a preference; it's the only way they can participate in the workforce.

For example, one X user posted:

Without remote work, I wouldn't be able to have a job. My disability makes commuting and office life impossible, but working from home gives me the flexibility to succeed. Accessibility isn't a perk; it's a necessity!

Before the pandemic, people experiencing disability often struggled to get workplace accommodations like remote work and flexible schedules, even though these were among the most commonly requested changes (Schimmel et al., 2024). Disability advocates have been pushing for more remote work options for decades, but they were difficult to secure (Shu and Millsap, 2022).

Working from home can be especially helpful for people experiencing disability, who often face barriers to finding and keeping a job. Many workplaces are not fully accessible, and things like transportation challenges, medical needs, or physical strain can make working in an office difficult or even impossible. Remote work can make a big difference, especially for

those who lack mobility who have homes set up for their needs or for whom commuting is long, difficult, or unsafe. It also helps those who need to stay close to medical equipment or caregivers who don't have the privacy or resources at work for self-care. For people who experience fatigue or pain, working in a traditional office can be exhausting and harm their well-being. Those with mental health or cognitive conditions may find it hard to function outside their homes, and people with severe allergies or environmental sensitivities may struggle to avoid harmful exposure in the workplace. For people with symptoms that come and go, having the flexibility to work from home can make managing their condition much easier (Shu and Millsap, 2022).

This is not, however, universally true. Not everyone experiencing disability wants or needs to work from home, even if their job could be done remotely.

Throughout our content analysis, several social media users, many identifying as people experiencing disability, shared concerns about both remote work and the idea that it is being treated as a "one-size-fits-all" solution to accessibility.

For example, one Facebook user argued that the solitude of remote work can worsen certain mental health conditions and shared their story:

Working from home isn't the right solution for everyone. I struggle with severe depression and anxiety, and while remote work might help some people, for me, the isolation only made things worse. When I contacted my employer for accommodations, they didn't ask what I needed—they just assumed remote work was the answer. But actual accessibility means having choices, not a one-size-fits-all approach. Employers need to listen and offer solutions that actually support their employees.

Similarly, another user posted on Threads:

Working remote sounds excellent, but with ADHD, it's a disaster (for me anyways). No structure, too many distractions, and zero accountability—I do everything except my work. I still need accommodations, but 'just work from home' isn't it.

Persons experiencing disability already face a lot of social stigma and unfair treatment. Our content analysis revealed that some worry that if more workers experiencing disability are pushed into remote work, they'll become even less visible and more overlooked.

One social media post argued:

I already feel like people underestimate me because of my disability. Now, with remote work becoming the go-to 'solution,' I worry that disabled workers will be even more invisible. Out of sight, out of mind, right? We need real inclusion, not just being sent home.



In addition to concerns about remote work, users on Facebook, X, and Threads also pointed out that remote work policies often fail to consider intersectionality. They raised concerns that factors like gender, race, disability, and caregiving responsibilities can shape how people experience remote work differently. Yet, many discussions and policies overlook these differences.

Overall, discussions on social media reveal that remote work is both an opportunity and a challenge for people experiencing disability. While many find it essential for accessibility, others feel it is being treated as a one-size-fits-all solution rather than part of a broader approach to workplace inclusion. Some users shared that remote work allows them to stay employed by reducing physical barriers. In contrast, others said that isolation, lack of structure, and reduced visibility at work make remote jobs difficult or even harmful.

Social media users emphasized the need for more flexible and personalized workplace accommodations. While many see remote work as essential for accessibility, they argue it should not be treated as the only or automatic solution. Instead, they believe workplaces should listen to employees, provide options, and ensure that all workers experiencing disability receive the support they need to succeed—whether they work remotely or in person.

## The Need for Intersectionality in Disability Conversations

Intersectionality and the concern that it is often overlooked in discussions about work and disability was another key theme in our content analysis. The sentiment was mixed, with some users appreciating the conversation while others expressed frustration that these issues continue to be ignored.

Intersectionality is a way of understanding how different forms of discrimination and inequality, like racism, sexism, ableism, and classism, overlap and affect people's lives in unique ways. It helps explain how someone's race, gender, disability, or other social identities combine to shape their experiences, opportunities, and challenges.

