Research Project: Barriers and Facilitators to Employment Experienced by Youth with Disabilities in Canada

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Prepared for: Employment and Social Development Canada

Please note the information, data, and findings presented in this paper are represented solely by the author and not the Government of Canada.

Executive Summary

Background

According to the 2022 *Canadian Survey on Disability* (CSD), 20% of Canada's 7 million youth aged 15 to 24 report having at least one disability. These youth with disabilities (YWD) are more likely to be female, experience mild to moderate impairments, have multiple disability types, and live with mental health-related and/or learning disabilities.

More than 114,000 YWD in Canada are not in school or employed, despite being available for work. Compared to youth without disabilities, YWD have consistently lower rates of both employment and school participation across all sexes and age groups. Research confirms a strong relationship between disability severity and negative employment or educational outcomes, with youth facing more significant barriers the more severe their disability. The 2022 CSD also highlights that YWD encounter unique challenges, particularly due to the higher prevalence of mental health and learning disabilities, which can complicate transitions to education and employment.

The Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS), led by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) in collaboration with 11 other federal departments and agencies, aims to support youth aged 15 to 30, especially those facing barriers to employment, through tailored employment services, skill development, and work experiences.

While YESS has made efforts to include the perspectives of YWD, there remains a gap in validated, up-to-date, and intersectional data from YWD themselves. A stronger evidence base is needed to design services that are more relevant and effective in supporting their unique employment journeys.

About the Research Project

This research project was commissioned by ESDC's Skills and Employment Branch (SEB) to explore the systemic barriers to employment experienced by YWD in Canada. The goal was to synthesize relevant literature and validate findings through direct engagement with YWD and community-based staff, ultimately informing more inclusive programs and policies.

The study focused on youth aged 15 to 30, incorporating age-disaggregated and sociodemographic data when available. The **socioecological model** was used to structure the analysis, recognizing the interconnected individual, relationship, community, and societal factors that influence youth development and employment outcomes. Findings were validated through consultations with eight (8) YWD and three (3) staff from community-based employment programs to ensure alignment with lived experiences.

Key Findings

Barriers to Employment

Barriers exist across all levels of the socioecological model:

- **Individual Level**: Factors such as age, gender, sexual orientation, Indigenous identity, socioeconomic status, type and severity of disability, mental health, and criminal justice involvement shape employment experiences. YWD with intersecting identities—such as those living in poverty—face unique challenges, including financial disincentives tied to income-tested benefits and lack of coverage for required supports (e.g., assistive devices, transportation).
- **Relationship Level**: YWD often rely heavily on family, peers, and close networks for emotional and logistical support. The quality of these relationships can either facilitate or limit employment access. For example, limited encouragement, unrealistic expectations, or social stigma within support networks can hinder employment participation. YWD also tend to engage less with community organizations, reducing access to resources that build social capital and employment connections.
- **Community Level**: Educational institutions, workplaces, and employment services often lack the flexibility or accessibility needed to support YWD. Youth face challenges transitioning from school to work, disclosing their disabilities, and navigating fragmented or eligibility-restricted services. Physical and attitudinal barriers, including inaccessible transportation and limited accommodations, further compound exclusion.
- **Societal Level**: Broader systemic issues such as discrimination, racism, ageism, and policy disincentives reduce labor market inclusion. Youth with disabilities may avoid employment altogether to maintain access to necessary subsidies, benefits, or health supports.

Despite these challenges, many YWD show strong motivation to succeed. However, meaningful inclusion remains contingent on access to tailored, consistent, and culturally responsive supports.

Enablers to Employment

Literature highlights critical enablers across all levels:

- **Individual & Relationship Levels**: Early development of soft skills and competencies, access to mentors, and encouragement from supportive networks can promote positive employment outcomes.
- **Community Level**: Successful transition strategies in schools, inclusive education models, collaborative partnerships, and continuity of support all foster smoother

pathways to work. In the employment services sector, personalized, youth-friendly, and culturally responsive approaches such as customized job development are most effective.

- **Societal Level**: Policies that mandate inclusive hiring, increase awareness, and fund accommodations contribute to broader cultural shifts. Federal programs that prioritize YWD serve as public examples of inclusion and set the tone for others.

Reflections and Takeaways

Many YWD can succeed in the labor market when provided with early, tailored, and accessible support. Expanding inclusive practices to all youth regardless of disability status can help normalize accommodations and reduce stigma. Efforts should align training and support systems with real-time labor market needs, ensuring youth are both included and equipped for the jobs of the future.

Policy & Program Opportunities

- Tailor supports and services to individual needs, accounting for intersecting identities.
- Address barriers and strengthen enablers across all levels of the socioecological model.
- Engage younger youth early to build confidence and preparedness.
- Design programs that reflect current labor market demands while maintaining inclusive principles.
- Promote collaboration and scale promising practices across sectors.

Research Opportunities

- Invest in intersectional, high-quality Canadian data focused specifically on YWD.
- Expand research into rural, remote, and underserved regions to reflect geographic diversity.
- Explore inclusive program designs that encourage interaction between youth with and without disabilities.
- Study employment-specific challenges, rather than grouping YWD within broader NEET categories.
- Integrate Indigenous worldviews and culturally appropriate frameworks to better support First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth with disabilities.

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Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
2SLGBTQI+	Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex. The plus sign (+) represents all the different, new and growing ways that people might identify with, as well as the ways that we continually expand our understanding of sexual and gender diversity.
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous and People of Colour
BIPOC-D	Black, Indigenous and People of Colour who experience disability
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CEGEP	Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel (General and professional teaching college in English)
CHRC	Canadian Human Resource Council
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
CSD	Canadian Survey on Disability
CSO	Career Service Office
DIAP	Disability Inclusion Action Plan
DSO	Disability Service Office
ESDC	Employment and Social Development Canada
FASD	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IPP	Individualized program planning
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PSE	Post-Secondary Education
SEB	Skills and Employment Branch
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
US	United States
WIL	Work Integrated Learning
YESS	Youth Employment and Skills Strategy
YWD	Youth with Disabilities

Definitions

Ableism is a systemic and structural form of oppression (similar to other forms of oppression such as ageism or homophobia) that stems from the attitude and belief that people with disabilities are inferior and involves discrimination in favour of persons without disabilities and may be intentional or not It underpins individual discrimination and systemic barriers and inequities against people with disabilities. Ableist beliefs include the fear of living with disabilities, as well as the fear of people living with disabilities. It engenders the erasure and invisibility of people with disabilities, which leads to inaccessible places, processes, and groups.[1]

Accessibility/Accessible. According to Article 9 (Accessibility) of the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, accessibility enables people with disabilities to participate fully in all aspects of life, on an equal basis with others, and to access services, employment, information and communications, physical environments, and transportation.[2]

Barrier. According to the Accessible Canada Act, **barrier** "means anything — including anything physical, architectural, technological or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice — that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, sensory impairment or functional limitation."[3]

Disability. According to the Government of Canada, a **disability** "means any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society."[4]

- **Disability type** can vary with people experiencing their disabilities in different ways. People can also have more than one disability. Disabilities can be permanent, temporary or episodic; visible or invisible; congenital or developed. The Government of Canada typically identifies ten overarching types of disabilities with many different disabilities that can be considered within each category. These are: vision, hearing, mobility, flexibility, dexterity, pain-related, learning, developmental, mental health-related, and memory.[5]

- **Disability severity** can vary and is often measured differently. According to the Government of Canada, severity takes into account the intensity of difficulties and frequency of activity limitations caused by disability, with people who have more severe disability experiencing higher difficulty and activity limitations than individuals with less severe disability.[6]

Diversity. Differences in the social identities and lived experiences and perspectives of people that may include race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability and conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered. These personal characteristics are protected grounds under the Canadian human rights legislation.[7, 8]

Equity is defined as the removal of systemic barriers (e.g., unconscious bias, discrimination, racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, etc.), enabling all individuals to have equitable opportunity to access and benefit from the program.[9]

Inclusion. Inclusion is an active, intentional, and continuous process to address inequities in power and privilege, and to build a respectful and diverse community that ensures welcoming spaces and opportunities to flourish for all.[10, 11]

Indigenous. The term "Indigenous" encompasses First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, either collectively or separately, and is a preferred term in international usage, e.g., the "U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." In its derivation from international movements, it is associated more with activism than government policy and so has emerged, for many, as the preferred term.[12]

Intersectionality. The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity as they apply to a given individual or group. Intersectional identities create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.[13]

Persons with Disabilities. A person with a disability(ies), is a person who experiences barriers, restrictions or limitations to their full and self-determined participation in societal or economic activities due to a difference in mobility, sensory, learning, or other physical or mental health experience.[14]

Person-First Language. This is an approach that emphasizes the person rather than the disability when describing persons with disabilities. For example, instead of saying "disabled persons," text would read "persons with disabilities." Not all persons with disabilities prefer person-first language. Some might think person-first language places too little emphasis on disabilities that are important parts of their lives. Others might find person-first language involves too much awkward grammar and phrasing. At the time of this publication, the Government of Canada uses person-first language by convention and will therefore be prioritized throughout this document. [15]

Racialized people. Members of racialized groups are persons who do not identify as primarily Caucasian (White) in race, ethnicity, origin, and/or colour, regardless of their birthplace or citizenship. The term "racialized" is used as a more current term than "visible minority" from the Employment Equity Act (1995).[16]

Youth. The term **"**Youth" tends to represent a fluid age category and is defined as the stages between adolescence to early adulthood, often culturally seen as a transition from dependence toward independence and autonomy.[17] The age classification of youth varies in different contexts and situations. Some literature identifies youth as under the age of 24, whereas others see this age group encompassing anyone under 34 years old. The Government of Canada typically identifies "youth" as being between the ages of 15 and 30, which is the definition this literature review adheres to.[18]

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide the Skills and Employment Branch (SEB) at Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) with a summary of the existing literature on the barriers to training and employment faced by youth with disabilities (YWD) in Canada. This report also identifies promising practices and enablers that can be used to better support YWD on their employment journey.

This report will begin with an overview of YWD inclusion in the Canadian labour market, a brief description of ESDC's Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) Program and the need for this research. A description of the research methodology will then be included that outlines the research questions, the scope and approach to the research, and the activities used to validate and present findings. The report will subsequently summarize the key findings through the lens of the sociological model and explore how these findings relate to the Canadian context, as well as the need for future research in this area.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Youth with Disabilities in Canada

Definition: Youth With Disabilities

Summary: The term "Youth with Disabilities (YWD)" is used throughout this report to describe a diverse group of individuals across Canada with varying backgrounds and experiences with disability. This report draws on definitions from the Government of Canada to broadly define this term. For the purposes of this research, YWD in Canada are:

- Between the ages of 15 and 30
- Living with at least one disability as per the Government of Canada's definition of disability

The 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) reported that of the over 7 million youth living in Canada between the ages of 15 to 24, approximately 20% identify with having at least one disability (just over 1.4 million). YWD in Canada are more likely to be female, have mild disability severity, live with 2 or 3 disability types, and live with mental health and/or learning disabilities.

In Canada, a disability refers to "any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory impairment, or a functional limitation whether permanent, temporary, or episodic in nature, evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society." [19] Definitions of the term "youth" varies across Government of Canada programs and policies, as well as between international bodies such as the United Nations.[20] The ESDC classifies this group as individuals between the ages of 15 to 30.[21] For the purposes of this report, the term "youth with disabilities (YWD)" is used to refer to those who are between the ages of 15 and 30 and live with at least one

disability as per the Government of Canada's definition of disability. Because of the varied definitions of YWD within Canada and globally, some literature referenced in this report may refer to younger youth (e.g., 15 to 24) or older youth (e.g., 25 to 30). This report will try to differentiate between these age groups and specify age range when it makes sense.

The 2022 Canadian Survey in Disability (CSD)[1] reports over 1,400,000 youth between the ages of 15 to 24 identify with having at least one disability, making up 20% of all youth in Canada.[2] This is the largest increase in disability rate over the last five years amongst all age groups, with the 2017 CSD reporting that just 13% of youth in Canada lived with at least one disability in 2017.[22] In 2022, the CSD reported that the majority of YWD are living with mild disability and are living with two to three disability types (Figure 1 and 2).[23]

Figure 1. Disability severity amongst YWD in Canada aged 15-24 (Source: CSD 2022)

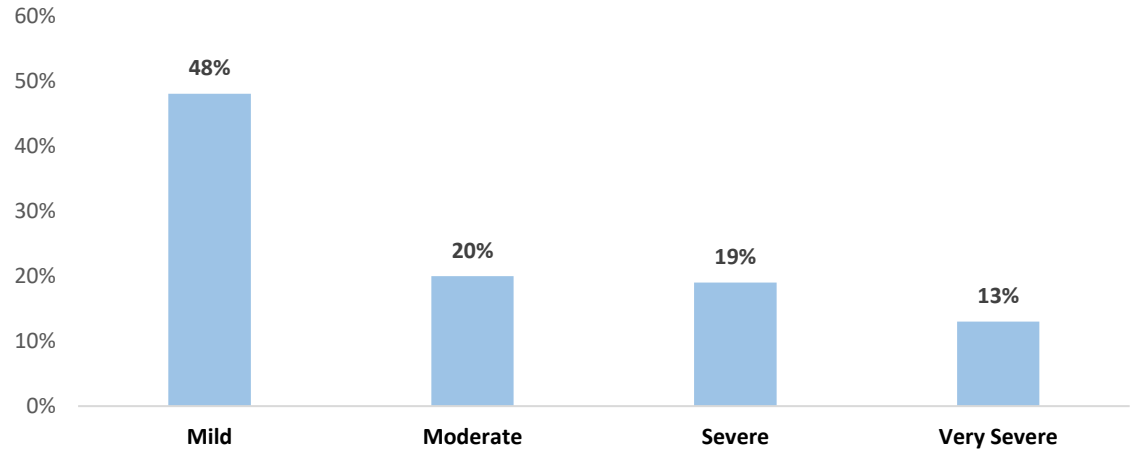
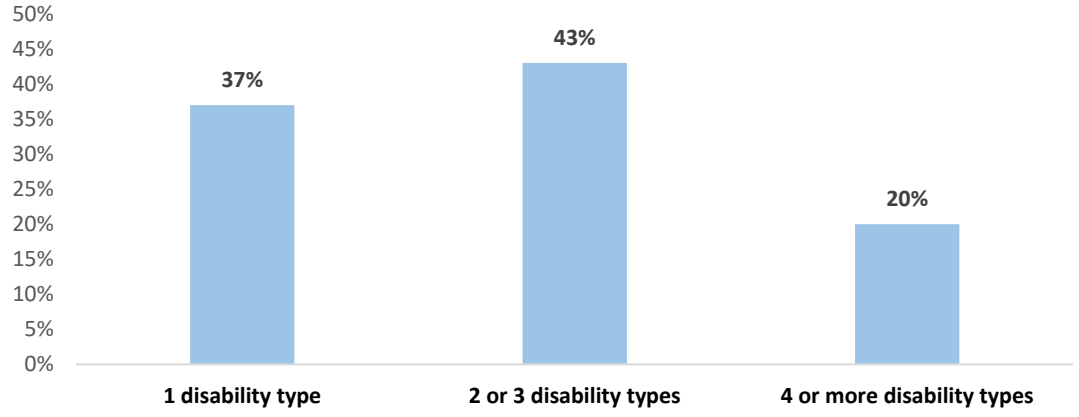


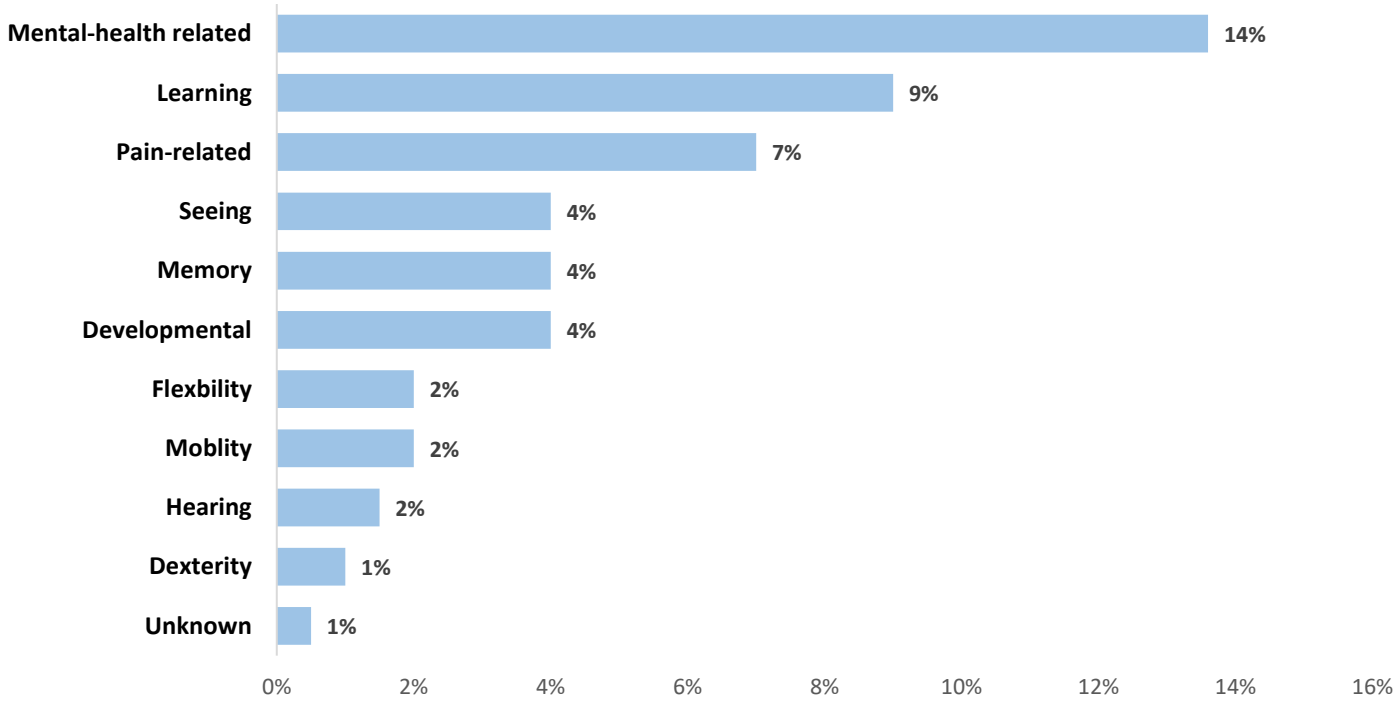
Figure 2. Number of disability types amongst YWD in Canada aged 15-24 (Source: CSD 2022)



[1] Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) is the official source for the disability rate among the Canadian population and provides insight on the lived experiences of persons with disabilities.
[2] Although this report refers to YWD between the ages of 15 and 30, the CSD is the highest standard of information about YWD in Canada and reports its findings within the age category of 15 to 24 years of age. To understand characteristics of YWD in Canada, the CSD is referenced throughout this section.

