Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) 2022 Public Opinion Research on Accessibility

Executive Summary

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For more information, please contact:
ACCESSIBLE.CANADA.DIRECTORATE-DIRECTION.CANADA.ACCESSIBLE@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

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Canada

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Prepared for Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) by Quorus Consulting Group Inc.
July 2022

This report presents the results of public opinion research conducted with persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities. The research involved a national survey with these two target audiences from March 2 to May 2, 2022. The study also involved ten online focus groups and 15 in-depth interviews with persons with disabilities completed between March 16 and April 14, 2022. Sessions included participants from across Canada and captured a mix of different types of disabilities.

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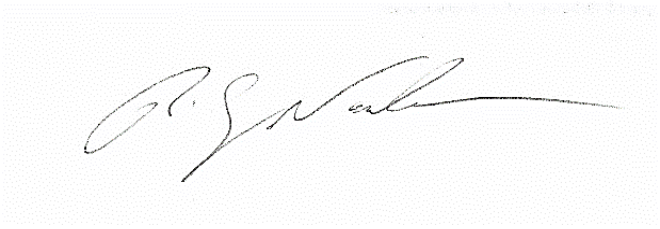


June 2022
Rick Nadeau, President
Quorus Consulting Group Inc.

Executive summary

Study background

In 2022, the Accessible Canada Directorate within Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) commissioned a follow-up to the 2019 study measuring Canadians' awareness and experiences with accessibility and disability issues. This research will be used to measure and track outcomes of the Accessible Canada Act and help shape future accessibility policies.

The scope of the study involved two key population segments: persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities. A series of questions was developed by Quorus and ESDC to identify persons with disabilities. Wording for some of these questions was borrowed from existing survey instruments and was customized for the purposes of this particular study.

The study was comprised of a survey of both population segments and a series of focus groups and in-depth interviews with persons with disabilities. Readers are reminded that survey results for persons with disabilities are derived from a non-probability sampling approach and as such cannot be used to draw inferences to the entire population. This data is representative of only those who participated in the survey.

Methodology for the national survey

Persons without disabilities

- A total of 1,205 telephone interviews with individuals 18 years of age and older.
- Respondents could complete the survey in either English or French.
- The sample consisted of traditional wireline telephone numbers and a sub-quota of cell-phone only households.
- The margin of error of this sample size is +/- 2.8%, 19 times out of 20.
- Data was weighted by region, gender, and age to ensure that the final distributions within the final sample mirror those of the Canadian population without a disability according to the latest Census data (2016).

Persons with disabilities

- A total of 872 surveys were completed with individuals with a disability, at least 18 years of age, of which 503 were completed by telephone and 369 were completed online.
- Nearly all surveys completed over the telephone (500) consisted of landline telephone numbers and a sub-quota of cell-phone only households. The remaining telephone interviews (3) were completed with individuals who dialed into the toll-free number to schedule an interview.
- All surveys completed online (369) were completed by individuals contacted through departmental stakeholder networks.

    - These respondents could complete the survey using a variety of formats in English or in French: telephone (the study website offered a toll-free number which participants could call and arrange for an interviewer to call back and collect their answers), online, downloadable accessible PDF and MSWord versions, Braille (available upon request), digital Braille (available upon request), VRS (available upon request), ASL/LSQ (available upon request), and hardcopy versions. As noted earlier, all surveys were completed either via telephone or online.
        - With the exception of 3 respondents who dialed into the toll-free number to schedule a phone interview, no respondents requested the use of alternative formats.
- Given the non-probability nature of the sampling, a margin of error cannot be calculated. As well, data for this segment were not weighted.

Study parameters common to both segments included the following:

- Data collection occurred between March 2 and May 2, 2022, and included a pretest of all data collection modes and formats.
- All survey respondents were informed that the study was being conducted by ESDC/the Government of Canada.
- Survey respondents did not receive any incentive for completing the survey.
- The survey took respondents, on average, 15 minutes to complete.