The concept of intersectionality was introduced by Crenshaw (1991) in a legal context. Crenshaw showed that discrimination isn't just about race or gender separately but how they overlap and interact in ways that the law didn't fully recognize. Intersectional approaches help us better understand how different forms of inequality—such as race, gender, class, and disability—combine to create unique challenges and disadvantages for some people while giving advantages to others.

This idea suggests that a person's social identity isn't just one thing at a time; it's a mix of different factors that all work together. For example, someone who is both a woman and a racial minority may face challenges that are different from those faced by someone who is a member of only one of these groups.

As scholar Patricia Hill Collins (1999) explains, categories like race, gender, and class don't exist separately. Instead, they interact and influence each other, shaping how people experience privilege, discrimination, and societal opportunities.

Disability has often been treated as a uniform experience, focusing only on individual "medical conditions" and ignoring the diverse identities and experiences of people experiencing disability (Liasidou and Gregoriou, 2024). According to Wolbring and Nasir (2024):

Being a disabled person is one marginalized identity that often intersects with other marginalized identities, which in turn frequently leads to intersectionality-based problems disabled people have to deal with on top of the problems they encounter based on their identity of being a disabled person. However, ... disabled people are often neglected in the intersectionality discourse (p.2)

While research on how different types of discrimination, like racism and ableism, overlap is still relatively new, an intersectional approach to research can understand disability as a social and political identity similar to gender, race, and other aspects of a person's background and experiences (Liasidou and Gregoriou, 2024).

This emerging area of research shows that persons experiencing disability who also belong to marginalized groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, refugees, or those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, face even more significant disadvantages (Liasidou and Gregoriou, 2024; De Beco, 2020), with structural ableism being deeply connected to other forms of discrimination, like racism, sexism, ageism, capitalism, and colonialism. A growing body of new research shows that, together, these systems reinforce the exclusion and economic exploitation of people experiencing disability, especially those who also face other forms of marginalization (Bixby, 2024).

For example, intersectional research shows that women experiencing disability face unique and compounded barriers to employment, limiting their career opportunities and advancement. These challenges include health-related issues and social issues, including discrimination, stigma, and experiences of violence. Research also shows that workplace barriers, including a lack of accommodations and exclusion from male-dominated industries, further disadvantage women experiencing disability (Chan and Hutchings, 2023).

Another example is a significant new scoping review (Fuentes et al., 2024) that explored the question, "**How do ableism and racism intersect to shape employment experiences and outcomes?**" by examining research on workplace discrimination faced by racialized individuals experiencing disability. It found that persons experiencing disability who are also racialized face more workplace discrimination than white people experiencing disability. This review examined research on how ableism (discrimination based on disability) and racism intersect in employment. The findings reveal that racialized people experiencing disability not only experience higher rates of discrimination but also face unique stereotypes and

systemic barriers in the workplace. This combination of ableism and racism leads to poorer job opportunities, negative impacts on well-being, and limited career growth. These results suggest that discrimination isn't just a matter of adding up different disadvantages. Instead, the intersection of ableism and racism creates distinct challenges that cannot be addressed with simple, additive approaches (Fuentes et al., 2024).

Intersectionality is increasingly regarded as an issue that needs to be addressed both within the literature and across social media.

According to social media users across platforms, categories like race, gender, and class are often overlooked in discussions about disability.

For example, one X user commented:

Tired of how disability in DEI is treated like a one-size-fits-all issue. A white, wealthy disabled worker doesn't face the same barriers as a racialized, low-income disabled worker. But guess whose stories get heard? Intersectionality matters, and ignoring it keeps the most vulnerable struggling.

Similarly, a Facebook post noted:

When people talk about disability, they often leave out an important piece: how things like race, gender, and income affect a person's experience. Conversations about disability tend to take a one-size-fits-all approach, ignoring the unique struggles faced by people who belong to more than one marginalized group. For example, a Black woman with a disability may face different barriers than a white man with a disability. Someone who is LGBTQ+ and disabled might have challenges that others don't. If we don't talk about these differences, we miss the full picture of what it's like to live with a disability.

Another Facebook user shared her personal story:

I remember the first time a hiring manager looked at me and saw only my wheelchair. It wasn't my years of experience, my degrees, or the fact that I was more than qualified for the job. It was the wheelchair, my Blackness, and the assumptions that came with both. Even when I finally got hired, the challenges didn't stop. Coworkers assumed I was just lucky to be there as if I hadn't worked twice as hard to prove myself. The office wasn't fully accessible, so I had to fight for basic accommodations—things that should have been there from the start. And as a queer Black woman, I faced microaggressions that made it clear: people like me weren't part of their idea of "professional."