The most common types of disabilities among YWD in Canada in 2022 were mental health-related disabilities (14%), learning disabilities (9%), and pain-related disabilities (7%) (Figure 3).[24] The 2022 CSD highlighted a notably higher presence of mental health-related disabilities in female youth between the ages of 15 to 24, when compared to their male counterparts, with one in five female youth having a mental health-related disability comparted to one in ten male youth.[25] Since 2017, the rate of mental health-related disability among female youth has doubled, which reflects the largest increase in mental health-disability rates over the past five years. [26]

Figure 3: Type of disabilities amongst Canadian youth aged 15-24 (Source: 2022 CSD)



Data from the 2016 and 2022 CSD and Census also demonstrated the following trends:

- A higher proportion of female youth (25%) in Canada live with a disability than male youth (16%).
- 15% of YWD in Canada between the ages of 18 and 34 are also racialized youth.[27]
- 8% of Indigenous youth indicated that they are living with a disability.[28]
- While YWD have similar poverty rates as to youth without disabilities, YWD are over twice as likely to live in poverty (12%) compared to seniors with disabilities (5%).
- Almost two thirds (63%) of persons with disabilities in Canada who reported being a 2SLGBTQI+ person were between the ages of 15 and 34 years old, with their median age substantially younger than their non-2SLGBTQI+ counterparts (29 years compared to 56 years).[29]

1.2.2 Labour Market Inclusion and Educational Engagement of YWD in Canada

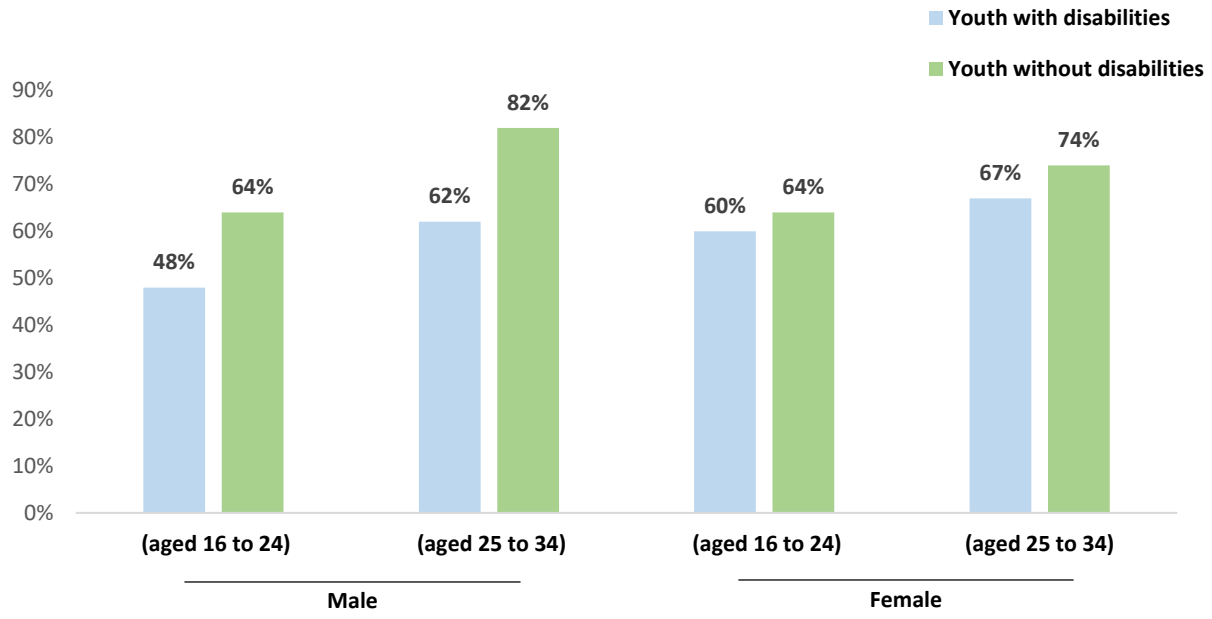
Engagement of YWD in Employment and Education

Summary: There are over 114,000 YWD in Canada who have the ability to work but are not in school, nor are they employed. The employment rate is lower among YWD comparted to youth without disabilities, and this trend is seen across all age groups and genders. YWD between the ages of 18 and 24 are also less likely to attend any level of schooling (e.g., high school, post secondary school) compared to youth without disabilities. Data shows a strong association between disability severity and attainment of education or employment for youth, where youth living with higher severities of disabilities experience a lower employment rate. The 2022 CSD outlined some of the unique challenges that YWD face in their transition into post-secondary education or employment. In particular, the 2022 CSD highlighted that YWD have a higher prevalence of mental health-related learning disabilities compared to older, working-age adults with disabilities.

Labour Market Inclusion

According to the 2022 CSD, over 114,000 YWD in Canada are neither in school nor employed and have the potential to work.[30] However, the employment rate among YWD is lower than youth without disabilities, which holds true across age and sex (Figure 4). [31] When the data is disaggregated, it is evident that the employment rate among male YWD between the ages of 16 to 24 is lower compared to their female counterparts (Figure 4).[32] Findings from Statistics Canada in 2018 indicated the majority of the YWD (87%) in the labour market and not employed live with a mental health-related disability, a learning disability, or both. [33]

Figure 4: Employment rates of YWD in Canada and youth without disabilities by age and sex, 2022 (Sources: 2022 CSD and 2022 Labour Force Survey)[34]



Educational Engagement

In terms of education, the most recent sources (2017 CSD and the 2016 Census) reported that generally YWD aged 18 to 34 were less likely to attend any types of schooling (e.g., high school, post-secondary school) compared to youth without disabilities.[35] YWD who are female were more likely to engage in any education (35%) than male YWD (32%).[36, 37] Several additional trends were identified from literature related to YWD and engagement in education, such as:

- Unlike the general trend, Indigenous YWD (aged 18 and 34) were more likely to attend any type of schooling compared to Indigenous youth without disabilities.[38, 39] Within this group, Indigenous YWD were more likely to attend elementary or high school (31%) compared to Indigenous youth without disabilities (20%), but they were less likely to attend a trade school, college, CEGEP (39% vs 47%).[40, 41] These statistics highlight the barriers to post-secondary education faced at the intersection of Indigeneity and disability. No further context was available as to why this disparity exists.
- Racialized youth were more likely to attend any school compared to non-racialized youth, irrespective of having a disability or not (44% for both groups).[42, 43] However, racialized YWD were more likely to attend elementary or high school (18%) than racialized youth without disabilities (12%).[44, 45] This pattern changes in post-secondary and when it comes to the trade school, college or CEGEP education levels, racialized YWD were less likely to attend (37%) than their racialized youth counterparts living without disabilities (40%).[46, 47] This was also true at the university level, as racialized YWD are less likely to attend university (45%) in comparison with racialized YWD without disabilities (54%).[48, 49]
- The three jurisdictions with the highest rate of YWD attending any school were Quebec (40%), Ontario (34%) and British Columbia (32%). In contrast, the two jurisdictions with the lowest rates of YWD attending any school were the Prairies (30%) and the Atlantic region (29%). It is important to note that Quebec also had the lowest disability rate among youth.[50, 51] Of YWD who have post-secondary credentials, a higher proportion specialized in the arts, humanities, social and behavioral sciences disciplines (16%) compared to STEM-related disciplines (7%).[52, 53]

The 2017 and 2022 CDS highlighted a strong relationship between severity of disability and attainment of employment or education among youth, with data showing that the employment rate was lower among youth with a severe disability compared to the employment rate of youth with a less severe disability.[54,55,56] It was also identified that youth between the ages of 15 and 24 with a severe disability were twice as likely to not be in school nor be employed when compared to their counterparts with a mild disability.[57] The 2022 CSD found that the employment rate of young women between the ages of 25 to 34 with a severe disability decreased significantly from 59% to 43%. There was no similar trend found among those with a mild disability.[58]

1.2.2 Government Initiatives for an Inclusive Canada

Disability Inclusion Action Plan

In response to the inequities faced by people with disabilities, the Government of Canada created the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP). Released in 2022, DIAP was designed to improve inclusivity, accessibility and employment prospects for people with disabilities. [59]

The 5 key objects of DIAP are to: [60]

1. Reduce poverty among persons with disabilities;
2. Achieve the Accessible Canada Act goal of a barrier-free Canada by 2040;
3. Develop a consistent approach to disability inclusion across the Government of Canada and make it easier for persons with disabilities to access federal programs and services;
4. Foster a culture of disability inclusion.

The government of Canada has committed to actions under DIAP that fall within 4 pillars: [61]

1. Financial security;
2. Employment;
3. Accessible and inclusive communities; and
4. A modern approach to disability.

Canada acknowledges that YWD face many barriers to employment that are often compounded by youth's diverse and intersecting identities. Government programs and departments are aligning with DIAP to facilitate an inclusive Canada.

Youth Employment and Skills Strategy Program[62]

ESDC is the department within the Government of Canada that is responsible for developing, managing and delivering social programs and services. [63] The role of ESDC includes the development of policies and programs that promote skills development while supporting labour inclusion and employment equity. [64]

The Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) is a horizontal, Government of Canada initiative led by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and delivered in partnership with 11 other federal departments, agencies, and Crown corporations. The Strategy aims to provide youth (aged 15 to 30), especially those facing barriers to employment, with opportunities to receive employment supports, gain work experience and develop the skills needed to find and keep quality jobs. The Strategy offers a diverse range of programs that support youth at various stages of their employment journeys. This includes Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ), which supports employers to create jobs for youth in not-for-profit, public sector and small businesses in the private sector. The YESS provides a flexible approach to employment services that meets the diverse needs of young Canadians. Eligibility is broad, support can be individually tailored and a diverse range of programs are offered. Through the YESS, the Government of Canada supports the employment goals of young people and addresses gaps across key sectors of the economy. In 2022-23, 25% of youth served through the YESS Program identified as having a disability. As youth across Canada continue to face barriers in the labour market, ESDC aims to improve and update its YESS Program to address these barriers over time.

2.0 About the Research Project

2.1 Need for Synthesized Research

There is growing evidence that highlights the complexity of skill gaps, learning needs and barriers to employment faced by YWD in Canada. It is critical that understanding of this issue is informed by up-to-date research that considers the intersectionality and unique experiences of YWD in the Canadian context. Currently the experiences and perspectives of YWD are not well reflected within program and policy design, as there is a lack of comprehensive and recent data that has been validated by YWD. To address this, there is a need to systematically synthesize research in a way that can identify existing knowledge and gaps in research to inform future research or programming. Using synthesized and validated findings will better highlight the employment journeys of YWD in Canada, allowing for the adaptation of programs and services to be more relevant to their needs and experiences.

2.2 Purpose

The Skills and Employment Branch (SEB) at ESDC contracted Ference & Company to conduct a comprehensive research synthesis which examines the existing knowledge related to the skills gaps, learning needs and systemic barriers to employment faced by YWD in Canada.

The primary purpose of this research is to provide the SEB with a scoping review of literature related to the systemic barriers to employment faced by YWD. This project aims to equip the YESS with a comprehensive understanding of the promising practices that support YWD to enter the Canada labour market and provide recommendations to inform future programming.

The goals is to synthesize existing information about YWD in Canada that prioritizes findings related to:

- Type and impact of barriers to employment and skills training;
- Promising practices and programs, including shared program characteristics that facilitate successful engagement and achievement of employment;
- Current gaps in research particularly surrounding youth intersectional experiences;
- Existence of disaggregated data for youth across ages, regions, identities, type of disability; and
- How existing data can inform future policy and program development.

Findings are recognized to inform ESDC's YESS but may also have applicability to other programs or departments across the Government of Canada.

2.3 Scope and Approach

2.3.1 Scope of Inquiry

The scope focused on data and research related to YWD in Canada between the ages of 15 and 30. Where possible, disaggregated age data was included, in addition to any recent sociodemographic data about YWD in Canada.

The scope of the research was shaped by the SEB's inquiry into existing evidence and emerging insights that can contribute to program and policy changes. Instead of just organizing available research thematically within specific topics, the literature review focused on elucidating the evidence most relevant to inform policy and programming. Furthermore, it explored how data can effectively guide such changes, while also identifying areas where further primary research may be needed to address gaps in evidence.

The researchers adopted an intersectional framework when amalgamating compiled research. This approach included examining variations in experiences among diverse populations and regions, as well as identification of similarities or differences based on distinct characteristics. It also explored how unique identities may require necessary adaptations in the systems or services designed to accommodate divergent experiences. This analysis aimed to elucidate how intersecting identities and barriers impacted experiences of YWD and could inform the design of future programs aimed at addressing their specific needs.

2.3.2 Guiding Questions

This research was informed by three core areas and twelve research questions, as identified by ESDC at the beginning of the project. The core areas of interest shaped the research exploration and analysis, whereas the research questions guided the literature review to ensure adequate achievement of research goals.

Core Areas of Interest
1. Understand barriers that YWD are facing and the impact on their experience trying to enter the labour market; 2. Describe the promising practices and evidence around certain programming/interventions/outreach that might work better than others; and 3. Explore the gaps in research, focused on disaggregated data and intersectional experiences.
Research Questions
1. What employment barriers are YWD currently facing? 2. What employment services do YWD need most? 3. How are YWD accessing services? How would they prefer to access services? How do YWD want to be reached? 4. What barriers stand in the way of youth accessing the services they need, in context of the current labour market situation? 5. How well is the current mix of services meeting needs, what gaps remain to be filled? 6. What services or programs do YWD want to be connected to? 7. What are the promising practices that support YWD in successfully entering and remaining in the labour market? 8. From the perspective of YWD, what do positive labour market experiences look like? How can we measure this? 9. What do well-delivered services look like? How do they work to support youth success? 10. How should the success in the delivery of employment programs be measured to be relevant? 11. What is the extent of the employer's role in training and skills development? 12. How do stigma and discrimination play out in different situations: when YWD apply for a job, during the hiring process and when they begin a new job?

2.4 Methodology

2.4.1 Literature Review

The literature review included a targeted internet search of public records which included a diverse range of sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly journals and grey literature (e.g., Statistics Canada data sets, departmental results reports, public accounts, civil society organization reports, etc.), as well as Canadian news media and social media (blogs, videos). These sources were used to identify actual and perceived needs, barriers and promising practices for employment of YWD. The literature search included a review of references in recent reports, non-governmental organization (NGO) or community-based organization (CBO) evaluations and program documents (e.g., newsletters, learning modules, presentations) to also identify programs perceived as successful in this area and to further explore their shared characteristics.

Search platforms that were used included Google, Google Scholar, PubMed, Research Gate, university websites, NGO or CBO websites (e.g., EARN, Respectability, CNIB, Community Living, Inclusion Canada) and research organization websites (e.g., SRDC, Ference & Company).

A complete list of search terms is listed in Appendix 1. Some of the key search terms include "youth," "employment," "barriers," and "transition." Different combinations of the search terms were used in the literature search. The review prioritized literature published since the year 2000 to include relatively recent findings. The literature review considered intersecting youth characteristics, such as 2SLGBTQI+, racialized/persons of colour, rural/remote, Indigenous, refugee/newcomers/immigrant, disability type, severity of disability, low-income, school status and attainment, age of onset of disability and youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Since two educational transition points exist for youth (one being the transition point from elementary school to high school and second being the transition point from high school to post-secondary), the review contained literature about the unique barriers related to each transition, and how they relate to subsequent employment journeys.

A list of over 200 potentially relevant literature in French and English were compiled. In total, 183 unique references were included in this report due to their relevance to the research project for further analysis and synthesis. Our focus was Canadian literature and NGOs or CBOs, but in some cases where Canadian data was not available, international literature from the United States (US), United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia and other countries were included, as well as systematic reviews that compiled data from low- and middle-income countries that were included to extrapolate findings for Canada.

2.4.2 Analysis/Synthesis

The first step for the research analysis and synthesis was to develop clear and robust research indicators that would reflect the guiding questions and lead the direction of data searches. Ference & Company designed these indicators to support the consideration of intersectional experiences and impacts across different groups and jurisdictions. Ference & Company also

developed a data tracking template to ensure a consistent and reliable review of the literature and facilitate a gap analysis. This approach allowed the project to synthesize information that enabled the development of a comprehensive and reliable understanding of research data and gaps. Subsequently, Ference & Company developed a concise report outline to illustrate the research areas. The two overarching research questions that emerged were:

1. What are the enablers to employment for YWD and best practices?
2. What are the types and impact of barriers to employment for YWD?

These two questions guided the research analysis and synthesis. Relevant literature was imported into NVivo (a software program used in qualitative and mixed-methods research to help users organize and analyze data from sources, such as, interviews, survey responses, journal articles, social media and web content) for qualitative analysis. The analysis was then reviewed using a grounded theory approach to determine a set of codes to elicit key themes that emerged from the collected data. Throughout the analysis and synthesis, the socioecological model (see Section 2.3.3) was leveraged to help organize and make sense of the findings, as well as situate the interactions between barriers and enablers that affect YWD's access to the labour market. As a final step, Ference & Company derived key conclusions within the Canadian context using a synthesis approach that categorized literature as "stronger" or "weaker". Literature that had more robust evidence (e.g., systematic reviews), compared to others (e.g., blogs or articles that were not authored by YWD or peer reviewed) was prioritized. In instances where there were data gaps related to the Canadian context, extrapolations using international data were made.

The methodological approach for this study was considered through a GBA Plus and intersectional lens. The methodology centered diverse groups and the impact of sociodemographic characteristics on the experiences of youth within literature. The data collection utilized an ongoing gap analysis to ensure inclusion and representation of data about diverse populations (when and where possible), and analysis considered how findings varied between and within sociodemographic characteristics. Addedly, validation was conducted by youth with lived experiences to ensure findings were reflective of their opinions.

Intersectionality
The complex and cumulative way in which systems of inequality such as race, class, and gender create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

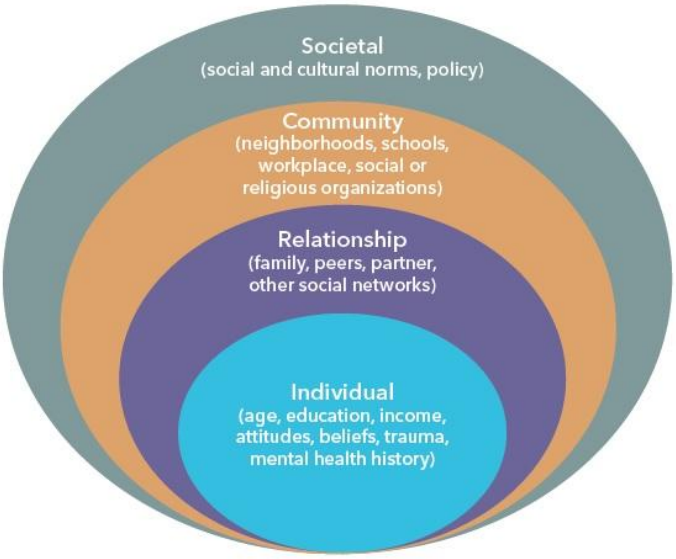
GBA Plus
A rigorous approach to analysis of systemic inequalities that acknowledges how diverse characteristics influences the way people experience policies, programs, and initiatives.

2.4.3 Socioecological model

It is recognized by researchers that the development and well-being of children and adolescent are contingent upon interacting biological and environmental factors including family, community, sociocultural, economic and political influences, as well as the services and structures that surround them, that affect their development and life course.[65] Frameworks have been developed to help illustrate these dynamic and interconnected factors in the life of children and adolescents, one of which is the socioecological model. This model is used by the World Health Organization to understand why some subpopulations are at greater risk of violence and to ensure prevention strategies are linked to underlying causes and risk factors.[66] It can also be used to illustrate the importance of the networks, people and structures that surround a child or adolescent to support their optimal development.

The socioecological model was selected to act as a framework for this research analysis and synthesis on YWD and their engagement with the labour market. This approach allowed for an exploration of the interconnected and diverse influences in the lives of YWD in an organized and methodical manner. While there are variations of the socioecological model, the one displayed in Figure 4 was selected by the research team to guide this project, as it complemented early findings throughout the research. More information around the risk and supportive factors that interact with and influence a youth's life at all levels of the socioecological model can be found in Appendix 2.

Figure 5: Visual depiction of the socioecological model used to structure analysis/synthesis of data[67] (Source: Safe States, (n.d.) Socioecological Model for Driver Safety)



2.4.4 Data Validation with YWD

To ensure the relevance and accuracy of findings, results were validated through direct engagement with YWD and relevant community-based staff to understand their experiences in the Canadian labour market and how those experiences did, or did not, align with findings from the literature review. Using an intersectional approach, the main purpose of this exercise was to talk with YWD and integrate their insights and feedback into the final report.

As part of this process, Ference & Company facilitated four (4) roundtable discussions between November 15 and December 8, 2023. The four sessions included the following stakeholder groups:

1. Community Program Staff (n=3 participants)
2. YWD (n=2 participants)
3. YWD (n=2 participants)
4. YWD (n=2 participants)

Additionally, written feedback was received from two (2) youth participants.

In total, feedback was received from eight (8) YWD and three (3) community-based program staff.

A complete overview about these sessions including recruitment, delivery and characteristics of participants can be found in Appendix 3.

Throughout the report, additional information and insights provided by YWD and community-based staff can be found in BLUE BOXES.

2.5 Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations and biases that emerged throughout this research process. These limitations may affect the generalizability of findings; however, a series of mitigation strategies were put in place to minimize impact of limitations and increase data validity.

Limitations	Mitigation Strategies
Mission Creep: Due to large scope and broad research questions, there may have been a shift in goals and inclusion criteria during the review to ensure findings captured intended objectives.	Provision of a clear outline related to methods for searching, screening, appraisal and synthesis.
Lack of Comprehensiveness: Due to large scope and broad research questions, it is possible not all relevant articles have been identified to support key findings.	Use of multiple bibliographic databases/languages/sources of grey literature to compliment and validate findings.
Canadian/Youth Generalizability: Much of the research on employment barriers for youth is either conducted outside of Canada or focused on adults; therefore, there may not be conclusive evidence to make claims related to Canadian youth.	Use of research/literature outside of Canada and focused on adults was collected and analyzed to extrapolate findings based on what we know about Canadian youth generally.
Deficit-Based: Due to the inherent focus on barriers through the design of the research project, the literature review may have overlooked data that focused on strengths.	Added search terms related to enablers and facilitators to ensure literature review captured various perspectives of YWD. Based section of findings on best practices and data needs inherently relevant to strengths.
Age Range Positioning: This research defined youth as ages 15 to 30, while much of the literature takes on a different scope (e.g., youth ages 18 to 34; or youth ages 15 to 24).	Literature with different youth age scopes as close to 15 to 30 as possible were included in the literature review and findings were extrapolated.

