



PEOPLE WITH EPISODIC DISABILITIES IN THE ONTARIO WORKPLACE: A FACT SHEET

Episodic disabilities (EDs) are long-term conditions that are characterized by periods of good health interrupted by periods of illness and disability. These periods may vary in severity, length and predictability. Unlike permanent disabilities, episodic disabilities are periodic—the episodes of illness come and go. But because the periods of illness and disability are unpredictable, they can often be challenging

to deal with in work settings, especially when accommodations are needed to support the person's ongoing participation in the workplace.

An increased commitment to enable the full participation of disabled people in schools, workplaces, and our communities is evident across Canada. Awareness has been building and policies and practices that focus on inclusion and diversity are being developed and implemented. The reality for many Canadians who have chronic health conditions characterized by unpredictable periods of illness and diminished capacity followed by periods of wellness remain unacknowledged. Individuals with episodic conditions including arthritis, mental health difficulties, migraines, MS and other conditions can be effective at work and in their daily lives much of the time, but also experience periods that may require time off work, reduced work hours, or other accommodations.

This fact sheet is based on data from Statistics Canada's 2012 Canadian Survey of Disability and provides information about Ontarians with episodic disabilities (EDs).

PEOPLE WITH EPISODIC DISABILITIES IN ONTARIO: AN OVERVIEW

- In 2012, there were 854,600 Ontarians age 18-64 with an episodic disability. It is estimated that approximately 82% of Ontarians with a disability have a chronic health condition that is episodic in nature, resulting in intermittent periods when their capacity to function is diminished as well as periods when they can function at full capacity.
- Episodic health conditions that result from illness or injury are more common among adult Ontarians in their peak earning years (aged 45-64 years), although almost one third (32.7% or 279,900) are aged 18 to 44.
- More women than men in Ontario (57% vs 43%) have an episodic disability.
- People with episodic disabilities are a diverse group with a range of needs and capacities. Many have more than one health condition with pain being the condition that most often limits their daily activities.
- Almost 385,000 Ontarians with episodic disability (45.5%) report having a mental health diagnosis such as depression or anxiety that typically occurs with one or more physical disabilities.

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In 2012, among working-age adults in Ontario aged 18 to 64 years with episodic disabilities:

- Almost half of working-age adults with episodic disabilities in Ontario were in the labour force in 2012 with 44.8% working at a job or business, while another 4.3% were unemployed and actively seeking work. The remainder included 188,000 people (22%) who described themselves as retired and 246,200 who were not in the labour force but felt that they might be able to work with appropriate flexibility and support.
- 382,700 Ontarians with episodic disabilities worked at a job or business in 2012, 82% (314,600) were employed; another 18% (68,000) were self-employed.
- Most employees with episodic disabilities (79.5%) were employed on a full-time basis and 74.5% had “permanent” or continuing jobs.
- Almost one quarter of employed Ontarians with episodic disabilities (97,000 or 25.4%) had jobs that Statistics Canada designates as managers or professionals.
- More than 142,600 (37.3%) people with episodic disabilities in Ontario were employed in public sector and quasi public-sector industries (health and social assistance, educational services, and public administration); another 70,150 people (18.3%) were employed in retail trade, while manufacturing and construction, accounted for 10% and 9.4%, respectively. Just under 30,000 employed Ontarians with episodic disabilities (7.8%) worked in accommodation and food services.
- Almost six out of ten Ontario employees with episodic disabilities have a post-secondary credential with those with a college certificate or diploma outnumbering those with a university degree, three to two.
- The majority of employees with episodic disabilities in Ontario reported having their current job for a considerable amount of time: 172,900 (45.9%) had been in their job for 12 years or longer, while 34,200 (9.1%) had their current job for between 5 and 12 years. Slightly more than 20% (76,500) had been employed in their current job for between 3 and 5 years, while just under 25% (93,500) had started their present job in the last one or two years.

WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH EPISODIC DISABILITIES

Some people with episodic disabilities benefit from having flexible work options for those times when they are not able to work full time or need time off from work. Others may not feel comfortable disclosing their circumstances or fear that by doing so, they may put their job or career opportunities at risk.

In 2012, among Ontario employees aged 18 to 64 years with episodic disabilities:

- Almost 60% (188,200) of employees in Ontario with episodic disabilities disclosed their condition to their employer or supervisor.

- 56% of employees in Ontario with episodic disabilities (174,500) reported that they needed some workplace accommodation. As is the case for persons with disabilities generally, employees with episodic disabilities who needed some form of workplace accommodation most often said they needed a “soft” accommodation such as modified hours or days, or reduced work weeks and/or the opportunity to work from home at times. In 2012, 65.7% of the 174,500 employees with episodic disabilities who needed some form of accommodation required one or more of these “soft” accommodations.
- Personal accommodations such as a special chair or a modified workstation also work well for many people with episodic disabilities. About 62% of employees with episodic disabilities required a personal accommodation in 2012.
- Structural accommodations in the workplace were required for 21% of employees with episodic disabilities who needed some form of accommodation. Structural accommodations are physical modifications to the workspace that provide physical access and may include things like an accessible elevator, ramps, or another physical modification.

GAPS IN THE RESEARCH

- There are considerable gaps in the research on Ontarians with episodic disabilities. As employers adopt Ontario’s Accessibility standards, it is important to determine if they are addressing the needs of employees with episodic health conditions. Little is known about how employers, supervisors and co-workers respond to employees’ needs for intermittent accommodations—and especially what creative solutions are used to support their ongoing effectiveness in the workplace.
- We also know little about the barriers employers and employees with episodic disabilities face that could be addressed through, for example changes in employer-provided benefit programs or short-term disability policies.
- Another gap in our knowledge is how to best support small businesses and non-profit organizations in their efforts to accommodate people with episodic disabilities.

RESOURCES

More information on episodic disabilities in the Canadian workplace can be found on the following websites:

From Invisibility to Inclusion: Episodic Disability in the Ontario Workplace
invisibility2inclusion.ca

Episodic Disabilities Employment Network
edencanada.ca

Realize | Réalise
realizecanada.org

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