Overview of results from the national survey

Persons without disabilities

- One in five (21%) have seen, read, or heard about the *Accessible Canada Act*. When asked to explain, unprompted, what they remember about this act, 18% of those who could recall the Act explained it will generally support or assist persons with disabilities. Other common responses included 10% who explained it will increase accessibility, a similar proportion (9%) explained it will make buildings accessible and 9% indicated it will make government services accessible.
- When asked how they like to access the services or programs from federal sector organizations, a majority (53%) preferred online, followed by in person (21%) and by telephone (13%).
- One in five respondents (21%) “always” or “often” saw or heard of someone with a disability needing federal sector organizations, including the Government of Canada, to make materials available in accessible formats. Another 22% saw or heard this “sometimes.” The most common types of accessible formats these respondents saw or heard someone with a disability needing were large print (39%), plain language (33%), text to speech compatible (26%), audio versions (26%) and closed captioning (25%).
- Nearly all respondents indicated they have access to the Internet at home (97%). Among the few who do not, the main reasons were a lack of need or interest (51%) followed by cost (21%).

- Over the past two years, the incidence of respondents who had seen or heard of someone with a disability experiencing the following technology barriers because of an accessibility issue either "always" or "often" were:
    - using a website (10%),
    - using self-service technology in a public place (8%),
    - using a cellphone or accessing a wireless service (7%),
    - watching a video on the internet, for example on YouTube, Facebook, other social media or websites (7%),
    - watching a show on a streaming service such as Netflix, AppleTV, Crave, Amazon Prime, or a similar service (6%),
    - watching cable TV (4%).

Persons with disabilities

- While all respondents in this segment qualified as individuals with a disability according to the series of screening questions developed for this study, 65% identified as a person with a disability.
- Respondents were asked if they had any of the following types of disabilities:

• **Seeing** - also known as visual impairment, it affects a person's ability to see - even when wearing glasses or contact lenses
• **Hearing** - also known as Deaf or hard of hearing, it affects a person's ability to hear - even when choosing to use devices like hearing aids or cochlear implants
• **Mobility** - a type of physical disability, it affects a person's ability to move
• **Flexibility** - also known as a physical disability, it affects a person's ability to move their joints
• **Dexterity** - also known as a physical disability, it affects a person's ability to do tasks, especially with their hands
• **Pain** - also known as chronic pain syndrome or disability, it affects a person's ability to function due to pain. This is the type of pain that continues over a long period of time and disrupts your life.
• **Learning** - also known as learning disabilities, it affects the way a person receives, understands, and uses information. Learning disabilities can include Dyslexia, Aphasia, Hyperactivity, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, etc.
• **Developmental** - also known as intellectual disabilities, it affects a person's ability to learn and to adapt their behaviour to different situations. More specifically, has a doctor, psychologist or other health care professional ever said that you had a developmental disability? This may include Down syndrome, autism, Asperger syndrome, etc.
• **Memory** - also known as a memory disability, it affects a person's ability to remember information. In other words, do you have a disability that regularly affects how you remember things?
• **Mental health-related** – also known as mental illness, it affects a person's psychology or their behavior, in other words it affects their ability to think, their emotions, and their behaviour.
• A **communications disability** – this affects a person's ability to receive, understand, and respond to communication from others. This includes people not knowing how to communicate with you and people