3.0 Findings

Research findings are presented in two sections. The first section focuses on the type and impact of barriers to employment for YWD while the second focuses on best practices and facilitators. Both sections use the socioecological model (described in Section 2.4.3) to structure findings within the context of individual, interpersonal, community/institutional and societal levels. This approach helps to present findings in a structured manner and highlight the dynamic interplay of factors affecting labour market inclusion of YWD.

3.1 Type and Impact of Barriers to Employment for Youth with Disabilities

This section describes the intricate web of employment barriers faced by YWD in Canada, drawing on the socioecological model to support a comprehensive analysis.

3.1.1 Barriers at the Individual Level

This section presents findings about the impact of individual-level barriers on YWD. Canadian data suggests YWD with multiple individual-level barriers have greater difficulty obtaining employment.[68] However, the literature review found few Canadian reports sought to understand YWD employment barriers with an intersectional lens to any large extent. Where possible, the following sections are supplemented with data from international research to extrapolate findings about YWD in a Canadian context. Available Canadian literature about employment and intersectionality focused primarily on YWD's age, socioeconomic status, ability/disability, gender and ethnicity. The intersect of employment and YWD newcomer status, Indigeneity, or criminal justice involvement appeared to be the least explored by Canadian literature.

From the Roundtable Validation Sessions:

YWD who participated in the validation sessions agreed with the individual level findings provided in this section and provided contextual anecdotes from their personal experiences to highlight the ways that individual level factors act as barriers to employment.

Community program staff who work with YWD also agreed with the findings of the individual level barriers and helped to further contextualize challenges perceived amongst the youth they serve. For example, one community program staff expressed how employers often view YWD as a monolithic group despite their individual diverse experiences and backgrounds. This program staff shared that disability is predominantly seen as a White, wheelchair user and advocacy efforts should move towards recognition that disability is very diverse and experienced uniquely.

Age

Literature indicated that all youth, not specific to YWD, face unique challenges engaging with the labour market based on their age. For example, younger youth looking to engage the labour market have had less time to attain relevant experience or develop skills needed to enter the

workforce.[69] They may also have less availability to work given school or academic commitments and tend to have a higher reliance on friends and families to access workplaces (e.g., needing transportation to/from work). [70] For these reasons, youth are often limited to entry-level jobs and are the most exposed when the economy is affected, leading them to be "last in, first out" of the labour market.[71] An international scoping review that looked at ageism in the workplace found that younger workers, regardless of disability status, feel more discriminated and disadvantaged due to their age compared to older workers.[72] Among youth, age discrimination was also found to be highly correlated with being a young women, especially in regards to pay and benefits.[73]

It can be expected that YWD face many of the age-related challenges that impact all youth, and it is likely these barriers are exacerbated as much of society is not well designed to be responsive to disabilities. When examining Figure 4 at the beginning of this report (page 4) it is evident that YWD are employed less frequently than youth without disabilities across age and gender. Addedly, younger YWD (aged 15-24) are less likely to be employed in Canada compared to their older counterparts (aged 25-34). Research suggests YWD are not given the same early work experiences as youth without disabilities as there are barriers to accessible experiential opportunities which help YWD develop skillsets desired by many employers.[74] For example, a 2021 Canadian study showed strong evidence that students with disabilities are less likely to participate in work integrated learning (WIL) opportunities such as internships, fieldwork, or service learning. This was described as partly due to uncertainties around needed accommodations for participation and especially impacted students with mental-health disabilities.[75] This research also suggested that disabilities can create a greater reliance on friends and families to provide support with accessing employment and experiential opportunities. International literature also reported that once in the workplace for the first time YWD are less likely than youth without disabilities to receive second chances if they are unsuccessful in a new role, limiting the ability of YWD to explore their career options.[76] Consequently, YWD may be labelled as unemployable by those around them and prevented from trying to further engage employment opportunities as they get older.[77]

Another important age-related finding from literature was the existence of agism facing youth who seek employment as a form of discrimination. Agism can also further compound with other barriers such as ableism, contributing to the employment barriers of YWD (described further in Section 3.1.4).[78]

Socioeconomic Status

YWD in Canada have similar poverty rates[3] (12%) compared to youth without disabilities; however, are over twice as likely to live in poverty compared to seniors with disabilities (5%).[79] Canadian data suggests low-income varies by disability type, regardless of age. For example, in 2014 the low-income rate was 17% for persons with a physical or sensory disabilities, 27% for persons with a mental or cognitive disabilities, and 35% for persons with a combination of both.[80] Canadian literature also identified a complex and bidirectional relationship between

[3] Canada's poverty rate was 7% in 2021, with the median market income of families and unattached persons being $61,700.

youth poverty and disability, with a positive correlation between the two. This means that at the same time youth experiencing poverty are more likely to have a disability; YWD are more likely to live in poverty.[81, 82]

Canadian research found that YWD who live in poverty are less likely to receive or access supports that can facilitate meaningful employment such as health services, housing stability and necessities such as food or identification compared to youth from higher income families.[83, 84, 85] Low-income YWD may also face added financial barriers to labour market inclusion that are unique to their disability, such as the cost of accessibility supports not covered by employers (e.g., specialized gear or transportation) or the potential that their income will inhibit or decrease existing disability-related financial supports.[86, 87] Poverty also limits the potential for youth engagement in skill-building and employment preparation activities that often require monetary or in-kind investments such as volunteering, unpaid internships, further education, trainings or starting businesses.[88] Research also suggests that low-income YWD are more inclined to take jobs without much potential for advancement or job security, as they may not be in a financial position to decline paid employment.[89] Statistics Canada data from 2019 indicated that there is a wider pay gap for older age groups in comparison to younger age groups, as well as a wider pay gap for YWD in comparison to youth without disabilities. For example, among younger workers (25 to 34 years), YWD earned 14% less than youth without disabilities.[90]

As YWD, particularly younger YWD, often live with family members it is important to acknowledge that household incomes for families with YWD in Canada are typically lower than household incomes of other families.[91] There are a variety of reasons for this including how families with YWD work fewer hours or less lucrative jobs to provide needed care at home, or how two-income families reduce to one-income so a parent can care for their child.

From the Roundtable Validation Sessions:

One of the YWD participants agreed that socioeconomic status was an important intersecting identity when understanding the realities of YWD in the labour market. They noted how a person's socioeconomic status can act as a catalyst for discrimination within the workplace, which may be perceived through their physical characteristics and attire. In the quote below, this YWD reflects on the unspoken dress code at their workplace and shares their perspective on how people treated them when dressing in a way that made them feel comfortable.

> "I cannot tell you how many times I received comments about the way I was dressing. I prefer to dress in things that are comfortable, and it comes down to the socioeconomic status piece. A lot of peers in my research group were coming from affluent homes, and (in this employment space) there were arbitrary lines of professionalism."

Despite many employers requiring some level of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) training during the onboarding processes related to working with persons with disabilities, this individual felt that there was an irony in how there was an emphasis on EDI in this workspace but in practice discrimination felt frequent and acceptable.

International literature reports a relationship between household income and vocational identity development for some YWD. For example, a systematic review about socioeconomic status and youth on the autism spectrum shared results from five papers that found YWD from lower income households[4] are less likely to engage in paid employment compared to their higher income peers.[92, 93] Another study explored the role of family in career development for youth with learning disabilities and identified that YWD from lower-income households are less likely to experience influential family relationships, support and advocacy, career aspirations and intentional career-related activities compared to higher-income households.[94] For instance, youth (not specific to YWD) in the United States whose parents had not attended college were less likely to attend college themselves and when they did, they had a higher chance of feeling marginalized.[95]

Gender and Sexual Orientation

As displayed in Figure 4 on page 4, male YWD in Canada have a lower employment rate in comparison to female YWD. It is worth noting that the literature examining barriers to employment for youth at the intersection of gender and disability reveal that both male and female YWD experience disability-related employment barriers differently (e.g., gender-based pay discrimination).[96] A 2018 study explored experiences of 23 youth aged 18 to 25 with physical disabilities in Ontario and found notable gendered differences in the way YWD experienced discrimination in the workplace. For example, young men with physical disabilities felt the need to hide their disability and were reluctant to ask for help due to masculine stereotypes (see quote below), while young women with physical disabilities felt an increased need to self-advocate and "sell" their abilities to potential employers.[97]

"No one really knew about my condition…I didn't talk about it too much because it was my own thing…People knew I was wearing [orthotics] because they're noticeable. People would ask and I would just, make stuff up, but I wouldn't really tell them what the problem was…I never really talked about my problems to anyone. I kept things to myself…I just wanted to talk to someone that wouldn't judge me as much…Guys don't really talk about their problems. They just want to solve them themselves."

- Male YWD, Ontario (Lindsay, et al., 2018)

Participants in this study working full-time were more likely to be male than female.[98] However, two Canada-wide government surveys conducted around the same time noted a higher rate of employment for female YWD compared to male YWD. The contradictory nature of these findings illustrates how employment rates for YWD in Canada can differ between and within respondent groups.[99, 100]

There was limited employment-specific research done within Canada that looked at the experiences of YWD who identify outside of the male and female gender binary. One article

[4] Please note data comes from a systematic review of over 40 papers (mostly within the US), with indicators that identify low-income varying, but often ≤ $25,000 USD.

from the University of Ottawa explored the experiences of transgender YWD in society but was not specific to employment or the workforce. This article highlighted how identity and oppression experienced by transgender youth are inseparable and it is important to acknowledging this when reflecting on the subject.[101]

A national survey conducted by Statistics Canada in 2021 found that nearly one-third of Canadian 2SLGBTQI+ persons are under 25 years old.[102] Literature suggested that 2SLGBTQI+ youth (not specific to YWD) are overrepresented amongst youth in Canada experiencing unemployment and receiving social assistance.[103] Yet, there appears to be limited data that focuses on the employment experiences of YWD as it relates to sexual orientation. Non-age specific Canadian literature suggested employment outcomes differ amongst those who identify as 2SLGBTQI+ compared to those who identify as heterosexual or cisgender. For example, a 2021 Canadian study showed that gender diverse employees (not specific to YWD) were 2.2 to 2.5 times more likely to experience discrimination and workplace harassment than their cisgender male coworkers.[104] Other differences in labour market outcomes also exist between 2SLGBTQI+ groups and their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts (not specific to YWD). For example, 2SLGBTQI+ groups have on average a lower number of hours worked per week, lower rates of full-time work, and higher unemployment rates.[105, 106]

Non-age specific Canadian sources suggested there are higher levels of educational attainment amongst gay, lesbian and transgender individuals (not specific to YWD) compared to their heterosexual or cisgender peers.[107, 108] Recent data from the 2022 CSD confirmed this trend amongst people with disabilities, highlighting that 2SLGBTQI+ persons with disabilities 25 years and older are more likely to hold a bachelor's degree or higher compared with non-2SLGBTQI+ persons with disabilities. A Government of Canada report released in 2020 indicated that post-secondary students with disabilities (including heterosexual and 2SLGBTQI+ students) face higher rates of discrimination (24%) based on their sexual orientation or gender identity compared to those without disabilities (13%).[109]

From the 2022 CSD, the Government of Canada was able to produce stratified data about 2SLGBTQI+ persons with disabilities for the first time in history.[110] Findings indicated that almost two thirds (64%) of persons with disabilities who reported being a 2SLGBTQI+ person were between the ages of 15 and 34, meaning 2SLGBTQI+ persons with disabilities are younger on average than their non-2SLGBTQI+ counterparts. These findings also highlighted that 2SLGBTQI+ YWD have higher proportions of mental health-related disability, more co-occurring disabilities, and more severe disabilities than non-2SLGBTQI+ persons with disabilities.[111] This type of intersectional research helps create an understanding of the unique experiences and needs of the 2SLGBTQI+ YWD population in Canada and is vital to have available when planning ways to increase labour market inclusion of these youth. While there remains a lack of Canadian literature on the intersectional employment experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ YWD, it can be hypothesized from the literature previously outlined that this group would experience the compounded effects of discrimination and marginalization when seeking employment.

Ethnicity/Race

In 2022, the Government of Canada funded a participatory research project that explored the employment journeys of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour with disabilities (BIPOC-D), regardless of age.[112] This report included experiences of four BIPOC-D youth who shared experiences of "invisible labour" within confines of White privilege and ableist employment environments. Findings from this study suggested that BIPCO-D job seekers may engage in code-switching to convince employers that they can "fit in" at the workplace; this includes changing their accents, keeping up with Canadian culture, anglicizing (or "Whitewashing") their names and masking or camouflaging behaviours to conceal their disability. The quote below was from a YWD who participated in the study.[113]

"[…] I'm just the same as anyone else…But the reality is, especially for BIPOC, for disabled folks, or any intersection of marginalization, it often takes way more labour before and after that time to get to that spot in a way than for someone who experiences more privilege, they might not have to deal with that pre-labour and post-labour of what it takes to get to that center spot."

BIPOC-D Job Seeker, Ontario (Diversity Works, An Exploration of the Employment Journeys of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour Who Experience Disability, 2022)

Available research outside of Canada indicated that racialized YWD have poorer school and work outcomes compared to White YWD, with researchers hypothesizing a root cause of "double discrimination" due to the dual identities of disability and ethnicity.[114, 115] Based in Canada, a CivicAction report further described the structural discrimination racialized youth and YWD experience, sharing perceptions that employers may have such as assuming lack of proper attitude, work ethic and motivation to attain entry-level jobs.[116] Canadian literature also found that newcomer youth (not specific to YWD) face hostility in both the Canadian education system and the labour market due to variety of factors that include race, language, culture and other identity factors. Generally, there appeared to be limited Canadian research at the intersection of youth, race/ethnicity and disability status. For example, a 2022 scoping review conducted by Canadian researchers explored the relationship between race, ethnicity and school/employment outcomes among YWD; however, cited no Canadia-based research.[117]

Substance Use

Substance use related disorders make up the most all-age disability-adjusted life years[5] in Canada.[118] Youth in Canada between 15–24 years of age are reported to have the highest rates of substance abuse or dependence compared to all other age groups, with alcohol being their most commonly used substance followed by tobacco, cannabis and opioids.[119,120] Few articles explored substance use amongst YWD in Canada and rather focused on people with mental/physical illnesses more broadly, making it challenging to draw meaningful conclusions related to the experiences of YWD. Research from the United States showed youth with

[5]Disability-adjusted life years (DALYS) are a universal measure of years lost due to premature mortality or years of life lost due to time lived in states of life less than full health, One DALY represents the loss of one year of full health.

intellectual disabilities have lower prevalence of alcohol and illicit drug use; however, also have disproportionally high rates of dependence amongst those who do use substances.[121]

The impact of substance use on labour market inclusion for young people (not specific to YWD) appeared to be varied. For example, one study showed work stability was not associated with alcohol or drug use among marginalized groups of youth; however, other studies found that problematic substance use (which may be diagnosed as a substance use disorder) impacts functions critical to successful employment such as loss of interest in activities, disorganized thinking, reduced problem-solving performance and social isolation. [122, 123, 124]

Skills and Competencies

Both Canadian and international literature suggests that the development of individual skills and competencies can positively impact employment for both youth with and without disabilities. Barriers related to the development of skills and competencies appear to be two-fold. Internally, how YWD perceive their own skills or competencies is integral to subsequent employment success. It has been found that societal pressures and standards influence YWD's internal perceptions and can create barriers in the form of negative mindsets such as not believing that they have sufficient preparation or experience to enter the workforce. Externally, opportunities for YWD to develop skills and competencies is important for job seeking; however, research indicated a variety of external barriers to accommodating avenues for this growth and development.[125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130]

In addition to technical or job-specific skills, literature found employers highly value soft skills (such as communication, adaptability, or empathy) when seeking out job candidates.[131] The societal standards for soft skills may present employment barriers for YWD, where evidence suggests that a lack of soft skills is a top barrier to employment amongst youth who face multiple barriers to employment.[132] For example, an American study found that youth with severe disabilities experienced employment challenges that included adapting to change, remaining professional on the job ("everything from hygiene to personal space") or asking for help ("I had a student yell at a supervisor because they were asked to do something they didn't know how to do.").[133] Canadian literature also found that YWD are perceived to be at a disadvantage due to the growing emphasis on soft skills and pliability in the workforce, which is conducive to employment discrimination (described further in section 3.1.4).

Having skills and competencies related to the job search was also a barrier identified in literature. For example, a study based in British Columbia highlighted many equity-deserving youth, including YWD, feel limited by not having an updated resume, lacking employer references, doing poorly in job interviews and not knowing how and where to look for work.[134] An adjoining study that focused on a group of 11 youth with mental-health related disability in British Columbia found that participants were concerned that their employment history of disjointed or inconsistent work would hinder their ability to gain employment.[135] In 2013, the Mental Health Commission of Canada surveyed 323 Canadians (not specific to YWD) and identified major challenges for those with mental-health related disability returning to work was having long gaps in employment, as well as the difficulties that arise in writing resumes and

answering interview questions about employment histories as a result of gaps related to mental illness.[136] It can be expected that similar challenges that these individuals face may also be experienced more broadly by YWD who have gaps in their employment history.

Ability/Disability (Type, Severity)

Canadian and international literature highlighted how the type and severity of disabilities can impact barriers to employment.[137, 138] In Canada, people with less severe disabilities have educational attainment levels similar to people without disabilities and these two groups have similar employment rates.[139] Contrastingly, youth with multiple disabilities or more severe disabilities are less likely to be employed and have greater difficulty finding employment.[140, 141, 142] For instance, a study looking at small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Canada found that people (not specifically youth) with both cognitive *and* physical disabilities experience greater difficulty in finding work than those with either a cognitive *or* physical disability.[143] A national study from the United States found that youth with severe disabilities had lower employment rates; however, if they were perceived to have strong communication and self-care skills they were more likely to report having paid employment, indicating perceptions and judgements at the interpersonal level may play a role.[144]

Different types of disability were also found to create different barrier to labour market attachment. An advocate for YWD employment in Canada who lives with hearing and vision loss shared how unique challenges to labour market attachment varied depending on the individual disability. They shared examples of unique needs, such as the need to take more time to complete tasks, concentration difficulties as a result of pain and fatigue, having eye strain when reading, not being able to read small font print or have bright lights in the workplace, experiencing sensory overload during meetings, needing to take time off work to go to medical appointments and manage their health and not working quick enough on a "bad day".[145, 146] In Canada, data shows higher employment rates amongst YWD who have mental health-related disabilities compared to other types of disability.[147]

Attitudinal and Belief Systems

Canadian and American data on YWD, including one article focused on NEET youth, were aligned regarding how personal attitudinal and belief systems can be a major barrier to employment. Personal attitudinal barriers such as low self-esteem and anxiety were found to be negatively correlated with employment of YWD. For example, a person's low confidence has a strong negative effect on them getting employed and as confidence increases, the likelihood of getting employed increases as well.[148, 149, 150] YWD were also found to be limited by internal fear of stigma, rejection and discrimination;[151, 152,] low expectations for working and self-sufficiency;[153] and being intimidated by the job search process.[154]

Factors at a societal level can shape an individual's attitude and belief, resulting in the occurrence of "internalized ableism," where persons with disabilities internalize negative sentiments from peers and society which influences how they view themselves and how they believe others view them. [155, 156] Literature from around the world points to how this phenomenon can create employment barriers for YWD.[157] In one example, a Canadian study

undertaken at Carleton University described how young girls with disabilities in Vietnam felt inferior and had negative feelings about their disability.[158] From this study, a YWD said:

"Occasionally, I feel inferior because I am different. I sometimes do not have much self-confidence."

-Moon, Youth with Disability (TDKRA Project, Carleton University, 2022)

This study went on to describe other examples of how negative self-perception extended to employment, such as where a YWD tried various jobs but could not do them because they were scared and felt they were not smart enough to do the work. In another example of internalized ableism, a UK YWD wrote about their personal experiences with attitudinal barriers, and how YWD feel the need to over-perform to show they are capable of the job to show they can be on a level playing field with their colleagues without disabilities and to return the favour of being employed in the first place. Although it was challenging to find data on YWD in Canada and their experiences with internalized ableism, it can be presumed this group face similar barriers.