Conversations about disability often focus only on ability—but what about race? Gender? Sexuality? Class? Disability doesn't erase those things; it shapes how we experience the world. My challenges aren't just about using a wheelchair; they're about navigating a system that wasn't built for people like me.

Overall, social media users highlighted concerns that discussions about disability often ignore intersectionality, overlooking how factors like race, gender, income, and sexuality shape a person's experiences. Many expressed frustration that disability is often treated as a one-size-fits-all issue, leaving out the unique challenges faced by those who belong to multiple marginalized groups. These conversations show that many people want disability inclusion efforts to be more intersectional, ensuring that the voices of all individuals experiencing disability are just the most visible or privileged represented in discussions about accessibility, equity, and workplace inclusion.

## Key Themes from Discussions on Facebook, X, and Instagram

Our analysis of discussions on X, Facebook, and Instagram's Threads revealed several dominant themes in conversations about disability and employment. One of the most significant was the widespread impact of ableism, with many people sharing experiences of bias, stigma, and discrimination in the workplace. Many social media users also expressed concerns about the growing backlash against DEI, with many fearing that potential rollbacks could weaken workplace protections and reduce opportunities for workers experiencing disability.

Another key theme emerged from the debate over remote work as an accessibility solution. Some saw it as essential, while others argued that it is being treated as a one-size-fits-all approach rather than one of many possible accommodations. Additionally, many social media users emphasized the need for intersectionality in disability discussions, highlighting that factors such as race, gender, and class shape workplace experiences and barriers in distinct ways.

Overall, our analysis highlights deep concerns about workplace inclusion and the systemic challenges workers experiencing disability continue to face. While some discussions reflected frustration and fear of losing progress, others underscored the need for stronger advocacy, policy improvements, and a more intersectional approach to disability inclusion. These conversations signal a growing demand for meaningful change to ensure that workplaces are genuinely accessible, inclusive, and equitable for all.

## Conclusion

This study analyzed real-time discussions on social media across Canada, using qualitative content analysis and sentiment analysis to explore public discourse on disability and employment.

We examined the differences in discussions about disability and employment across LinkedIn and other social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and X. The findings reveal significant differences across platforms, with LinkedIn serving as a professional space where conversations about disability come up within the context of workplace policies, corporate DEI strategies, and the business case for inclusion. These conversations tend to be more formal, focused on solutions, and often come from the perspective of employers or organizations, focusing on career development and professional networking.

In contrast, on Facebook, Instagram, and X, conversations about disability are more personal and emotional. People often share their own experiences, talk about discrimination, and raise awareness about how society views and treats persons experiencing disability. These discussions often highlight the stigma, bias, and misconceptions that people experiencing disability experience in everyday life, both within and beyond the workplace. Many posts serve as a form of awareness-raising, highlighting systemic ableism, the lack of accommodations, and the struggles of securing employment.

Unlike LinkedIn, where conversations focus on professional discourse and policy solutions, discussions on these platforms are more candid and unfiltered, reflecting raw emotions such as frustration, disappointment, and resilience. While LinkedIn posts emphasize policy improvements and corporate responsibility, the other platforms we analyzed expose widespread stigma, bias, and frustration with workplace discrimination. Users expressed concerns over anti-DEI movements, misconceptions about accommodations, and the intersectionality of disability with race, gender, and class.

Additionally, while LinkedIn fosters professional engagement, often with constructive dialogue, discussions on other platforms are more polarized, with greater hostility, misinformation, and resistance to disability inclusion. These differences highlight the distinct roles that various platforms play in shaping public and professional discourse on disability. LinkedIn provides insights into industry perspectives and policy discussions, while general social media platforms reveal the personal and social realities of people experiencing disability.

### Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into public sentiment on disability and employment through social media analysis, it has some limitations. Social media users are not fully representative of the general population, meaning some perspectives may be over- or under-represented. Additionally, while qualitative content and sentiment analysis allow for a nuanced understanding of public discussions, they cannot capture the full complexity of individuals' lived experiences. Biases inherent in social media algorithms may also influence which conversations gain traction, potentially shaping the visibility of certain viewpoints.

Future research should explore complementary methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, to provide a more comprehensive picture of attitudes toward disability and employment.

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