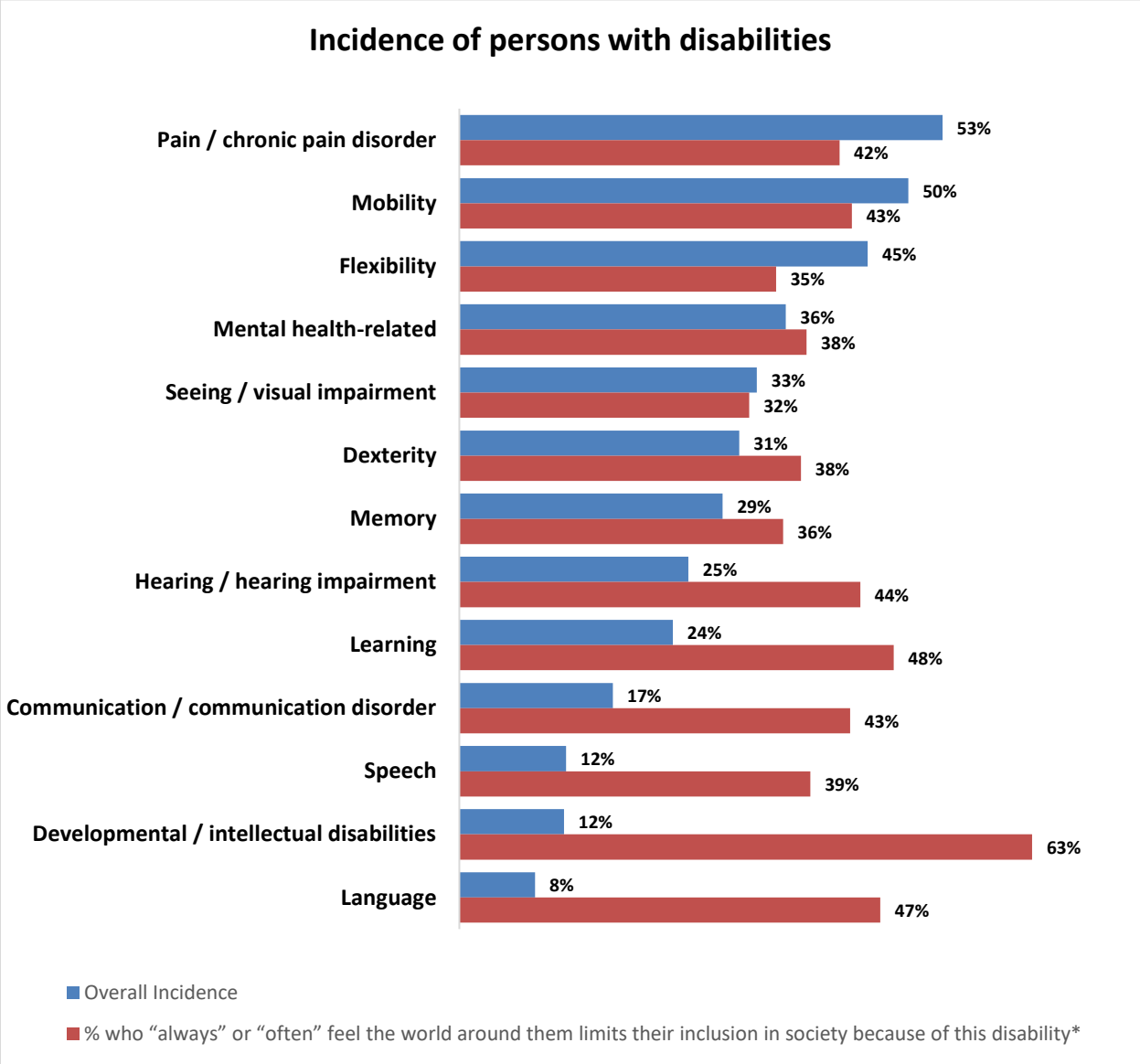
not understanding what you are saying but does not refer to a situation where you are not sufficiently fluent in a given language.

- A **speech disability** - this affects the way a person speaks.
- **Language** - also known as a language-based disability, it affects a person's ability to understand and use spoken, signed, and written language.

Respondents having indicated having a specific disability were then asked how often they believe the world around them - for example physical spaces, technology, or people's attitudes towards them - limits their inclusion in society because of this disability.

Results revealed that the most common disabilities related to pain (53%), mobility (50%) and flexibility (45%), followed by mental health-related (36%), seeing (33%), and dexterity (31%). All other disabilities had an overall incidence below 30%. Among those indicating having each disability, the ones most likely to feel that the world around them "always" or "often" limits their inclusion in society because of this disability are those with developmental / intellectual disabilities (63% feel this way among the 12% who have this disability), a learning disability (48%), and a language disability (47%).

Figure 1: Incidence of persons with disabilities



*Base: respondents who indicated having the given disability

- Roughly one-third of respondents (34%) have seen, read, or heard about the *Accessible Canada Act*. When asked to explain, unprompted, what they remember about this act, 15% of those who could recall the Act explained it will generally support or assist persons with disabilities and 13% explained it will increase accessibility.
- When asked how they like to access services or programs from federal sector organizations, the plurality (42%) preferred online, followed by in person (24%) and by telephone (19%).
- Over the past two years, just over one in ten respondents (13%) "always" or "often" needed certain kinds of accommodations when accessing the services or programs from federal sector organizations. Another 12% needed them "sometimes." The most common types of accommodations, across all

respondents, were an accessible website[1] (27%), more time to complete a form or an application (26%), documents in plain language (21%) and the use of an assistive device (21%).