Indigenous Status

Statistics Canada shows that Canada's Indigenous population is very young in comparison with age distributions of non-Indigenous Canadians.[159] Previous work by the OECD estimated 350,000 Indigenous youth in Canada will turn 15 years old between 2016-26, which provides an unprecedented opportunity to invest in job and skills training as well as employment readiness.[160] Canadian research published in 2019 and leveraging the Labour Force Survey indicated Indigenous youth (aged 20 to 24) are nearly twice as likely to be NEET compared to non-Indigenous youth (23% vs. 12%).[161] Subsequent research also showed Indigenous status as having significant effects on the likelihood of youth being NEET in their early 20s.[162] Despite this, information about the labour market interests and needs of Indigenous youth across appears to be limited, with employment data more often referring to Indigenous persons of all ages. Literature mentioned in this section, along with other important narratives in this field, allude to distinct barriers for Indigenous youth engagement with the labour market such as financial and geographical challenges, along with systemic structures such as racism and discrimination.[163] Further data should be gathered about the unique needs of Indigenous YWD in reaching their labour market goals.

Criminal Justice Involvement

In 2014, Statistics Canada police-report data showed that young adults between the ages of 18-24 had the highest rates of criminal offending of any age group.[164] According to the 2017 Developmental Disabilities Toolkit (a Canadian resource) there are very few studies specifically about YWD involved in the justice system.[165] However, it was suggested that the prevalence of youth with developmental disabilities or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in the Canadian corrections system is higher than their counterparts without disabilities.[166] A Toronto review paper identified specific and significant challenges to employment for youth who have experience with the criminal justice system.[167] Though information on barriers to labour market inclusion for YWD involved with the criminal justice system is limited, criminal justice

involvement is identified generally to be a barrier to youth employment and would be expected to impact YWD similarly.[168, 169, 170]

From the Roundtable Validation Sessions:

A community partner participant emphasized during the validation sessions that they see significant barriers for YWD within criminal justice systems through their work, which disproportionately affect Indigenous youth. Navigating the justice system and labour market simultaneously was described as a huge challenge for those involved.

3.1.2 Barriers at the Interpersonal Level (Family, Peers, Social Networks)

At the interpersonal level of the socioecological model, literature suggests that youth's personal relationships such as their family, peers and social networks influence their labour market inclusion. It is important to recognize that YWD often have a unique composition of interpersonal relationships and social networks compared to youth without disabilities. To contextualize these differences, a 2015 study interviewed 30 youth with/without disabilities in Toronto and highlighted findings between the two groups:[171]

- More youth without disabilities (94%) took part in extracurricular activities compared to YWD (50%).
- All youth without disabilities were independent with going out on their own, able to navigate public transportation and/or had a driver's license (100%) compared to 57% of YWD.[6]
- Most youth had volunteer experience (100% of youth without disabilities and 86% of YWD), with most youth without disabilities having already completed their volunteer service hours (a requirement of high schools in this region). YWD mentioned struggling to find volunteer placements or said their school did not expect them to complete their volunteer hours.

Literature identified negative attitudes, limited social capital, reliance on family and finite peer influence negatively impacts the ability for YWD to access and engage with the labour market. These barriers are described further in this section.

Negative Attitudes and Misconceptions

Negative attitudes and misconceptions about the employment capabilities of YWD amongst family, friends and the community can create barriers to youths' ability to gain meaningful employment. Literature from Canada and the United States identified contributing negative attitudes such as:

- Discouragement from friends and family for YWD to search for employment;[172]

[6] Note that although no youth-specific data was identified, it is estimated that 20% of people with disabilities in Canada use regular public transportation such as train, bus or subway (Statistics Canada, 2006).

- Overprotection from family related to concerns that YWD will be challenged to perform in the role or will experience workplace harassment/discrimination;[173, 174]
- Low expectations from parents that YWD is capable of working or becoming self-supporting.[175, 176, 177, 178]
- Unrealistically high expectations from parents which the YWD cannot fulfill;[179]
- Concerns from parents about the safety of YWD at work or when going to work;[180] and
- Reluctance or fear from community members encountering YWD in the workplace.[181]

Encouragement and support from youths' touchpoints, such as family, peers or service providers can positively impact labour market attachment in the earlier years of life. Touchpoints influence YWD who are likely to follow the guidance of their immediate networks at a young age.[182] Not having a network of positive touchpoints who are engaged with the labour market creates barriers for YWD who may not have supports to help them feel prepared or capable to enter employment.[183] For example, a common barrier for YWD when contemplating employment is the risk of social rejection by their peers.[184]

Social Capital and Connection

A 2022 Canadian study that surveyed over 300 youth from equity-deserving populations, including YWD, found that YWD engage more frequently with their social networks and less frequently with community programs, services and supports.[185] Literature further suggests that less community involvement creates barriers for YWD to develop community-based social capital which can facilitate employment opportunities. For example, the Canadian Disability Foundation found that YWD are likely to lack community connections compared to youth without disabilities, which is a common factor leading to reduced employment. Additional research found that YWD in Canada may have fewer connections linking them between school, peers and work compared to their peers without disabilities, hindering YWD's ability to network with potential employers and cause them to be perceived by employers as less engaged in "typical" networks that they may consider a target audience[186] Canadian literature on YWD and NEET youth further indicated that barriers to networking and connecting with potential employers contributes to difficulty in gaining employment.[187, 188] Achievement of social capital and engagement with the community also provides opportunity for the development of soft skills such as self-confidence or self-advocacy as described in section 3.1.1.

Role models, especially those whose sociodemographic background is reflective of youth, have an important role in influencing the pursuit of employment. When there is a lack of diverse representation within the workforce, there are less role models and mentors available for YWD to look up to.[189] A lack of diversity in certain industries dissuades diverse groups from seeking employment in those industries.[190] This impacts many equity-deserving populations; for example, research in Canada found that Indigenous peoples, members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, Black and other racialized people are significantly underrepresented on company boards in the public and private sectors due to complex and systemic barriers at multiple levels, including discrimination.[191]

Family Dynamics

Family dynamics can be particularly complex for YWD and impact labour market inclusion in different ways. For example, multiple studies found that YWD often have family caretaker responsibilities, such as looking after dependents or younger siblings, which takes priority over employment. [192, 193, 194] Other youth, particularly younger youth (e.g., under the age of 24), may rely on family members to help them with transportation or the financial implications of job seeking (such as commuting to/from work, purchasing relevant equipment or accommodation, etc.). Addedly, research suggested some families of YWD may lack the capacity or knowledge to advocate for the accommodations or services that would help set the YWD up for success at a workplace.[195] A lack of immediate family involvement can present barriers to youth employment opportunities; however, overinvolvement from family members can also create barriers for YWD. For example, a US study showed some parents of YWD push for their child to pursue jobs that do not match their strengths or interests and may be overinvolved in the job seeking process, limiting youth independence or successful employment.[196] The quote below helps to illustrate this barrier in the Canadian context.

"There are youth that have very protective parents who might have sheltered them and that goes for students with disabilities. We get calls from parents saying, 'Why isn't my son employed? He's fantastic!'…You have to break it to the parents that you're not doing them any favours by going with him to the interviews, by calling employers and sending their resumes."

Employment counselor, #5 (Lyndsay et al., 2015)

3.1.3 Barriers at the Community Level (Education, Employers, Employment Agency)

The community level of the socioecological model examines the influence and relationships between systems that are involved in the training and employment pathways of YWD in Canada such as education, the workplace, and employment agencies. YWD experience common barriers within education, workplaces, and employment agencies; however, there are also many distinct challenges in each of these systems. Common barriers are often centered around physical and social restrictions such as access to accommodation and transportation, or negative attitudes and stigma. This section provides a deeper understanding of community level barriers within and across education, the workplace, and employment agencies.

From the Roundtable Validation Sessions:

YWD and community partners both agreed with the community barriers identified below within education, employment, and employment services. One community partner even felt the educational barriers were understated, as they present significant challenges to YWD.

Education

Extensive literature has been published that explores educational barriers and challenges experienced by students with disabilities. When reviewing the research, it was recognized that students with disabilities may not be akin to YWD, as someone can be a student at any age. For example, the Canadian Human Rights Commission identified that across Canada, over 30% of people with disabilities take fewer courses per semester at post-secondary, often taking longer to achieve their desired educational goals (excluding in Saskatchewan and the territories).[197] Additionally, the barriers associated with entering public school or transitioning into post-secondary are not akin to barriers associated with successful education achievement. This distinction is made further below and is important when considering key barriers to the development of skills and competencies needed for YWD to join the labour market.

Inclusivity in schools and equal opportunities

Canada is considered a leader in inclusive education on the global stage with pockets of excellence implemented across the country. Progress has not been uniform across Canada and parts of the country remain entrenched in the traditional models of special education as opposed to the "inclusive education model."[198, 199] The inclusive education model is considered a best practice globally and integrates YWD with youth without disabilities in regular classroom settings at public schools up to grade 12.[200, 201, 202] For example, the province of New Brunswick has a fully inclusive education system, where all students participate in a common learning environment. Comparatively, the education system in Ontario has segregated placements for YWD and both Alberta and Quebec are recognized to have outdated special educational practices given the recent developments in this area.[203, 204, 205, 206] The practice of segregating students with special education needs in primary or secondary education has been found to create negative outcomes because these classes receive reduced curricula and students lack access to a full diversity of school activities.[207] A recognized challenge to the implementation of inclusive education is that education is the responsibility of the provincial/territorial governments meaning there is no federal department or standard to promote this model.[208, 209] Inclusive Education Canada (n.d.) estimates that less than 50% of students with some type of intellectual and developmental disabilities are in inclusive classrooms across the country. In a recent report, Inclusion Canada and Inclusive Education Canada called for more inclusive and equal education policies across the country, sharing several statements made by the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities such as:[210]

"I am concerned that most provincial and territorial policies are yet to implement fully inclusive education systems and that students with disabilities in other parts of Canada may receive considerably different levels of support. I was informed that many children with disabilities are still being taught in segregated classrooms or in special education schools, and I received worrisome reports that children with disabilities can be put on partial school days or temporarily removed from school, for periods of up to six months without access to education."

Ms. Catalina Devandas-Auguilar, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2019)

According to the 2012 Canadian Survey on Disability, approximately 10% of persons with disabilities across Canada report having stopped their education or training due to their disability (this is the most recent data available). The proportion was especially high for persons with disabilities in British Columbia (14%; and lowest in Saskatchewan (9%)). Similarly, more than 25% of persons with disabilities across Canada reported being excluded at school due to their disability. This proportion reaches more than 30% in the Atlantic provinces (34%), Ontario (38%), Manitoba (32%), Alberta (35%) and British Columbia (37%).

In 2017, the Canada Human Rights Commission indicated that many jurisdictions across Canada have been closing specialized education centres for persons with disabilities.[211] There was a strong debate around the effects of these closures and its anticipated impacts amongst students and YWD of varying backgrounds. For example, although many advocates are supportive of the full integration of YWD in regular public schools and classrooms, others claim that sufficient and effective services to accommodate these students are unavailable in typical classroom settings outside of these special education centres. The Deaf community, for example, has stood up against these closures, stating that there would be a more distinct gap in education delivered in Sign language for students without these centres.[212]

Youth with certain types of disabilities may not have access to the accommodations and assistive technology required to fully participate in the classroom at the same pace as their peers. For example, for students who are visually impaired, textbooks with graphics and equations can be costly to convert from transcription to Braille and are rarely available in alternative formats.[213] Depending on the quality of the source material and the scanning method (e.g., documents that have been previously photocopied, are handwritten, have multiple columns, tables, figures or equations), there are challenges to convert files with existing software.[214] Some students may be able to work with their educational institution's disability resource office to request digital versions from publishers or to have print versions scanned into digital formats, but this process can be long and complex, causing students to fall behind in course readings.[215] YWD encounter many barriers to fully participate in education and training, which can be further exacerbated by the lack of access to accommodations for their specific needs.

Students with disabilities and their families who live in remote locations or on Indigenous reserves face additional barriers as services required are often not available in their home communities.[216] These students may be forced to travel long distances or to move to access the services needed for inclusive education. Another Canadian report further highlighted challenges faced by Indigenous youth who have been, and are still being, impacted by the intergenerational trauma of colonization and discrimination in the education system,[217] which compounds with disability-specific barriers faced by Indigenous youth who have a disability. Gaps in educational funding continues to exist for Indigenous youth living on reserve and in Northern regions of Canada compared to the non-Indigenous population.[218, 219] For example, Inuit youth have high educational dropout rates which can present challenges to training youth for the labour market.[220]

In post-secondary education (PSE) YWD also face barriers to inclusivity and equal opportunity, especially given many post-secondary institutions are not prepared to accommodate students with diverse impairments. For example, A 2018 national study across Canada found inclusion efforts in the post-secondary environment have lagged behind the evolution of the student experience and are limited to the academic (classroom and online learning) environment and not extended to the experiential learning opportunities outside of the classroom.[221] There appears to be room for improvement in terms of accessibility and inclusion in the co-curricular, professional development and WIL spaces.[222] It was determined through cross-Canada consultations that there is a general lack of understanding within the post-secondary environment about the intersectionality and use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiated instruction and essential requirements for courses, programs and disciplines. This gap extended further to how these types of pedagogies and their application may relate to accessibility and individual student learner pathways.[223.] Many post-secondary institutions have been found to be inadequate in supporting students from equity-deserving groups, such as YWD, who may lack the social capital, experience and skills needed to be included in WIL programs, such as co-op. These programs are often more costly and frequently associated with programs where women and other equity-deserving groups are less represented (such as engineering).[224] Addedly, the amount of hands-on learning required in science or engineering programs can be significant as there is numerous laboratory components involved. Some institutions have been able to support their students with disabilities, as is illustrated by a case study that showed a student with low vision being able to use a specialized portable video camera and a liquid-crystal display monitor to magnify objects during laboratory sessions to fully participate in coursework.[225] Overall, YWD in Canada have been found more likely to choose arts and humanities programs, which often are lacking in co-op placement opportunities.[226]

Pathways for continuity/transition

The transition from high school is a critical period of youth development where youth are exploring their self-identities, discovering their adult roles and building their independence.[227] After high school, YWD are more likely to experience social isolation, reduced social participation and high unemployment rates compared with youth without disabilities.[228, 229, 230] These transitional periods are identified as a precarious time when YWD are transitioned away from their established circle of care providers to a new set of health care providers and services.[231]

YWD can face multiple barriers after high school along the pathway for continuity in their education and towards employment. A report from the United States indicates that YWD are less likely to graduate from high school, less likely to attend college, and for those who do start college, they are less likely to complete their education.[232] Canadian data mirrors this trend and suggests a lower education attachment and attainment among people with disability.[233] For example, a national analysis of the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability found that 40% of youth with developmental disability and 18% of people with any disability did not complete high school across the country, compared to only 10% of people without disabilities.[234]

When a youth's educational and employment pathways are disrupted, there can be significant long-term impacts on their career and income.[235, 236] Transition planning is identified throughout literature as an important and beneficial step to educational success, and encourages involvement of family and other stakeholders to support continuity.[237] Especially when started earlier in life (i.e., as early as elementary school), successful transition planning into post-secondary for YWD has been shown to improve college enrollment, self-determination, self-confidence, social and vocational self-efficacy, autonomy, social support, career exploration and transition skills.[238, 239] Most provinces and territories have policies to guide the transition process which typically involve various Ministries (e.g., British Columbia's Department of Education developed a *Cross Ministry Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Special Needs,* Alberta's transition planning is addressed in Chapter 8 of the Learning and Teaching Resources Branch's document *Individualized program planning (IPP): ECS to grade 12,* Nunavut does not have a specific transition planning policy, but the topic is addressed in the policy *Foundation for Inclusive Education Inuglugijaittuq in Nunavut Schools*); however, some do not, and it can be a challenge for YWD to smoothly transition into further education, and subsequently into work and community life.[240]

The Government of Ontario Education Technical Sub-Committee created a report about challenges experienced in their educational system when supporting the transition from Grade 12 to PSE for student with disabilities.[241] The seven main challenges they identified highlight gaps across the provincial education system to create consistent and tailored transition planning for YWD, including:

1. Lack of consistency when planning transitions;
2. Lack of understanding between the K-12 and PSE systems;
3. Difficulty during transitions for Indigenous students (between First Nations boards and communities and provincially funded school boards);
4. Lack of a consistent and clear process (and required documentation) to obtain accommodation supports;
5. Lack of a clear support process for students who do not have individualized education plans, as not all students have this plan;
6. Lack of integration of transition planning; and
7. Financial difficulties related to reassessment for YWD in the transition from K-12 and PSE.

Availability or accessibility of educational accommodations

In some cases it can be a challenge for YWD to access educational accommodations, which creates barriers to their school success and causes negative downstream effects for employment.[242] Students with disabilities experience a greater "cognitive load" compared to their peers without disabilities, that comes from navigating life with disabilities within an educational system that is not always accommodating.[243] This extra mental energy may include thinking through the logistics of transportation or accessible housing, managing rehabilitation services relevant to their PSE experience, managing access to assistive technology and/or

appropriate medication, accessing accessible format materials, learning to use assistive technology and interacting with others about their education-related accommodations.[244] Post-secondary institutions should take into consideration the student's lived and intersectional experiences within and outside of the educational system such as the additional time, energy and effort required to navigate a disability, which may negatively impact educational experiences.[245]

A systematic review of literature from multiple countries pinpointed barriers to accommodation in PSE which included, but were not limited to, disability disclosures, risk of stigma and discrimination and a lack of information about potential supports or how to access them.[246] Another challenge included the requirement from some post-secondary institutions for students to provide documentation about their disability to receive academic accommodation, possibly presenting barriers for students who do not fit within a standardized definition of disability but would still benefit from supports.[247] For example, a study of Ontario universities identified various barriers faced by YWD to attain documentation about their disability, particularly in cases where assessments must have been completed within the last 3 to 5 years with adult-normed measures. [248] YWD who could afford learning disability assessments before their high school graduation were found to have different disability labels from YWD who could only afford learning disability assessments with the assistance of bursaries during post-secondary.[249] Additionally, assessments that use current or more robust psychometric measures can conclude that students who were identified with a learning disability in primary or secondary school may have another disability or do not have a disability at all, potentially leading to a loss, decrease, or change of accommodations once they enter PSE.[250]

The impacts of barriers surrounding accommodation requests was illustrated by one study involving YWD at Queen's University in Ontario, where most (86%) participants received six fewer accommodations on average during their PSE compared to what they received in high school.[251] A 2021 study conducted an environmental scan of 55 Canadian post-secondary schools to identify employment and/or WIL services and resources advertised online for students with disabilities. The study found that 40% of post secondary institutions had no reference to disability supports for any career-related activities, and only 18% referred to disability supports for WIL.[252]

In an important case study from 2017, the Canadian Human Rights Commission identified post-secondary accommodation for mental health-related disabilities and learning disabilities as an emerging issue in Canada.[253] As part of the study, some jurisdictions found accommodation-related complaints were increasing amongst students with disabilities. While there may be increased awareness about mental health in Canada, individuals with mental health-related disabilities and learning disabilities are still facing many barriers to access education, including a lack of services and adequate accommodation due to insufficient funding, stigma and discrimination.

From the Roundtable Validation Sessions:

YWD who participated in the validation sessions suggested that youth who did not have access to wraparound supports at a younger age or who lacked social infrastructure may not be equipped with the language or information about which accommodations are available or needed (i.e., "you don't know what you don't know"). For example, YWD who are diagnosed later in life and pursuing accommodations for the first time through their academic institution may be asked to provide proof of diagnosis and submit a formal request from a medical practitioner in order to access services and supports. One youth participant with disabilities shared:

> "My undergrad university needed my family doctor to fill out a letter, but the doctor wanted to know what accommodations are needed but I had no idea what academic accommodations were available. You don't know what you don't know. In post-secondary education, often professors don't know what to do when you need accommodations."

