

An Anti-Poverty Agenda for Persons with Disabilities

Poverty and Disability

People with Disabilities (PWD) are far more likely to be unemployed or underemployed than other Canadians leading to higher levels of poverty.

Adults

- Between 12-14% of those living in households have a disability;
- There are approximately 15,000 persons with intellectual disabilities living in institutions;
- More than 55% of adults with disabilities live below the low income cut-off (LICO) as compared to 19% adults without disabilities; and
- A majority of adults with disabilities have incomes below \$15,000/year.

Children and Families

- Between 5-7% of children 0-19 years old have a disability;
- More than 17% of children with disabilities live in households dependent on government assistance (compared to 8% of non-disabled children);
- More than 28% of children with disabilities live in households in lowest income bracket - compared to 17% of those without disabilities; and
- Over 14% of children with disabilities live in households that rely on food banks (compared to 8% of non-disabled children).

Factors Affecting Poverty

Most people with disabilities face barriers to education and employment. In addition, social supports that could overcome these barriers are either non-existent or have been seriously eroded over the last decade.

Education

- 40% of children with intellectual disabilities are not integrated in regular classes and 15% of all children with disabilities do not attend regular school;
- This should be of major concern since participation in social activities increases with education level attained;
- Employment income also generally increases by level of education;
- Those children who attend special education (as opposed to being integrated into 'regular classes'), have a lower level of education; and
- Regular education early in life is associated with favourable economic outcomes later in life.

Employment

- Only 41% of working-age males with disabilities and 30% of females with disabilities are employed year-round; compared to 76% of males without disabilities and 63% of females without disabilities;
- Workplace barriers range from discrimination in recruitment and hiring practices, lack of

access to employment and workplace supports, to a lack of access to training opportunities; and

- For 64% of two-parent families with a child with a disability, one parent has to leave the labour market to care for their child, 40% of parents with children with disabilities find themselves only able to work at reduced hours, and over 70% pass up promotions.

Supports

- Less than half of the 2 million persons with disabilities access the support services available;
- At least 100,000 people with disabilities in Canada need modifications in the home;
- Some 80,000 children with disabilities have medication expenses that their parents are not insured for and therefore must pay themselves;
- Over 70% of personal supports to persons with disabilities are provided by family members; and
- Women are the main provider of unpaid support (65%), with many women facing the 'triple burden' of domestic responsibilities, work outside the home, and caring for a disabled family member.

Income Programs

- At least one third of those Canadians relying on social assistance benefits are persons with disabilities;
- Often rigid employable/unemployable distinctions do not allow for work programs adapted to individual needs of a person with a disability; and
- Medications and other benefits available through social assistance for persons with disabilities are often denied to them when they enter the workforce, often providing

persons with disabilities with an economic penalty if they enter the paid workforce.

An Anti-Poverty Agenda

An anti-poverty agenda for people with disabilities is desperately needed. It needs to involve all levels of government to address the need for greater social investment in individuals with disabilities, along with their families and communities.

The labour movement must adopt a disability rights agenda that includes lobbying all levels of government to focus on:

- Increasing access to employment, support, and decent wages;
- A national children's agenda to meet the needs of all children with disabilities;
- A national income security program that recognizes the costs of disability as a collective cost to society;
- A national comprehensive public system of disability support services;
- A family supports policy strategy;
- A national inclusive education strategy; and
- Making accessible design an important element of any infrastructure development.

The contents of this Fact Sheet are based on a presentation by Michael Bach to the National Union's 2003 Equality Leadership School. Michael is the Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Association for Community Living.

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