- Just over one in ten respondents (12%) always or often need federal sector organizations, including the Government of Canada, to make materials available in accessible formats. Another 18% need them "sometimes." The most common types of accessible formats needed were plain language (48%), large print (37%), audio version (18%), e-books (18%), text to speech compatible (15%), and closed captioning (15%).[2]
- In terms of the built environment, over the past two years respondents "always" or "often" experienced barriers that limited their ability to move in and around at following types of places:
    - public spaces, such as sidewalks and parks (20%),
    - small and independent local stores or shops (20%),
    - friends or other people's houses they visited (18%),
    - large retail stores and chain stores (17%),
    - shopping centres (17%),
    - medical offices including walk-in clinics, hospitals, etc. (17%),
    - restaurants (17%),
    - public buildings, such as libraries, community buildings, city hall, etc. (13%),
    - movie theatres (13%),
    - government buildings, such as Service Canada centres, etc. (12%),
    - place of work (8%).
- Nearly all respondents indicated they have access to the Internet at home (93%). Among the few who do not, the main reasons are a lack of need or interest (42%) followed by cost (22%).
- Over the past two years, the incidence of respondents having experienced the following technology barriers because of an accessibility issue either "always" or "often" are:
    - using a website (16%),
    - using self-service technology in a public place (16%),
    - using a cellphone or accessing a wireless service (13%),
    - watching a video on the internet, for example on YouTube, Facebook, other social media or websites (13%),
    - watching a show on a streaming service such as Netflix, AppleTV, Crave, Amazon Prime, or a similar service (10%),
    - watching cable TV (10%).

[1] This was explained to respondents as "a website which is easy to use and designed so that everyone, including persons with disabilities, can use it"
[2] Telephone survey results exclusively

Methodology for the focus groups and depth interviews

- Sessions were completed between March 16 and April 14, 2022
- In an attempt to limit the impact of participants not showing for their session, which can happen for any variety of reasons and is customary for focus group research, Quorus recruited six participants per group so that approximately five to six would ultimately show. In the end, 64 persons with disabilities participated in this phase: 15 through in-depth interviews and 49 through ten online focus groups. There was no participant overlap between the in-depth interviews and the online focus groups.
- The same research material was used for the focus groups and the in-depth interviews. Focus groups each lasted 90 minutes and depth interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes each.
- All participants were given an $80 honorarium.
- Sessions included participants from across Canada and captured a mix of different types of disabilities. Some sessions were with individuals with mild disabilities and others with moderate to severe disabilities.
- Given the nature of the target audiences for this study and the research subject matter, a variety of recruitment approaches were used. Participants invited to participate in this study were randomly recruited by telephone from the general public, invited via a proprietary opt-in database, invited via the quantitative research component of this study, and, similar to the outreach used for the quantitative study, individuals were reached through stakeholder organizations.
- All survey respondents were informed that the study was being conducted by ESDC/the Government of Canada.

Overview of results from the focus groups and depth interviews

General discussion regarding accessibility

Participants were asked to explain in their own words what comes to mind when they think of "disability", that something is "accessible" and when they consider that they encounter "a barrier to accessibility."

- Participants generally viewed a "disability" as something that limits their ability to do something the same way as someone who does not have the same disability. Many stressed that this can just as much be something physical (and typically visible) as it could be something invisible (e.g., mental health).
- They generally considered something to be "accessible" if "everyone" can do it, irrespective of their disability or lack thereof.
- Finally, a "barrier to accessibility" was broadly seen as something that is getting in the way of a person trying to do something. The barrier might make it more difficult to do something or it might completely impede the ability to do something.

When generally asked what they believe could be done to reduce accessibility barriers in Canada, some of the solutions that participants proposed included:

- Consult, test and do research with PWDs
- Involve PWDs in the decision-making or design process
- Adopt universal design principles
- Create and/or engage committees in the community that can be consulted regarding accessibility considerations
- Require product and built environment designers to spend a day "in the shoes of" someone with a disability – they need to experience the world the way PWDs do. For instance, it was suggested that designers should spend a day in a wheelchair.

A focus on information and communication technologies

Very few participants with mild disabilities encounter barriers when accessing online content or using online features. They are more likely to be encountered by those with moderate to severe disabilities, especially those with visual and/or hand or arm-related physical disabilities. For these individuals, the main issues typically pertain to websites that are not adapted for screen readers, websites that are not designed for easy navigation and/or require many clicks to navigate. Some avoid websites with streaming content because they do not all provide sub-titles or closed captioning.