Internal capacity

An environmental scan on the trends of collaboration between Disability Service Offices (DSOs) and Career Service Offices (CSOs) in post-secondary institutions found that DSOs and CSOs are successfully collaborating across Canada. [254] However, capacity challenges, such as from a lack of financial resources or inadequate staffing, affect these relationships and impact the ability for offices to support YWD.[255] Trends suggest DSOs run into challenges providing academic accommodations for a growing student population with disabilities, while CSOs frequently face staffing challenges when trying to provide more targeted services to students with unique barriers, such as YWD.[256] As another example of capacity challenges, the Canadian Human Rights Commission highlighted concerns around being able to fully accommodate YWD in classrooms more broadly, as class sizes increase and funds for specialized supports and accommodations decrease (such as less educational assistants in the classroom).[257]

Employment

Social and physical barriers

YWD in Canada face a multitude of barriers to employment, including both physical and social barriers. Employers often perpetuate social barriers through negative attitudes, misconceptions and stigma surrounding disabilities.[258] Literature points to employer barriers such as concerns about liability, cost, efficiency, performance, as well as their limited knowledge about how to support employees with different types of disabilities who are seeking meaningful employment.[259, 260, 261] Canadian and international literature on youth and YWD describe different ways discrimination (e.g., ableism) by employers impact young people including pay discrimination, workplace harassment, reluctance to hire, social exclusion, lack of job supports and more.[262, 263, 264] Furthermore, the intersecting identities of YWD results in compounding discrimination such as ageism or racism, and YWD who are part of equity-deserving groups are more likely to encounter this added discrimination when seeking work.[265, 266] These social barriers are often rooted in far-reaching systems and structures, and are further explored in section 3.1.4.

Physical barriers can impact a YWD's ability to access employment and appears to disproportionately affect younger youth and those with physical disabilities. For example, younger youth are less likely to afford public transit and may not be old enough to have a license, limiting the geographic reach of potential job opportunities.[267, 268] Physical barriers can also include infrastructure limitations when accessing buildings or using transportation if a job is in-person.[269] Youth (not specifically YWD) in Canada face added barriers in rural areas and small communities where there is a lack of available public and affordable transportation to attend job interviews or commute to work. Infrastructure challenges in more rural areas may also include responsiveness to heavy snowfalls in the winter which can create challenging landscapes for people with physical disabilities.[270] YWD also experience barriers aside from architectural or structural, such as communication with employers. For example, a person with visual disability may be prevented from reading or completing an application due to the size of printed materials, or they may have difficulty reading inaccessible directional signs in a building, locate landmarks, or spot hazards.[271] As another example, a person with an intellectual disability may face obstacles to understand information not presented in plain language, or a person who is hard of hearing may not hear information provided to them if the speaker is not facing them.[272] The way technologies, including assistive technologies, are set up for YWD may present further barriers if not designed with consideration of accessibility.[273]

Ability to gain meaningful experience

During youth consultations, the Government of Canada heard that there is lack of opportunities for youth to gain real world experiences, such as those that allow them to explore job options and gain meaningful understanding of career opportunities. [274] This can be particularly challenging when youth are making early-stage career decisions and deciding what field of work to pursue. First jobs are less structured compared to a school environment and it can be hard for youth to succeed in these roles. Initial negative experiences within employment can lead to some youth believing the career they originally had in mind was not the right one for them.[275] In addition, there are fewer potential job opportunities for YWD due to of the inaccessibility of WIL or trainings in their younger years. This is thought to be exceptionally challenging for YWD, who are often presented with less opportunities to acquire soft skill experiences throughout their education. Section 3.1.1 describes barriers to acquiring soft skills and work experience further within the Skills and Competencies section.

Barriers throughout the job search process

YWD also experience barriers throughout the job search process (e.g., from the identification of potential work to being hired in a role). Literature on this topic suggests YWD experience barriers at different stages of the job search such as identifying jobs that can accommodate or suit their skillsets and attaining information about positions.[276, 277, 278] Youth and those with less education are disproportionately represented in low quality and part-time or temporary jobs, with the quality of jobs being defined by the income and benefits, career prospects, work intensity, working-time quality, skills and discretion, and social environment.[279] YWD or those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may experience a sense of urgency during the job seeking process and are more likely to accept the first job they are offered, which can have

potentially negative implications for long-term career development.[280] Furthermore, it has been cited that people with disabilities experience higher exposure to precarious and non-unionized work than those without;[281] however, recent research published by Statistics Canada (2023) contradicts this previous literature, stating that there is no correlation between being in a union or covered by a collective agreement and disability status.[282] As an example of how barriers to the job search can vary by disability type, literature found people with episodic disabilities have difficulty identifying work that can be balanced with income support programs; caught between being "too disabled" to sustain continuous employment but "not disabled enough" to meet criteria for income supports.[283, 284]

From the Roundtable Validation Sessions:

During the validation roundtables, a YWD shared that the recruitment process can feel discriminatory based on the need to adhere to or 'mask' social norms, such as body language and speech. Specifically, arbitrary or abstract interview questions in the recruitment process may not be as clear to individuals that are neurodivergent. For example, being asked to answer situational questions with no real-world application can be difficult to navigate, as the YWD describes below:

> "If you manage to get an interview then you end up with the situational questions like 'if you were stuck on an island…' and they have hidden answers that nobody teaches you about, they don't like the answers you give. My experience is as someone who is autistic and has ADHD. Neurotypicals require mind reading for questions that have no logical basis and just by existing, people think there might be something weird or off about you."

Note: Masking, or camouflaging, refers to the ways in which individuals who are neurodivergent employ strategies and behaviors to cope with the everyday social world, thereby "camouflaging" or suppressing their natural responses. See: Amy Pearson and Kieran Rose. "A Conceptual Analysis of Autistic Masking"

Availability or accessibility of employment accommodations

YWD also experience barriers to the availability and accessibility of employment accommodation. A 2018 Canadian survey of over 140 YWD identified the biggest barriers to accessing job accommodations and health benefits were (in order of highest to lowest percentage of respondents): requirement to disclose disability (77%), accommodation cost (74%), job duties unable to be accommodated (68%), negative attitudes towards employees with disabilities (65%), employer awareness of disability (63%), lack of enforcement to accommodation policies (62%) and absence of formal management policies (61%).[285] Additional research further explored the barrier around disability disclosure to access accommodation, which found "forced" disclosure in the workplace created fear of a hostile work environment, fear of being discriminated against, and lack of support for YWD to be successful in the workplace.[286, 287, 288]

Employment Services

Eligibility restrictions

Literature identified eligibility restrictions for employment programs as a barrier for YWD to access these important services. For example, a 2019 study found that Newfoundland and Labrador had very structured and rigid eligibility criteria for employment programs that supported people with disabilities. The study described these restrictions as being "inappropriate" and were perceived as placing unnecessary access criteria on needed programs.[289] These inappropriate restrictions included:[290]

- An IQ cut-off criteria for youth with intellectual disability, which was not suitable for all YWD who required services due to varying IQ levels;
- A diagnosis of disability, which was not representative of YWD due to inconsistent nature of episodic mental health episodes;
- Full-time admission to program, which was not feasible for YWD who could not practically work full-time hours.

During a CANAssist youth survey, a YWD described their perspective on the barriers presented by full time programs:

"Employment programs in my area demand 6–8 hour days 5 days a week for an extended period of time, which is emotionally and physically inaccessible to me due to the workload. Further, I attend 4 crucial medical appointments a week, and would not be able to attend any of them if I were participating in an employment program."

Youth with Disability (Survey), CANAssist Youth Survey Report (2022)

Barriers related to eligibility restrictions were mirrored across Canada, although varied by province/territory as programs often comply with regional policies. For example, a British Columbia based study identified similar findings to those from Newfoundland and Labrador and highlighted additional challenges such as how YWD felt confusion around eligibility requirements, especially where participants had invisible disabilities (such as chronic pain and mental health-related disabilities) and were unsure how to "prove" their need for services.[291] This study also revealed that some YWD felt their disability was not seen as severe enough to access services, by both others as well as themselves (i.e., internalized ableism). For instance, YWD between ages 16-25 with mild to moderate mental health-related disabilities are ineligible for services in the adult community-based health system, as it only serves people with severe conditions.[292] Despite feeling like they need help, these eligibility restrictions create uncertainty around how to ask for support.[293] YWD without a diagnosed disability also face the challenge of finding accessible employment programs, as programs generally have strict eligibility for who they can serve based on their funding.[294] Common requirements include having a formal disability diagnosis, being between ages 12 to 24, and being out of school.[295] The section on Educational Accommodations presents more information about barriers to attain a disability diagnosis.

Internal capacity, coordination and continuity of care

YWD are prevented from achieving success within employment programs when employment providers lack the capacity to provide needed services. For example, a study in Newfoundland

and Labrador identified many inclusive employment services that do not offer resources for people with mental health-related disabilities (compared to other types of disabilities).[296] A Canadian study highlighted that employment programs are often siloed and narrowly focused. For example, they either target youth in general or those with mental health-related disabilities, but rarely have capacity for both, creating isolation and disconnect within the continuity of care (despite mental-health related disabilities being common amongst youth).[297] As another illustration of the impact of disjointed wraparound supports, one study suggested that when organizations focus on "survival issues," such as homelessness, addiction or poverty in isolation from employment issues, dependence on income support programs for youth is prolonged.[298] Further, a British Columbia study found that YWD notice when employment services lack community wide consistency and coordination.[299] As a result, available services feel very fragmented and targeted to adults, which creates difficulties for both employers and youth job seekers when trying to navigate these networks of organizations.[300] A notable challenge to coordinating employment services, particularly within government departments, are the privacy policies surrounding information sharing which protect the ethical and legal rights of clients. YWD in Canada felt disjointed services were a barrier to access employment programs, as there can be too much unnecessary work when trying to find and access the services that they need most.[301]

Physical, social and structural restrictions

Similar to accessing employment, physical and social barriers can create challenges for YWD in Canada to engage with employment services and programs. Literature identified barriers such as virtual programming formats, geographical location of the program, transportation availability and a limited number of employment services for YWD.[302, 303] The below quote provides an illustrative example from a YWD related to geographical location/transportation:

"The grid system in [British Columbia] doesn't work in everyone's favour. Technically I live in one city, but I am just a street over from the next which makes it hard to access help in my area because transportation is twice as long."

Youth with Disability (Survey), CANAssist Youth Survey Report (2022)

Social barriers to YWD involvement in employment programming included the lack of visibility for available resources and support services, as well as scheduling conflicts with the programming offered as highlighted earlier in this section (i.e., medical appointments and employment services are typically offered between 9 and 5pm Monday to Friday).[304, 305]

In British Columbia, a survey identified that Indigenous and newcomer/refugee YWD were more likely than other YWD to indicate that employment supports were helpful; but that they did not feel they were receiving sufficient culturally sensitive supports from this programming.[306] There was no further insight provided for rationale; however, structural discrimination can play a role in the limitations of culturally available supports and services. Social, economic and political power imbalances can enable structural discrimination to occur and these power imbalances are often overlooked. They become societal norms and are routinely perpetrated by institutional systems, whether unintentionally or intentionally.[307] Structural discrimination

manifests in law, internal regulations and procedures of private and public institutional systems, and in professional practice.[308] Racial stigma and structural discrimination were found to have the potential to traumatize YWD who come into contact with service providers, and create further disconnect in their willingness to re-engage services.[309] This is discussed further in section 3.1.4.

3.1.4 Barriers at the Societal Level

The last level of the socioecological model situates barriers experienced by YWD within broader structures such as political, environmental and societal. These barriers inhibit YWD employment in different ways and can compound the impact of the many barriers discussed throughout this report. For example, how societal systems affect YWD's ability to gain meaningful employment is influenced by the rest of the socioecological layers, such as individual characteristics, relationships and access to institutions such as education, employment and employment services. As societal factors penetrate each level of the socioecological model, the barriers in this section have already been described throughout the previous sections of the report. This section examines these constructs together and explores associated literature more fully.

From the Roundtable Validation Sessions:

YWD and community partners agreed with the findings at the societal level. Community partners added that even where there are efforts to reduce implicit biases and improve policies, they do not see a streamlined approach, thus leading to fragmentation of effort.

> "Everyone's working on different aspects of prioritization. They still don't understand the impact of these barriers and how they're stacked against job seekers."

Another community partner expressed that legislative and policy reform is important to pursue moving forward; however, they felt these efforts need to be from "cradle to grave," meaning that efforts to address systemic barriers from younger ages of 0-15 will impact those 15-30 (youth), and so on.

In addition to the societal barriers identified by literature, YWD shared several other barriers, which are presented at the end of this section.

Discrimination

Discrimination against YWD transcends spheres of society, including health, education and the labour market.[310] YWD experience ableism (the discrimination of, and social prejudice against, people with disabilities) in various ways along the pathway to employment which negatively impacts their labour market inclusion. Notably, the prevalence of ableism appears to be more pronounced among younger age groups compared to older generations.[311] For example, one Canadian study found more YWD worry about facing stigma if they disclose their disability status to a new employer compared to older populations who may acquire age-related disability after establishing strong connections with employers. Older populations may also be

more comfortable with disability disclosure after having more experience with it over the years.[312] A blog by a Canadian youth described how fear of discrimination can create a mindset amongst YWD that they are not capable to perform at a workplace because of their disability; yet, not disclosing prevents youth from asking for workplace accommodations that can help them perform the job tasks to the best of their ability.[313] This type of discrimination is often deeply ingrained in the labour market, with biases that stem from a lack of understanding about disabilities.[314, 315, 316] Studies show that the impact of workplace ableism on YWD can include pay discrimination, lack of job supports, social exclusion, job turnover and discrimination allegations or charges.[317]

Many YWD also face intersectional discrimination, a term which recognizes that people's lives involve multiple interrelated identities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities identifies the "the difficult conditions faced by persons with disabilities who are subject to multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic, Indigenous or social origin, property, birth, age or other status."[318] Intersecting discrimination, such as racism or sexism, likely pose a significant challenge for YWD and limit their employment opportunities and growth.[319, 320, 321] There is research ongoing in Canada with the objective to remove barriers and disparities for YWD, particularly for marginalized and racialized youth.[322]

Disincentives to Working and Accessing Employment Services

Some Canadian policies and subsidies appear to act as disincentives that keep YWD from accessing employment services and pursuing work opportunities. A notable barrier for YWD is the incompatibility between government disability subsidies and participation in funded employment services. For example, a study involving people with disabilities (not specifically youth) highlighted how the interplay between provincial and federal social assistance systems can impact one's eligibility for employment services, and vice versa.[323] Youth receiving financial assistance may be hesitant to engage in employment services if doing so jeopardizes their eligibility for income support. Youth often rely on a variety of income sources and are therefore more wary to transition in or out of employment services to avoid income loss.[324] It may be prudent for the design and funding of employment programs to consider their compatibility with other income support mechanisms designed for persons with disabilities in Canada.

Similarly, some literature expressed concern that combined loss of income-tested benefits and disability support may outweigh earnings from work; thereby also acting as a disincentive for people with disabilities, discouraging them to enter or re-enter the workforce.[325] Studies also showed that the requirement for extended health services and drug coverage can further propel people with disabilities (not specifically youth) to leave the labour market in order to meet eligibility requirements for government-funded drug coverage.[326, 327, 328] While existing information highlights disincentives to work experienced by people with disabilities, the literature lacked insights into these disincentives as they relate to YWD transitioning to the age of majority.

Labour Market Environment

A recent report on youth (not specifically focused on YWD) shared that the state of the Canadian labour market is conducive to barriers for attachment due to the prevalence of precarious employment and overqualification for available jobs.[329] It is forecasted that by 2030, millions of workers across Canada will need to change careers due to technological advancements that will disproportionately impact entry-level positions traditionally available to youth within sectors such as food services, tourism, accommodation and retail sectors.[330] Uncertainty about the evolving nature of work, precarious part-time/temporary employment and limited availability of employment opportunities may prove to be especially challenging for youth who are often relegated to low-paying entry-level jobs with limited advancement opportunities.[331, 332] The current labour market has been described as presenting more entry barriers for youth who need to compete against older workers with more qualifications and experience; for YWD, this challenge becomes even more pronounced.[333] Geographic factors also play a role, with high living costs in certain areas deterring YWD from accepting minimum-wage jobs compared to higher paying opportunities unless they have additional support such as the option to live at-home or attain a wage subsidy.[334] There are potential long-term consequences to delayed entrance into the labour market and prolonged unemployment amongst youth and YWD.[335]

COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were less available and secure jobs across Canada as the nature of the labour market evolved to reflect a reduced emphasis on long-term, permanent employment and career advancement. This adjustment made entry-level positions less readily available for youth who were looking to enter the workforce.[336, 337] Challenges to finding employment were further compounded by labour market insecurity, as young Canadians, including YWD, experienced less job security compared to older individuals. This included being more likely to lose work hours, become unemployed or experience income losses as the pandemic accentuated economic vulnerabilities.[338, 339] In 2020, a Statistics Canada national survey reported over half (55%) of YWD aged 15-24 in the study were employed prior to the start of the pandemic compared with 39% who were employed at the time of the study, which represented the largest change in employment rates amongst any age group.[340]

The COVID-19 pandemic also amplified barriers faced by YWD to access both education and employment. For example, studies showed many YWD had to discontinue or postpone their studies as COVID-19 disrupted plans for PSE, especially for youth who were also Indigenous and Black.[341] A Toronto-based study explored these barriers during the pandemic for youth and YWD, with key findings illustrating experiences of YWD such as:[342]

- Difficulty with the transition to online school and work from home (i.e., the expense of setting up a home office, technical challenges, impact on mental health);
- Uncertainty about employment (i.e., under-employment, difficult working conditions, difficulty finding work, disability-related challenges); and
- Missed career development opportunities (i.e., canceled or reduced internships or placements, lack of volunteer opportunities, uncertainties about career pathway, the longer-term impact of the pandemic).

A major concern for youth (not specifically YWD) post-pandemic has been the potentially serious and long-lasting negative implications on their labour-market outcomes due to the pandemic-driven economic shocks. Based on a theory about labour market scarring, past unemployment can lead to long-term poor labour market outcomes, reflected in higher rates of unemployment and lower quality and lower paying jobs.[343] The impacts of labour market scarring can also include losses in earnings potential, setbacks for new graduates, stigma towards resume gaps, reduced equity and social inclusion, risks to well-being, reduced social capital, and further challenges for youth who are part of equity-seeking groups.[344] To mitigate the harmful consequences of long-term labour market scarring on youth, all levels of government, employers, and the community have been encouraged to respond in ways that target different components of economic need.[345] Recommendations for action (as suggested by Canadian literature) include:

- Bridging the opportunity gap through skills development and social capital;[346]
- Supporting a smooth transition into the workforce to reduce the risk of long stretches outside work or education;[347]
- Expanding career support services and access to these services (e.g., counselling and job search assistance) to navigate shifts in the labour market, the structure of the economy, and in-demand skills;[348, 349]
- Creating new opportunities for young people to engage in the labour market following economic shocks;[350]
- Funding long-term evidence generation and infrastructure to measure the impact of programs and design policies for future economic shocks;[351]
- Increasing support and funding to expand summer school and offering tutoring during and after school for K-12 students, while ensuring students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, receive the supports they need to make up for learning losses;
- Encouraging participation in and support for opportunities in education, learning and training, and addressing barriers to participation for non-student youth; and[352]
- Enhancing labour market flexibility and labour mobility (occupational and geographical mobility) to reduce mismatches and improve the skills match with the first job.[353]

From the Roundtable Validation Sessions:

In addition to the high-level findings within the report, YWD described other areas that may present barriers or could serve as areas of further inquiry. These areas include:

- **Societal Assertiveness.** Those that identify as female may be viewed as angry if they express assertiveness, even when it is an assertion of advocating for one's needs.
- **Stable, Accessible, and Affordable Housing.** Access to housing is particularly difficult for persons with disabilities as housing applications, including applications for government subsidies, public housing, and private housing may be long, tedious processes. Additionally, most job applications require disclosure of a home address, therefore presenting additional barriers to YWD who are experiencing homeless or are in precarious housing situations.
- **Degradation.** In addition to the barriers identified, the feeling of degradation associated with being fired due to disability, implicitly or explicitly, was noted as a significant area of concern and harm.
- **Geographic Location.** YWD often do not have a choice regarding where they live. This can present an additional barrier if there is a lack of accessible opportunities in their community. Occasionally, work experience at a younger age may be substituted with volunteer experience, however, volunteer experiences may be inaccessible for similar reasons. This may be a barrier that is experienced more acutely by those YWD living in rural areas.

3.2 Enablers and Good Practices to Employment for YWD

This section explores the enablers and good practices identified in literature that may help facilitate labour market attachment for YWD. Importantly, literature related to YWD in Canada illustrates the resilience and willingness of YWD in Canada to be engaged in the labour market. For example, key messages from ESDC's "What We Heard Report" shared the importance of providing opportunities, or enablers, to help YWD access the labour market in a system that is not often supportive to their needs and abilities.[354] A participant shared:

"It feels like treading water in a vast sea called employment that's not designed for us."

- Youth Participant (Interview), What We Heard Report (ESDC)[355]

The report identified YWD in Canada to be hardworking and resilient despite these complex barriers to employment, including those compounded by other identity factors such as their gender or age. YWD still show the will and determination to succeed and thrive in the Canadian labour market and are able to do so when provided with the necessary supports and opportunities.

