

Inclusive Workplaces Start With Understanding

How stigma shapes the workplace experience

Many employers want to create workplaces that are fair and welcoming for people with disabilities. However, stigma is a challenge. Stigma occurs when people hold false beliefs or make unfair judgments about others. This can limit a person's ability to succeed at work.

Signal49 Research studied how adults with disabilities face stigma at work. We surveyed 100 employers and 1,000 people who identified as having a disability. We found that stigma shows up as negative attitudes, unfair treatment, and assumptions about what individuals with disabilities can and cannot do.

In addition, many employees are afraid to talk about their disability. This makes it harder for them to get the support they need. About one third of the people we interviewed chose not to tell their employer about their disability because they feared it would hurt their chances of succeeding at work.

Almost half of employees did not share information about their disability with their employer because they didn't want to be treated differently. Nearly one-third worried they might face discrimination. Job seekers worried even more. They feared that saying they have a disability would hurt their chances of getting hired.



Creating a safe and supportive place for all employees

The employers we spoke with said it is hard to create a workplace where people feel safe to share a disability. One employer said that workers often don't mention their disability until something serious happens. By then, it might be too late to provide the support they needed.

Some employees we spoke with said similar things. They only share their disability when they have to. For example, when they have to ask for support, or explain a performance problem or why they missed work.

Many workplace processes treat all disabilities the same. However people with different disabilities have different needs. Employers shared that they still have a lot to learn. Almost 30 per cent of employers said they do not feel confident handling requests for support. Workers notice this. They say that the process around accommodations takes too long, or that employers don't know how to manage these requests, or that communication around it is poor.

Making a workplace inclusive takes action. Employers can help in simple, everyday ways, such as

- Making sure employees know where to find information on accommodation. If the steps are clear, people will know how to ask for support.
- Giving employees chances to learn about disability inclusion. When leaders share updates or talk about how to support coworkers, everyone learns and grows.
- Asking persons with disabilities how they prefer to be identified.
- Acting quickly if someone is treated unfairly. Let all employees know how to report problems and who to report to.
- Offering regular training to help employees learn how to be respectful to and support coworkers with disabilities.
- Supporting simple changes that help employees do their best work, such as providing quiet spaces, flexible hours, or better lighting.

The resources in the research links at the end of this document can help employers understand how to make workplaces more accessible.

Employers play a big part in reducing stigma by creating safer, more-inclusive environments for everyone. If you want to learn more, please read the full report: [Overcoming Workplace Stigma: Inclusive Strategies for Supporting People Experiencing Disability](#).

Want to help make your job more inclusive? Read our research to get started.

[Supporting Employees With Disabilities: Key Insights on Disclosure and Accommodations](#)

[Opportunity for All: Improving Workplace Experiences and Career Outcomes for Canadians With Disabilities](#)

[Building Workplaces Where Neurodiverse Workers Thrive](#)

[Fostering Inclusion through Mentorship: A Call to Action From People With Disabilities](#)

[Build Diverse Workforces: Strategies and Tools for Inclusive Mentorship](#)



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