



All In

How Inclusive Labour Markets Unlock Growth and Drive Prosperity

Issue

When work opportunities are accessible to all members of the working population, economies and businesses grow. Diverse teams boost productivity, strengthen problem solving and improve business performance while inclusion builds institutional trust. In fact, existing barriers to an inclusive workforce point to an opportunity cost as high as \$200 billion to Canada's economy.

A diverse workforce has the potential to significantly boost Canada's GDP. For example, closing the employment gap for people with disabilities could add [\\$50 billion](#) to the country's GDP and create [450,000 new jobs](#) by 2030.

And it doesn't stop there.

Increasing female participation in the labour force could generate up to [\\$150 billion by 2026](#), while bridging the Indigenous economic gap could boost GDP by [\\$27.7 billion](#) annually – resulting in over \$200 billion benefit to the economy.

Immigrants also play a disproportionate role in entrepreneurship, representing over [one fifth](#) of the private sector businesses in Canada and contributing significantly to job creation and export growth, while women-owned businesses remain underrepresented relative to their economic potential.

Indigenous small and medium sized enterprises already outperform the national average in revenue growth. Greater labour market inclusion would amplify this success. Indigenous communities are younger than the Canadian average, highly entrepreneurial, and innovation driven. Indigenous women, for example, are twice as likely as their non-Indigenous counterparts to own a business. Indigenous entrepreneurs are also more than twice as likely to be early adopters of new technology.

As workforce inclusion grows, these benefits cascade – strengthening the talent pipeline, fueling business creation and building a more dynamic, competitive business community. While progress has been made through legislation and targeted supports, inequities remain. Unlocking the full potential of every individual will strengthen Canada and Alberta's workforce, foster innovation, and ensure businesses have the talent they need to grow and compete.

Background

Over the past 50 years, Canada and the provinces have each enacted legislation to govern workforce inclusion, which has evolved through various forms of social advocacy, legal reform and policy innovation. In the early 20th century, labour movements and post-war demographic shifts such as increased immigration and women's workforce participation laid the foundation for equity in employment. Landmark legislation followed, including the [Canadian Human Rights Act \(1977\)](#), the [Charter of Rights and Freedoms \(1982\)](#), and the [Employment Equity Act, EEA \(1986\)](#). The latter targeted systemic barriers faced by women, Indigenous people, persons with disabilities and racialized communities. For individuals with disabilities, the [Accessible Canada Act \(2019\)](#) was passed with the aim to create a [barrier-free Canada by 2040](#) and focuses on several priority areas including employment. More recent developments, such as the [Accessible Canada Act \(2019\)](#) and the ongoing

2023–2025 review of the [Employment Equity Act](#), have expanded inclusion to cover 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, intersectional identities, and other marginalized groups, reinforcing a national commitment to equitable participation in the labour market.

In Alberta, the inclusion journey has evolved in parallel with federal progress, reflecting the province's unique social and economic landscape. The [Alberta Human Rights Act](#) (originally enacted in 1972 as the *Individual's Rights Protection Act*) established legal protections against workplace discrimination based on race, gender, disability, age, and other grounds, later expanding to include sexual orientation and gender identity. Alberta has since implemented a range of initiatives to foster inclusive employment and remove systemic barriers. Together, these provincial and federal efforts have shaped a more diverse, equitable and competitive workforce.

Present Day

Despite decades of progress, systemic barriers continue to hinder full workforce inclusion in Canada. Women continue to earn less, just [87 cents for every dollar](#) earned by men in 2024 and [82 cents](#) in Alberta – the lowest in Canada. Women are significantly underrepresented in leadership, holding only [24 per cent](#) of corporate board seats, with even lower representation among Indigenous ([0.4 per cent](#)), Black ([0.8 per cent](#)) and 2SLGBTQIA+ ([0.7 per cent](#)) women. Federal supports like \$10 per day childcare through the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care program and the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy are critically important programs aimed at improving outcomes.

Indigenous peoples, who make up nearly [two million](#) Canadians, had an employment rate of just [50 per cent](#) in 2021 compared to [57 per cent](#) for non-Indigenous people. Still, Indigenous entrepreneurship is booming – growing over 42 per cent between 2005 and 2021 – with Alberta now home to the largest number of Indigenous-owned businesses in the country.