The following section leverages the socioecological model to illustrate examples of enablers from literature and how they focus on the strengths, individuality, and resilience of YWD in Canada. Enablers can be described as supports, practices or factors that help to reduce the barriers described in section 3.1. This section also aims to depict new or different ideas described in literature (such as good practices) beyond reiteration of the barriers described previously.

3.2.1 Enablers at the Individual Level

Enablers at the individual level are highly ingrained within all other levels of the socioecological model. For example, practices that can help support labour market inclusion of YWD at the individual level include personal development of skills and competencies (enablers community level to increase access to further education/training), as well as shifting away from negative self-attitudinal and belief systems (enablers at the interpersonal level to increase encouragement or support), and reducing intersecting discrimination (enablers at the societal level to reduce stigma within social structures).

A good practice to help enable employment of YWD at the individual level focuses on understanding and leveraging the unique characteristics of each youth to tailor supports and services in a way that best meet their individualized needs. Below is a quote from a recent research project, where a service provider in British Columbia that supports YWD highlighted this importance:

"Anything that feels truly individualized is the way forward (in terms of service delivery/care planning for YWD). Sometimes services can be too broad, or they're not individualized for the person and their family's needs. [We need to look at] tailored, individualized supports."

- Service Organization, British Columbia (Ference & Company, 2022)[356]

3.2.2 Enablers at the Interpersonal Level (Family, Peers, Social Networks)

Family and Social Network Support

Employment enablers for YWD in Canada at the interpersonal level included the presence of strong support systems, including families and social networks (e.g., peers, friends, teachers, counsellors, etc.). Supportive families and social networks can instill positive perceptions of what is possible for YWD to achieve within an employment setting.[357] There is a positive correlation between YWD pursuing training and skills development opportunities when their family believes they are capable of gaining skills and being employed.[358] A youth's relationship with their family, peers and social networks has the potential to play a large role of encouragement towards seeking employment, influencing their attitudes and expectations and supporting self-confidence.[359] A family's positive perception of YWD's potential can also drive advocacy efforts in transition planning. For example, a network that is familiar and knowledgeable about a YWD's abilities and areas of needed support is important. This is highlighted by a YWD in the quote below:

"It is my parent/guardian/caregivers that know me best in terms of my physical limitations being a person with a disability. My friends can help point out the unique opportunities as can my siblings. […] Educational institutions unless they know the severity of my disability is not necessarily an effective place to go for advice unless I have made one-on-one connections."

- YWD, British Columbia (Ference & Company, 2022)[360]

For these affirmative actions to occur, it is crucial for the negative attitudes, misconceptions and concerns of families and social networks to be addressed, or to evolve into a more positive and well-informed frame.

Mentors/Role Models

Another good practice at the interpersonal level is the engagement of mentors, role models or advocates within the education, employment and employment service sectors.[361] These individuals can motivate YWD and provide support at all stages of the employment process to help youth gain the skills, competencies and esteem to feel prepared for employment. This group may also support preparedness with soft and hard skills, often through leading by example, to illustrate to YWD how they themselves could work well in meaningful employment. They can also play a part in alleviating the fears of YWD in disclosing their disability, and in turn, support asking for accommodations, which are important to success within educational institutions and the workplace.

3.2.3 Community Enablers

Education

It has been documented that improvements of inclusivity within the education sector would strengthen the labour market inclusion of YWD. It is predicted that achieving better educational outcomes is essential to sustained employment and reduced overrepresentation in low-skill

and low-education jobs for persons with disabilities.[362] However, YWD are more than twice as likely to have no educational certification, to be jobless, and to not attend school compared to youth without disabilities.[363]

In Canada, the education systems where YWD are most often engaged include high-school, post-secondary and informal training structures, such as courses and programs offered by workplaces and employment service providers. This section focuses on enablers found in high school and post-secondary settings, with informal training encompassed in section 3.2.4. Both high school and PSE have unique enabling factors, as well as common good practices to support YWD to enter the labour market, such as:

- Inclusive education models (e.g., inclusive learning materials, curricula, standards, etc.);
- Accessible built environments (e.g., human supports, accessible building and facilities, physical infrastructure and accessible technologies and equipment); and
- Transition planning in advance of employment, post-secondary or training programs.[364]

High school

An important practice to support YWD is transition planning following high school (described further in section 1.1.3). The public school system has been identified as a strategic entry point to connect YWD with subsequent education, employment, and employment services or programming. Fostering an early connection with programs that bridge youth with services after high school offers a valuable avenue to build a foundation of learning and skill development, create connections that can be leveraged post-graduation and raise awareness of other community services that may be useful.[365] The Government of New Brunswick shared effective practices that can be used during the last years of high school to prepare YWD for future work or education post-graduation, which included:

- Prioritize key elements of labour market inclusion such as basic literacy skills;
- Create comprehensive transition planning with a family member/caregiver;
- Develop essential soft skills such as positive mental health, resiliency, communication;
- Use high-quality community work experience programs for high school students; and
- Leverage a collaborative model of support, involving active partnerships with community organizations and employers.[366]

Post-secondary

The literature identified a variety of good practices that can be leveraged by post-secondary institutions to best support YWD in labour market inclusion. Examples cover a wide range of supports and services, including:

- Workplace preparation opportunities (e.g., apprenticeship, intern and co-operative programs);[367]
- Job exploration support;
- Individualized support;
- Online information resources;

- Online job boards that connect YWD to employers who are seeking to hire candidates with disabilities;
- Transition workshops;
- Collaboration with diversity employers and employment service providers;
- Conferences bringing together students, employers, service providers, practitioners and scholars; and
- Collaboration between DSOs and CSOs and other student services, including academic advising, academic success coaching, writing services, alumni services, human resources, equity services, etc.[368]

Literature suggested there should be increased efforts from governments, PSE administrators, professors, instructors and other relevant stakeholders beyond the encouragement to attend PSE and rather promote success during educational programs along well-defined pathways into good quality employment.[369] Some good practices were identified that support these efforts and focus on addressing the needs of YWD with intersectional identities. Examples of supports beyond admission to a program for diverse YWD include:[370]

- **YWD with vision and hearing disabilities, BIPOC YWD**: Increase access to accessible building features, learning materials, human support in PSE (e.g., sign language interpreters, tutors, support persons)
- **YWD in low-income households, YWD of moderate complexity**: Ensure curricula and procedures are flexible and accessible learning technologies are available
- **Diverse YWD**: Implement measures to gauge adequacy of the supports available to diverse students
- **YWD who live on low incomes, youth with complex forms of disability, BIPOC YWD**: Foster positive social and economic experiences (e.g., make counselling, peer support, fully inclusive classes and extra curricular activities readily available, provide adequate student financing)

Examples of Good Practices for YWD Inclusion at Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions

Examples of new or promising practices for YWD inclusion at Canadian post-secondary institutions were challenging to identify. The following examples were found using a targeted search and selected to be shared in this report because they were most reflective of the enablers and barriers identified throughout the research.

Disability Impact on Career/Employment (D.I.C.E.) Assessment at Brock University

Using a process of reflection and self-discovery, the D.I.C.E. Assessment is a personalized assessment offered at Brock University aimed at identifying the ways in which disability shapes a student's career options, impacts their job performance and determines the necessary workplace accommodations for carrying out a job effectively.[371] The assessment explores past experiences and personal preferences to find potential careers that would emphasize individual strengths and help a participant identify their needed accommodation (if any). This approach

embodies the individual-level of the socioecological model to help equip students with the knowledge and understanding of their disability in context of the workplace.

Innovation for Inclusion of YWD in Typically Unrepresented Activities at Mount Allison University

Through funding received by the Global Skills Opportunity fund, Mount Allision University offers a variety of experiential field schools around the world that focus on providing inclusive programming for students who are typically underrepresented in these types of experiences, with priority selection to students who are low-income, have a disability and/or are Indigenous. Their accessibility office works collaboratively with their international office and the professor who created the field school to incorporate inclusion/accessibility principles and tenants of the UDL principles throughout course offerings. The UDL is a framework designed to accommodate diverse student learning and education by offering multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation and multiple means of action and expression. The field schools aim to eliminate barriers that prevent students with documented disabilities from participating in experiential and impactful experiences that can increase their soft skills and employment opportunities.[372] A staff member from the accessibility office attends the field school as a support person to provide advocacy support to students with disability during the course.[373]

Collaboration with Disability Service Offices (DSOs) and Career Service Offices (CSOs) Nationally[374]

There are increasingly more employers committed to disability inclusion who are actively seeking out potential candidates with disabilities from colleges and universities. Educational institutions that have established a collaborative partnership between their DSOs and CSOs are better positioned to facilitate the hiring process and connect qualified job seekers with inclusive employers. Post-secondary institutions like Brock, Laurier and Guelph are role models in bringing about these good practices by offering employers comprehensive information on the benefits of hiring students and alumni with disabilities and building up their capacity to successfully employ YWD.[375] As another example, Carleton University, through the Research, Education, Accessibility and Design (READ) Initiative, successfully organized customized employment preparation events targeting diversity-minded employers. These initiatives are conducted in collaboration with both their Career Services Centre and the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities. Many of these events are also conducted in partnership with diversity-conscious employers affiliated with the Employment Accessibility Resource Network (EARN), a community initiative supported by the Ottawa Carleton United Way.[376] Algonquin College and the University of Ottawa are also active participants in EARN, while the University of Manitoba maintains a similar collaboration with Reaching E-Quality Employment Services (REES) in Winnipeg.[377]

Online Job Boards at Magnet, a Not-For Profit Founded by Ryerson University

Magnet is a not-for-profit initiative, founded by Ryerson University and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.[378] Using matching technology, Magnet allows job seekers with disabilities the

opportunity to connect with employers who are seeking to hire candidates with disabilities.[379] Good coordination between DSOs and CSOs, facilitated the success of this initiative, and shared that is was an effective way to support students with disability,.[380] In addition, while post-secondary institutions across Canada have online job boards that bridge students and employers, the majority of post-secondary institutions are not using the functionality for self-disclosure of disability.[381] The Magnet job board provides support and advocacy for YWD to help them disclose their disability in a positive way that helps attainment of needed workplace accommodation and partner them with employers who are equipped with policy and tools to provide a safe work environment.

Employers

The employment process has many different stages, from pre-employment (e.g., job matching and skill identification), to recruitment and hiring, to onboarding and training and finally long-term employee retention. This section divides enablers and good practices for employment of YWD by each of these stages as identified through literature.

Pre-employment phase

Canadian literature often focused on capturing and understanding pre-employment experiences of employers or employment agencies and less often focused on experiences of YWD themselves. YWD advocates suggested job matching and testing are integral components of the pre-employment phase. For example, two YWD advocates from Canada emphasized the importance of a good job match for YWD, where their skills and strengths align well with the job tasks (e.g., radio show host position for a youth with a visual disability who loves to be engaged and share thoughts).[382] In agreement with this, an international report indicated that the skills and talents of each YWD should be understood and leveraged when seeking employment, with their aptitudes at the focus, not their disabilities.[383] Trialling or testing a work environment can be helpful during the pre-employment phase. For example, from the experience of a YWD advocate living in the UK, having opportunity to volunteer or intern at an organization was an important step to help them achieve longer-term employment.[384]

Recruiting and hiring phases

A good practice identified for employers during the recruitment and hiring phase was to have a multi-level inclusion hiring initiative. For example, employers should have an active inclusion or accommodation strategy at the human resource level, as well as an outreach strategy at the marketing level that focuses on people with disabilities within their recruitment plans.[385] A Canadian study which focused on people with disabilities (not specifically youth) identified a good practice for inclusive recruitment and hiring as having accessible and direct advertising of available positions with clear and established methods to communicate information about disabilities between employer and employee.[386] Another Canadian study involving YWD, caregivers and service providers recommended adapting job interview protocols for YWD to ensure their abilities are recognized without assuming they can (or need to) participate in the same ways as everyone else.[387] Building on this, additional research suggests inclusive recruitment could involve tours of the company as part of the interview process, which would

allow job candidates to better understand the work environment and objectives to assess if it would be a good fit prior to applying.[388]

A comprehensive report from the United States outlined numerous good practices for employers in recruiting and hiring YWD, especially when working with post-secondary institutions. Many of the suggested practices were reflected by Canadian programs. These practices are shared below:

- **Work with Career Services and Disability Services** to identify potential job candidates;
- **Advertise** recruitment events and job and internship opportunities by posting advertisements in disability support services newsletters or listservs;
- Participate in **job fairs** that connect employers with YWD, or if not available, request a meeting space with disability support services to meet with YWD in small settings;
- **Connect with campus disability organizations/clubs** (e.g., Autism networking and support groups, mental health clubs);
- **Promote a disability-friendly employer image** (e.g., place disability-friendly language within job postings, have representation at career fairs by employees with a disability, reach out to vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency offices to let VR counsellors know that your business has disability-friendly policies and that internships and jobs with accommodations are available);
- **Create a disability-positive online image** (e.g., have disability inclusion as part of your company's mission or culture statements, highlight your company's commitment to disability inclusion on your website and social media, include success stories of current employees and interns with disabilities in marketing materials);
- **Use job portals that partner with post-secondary institutions** (e.g., use disability-inclusive language and photos on the company page to identify the company as disability-friendly);
- **Provide training to company recruiters, human resource professionals and hiring managers** to demystify the process of hiring and working with people with disabilities (e.g., disability awareness and etiquette training, disability sensitivity training, tips for recruiting and interviewing candidates with disabilities);
- **Facilitate self-disclosure** (e.g., if an applicant discloses their disability, offer examples of the types of accommodations offered in the past to assist employees in performing job tasks);
- **Make your accommodations request process simple, open and easy** by proactively facilitating the accommodation process;
- **Create disability-inclusive internships and hire former interns** while keeping in mind that YWD from racialized backgrounds may have economic challenges and be less financially able to participate in an unpaid internship;
- **Recruit at schools with strong disability representation;**
- **Reduce bias in the interview process and develop alternative interviewing processes** (e.g., eliminate conscious and unconscious bias through staff training); and
- **Make necessary accommodations** (e.g., ensure the interview space is physically accessible and away from noise and other distractions, provide a sign language interpreter, if

necessary, be responsive to the needs of the candidate during the interview, such as offering breaks). [389]

Training phase

In a Canadian report about hiring people with disabilities (not specific to youth), a good practice for inclusive employment involved the provision of appropriate support during the training phase, or early-on after hiring. Recommendations for inclusive, early-stage training initiatives included:

- Providing accommodation (or financial stipends) to employees with disabilities to attain necessary devices or adaptations needed to do their job well;
- Establishing mentoring programs within the organization to offer invaluable support and guidance;
- Helping new employees with disabilities through tailored supports in the early days of employment; and
- Providing clear and open lines of communication so that employees can navigate their responsibilities effectively.[390]

Results from a survey of 85 students with disabilities at Montmorency College in Québec revealed that the main training needs for YWD included the receipt of hands-on support during the first few days of an internship or job to facilitate the transition into the workplace, as well as pre-emptive company site visits or one-day internships to gain a lay of the land. This alleviates stress felt by students with disabilities when starting a new position and is conducive to understanding where additional supports may be needed prior to their first day of paid work.[391] In an international report, several different training strategies were presented, such as offering skills training tailored to specific needs so that YWD employees can learn how to do a particular task, or addressing needs holistically while tackling several skills.[392] Slightly modified training of work tasks and duties may be required for YWD to learn and perform a job effectively; however, this type of support early-on can facilitate learning and support a good employee.[393]

Employment retention

Canadian and international literature identified the delivery of both hard accommodations (such as physical materials or structures) and soft accommodations (such as flexible or adjustable policies) as an enabler to employment retention for YWD. A Canadian study involving an online survey of 155 YWD in Ontario and British Columbia found YWD feel a greater need for soft accommodations in the workplace compared to hard accommodations.[394] This varied by disability type, where youth with psychological disabilities and learning/memory disabilities identified a greater need for soft accommodations (e.g., modified scheduling, assistance with self-management, workplace social support and informal modifications to job tasks), whereas youth with physical and sensory disabilities were more likely to identify a greater need for hard accommodations (e.g., a large touch screen monitor, a laptop stand, assistive technology, communication adaptation and a screen reader).[395] This study also highlighted extended health benefits as an important and critical need for YWD who are

employed. Health and wellness support, such as paid time off, mental health days and wellness programs act as enablers for employee retention for people and YWD.[396, 397] For example, extended health benefits give employees access to diverse health services including prescription medication coverage, rehabilitation, assistive devices (e.g., orthotics) and mental health treatment (e.g., counselling). These services support YWD in managing their health and minimizing activity limitations due to their disability.[398]

A workplace that is inclusive, supportive and caring towards a YWD increases the likelihood of employment success and retention.[399] For example, focusing on an YWD employee's mental and emotional health by ensuring they feel successful and validated in their work boosts morale and contributes to workplace retention.[400] Opportunities for inclusion and growth can include on-the job training, professional development opportunities and allocation of a workplace mentor.[401] This sense of inclusion and community can also happen in other ways, for example, some literature suggests inclusion of YWD in emergency response plans helps to foster this connection.[402, 403]

Examples of Good Practices for Inclusion of YWD by Canadian Employers

During the literature review, examples of new or promising practices for YWD inclusion within Canadian workplaces were identified. The following examples were found using a targeted search and selected to be shared in this report because they were most reflective of the enablers and barriers identified throughout the research.

Manitoba Hydro: Successes in Diversity and Hiring of Young People

Manitoba Hydro is a winner of the Canada's Best Diversity Employers competition and is recognized as one of Canada's top employers for young people (2023).[404] Highlights of this company's promising practices or enablers related to the employment of youth and YWD include:

- **Student opportunities:** Offers summer jobs, co-op opportunities and paid internships.
- **Recruitment initiatives:** Has a DisAbility Access Program to help persons who have sustained severe brain injury reintegrate into the workforce (program also includes individuals with intellectual disabilities, organization hires graduates of Project Search as well as referrals from other disability organizations).
- **Diversity and inclusion training and awareness initiatives:** Offers leadership training which includes modules on discrimination, harassment and diversity and inclusion, Employee Inclusion Lens and Leadership and Supervisory Inclusion Lens resources, resource checklist for accessible formats and communications supports.
- **In-house training initiatives:** Offers apprenticeship/skilled trades programs, in-house training, online training, mentoring, paid internships, orientation program, in-house career planning services, online employee skills inventory.
- **Related tuition subsidies:** Covers up to 100% of tuition per year up to $8,000 in tuition subsidies for job-related courses per year.

- **Diversity highlights:** Offers over 80 annual awards, bursaries and scholarships totalling over $100,000 to students representing equity groups.
- **Flexible work options:** Offers flexible work hours, shortened work week (fewer hours with less pay), compressed work week, telecommuting.
- **Health plan premium:** Pays to 100% of the premiums on health benefits and insurance.

Manitoba Hydro has also signed a formal agreement with four Cree Nations near Keeyask Generation Station on the Nelson River and is working towards increasing the participation of community members into operational jobs. The Joint Keeyask Development Agreement (JKDA) Employment Framework is a 20-year plan with seven components (including career exploration, career preparation, employment preparation and pre-project training employment bridging, to name a few), with individuals hired on an ongoing basis from Fox Lake Cree Nation, Tataskwayak Cree Nation, War Lake First Nation and York Factory First Nation.

SaskTel: Innovative and Unique Efforts to Attract and Retain Young People with Disabilities

SaskTel is also one of the winners of the Canada's Best Diversity Employers competition and is recognized as one of Canada's top employers for young people (2023).[405] Highlights of this company's promising practices or enablers related to the employment of youth and YWD include:

- **Recruitment initiatives**: Dedicated recruitment strategies for Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities and new Canadians, recruitment with community partners (First Nations Employment Centre, Regina and Saskatoon Open Door Society, Autism Resource Centre, Inclusion Saskatchewan), Supported Employment program for candidates with cognitive disabilities (offered in partnership with Saskatchewan Abilities Council), equity hiring program allows hiring managers to offer potential candidates positions by creating opportunities proactively instead of waiting for vacancies.
- **Partnerships with schools**: Works with a number of post-secondary institutions to offer pre-employment workshops, mock interview sessions, scholarships, mentoring and networking events.
- **Flexible work options**: Offers flexible work hours, 35-hour work week (with full pay), shortened work week (fewer hours with less pay), telecommuting, earned days off program, hybrid work (work from home for up to three days of the week), planning office renovations to incorporate flexible work strategies.
- **Diversity and inclusion training and awareness initiatives**: Offers training in the diversity and inclusion category in learning management system, with courses on diversity and inclusion fundamentals, unconscious bias and Indigenous awareness.
- **Unique training and development opportunities**: Has unique trainings such as formal job shadowing program, knowledge maps (career planning tool, recommends appropriate learning and development opportunities based on each employee's background, experience and desired career path), on-site and virtual instructor-led training, custom training for products and services, programs and initiatives, live and pre-recorded webinars, apprenticeship/skilled trades programs, in-house training, online training, mentoring, paid

internships, orientation program, in-house career planning services, online employee skills inventory, leadership training.

