



Unlocking Self-Employment for Neurodivergent Canadians

Key Findings and Recommendations

Canada's workforce includes many individuals who think and learn differently. These neurodivergent Canadians bring strengths such as creativity, pattern recognition, and solution-oriented thinking – qualities that can drive innovation. Yet, traditional employment systems often fail to accommodate these differences, leaving talent underutilized.

This research explores self-employment as a pathway to inclusion, drawing on interviews and focus groups with entrepreneurs and system-level stakeholders. It reveals both opportunities and systemic barriers that need attention.

What we learned

Neurodivergent entrepreneurs work across diverse sectors: professional services, creative industries, education, mental health, skilled trades, and the gig economy. For many, self-employment is a deliberate choice – an opportunity to align work with strengths and values, create flexible schedules, and design supportive environments. For others, it is a last resort after exclusion or being denied accommodations in traditional workplaces.

A critical insight: Self-employment is rarely presented as an option within Canada's supported employment programs, which overwhelmingly focus on traditional jobs. This narrow approach overlooks entrepreneurial potential and reinforces limiting beliefs about capability.

Practical barriers compound the challenge. Training and mentorship programs often assume neurotypical learning styles, leaving gaps for those with executive function challenges such as planning and time management and those with learning differences. Financial obstacles are considerable: Restrictive disability benefit policies discourage risk-taking, and targeted funding for neurodivergent entrepreneurs is virtually nonexistent.

Why it matters

Canada faces skills shortages and productivity challenges. Neurodivergent underemployment represents a missed opportunity to tap into a diverse talent pool. Self-employment offers autonomy, innovation, and economic participation – but realizing this potential requires systemic change.

Recommendations for action

Government and policy

- **Reform disability benefits:** Remove clawback penalties and allow gradual income adjustments so entrepreneurs can grow without losing essential supports.
- **Expand income stability programs:** Restore or introduce basic income initiatives during start-up phases to reduce financial risk.
- **Accessible financing:** Partner with financial institutions and supported employment service providers to offer low-interest loans, microgrants, and flexible repayment options tailored for neurodivergent entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurial ecosystem

- **Neuroinclusive accelerators and incubators:** Fund programs that provide adaptive resources, flexible pacing, and mentorship grounded in lived experience.
- **Mentorship and peer networks:** Develop neurodivergent-led mentorship programs and peer communities for authentic guidance and collaboration.
- **Inclusive networking:** Organize sensory-friendly events, structured small-group sessions, and virtual options to accommodate diverse communication needs.
- **Centralized resource Hubs:** Create user-friendly platforms consolidating information on programs, training, funding, and accessible tools.

Education and workforce development

- **Integrate self-employment into career education:** Include entrepreneurial pathways in K–12 curricula and expand experiential learning in post-secondary settings.
- **Experiential opportunities:** Offer internships, co-ops, and project-based learning focused on entrepreneurship to build confidence and skills.
- **Neurodiversity awareness training:** Equip educators and career advisors with training to dismantle stigma and foster inclusion.

Ecosystem-wide awareness

- **Comprehensive training:** Deliver neurodiversity education for all stakeholders—supported employment providers, business associations, incubators—led by neurodivergent experts to ensure authenticity and impact.

For the full research, see our impact paper [*Creating Their Own Path: Unlocking Self-Employment for Neurodivergent Canadians*](#).



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