

# **Building Fair Employment Services in Rural and Remote Communities in Canada**

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## **Plain Language Executive Summary**

Employment service providers help people find jobs. They have an important role to play. They help to develop a workforce. Service providers in cities have many resources. But those in rural and remote areas have fewer resources to rely on.

### **Barriers to employment**

This creates barriers for people with disabilities who live in rural and remote areas. These barriers include being isolated and not having many transportation options. They have limited support services to find and keep a job.

Many groups must work together to fix this. This includes governments and funders. It includes service providers and employers.

Rural and remote areas have unique barriers. There are not many jobs available. There are not enough social supports. Transportation is not reliable.

These barriers are even worse for people with disabilities. Many do not have internet access. Employers do not know how to accommodate them.

## **Key numbers**

Here are some key points from recent research.

- About 40% of people with disabilities have turned down a job due to transportation. There were about 25% that left a job for the same reason.
- About 20% of adults with disabilities do not use the internet. But only 9% of adults without disabilities do not use the internet.
- About 82% of employers think that they are inclusive. But only 49% of job seekers agreed with this.

There needs to be money put towards these barriers. There needs to be better transportation. There needs to be more internet access. There needs to be more training in digital skills. Without these supports, many people with disabilities in rural or remote areas will be left out of the job market.

## **About the research**

This study builds on earlier work on this topic. This study expands the focus. It looks more closely at how to support people with disabilities in rural and remote areas.

This study was funded by the Canadian Association of Supported Employment. It includes feedback from 74 employment service providers. Feedback came from Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia.

Our research looked at the following areas.

- Distance: This is about the lack of access to services and transportation.
- Work force shortages: This is about barriers to finding and keeping good staff.
- Internet gaps: This is about access to the internet and lack of digital skills.
- Funding rules: This is about the strict funding rules. It is also about the lack of funding for support services.

- **Employer support:** This is about training to promote work spaces that are inclusive.

## Main findings

Here are the main points we found in the study.

1. **Funding does not reflect the real cost.** Rural services cost more. There are higher costs to operate. There are unmet transportation needs. But funding does not reflect this reality.
2. **Wraparound supports do not have enough funding.** Critical supports are not given enough funds to cover the need. Mental health services are underfunded. There is not enough funding for assistive technology. Case management is also underfunded.
3. **Outcomes are not realistic.** Funding is based on quick job placements. There is no funding for steady progress. This limits access for people with disabilities.
4. **Rising costs are ignored.** Long-term contracts do not adjust for inflation or changing needs. This means services are reduced over time. The funding does not cover as much with rising costs.
5. **Staff shortages affect the quality of service.** Low pay and lack of training make it hard to keep qualified staff. This means services are not as good as they could be.
6. **Limited internet access is a barrier.** Internet access is limited in rural and remote areas. It costs a lot of money when it is available. Many job seekers cannot access online job services. They cannot use the option to work-from-home.
7. **Employers need more help.** Many do not know how to support employees with disabilities. Some think it will be too expensive.

## **Recommendations**

Here are our recommendations. These will help to make employment services more fair and effective. All groups should work together to follow these recommendations.

1. Adjust funding to match regional costs. Include transportation in these costs.
2. Increase funding for more services. This includes support for mental health. It includes funds for assistive technology. It also includes more funds for case management.
3. Use funding models that have rewards for reaching goals. This recognizes that gradual progress is important.
4. Include increases in contracts that are longer than 1 year. This will help when the cost-of-living goes up. Do this for both clients and service providers.
5. Raise wages and offer training. This will help to hire and keep good staff.
6. Improve access to the internet. Provide training in digital skills.
7. Help employers learn more about how to hire people with disabilities.
8. Create flexible funding. Make sure it meets the unique needs of each region. Make sure it supports inclusion.

## **Conclusion**

Improving employment in rural and remote areas means working together. Solutions need to be flexible. They need to be inclusive. And they need to respond to the unique challenges of the region. Funding amounts need to match the real costs to do this. This will remove and reduce the barriers. It will make sure that everybody has a fair chance to be fully included in the work force.