- **Employee resource group**: Has an employee resource groups aim to raise awareness of workplace issues that affect people with disabilities. They create a safe and empathetic space where people with disabilities and their allies can openly discuss issues facing them.
- **Diversity highlights**: Partners with post-secondary institutions to offer scholarships and mentoring opportunities to youth, including Aboriginal students and students with disabilities, participates in the "4to40" Campus for All program (a Supported Employment program which connects individuals with intellectual disabilities to employers who embrace a flexible four to 40-hour work week).

With the partnership of the Prairie South School Division and the Information Communication Technology Council, SaskTel offers the Focus on Information Technology program to teach secondary students essential skills in four main areas of focus: business and information analysis, software design and development, network and operations support and interactive media. SaskTel also created the YOUTH Network program, a comprehensive strategy to improve human resource issues and encourage young people, specifically underprivileged youth or Aboriginal groups, to pursue technology-based PSE. The program includes strategies in elementary schools, high schools and post-secondary schools with tailored initiatives for each group.

Employment Service Providers

Canadian, American and international literature highlighted good practices and approaches for employment service providers when working with YWD. Appendix 4 presents an overview of literature in this area and this section presents a summary of findings.

Youth-centered and experiential

Literature stressed the importance for workforce and training programs to recognize that youth are experts in their own lives with unique talents and interests that can be grown and developed. For example, one study highlighted how experiences with addiction or mental health-related disability can be a “parallel process to career” which serves to inform values and goals, act as transferable skills, and positions experiences in a way that eliminates the assumption that life struggles are entirely negative.[406] Life experiences can uniquely position YWD to perform well in workplaces, even if it appears unconventional.

Services that embody real-world situations and enable YWD to leverage their strengths, interests and likes were also identified as a good practice within employment programs.[407] For example, this may include experiential learning abroad in a language of interest or work placements at a store that a youth likes to visit. Real-world programs can help youth decide what type of work environment may suit them best. Real-world situations are important because YWD may not have a inherent sense of where their strengths are, or what kind of work they might thrive in, especially if youth are missing role models or social networks that could expose them to what is available. A youth might watch an episode of a cooking show and be interested in pursuing a job as a chef but have no knowledge of the work skills needed, or

career path itself. So, providing experiential pathways to test careers before making decisions could help with preparedness and buy-in.[408] This also allows youth to explore their own areas of interest and develop skills in a way that is engaging to them and will set them up for a future career success in a field they may enjoy. As highlighted in the quote below, a YWD may already know they are unable to work within loud spaces; however, without a youth-centered and real-world approach to help them about their preferences and preferred environment, the youth has limited ability to understand what their needs look like in practice.

"[…] what is difficult is finding a job that works for my limitations. For example, I have social anxiety and a major trigger is loud spaces and yelling. Most jobs available are in retail or food services which have both triggers frequently."

- 2SLGBTQ+ youth with a disability, Ontario (Ference & Company, 2022)

Engagement of Touchpoints such as Employers and Families/Caregivers

Employment programs that directly engage youth touchpoints such as employers and families in the hiring process were suggested to be effective. Early engagement of potential employers is important as they are often best positioned to provide information about what skills or competencies are valuable for their workplace. Employment programs that engage directly with employers were found to help build linkages and trust between an employer and potential employee with disabilities. Some models utilized by Canadian service organizations that facilitate is type of engagement include:[409, 410]

- Employment programs that collaborate with the employer to identify youth who may need additional support during a more traditional interview and recruitment process, so the employer has a connection to the agency when looking to provide resources for themselves and their potential employees.
- Service agency collaborates with employer to provide appropriate training and support directly to employer, recognizing that inherent biases exist amongst employers who may not have capacity or safe enough work environments to hire and retain someone who has a disability (i.e., trainings about how to create discrimination-free environment, detailed information how to support employees with disabilities, etc.).
- Employer-driven programs that collaborate with an employment organization to train specific on job-relevant skills, with the intent to hire participants after.

Comprehensive and equitable supports

Literature suggests employment services should provide equitable supports to YWD to ensure they receive the same opportunities for engagement as someone else. The creation of equitable opportunities for YWD might mean providing flexible program hours, hybrid engagement models, use of additional programs/services, financial bursaries, etc.[411] Equitable opportunities can also include having no costs associated with registration, simplicity in understanding and navigating programming and services, and flexibility in registration processes and program delivery hours, as youth with uncertain life circumstances (e.g., transportation, intermittent work, dynamic of periodic disabilities or unpredictable health

challenges) may not be able to pre-commit to advanced registrations of training programs. In a Canadian research report, service organizations described success for youth employment services as the ability to meet the underlying needs that create barriers to successful and sustained employment, such as provision of mental health resources, housing supports, driving lessons, etc.[412]

Provides holistic and safe spaces

Literature indicated that NEET youth, including YWD, may care as much about the spaces a program is hosted as the actual program content, particularly amongst those who have experienced trauma or discrimination.[413] A recent study by Ference & Company surveyed almost 300 NEET youth across Canada, including YWD, and identified that the most desired traits for in-person programs and services (including employment services) are those that are safe, supportive, consistent, relatable, accessible, private and provide autonomy/choice. This research identified that YWD prioritize consistency in their relationships and ability to access services, likely because they do not have to re-explain their disability and ability to multiple providers and rather remain with an advocate who understands them and their needs. Building solid relationships was identified as an important foundation to fully engage YWD through a particular training program or workplace. The development of these environments is part of ensuring all youth can access a training space in a safe and comfortable way.

Examples of Good Practices Amongst Employment Services in Canada

During the literature review, examples of new or good practices for YWD inclusion within Canadian employment services were identified. The following examples were found using a targeted search and selected to be shared in this report because they were most reflective of the enablers and barriers identified throughout the research.

Use of Wraparound and Tailored Supports: YMCA Ontario – Y Opportunities[414]

An example of a successful service provider that uses multiple best practices is the YMCA in Ontario. They offer a six-week program called Y Opportunities for youth with diagnosed or self-identified disabilities to help them refine and discover new skills that lend towards labour market integration or further education. Offered supports include needs assessments, transportation, childcare, interview preparation and skills-building workshops. Upon completion, participants are connected with a paid job opportunity or with appropriate courses and training opportunities in a field of their choice. Participants enter the workforce along with their employers receive an extra 12 weeks of tailored supports to foster long-term success.

Training and Skill Development: Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society – British Columbia Intercultural Youth Service Corps Project[415, 416]

Another example of a successful service provider is the Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society in British Columbia, which runs its Surrey Intercultural Youth Service Corps Project. They support youth aged 15 to 30 who self-identify as a person with a disability(ies), as a person with multiple barriers and/or are an LGBTQ2+ individual. This 17-week program

provides valuable leadership training, community engagement skills and volunteer placements so that youth can build community connections. Their training also includes job search skills, resume building, financial literacy and essential life skills that will help youth gain valuable experience in community engagement and enhance employment.

Employer Engagement: Ready, Willing & Able (RWA) National Program

A national initiative funded through ESDC's Opportunity Fund, RWA is a highly successful program that works closely with employers and employment agencies to connect youth with intellectual disabilities and autism to the labour market. This program provides support directly to employers to best prepare their workplace for accommodation of persons with intellectual disabilities and/or are on the autism spectrum, as well as provide support throughout the hiring process. The initiative works to pair candidates with employers that best fits the candidates interests or abilities and also has funding available to remove barriers to employment such as short-term supply of bus tickets or needed apparel (i.e., work boots).

Peer Mentorship: Inclusion Alberta's Youth Employment Partnership

The Youth Employment Partnership bridges the gap between youth and adult employment, creating confident youth who are empowered to be more self-sufficient, creating stronger communities for everyone. The Youth Employment Partnership works with local businesses to develop jobs for youth with developmental disabilities through peer-mentored employment. The Youth Employment Partnership is built on peer mentorship, where youth mentors (high school or university students hired to support students with developmental disabilities), work alongside the youth with developmental disabilities, providing support as needed.

3.2.4 Societal, Structures, Policy and Systems Enablers

This section focuses on the enablers to employment for YWD at the societal level of the socioecological model.

Regulations and views around inclusive employment

Canadian literature on employment enablers for people with disabilities (not specifically youth) indicated that good practices change employers' views and policies on inclusive employment and build a more inclusive workplace. For example, providing information to employers that help them recognize the numerous benefits of hiring YWD and understanding that most accommodations required for YWD to fully participate in the workforce are low cost and low risk.[417] A Canadian study highlighted that employers who adopt policies of inclusion and non-discrimination can influence the culture of the workplace and ensure that YWD are given equal opportunities to participate in the workforce.[418] There is international literature aligned with these good practices that indicate how accessible and inclusive work environments should also involve trainings for employees and employers without disabilities.[419] These training sessions are suggested to be geared towards promoting universal design and workplace accessibility, enabling YWD to thrive in inclusive workplaces.[420] Employer commitment to creating a

supportive and accommodating work environment often stems from an understanding of disability and a growing awareness of the importance of workplace diversity.[421]

Legislation and policy

In Canada, legislation and policy are established to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities (including youth) in all areas of society. This type of national stance supports YWD to gain meaningful employment, as it encourages society to be responsive to the needs of people with disabilities. Human rights legislation protects people with disabilities against discrimination and harassment in social areas such as education and employment, where the legislation applies.[422] Today, protective federal legislation includes:[423, 424]

- The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, indicating equality rights, with specific mention of people with physical and mental disabilities;
- The Canadian Human Rights Act, indicating the duty of work accommodation for people with disabilities;
- The Employment Equity Act, aiming to eliminate systemic discrimination against four designated groups, one of which was people with disabilities, so no person is denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons related to their ability; and
- The Accessible Canada Act, providing a proactive and systemic approach for identifying, removing and preventing barriers to accessibility.

Protective provincial legislation includes human rights codes, accessibility legislation (in several provinces such as Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Ontario) and employment standards that include rules on sick leave.[425]

At the international level, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reinforces the domestic laws protecting the rights of people with disabilities. Specifically, Article 24 of the CRPD guarantees education for people with disabilities, and calls on States Parties to provide an inclusive education system at all levels, as well as lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, with reasonable accommodations and supports.[426] Similarly, Article 27 of the CRPD on work and employment oblige State Parties to recognize the rights of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others, in a work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible.[427] This includes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability in all areas of employment, including recruitment, hiring and employment, continuance of employment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions.[428]

3.3 Measurements Used in Literature for Successful Employment

The collection and review of data to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, services and employment when seeking to increase labour market inclusion of YWD is essential for continued improvement. Both personal and employment measures have been utilized to determine the effectiveness of employment services and inclusive employment approaches. Measures and indicators specific to determining the effectiveness and impact of employment services are also useful in determining avenues of labour market success. Table 2 provides measures and indicators identified in Canadian and international literature used to assess successful inclusion of YWD in employment and related services. They are categorized into personal, employment and employment agency measures.

Table 2. Examples of Indicators Identified in Research

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Personal Indicators</th></tr>
<tr><td>Wellbeing, attitudes and life measures
Well-being
Attitudes toward learning
Social supports
Self-esteem
Mental and physical health
Addictions
Life satisfaction
Achievement of goals
Self-determination
Future independence
Living arrangement
Disability benefits
Inclusion into communities</td><td>Skills and Knowledge
Knowledge about how to search for jobs
Knowledge about how to interview
Ability to advocate for workplace adaptations
Ability to access services and supports
Proficiency in essential skills
Engagement in education or training</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Employment Indicators</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Hours worked
Duration of employment
Skills and education match
Wages
Employee benefits (e.g., health insurance coverage)
Employment status (part-time/full-time, paid/unpaid)</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Employment Agency Indicators</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Clients who have job secured
Client and their families’ satisfaction with services
Clients have received information about their rights
Number of job creations
Staff who meet training qualifications
Critical incidents in the workplace</td></tr>
</table>

3.4 Takeaways and Next Steps in the Canadian Context

This final section considers key takeaways from the research project and suggests next steps in the Canadian context. This includes a reflection on the literature that considered barriers and enablers for future labour market engagement of YWD, as well as a narrative about opportunities to improve Canadian policies, programs, and research related to YWD.

3.4.1 Shifting Canadian Context

Studies are unclear how the changing labour market landscape in Canada will impact YWD in the future. For example, many people with disabilities work in the public sector and hospitality industries which are positions that could become more automated with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence and technological advances. A Canadian study highlighted mixed perceptions about how YWD perceive the future of work in Canada. Some YWD shared positive expectations regarding the impact of digital technology on their work; and others held negative attitudes and were concerned about how this would impact future employment opportunities.[429] There was concern about the lack of available insights from YWD in a changing Canadian labour market and how insufficient data about YWD in Canada could affect the development of policies and programs in the context of this changing labour market.[430]

Aligned with other Canadian literature, this report also highlighted the impending role of technological skills and soft skills to participation in a labour market reliant on advanced technology. Recent literature highlighted how YWD have been unequally impacted following the COVID-19 pandemic and could be considered a vulnerable population in the workforce given the changing labour market. Also notably, much research explored throughout this research project occurred prior 2020 and is based on pre-COVID-19 research and data. It is expected that the most recent data from the 2022 CSD, published in 2024, will be used to better contextualize and understand challenges amongst YWD in Canada in a post-pandemic world. For example, the percentage of YWD reporting mental health-related disabilities greatly increased between the 2017 and 2022 CSDs, becoming an important consideration when crafting opportunities for YWD to engage with the labour market. As Canadian researchers, organizations and governments continue to explore ways to support and create opportunities for YWD, it is important to use data that accurately reflects experiences of youth in today's world.

3.3.1 Policy/Program Opportunities

Based on the information presented in this report many opportunities exist to better support YWD through policies and programs at a federal, provincial, and community level. The researchers highlighted five key points for consideration when designing and implementing future Canadian programs and policies for YWD to engage the labour market.

1. **Tailored and Individualized**

Programs and policies that don't take on a "one size fits all" approach to deliver services may be useful to acknowledging and promoting the unique strengths of YWD. When possible,

recognition and support that understand and respond to individual person or family needs could be beneficial for YWD. For example, soft skills were identified in various studies as being important to labour market engagement amongst YWD; however, not all YWD require support in this area. Tailored services that can prioritize and provide needed services to YWD is exceptionally helpful given the broad range of knowledge, strengths, and abilities amongst this diverse group.

Across Socioecological Framework. Programs and policies that intend to increase the labour market inclusion of YWD should broaden their scope beyond individual youths, and additionally aim to develop and improve the supports and systems within which YWD live. This includes a broader focus on natural supports and networks (as well as institutional systems and structures) that may be useful when creating affirmative environments to support and encourage labour market inclusion amongst YWD. As another example, improvements within the education sector will likely strengthen the labour market inclusion of youth as it is predicted that achieving better educational outcomes will be essential to improving sustained employment and reducing overrepresentation in low-skill and low-education jobs for persons with disabilities.[431]

Proactive and Consistent. Programs and policies should take a proactive and consistent approach to engage YWD early in life and provide them with needed tools and resources (e.g., diagnoses, accommodations). These should begin early in a youth's life and follow a logical life course pathway that doesn't allow for gaps in support while crossing into different parts of life (e.g., the transition from high school to graduation). Future work in this area should also include a proactive lens to the shifting labour markets to ensure YWD training and accommodation are responsive to supply and demand within the workforce.

Inclusive and Integrated. There is an opportunity to adjust existing programs and policies in a way that responds to existing good practices and are increasingly inclusive, as opposed to creation of separate initiatives that cater only to YWD. As an example, the UDL principles expand methods of teaching and learning to welcome people who learn in different ways into existing classroom spaces, not only YWD. Another example would be the expansion of mechanisms used during employment interviews to not limit the types of communication offered for all applicants, regardless of their ability.

Focused on barriers AND enablers. Literature suggests many YWD can successfully attach to the labour market when provided with meaningful support and accommodation. There is an opportunity to make enablers more readily available for both youth with and without disabilities at younger ages to reduce stigma and better equip all youth towards their pathway to employment at all stages of their development.

3.3.2 Research Opportunities

Based on literature availability and quality throughout the process of creating this report, several key opportunities for future Canadian research about YWD and employment were identified.

Relevant Canadian Data

It is challenging to make conclusive claims about employment and YWD in Canada, as much of the research on barriers to employment are either conducted outside of Canada or are focused on adults. Additionally, at the time of this literature review (e.g., Summer/Fall 2023), many articles related to YWD in Canada reference data from the 2017 CSD. This data likely does not reflect the current realities of YWD in Canada and does not capture the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024, Statistics Canada began releasing detailed reports about findings from the 2022 CSD, which aims to build a more comprehensive understanding of YWD in Canada today. For instance, the 2022 CSD found a notable increase in mental health-related disabilities amongst female youth, which may help contextualize future research and help address emerging areas of need.

Geographical Distribution

There was a significant amount of literature available on employment barriers and enablers for YWD based in Ontario and in urban areas, compared to other provinces and rural areas. Although there are programs and research being conducted throughout the country, the most relevant data explores a narrative around these groups rather than substantial inclusion in research or evaluation. As Canada has a wide geographic distribution across a variety of jurisdictions with unique characteristics such as distinct provincial or territorial policies, community design, service availability, etc. it is important to understand how young people are impacted and further, how disabilities play a role in their engagement within the broader community and labour market.

Inclusive Program Design

Data suggests there is a promising international practice for inclusive education to better serve YWD, such as integrated classrooms and more focus on non-segregated learning. Research also suggests the integration of YWD in community and employment can create more meaningful engagement of this group amongst all involved. There is not enough evidence to conclude whether it is more beneficial to have separate employment services catered specifically to YWD or to have employment services that serve youth and YWD together.

Intersectional Data

Despite youth being overrepresented within many equity-deserving groups (e.g., substance users, low-income households, Indigenous communities, 2SLGBTQI), there were challenges in identifying data focused on youth intersectional employment experiences exclusively regarding YWD. For example, reports that focus on employment often referred to ‘NEET’ youth as a collective group with racialized youth, Indigenous youth, and YWD without explicitly teasing out

experiences unique to the distinct sub-populations. Also, much literature about people with disabilities broadly (e.g., 24 years and older) does not disaggregate their findings by intersectional characteristics to explore the unique barriers faced by younger demographics. This leaves a knowledge gap regarding the unique barriers and enablers experienced by YWD with intersectional characteristics, such as involvement in the justice system, Indigenous youth, mental health/trauma, 2SLGBTQI+, race, type of disability, age and so on. Consequently, there is a lack of a comprehensive understanding of youths' needs at the intersect of their disability and other sociodemographic characteristics. This information gap could impede programs from designing effective services catered to the entire lived experience of YWD in Canada.

Indigenous Worldview

Indigenous peoples are the youngest population in Canada, with 28% under the age of 25 in 2021.[432] However, the literature review identified very limited information shared by or with Indigenous YWD in Canada. With federal government efforts towards reconciliation, there is a need to recognize the diverse context across Indigenous peoples, including the distinct characteristics of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples who have many unique histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. There is an opportunity to provide funding to Indigenous communities and advocates who can support a further understanding of how programs and services can best serve this diverse group of youth.

4.0 Conclusion

Canadian Context

(YWD) in Canada face diverse experiences in education and employment, influenced by a wide range of factors that shape their ability to participate in the labor market. It is challenging to determine which factors have the greatest impact, as these vary significantly between individuals. A review of the literature highlights numerous interrelated influences across different socioecological levels, all of which play a role in shaping YWD's efforts to secure and sustain employment. The complexity and multifaceted nature of these factors make it difficult to identify a universal solution for Canadian programs and policies. The diversity of experiences among YWD further underscores the need for nuanced approaches. However, some common themes can be identified to guide supportive initiatives. For instance, YWD's experiences are shaped by socioecological structures that include individual, relational, institutional, and societal factors. These structures can act as barriers or enablers to labor market inclusion. Factors at the institutional and societal levels tend to have a more consistent impact across YWD in Canada, while individual and relational factors create unique challenges and opportunities based on the specific characteristics and circumstances of each youth.