Persons with disabilities, representing over [eight million](#) Canadians aged 15 and older, continue to face exclusion from the labour force. In 2024, the employment rate for persons with disabilities was [46.4 per cent](#), compared to [66.2 per cent](#) for those without, and a [\\$2.22](#) hourly wage gap persisted. Nearly [1.9 million](#) working-age Canadians with disabilities are not in school or employment, despite nearly half reporting they are able and willing to work.

While our province posted the highest employment rate for persons with disabilities in the country in 2024 at 53 per cent, this is not a success story. It means Alberta is performing slightly better within a system that continues to exclude too many people. Persistent barriers remain, ranging from inequitable recruitment and hiring practices, to discrimination, inaccessible workplaces or unmet accommodation requests. Until these structural barriers are addressed, talent will continue to be left on the sidelines.

Racialized Canadians and immigrants continue to face persistent barriers in the labour market, even when they hold in-demand skills and education. Research shows that individuals with racialized-sounding names are [less likely to receive job callbacks](#), highlighting the persistence of hiring discrimination.

While immigrants have been closing the gap with Canadian-born workers disparities remain. In 2024, immigrants aged 25 to 54 had participation and employment rates of [87.5 per cent and 81.6 per cent](#), compared to [89.3 per cent and 85.6 per cent](#) for Canadian-born individuals. Also, immigrants still hold significantly fewer leadership and senior management roles, and immigrant women earn around [25 per cent](#) less than their immigrant male counterpart. The income disparity is even wider between university-educated immigrants, with men earning on average just [over 27 per cent](#) more than their female counterparts.

The 2SLGBTQIA+ community continues to face workplace exclusion, earning less despite higher education levels and holding just [0.7 per cent](#) of board seats. The federal 2SLGBTQIA+ Action Plan, with a [\\$41.5 million](#) investment, aims to improve data and support inclusion, but broader change is needed to ensure market equity across the labour market.

Recommendations

The Chamber has identified key areas that governments can support businesses in establishing a more inclusive workforce:

Federal-Provincial Actions

- Advance credential recognition reform at both provincial and federal levels to support equitable labour market integration for internationally trained immigrants. This includes streamlining assessment processes and expanding support for employers who recognize foreign qualifications.
- Enable and support employer readiness to hire, train and retain diverse and barriered talent through practical, employer-focused tools, including step-by-step guidance on inclusive recruitment, workplace accommodations and retention practices, as well as targeted training and wage supports. Reducing complexity and perceived risk for employers will unlock workforce participation.
- Target supports for remote and northern communities. Programs should be tailored to the unique challenges of these regions, including access to training, digital infrastructure and mentorship.
- Design workforce development programs to advance equitable opportunity. Consider providing increased eligibility for businesses that hire and upskill people with disabilities, akin to the Canada-Alberta Job Grant.
- Improve data collection and reporting by strengthening federal statistical surveys to capture comprehensive employment data across 2SLGBTQIA+ identities, enabling evidence-based policy and program design.
- Increase support for immigrant settlement agencies, including funding for stage 2 language training, across the country. Many of are facing challenges due to funding uncertainty. These agencies are critical to settle newcomers to Calgary and help them join the local labour force.

Provincial

- Ensure Alberta is a leader in accessible and affordable childcare. Affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare is critical to improving labour force participation by enabling parents to rejoin the workforce.
- Prioritize Indigenous-led initiatives to ensure that all training, employment and entrepreneurship programs are designed and delivered by Indigenous organizations or in close partnership with communities.

- Provide specific supports for businesses to improve accessibility, including grants and other support programs that would provide funding for construction, retrofits or communication technology upgrades.

Municipal

- Continue support for Indigenous businesses, including the Indigenous Procurement Program.
- Support 2SLGBTQIA+ community-led programs and expand funding for initiatives that are led by these organizations, ensuring programs are tailored to the needs of the community.

Conclusion

Beyond dollars, inclusion strengthens businesses by providing access to a diverse, multi-skilled talent pool, improving workplace morale, raising ethical standards and fostering a more cohesive social fabric. These outcomes are the foundation of resilient businesses and a competitive, thriving economy.

Ensuring consistent workplace inclusivity across the province and Canada, alongside supports tailored to the needs of underrepresented groups, is essential. This is an opportunity for all levels of government to work together with business to break down barriers, expand participation and unlock the full potential of Alberta's and Canada's workforce.