To illustrate the impact of enablers and barriers to labor market inclusion, consider two different examples of YWD in Canada. The first YWD faces significant challenges, including poverty, severe mental health issues, and a learning disability. Lacking financial resources to commute to a job located across the city, they are limited to employment opportunities nearby. Addedly, their local workplace has a negative environment where they experience discrimination and harassment. This situation exacerbates their anxiety and internalized feelings of inadequacy, leaving them apprehensive about seeking other employment opportunities for fear of encountering similar discrimination. In contrast, a second YWD benefits from a supportive family and well-connected social networks. These supports encourage them to explore employment opportunities aligned with their strengths and needs. They also receive necessary school accommodations, enabling them to actively engage in transition planning. With the guidance of their family and important supports, this youth participates in a positive pre-graduation internship experience in a field of interest, laying a strong foundation for future employment. Comparing these scenarios highlights the stark contrast between the two experiences. The second YWD, supported by multiple enabling factors, is set up for a more positive employment journey and life trajectory. In contrast, the first YWD faces compounded barriers that limit their opportunities and impact their well-being.

Barriers to Labour Market Inclusion

YWD have a wide diversity of intersectional characteristics that influence their experience with the Canadian labour market. Individualized factors such as gender identity, socioeconomic status, skills and knowledge, and type or severity of disability can create unique barriers to employment. The ways in which YWD experience barriers extends to their immediate circle of relationships, as well as the social and structural contexts in which they live. For example, negative attitudes and misconceptions from family, peers and social networks, as well as a lack

of social capital and complex family dynamics can limit the opportunities for youth employment. Further, YWD can face a multitude of social and physical barriers at an early age when looking to attain workplace experience. This can occur with educational institutions, where barriers exist around inclusivity, pathways for continuity and transition planning, the availability/accessibility of educational accommodations and the lack of internal capacity for collaboration in post-secondary institutions. These barriers can also later appear when applying for jobs through employers and employment agencies. For instance, employers who have negative attitudes, misconceptions, discrimination and stigma surrounding disabilities, as well as factors such as inaccessible transportation and job-specific barriers (e.g., difficulty finding accommodating jobs). Employment service providers may also create barriers due to eligibility restrictions, internal capacity, community coordination, continuity of care, physical restrictions (e.g., barriers of virtual programming formats, location of the program) and social barriers (e.g., YWD's unawareness of resources and support services, stigma and structural discrimination). Finally, barriers were identified at the societal level include intersecting discrimination and a changing labour market environment.

Enablers to Labour Market Inclusion

The presence of strong support systems plays a pivotal role in fostering positive perceptions of what YWD can achieve. Positive attitudes from families and social networks are particularly influential, as they can drive active involvement in the critical step of transition planning with YWD. High school, or even earlier, is an ideal time for YWD to connect with employment services that can support them post-graduation. It is also a key period for preparing them with the skills, knowledge, and experience needed for workforce participation.

A collaborative support model, involving partnerships with community organizations, employers, and parents/guardians, could significantly enhance transition planning efforts in high schools. Similarly, providing a range of services and supports during the transition into and out of post-secondary institutions would help YWD pursue meaningful employment opportunities. Further research is needed to understand the capacity of Canadian high schools to deliver such support effectively. There is potential for community programs to engage directly with high schools, creating a seamless transition system for YWD. While there is a wealth of data on good practices for inclusive, accessible, and supportive employment processes, much of it lacks specificity to YWD in the Canadian context. Even fewer resources focus on centering the voices and preferences of YWD within these initiatives. Employment service providers can help bridge this gap by offering programs that adopt person-centered, relational, and holistic approaches. Such programs should prioritize capacity building for YWD and incorporate intersectional service delivery methods to address diverse needs. Additionally, several policies and pieces of legislation have been established at the international, federal, and provincial levels to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities—including youth—in all areas of society. These frameworks play an essential role in supporting YWD to gain and maintain employment.

Looking Forward

Many YWD can successfully engage with the labor market when provided with meaningful support and accommodations. Research highlights the importance of individualized support tailored to the unique strengths and needs of each youth. Moving forward, it is essential to make enablers more accessible to all youth—both with and without disabilities—starting at younger ages. This approach can help reduce stigma and better prepare all youth for employment pathways throughout their development. Future research in this area should focus on adapting training and accommodations for YWD to align with shifting labor market demands. Ensuring that support remains responsive to changes in workforce supply and demand will be critical to equipping YWD with the skills and opportunities needed for long-term success.

Recommendations for Research and Policy

Identifying data that focuses specifically on the intersectional employment experiences of YWD remains a challenge. Many reports and articles address broader groups, such as NEET youth, including YWD, but often fail to distinguish the unique experiences of this population. Research gaps persist regarding how intersectional characteristics—such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, and disability—affect YWD. While data on youth in Canada may offer insights into some shared barriers, such as social pressures, reliance on family or caregivers, and the need for training and skill development, the experiences of YWD are distinct and highly individualized. These differences are shaped by unique demographics, personal circumstances, and lived experiences. To better support YWD, it is crucial to identify and address their specific needs through targeted enablers and opportunities. Efforts should prioritize capturing youth perspectives, incorporating intersectional approaches, and leveraging disaggregated data to inform inclusive policies and programs. Ultimately, this research highlights the importance of reducing barriers and enhancing enablers to create more streamlined pathways for YWD to access and thrive in the Canadian labor market. It lays the groundwork for ongoing efforts to foster greater inclusion and opportunity for this demographic group.

Appendix I: Database Search Terms

- Employ*/employment/work/labour market
- Barrier/barriers/gaps/barrières
- Youth/student/children/NEET/adolescents/jeunes
- Disability/disabled/disab*/disabilities/handicap/physical/developmental/disorder/illness
- Success/succès
- Transition
- Measuring/measures/indicators
- Role/responsibility of employer in support youth
- Employment programs/services/employ/delivery
- Blog
- Skills training/on-the-job training/vocational rehabilitation/job search
- Extent/progress/status employment services meeting needs
- Community living
- Access
- Canada/Québec
- Sexual orientation/LGBTQ/racialized/ethnic/demographics
- Evaluation
- YMCA/Project SEARCH
- Statistics Canada
- Covid
- Advocate
- Disincentives/disability assistance
- Trends
- Family
- Post-secondary/education/school accommodations/inclusive education
- Policy
- Poverty
- Ageism/racism/discrimination
- Inclusion

Appendix II: Key Definitions of the Socioecological Model

The risk factors and protective factors which interact with and influences a youth's life at all levels of the socioecological model are shown below.

Table 1: Key definitions in the socioecological model[433]

Risk factor: Any attribute, characteristic or exposure that increases the risk of developing an adverse mental health outcome
Protective factor: Any attribute, characteristic or exposure that that reduce risk factors, or independently act to increase positive outcomes

Level	Risk factors	Protective factors
Individual	• Genetic or familial predisposition • Gender, age • Childhood neglect • Discrimination due to socioeconomic and identity characteristics (e.g. gender identity/ sexual orientation, belonging to a minority group, etc.) • Ethnicity • Disability or chronic health condition • Exposure to trauma (witnessing or experiencing), including involvement in armed groups • Post-conflict/ emergency/crisis/natural disasters/ displacement/ insecurity/ or other hardships (i.e. hunger, housing) including household-level • Experience of physical or sexual abuse	• Self-esteem • Coping styles • Civic engagement • Individual agency/ locus of control • Religious beliefs and practices • Access to livelihoods (including household-level) • Supportive and inclusive learning pathways (schools, training centers, etc.) • Access to care and support services
Family and peer	• Loss of caregiver/family member • A history of mental health conditions, including depression, suicide and self-harm within the family • Alcohol and substance use within household • Intimate partner violence (witnessing or experiencing) • Household-level economic stress • Caregiver poor mental health • Caregiver trauma exposure • Abuse and neglect within family • Stigma and discrimination	• Parental support and parental monitoring • Secure attachment • Positive family functioning • Nurturing care including responsive caregiving • Mother's education • Quality of home environment • Caregiver positive mental health • Peer social support • Participation and engagement
School-level	• Destruction of schools/ lack of access to inclusive educational opportunities • Violence experienced at school – by peers or teachers	• School retention/ level of schooling achieved • Teacher social support

	• Lack of connectedness and a sense of belonging to schools – including through teasing, discrimination, stigma experienced at school. • Lack of capacity of teachers • Lack of accessible physical environment and education materials	• Counselling/peer to peer support • Social cohesion programs • Mental and physical health promotion in school settings and in educational plan/ curricula
Community-level	• Disruption of social networks • Changes in gender or religious dynamics • Cultural norms/ concepts, i.e. hiding distress, etc. • Community-level violence • Stigma and discrimination / Prevailing perceptions of mental health/illness and acceptable coping strategies within communities	• Cultural norms/ practices/ concepts, i.e. adherence to ideology and connection to land • Community acceptance • Trust • Community cohesion
Macro-level	• Housing/ settlement options – i.e. temporary vs. permanent • Ongoing conflict • Displacement status, i.e. refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) • Limited access to services in deprived communities and humanitarian contexts • Modes of delivery of humanitarian aid	• Supportive policies and legal frameworks • Trust in national system and government • Children and adolescent specific mental health policies • On the move support (migrants) • Disability inclusive services and assistance in all contexts

Note. From "Brief on The Social Ecological Model." By UNICEF, n.d., https://www.unicef.org/media/135011/file/Global%20multisectoral%20operational%20framework.pdf

Appendix III: Summary of Validation Roundtable Sessions

About the Validation Sessions

The purpose of the validation roundtable discussions was to seek perspectives from YWD, caregivers of YWD, employers and community-based organization staff about the research conducted on barriers to training and employment experienced by YWD in Canada. The feedback provided was valuable to gain further insights and thoughts of differing and overlapping groups, as it relates to the report's findings. These discussions placed emphasis on unique lived experiences based on an individual's overlapping social identities and experiences with the systems and structures within which they navigate or support youth to navigate. The main purpose of these discussions was to engage with youth and other stakeholders directly to validate and better understand the applicability of findings from the extensive literature review.

Summary of Outreach

Based on a web search, Ference & Company identified potential community-based organizations who serve YWD and/or their families. We also identified several employers who have publicly identified as being advocates for inclusive hiring.

Between November 6 and 22, 2023, we contacted a total of 38 organizations. Of these, 10 responded to us directly (26%).

The initial outreach occurred on November 6 and involved connecting with 21 organizations via email, online contact forms, or telephone (if the former were not publicly available). If organizations responded and agreed to participate or share this opportunity with YWD and/or their families, we sent them a participant screening questionnaire for the roundtable sessions. The questionnaire was used to confirm participant names, contact details, to confirm they were 18 years of age or older, stakeholder group, gender, province or territory in which they reside, time/dates of availability and accommodations needed for accessible and comfortable participation in roundtable discussions. We followed up with each organization a minimum of two times via email or telephone over the course of 3 weeks.

Due to initial low participation rates, Ference & Company identified an additional 17 organizations for outreach. We adjusted our outreach approach for this second batch of invitations, sent November 22, 2023, which included sharing a link to the participant screening questionnaire upon first outreach. In total, we followed-up with these organizations once via email or telephone. We additionally sent this link to previously non-responsive organizations from the first batch of organizations.

The questionnaire did not ask participants to confirm which organization referred them to our study; therefore, we cannot provide an accurate estimate of how many organizations were active in recruitment outside of the 10 that responded to our outreach via email or telephone.

Summary of Data Collected

From the outreach, 16 YWD and 10 community-based organization staff completed the participant screening questionnaire and showed interest in roundtable participation. There was no interest from employers or caregivers despite targeted follow-up about these groups.

Not all potential participants showed up to the roundtable discussions at the selected date and time, despite the effort to accommodate schedules. Most participants who had showed an interest in

providing feedback but who did not attend their selected roundtable session were contacted via email and invited to either attend a different session, have a one-on-one call with the researcher, or provide written feedback via email.

In total, Ference & Company facilitated four roundtable discussions with the following stakeholder groups:

5. Community Program Staff (n=3 participants)
6. YWD (n=2 participants)
7. YWD (n=2 participants)
8. YWD (n=2 participants)

Additionally, we received written feedback from two (2) youth participants.

In total, we received feedback from eight (8) YWD and three (3) community-based program staff.

Summary of Participants

The gender and provincial representation of roundtable participants is summarized in the tables below. Note that participants had the option to identify with multiple identity characteristics (for example, gender), therefore the totals in each category do not necessarily equate to the sum of the participants.

Table 2. Youth Participants engaged in Roundtable Discussions

Total Youth Participants (n=8)		
Characteristic	**Number (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender		
Man	2	25%
Woman	6	75%
Non-Binary/Gender Non-Conforming	1	12%
Let me write*	1	12%
Province/Territory		
Yukon	0	0%
Northwest Territories	0	0%
Nunavut	0	0%
British Columbia	2	25%
Alberta	0	0%
Saskatchewan	0	0%
Manitoba	3	37%
Ontario	1	12%
Quebec	0	0%
New Brunswick	0	0%
Nova Scotia	1	12%
Prince Edward Island	0	0%
Newfoundland and Labrador	1	12%
Total Community Staff Participants (n=3)		
Characteristic	**Number (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender		

Man	0	0%
Woman	2	67%
Non-Binary/Gender Non-Conforming	1	33%
Province/Territory		
Yukon	0	0%
Northwest Territories	0	0%
Nunavut	0	0%
British Columbia	1	33%
Alberta	0	0%
Saskatchewan	0	0%
Manitoba	1	33%
Ontario	1	33%
Quebec	0	0%
New Brunswick	0	0%
Nova Scotia	0	0%
Prince Edward Island	0	0%
Newfoundland and Labrador	0	0%

Summary Information Provided to Participants

To help contextualize the responses/findings provided above, the summary of information provided to participants contained data such as:

Individual Level factors that can contribute to employment **barriers** for youth with disabilities include age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, skills, competencies, criminal justice involvement, type of disability, mental health, and substance use. Some individual level **enabling factors** include development of skills, competencies, and knowledge, as well as shifts away from negative attitudinal and belief systems.

Relationships Level factors that can contribute to employment **barriers** for youth with disabilities involve aspects of a youth's interpersonal relationships with their family, peers, and social networks. For example, negative attitudes and misconceptions, a lack of encouragement or supportiveness for youth with disabilities to work, unrealistically high or low expectations and concerns about safety. Some relationship level **enabling factors** include the presence of a strong support system that encourages them towards seeking employment and influences their attitudes and expectations.

Community Level comprises educational institutions, employers, and employment service providers. At **educational institutions** including high schools and post-secondary schools, youth with disabilities can face **barriers**. The transition from high school is a precarious time as youth with disabilities are transitioned away from their established circle of care providers to a new set of health care providers and services. After high school, youth with disabilities often experience social isolation, reduced social participation and high unemployment rates compared with youth without disabilities. Surrounding the **employment process**, youth with disabilities face social and physical **barriers**, including negative attitudes, misconceptions, and stigma surrounding disabilities from employers, inaccessibility of transportation and infrastructural barriers at the workplace. Surrounding **employment service**

providers, there are a number of **barriers** that can hinder youth with disability from engaging with their services. These barriers include eligibility restrictions or confusion around eligibility requirements of employment services, fragmented and siloed services that cater to only adults or that focus on 'survival issues' (e.g., homelessness, addiction, school dropouts, poverty).

Societal Level situates **barriers** experienced by youth with disabilities within broader systems such as political, environmental and societal structures. Youth with disabilities may face discrimination in all spheres of society, including health, education and the labour market. Some Canadian policies and subsidies appear to act as disincentives that keep youth with disabilities from accessing employment services and pursuing work opportunities. Labour market challenges include the evolving nature of work due to technological advancements which may impact entry-level positions traditionally available to youth. **Enabling factors** at the societal level include legislature and policies the have been established to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in all areas of society.

Appendix IV: List of Promising Practices for Employment Service Providers

Table 3. Summary of Identified Promising Practices/Approaches for Employment Service Providers

Promising Practices and Approaches for Employment Service Providers	Literature Source	Literature Focus on Population
Person-centered, family-centered, holistic approaches		
Respect individual goals and aspirations[434]	Canada	People with disabilities
Easily accessible for individuals and their supporters, must be simple to administer, explain and understand[435]	Canada	People with disabilities
Flexible and recognize that every individual has a unique way of learning and developing skills,[436] adapting to youth's specific needs and contexts, and that can change and transform as youth changes and transforms[437, 438]	Canada, UK	People with disabilities, YWD, disadvantaged youth
Designed and delivered in a way that respects a person's dignity and minimizes the government's interference in a person's life[439]	Canada	People with disabilities
Strengths-based approach[440]	Canada	Equity-seeking groups including people with disabilities
Intersectional, trauma-informed, culturally responsive, identity-affirming approaches, focus on building relationships and facilitating safe environments that serve the whole person[441]	Canada	Youth who have or have not experienced trauma
Capacity building, coordination and accountability		
Aligned with other supports and services that are designed to assist persons with a disability to participate in their communities[442]	Canada	People with disabilities
Designed and delivered in a way that integrates planning, monitoring and program evaluation[443]	Canada	People with disabilities
Involves interdepartmental and community partnerships, as well as NGOs across disabilities to strengthen impact of programs[444]	Low-income countries	People with disabilities
Fair and transparent in its administrative and decision-making processes[445]	Canada	People with disabilities
Wraparound Supports		
Designed to ensure job maintenance supports are available once an individual begins employment[446]	Canada	People with disabilities
Designed to ensure supports and services are available for individuals who acquire disabilities later in life[447]	Canada	People with disabilities
Includes mentorship,[448] or a trusted, consistent advisor[449]	USA, UK	YWD, disadvantaged youth
Checking in and following up with youth (including after program completion) to maintain connections and support individuals through changes in life[450]	Canada	Opportunity youth

Wrap-around employment services, which combine employment training with other supports, such as housing, education or health support[451]	Canada	Youth who have or have not experienced trauma
Combined services implemented at multiple chronological stages based on the supported employment model (including personalized assessments to build a job seeker profile, individualized job development, on-the-job training, needs-based on-going support)[452]	Multiple countries	People with an intellectual disability
Providing a higher dosage of quality services (i.e., a combination of services was associated with greater competitive integrated employment outcomes: assessments, counseling, job placement, on-the-job training, job search support and transportation services)[453]	Multiple countries	People with an intellectual disability
Intersectionality		
Translate resources, tools and other materials into languages commonly used by YWD[454]	USA	YWD
Deliver existing services in non-traditional settings to meet YWD with intersecting identities where they are[455]	USA	YWD
Staff programs with individuals who have the language and other skills to engage target populations[456]	USA	YWD
Provide intensive case management services to YWD exiting juvenile justice supervision[457]	USA	YWD
Provide peer mentoring and self-advocacy services to YWD who lack strong social support systems[458]	USA	YWD
Promote service equity to help reduce disparities YWD from diverse backgrounds experience[459]	USA	YWD
Holistic and Safe Spaces		
Allow youth to try opportunities in a safe space without fear of removal; service providers should recognize that progress can be non-linear and youth may take longer at different parts of the process[460, 461]	Canada	Youth who have or have not experienced trauma, opportunity youth
Focus on skills that are in demand in the labour market or from employers[462]	Canada	Youth with mental illness
Low barrier into training programs (e.g., barriers include stringent eligibility criteria and application processes that involve lengthy forms and administrative processes)[463]	Canada	Inuit youth
One-stop-shop service hubs[464]	Canada	Youth with mental illness
Focus on life-skills and mental wellness[465]	Canada	YWD
Identify marginalized young people as early as possible, possibly through tracking systems,[466] and reach youth at an earlier age so they can receive employment services earlier rather than later[467]	UK, US	Disadvantaged youth, YWD

Appendix V: Type of Existing Employment Services in Canada

Community-based	Advocacy services, outreach programs
	Community-based transition programs
Employment support	One-on-one employment counselling/personalized support from a job coach
	Career decision making strategies and support
	Job search assistance
	Customized employment development/job carving
	Resume writing
	Assessments for work accommodations
	Skill enhancement/workplace readiness training
	Information and support for employers who hire people with a disability
	Employment maintenance support
	Vocational rehabilitation
	Assistive devices and accommodations
	Job/career fairs
	Career skills assessment
	Job maintenance/ongoing support from a job coach once employment has been found
	Mentorship
Government	Funding (e.g., student financial aid, disability assistance, income assistance, employment insurance)
	Work experience programs (e.g., Federal Student Work Experience Program, Ontario Internship Program)
Health-related	Vocational rehabilitation
	Supported education
	Supported employment
	Occupational therapy vocational assessments
	Psychological vocational assessments
Training and work experience	Experiential learning
	Skills development, soft skills training
	Literacy services
	Internship, technical preparation, entrepreneurship program, cooperative education program, work-based learning experiences

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