- Participants suggest involving PWDs more often at the testing stage when websites are being designed.

Very few believe they encounter barriers using specific types of devices. Some with physical impairments avoid or limit their use of portable devices and will resort to stands or similar devices to prop up their device instead of holding it.

Over the past two years, participants could not think of many government websites on which they encountered a barrier. The most common feedback typically pertained to the Canada Revenue Agency website, which was seen as dense and generally difficult to navigate because of the amount of content and the technical language used. A few participants had struggled with the ease of use of vaccine-booking websites.

Very few participants used any assistive devices to help them communicate, work, or access the Internet at home or at work. For many who did use these devices, the technology was either built into the device they were using and as such was generally seen as "affordable", or the costs were covered by their insurance. A few did explain that the devices they required were quite expensive.

A focus on communication other than ICT

Accessibility barriers were very rarely encountered when participants communicated with friends, family or local businesses and organizations, irrespective of how that communication was happening. Those who required more support relied on a companion to help them and this typically met their needs.

Communicating with Government of Canada staff is rarely done and when it occurs, the only main challenge is the wait time when dialing into a call center. Otherwise, participants did not recall having any difficulty accessing programs or services because a given federal government agency or department did not offer adequate accessible formats or accessible forms of communication.

There was some awareness of the term "plain language materials" although very few knew that they could obtain plain language materials from the federal government. That said, some felt that all government materials should be provided in plain language by default since many felt that current materials from the federal government are not always easily understood. At a minimum, the availability of plain language versions should be better advertised.

Finally, when it comes to communicating emergencies to all Canadians, for the most part participants were only aware of the alerts they receive on their mobile devices, when listening to the radio or when they are watching television. This approach was widely appreciated and considered adequate and effective. Of the few who had concerns with this approach, we heard:

- Concern for Canadians who do not have a mobile device
- Not being able to retrieve an alert – they might have heard the alarm but when they wanted to find out more, the alert was gone, and they could not find out more about it
- A few felt the alarm was too loud and was anxiety-inducing

A focus on the built environment

When considering some of the stores they might visit or some of the products they tend to buy regularly, participants feel they encounter many barriers, many of which are related to physical disabilities. Given the variety of persons with disabilities in the sessions, these findings might suggest that retail environments are generally more likely to present barriers to individuals with physical disabilities, or those with physical disabilities are more inclined to voice the barriers they encounter.

The most common barriers encountered included the following:

- Curbs that are too high for wheelchairs, mobility scooters and/or individuals with a physical impairment that limits their ability to go up steps.
- Store entrances, including the lack of or broken handicap door openers, and doors to stores or malls that require one or more step to enter (i.e., no entrance ramp or threshold ramp). A few also felt that some store entrances are too narrow or built on angles that make it either difficult or impossible to enter with a mobility scooter or a wheelchair.
- Lack of parking spots reserved for persons with disabilities. Some also expressed frustration with the limitations or eligibility requirements to obtain an accessible parking permit.
- Narrow aisles in stores that limit their use of their wheelchair or mobility scooter.
- Lack of seating in malls and stores.
- Lack of motorized shopping carts.
- Walkways, sidewalks and entrances not properly cleared of snow.
- Shelving that is too high and a general lack of staff to help reach for items that are too high and/or too heavy.
- Shopping environments that have too many stimuli such as bright/flashing lights, loud music, flashing display screens, loud public announcements, etc.

Participants living in rural or remote areas felt that many of these barriers were more common in their region compared to larger cities.

A focus on the built environment and procurement of goods, services, and facilities

Generally, beyond the barriers that participants outlined when they go shopping or go to other types of buildings in their area, they did not have much to add regarding how well the spaces and equipment of businesses and organizations meet the needs of persons with different types of disabilities.

Participants did have more to say regarding their current or previous workplace and how well they ensured workspaces and products are designed to be barrier free. Performance varied a great deal on this front – some felt that their workplace was very proactive in terms of making sure that workspaces were barrier free. To achieve this, they constantly ask staff how well their workspace is performing and if there is anything that

should change. Similarly, some workplaces are quite accommodating when employees request special equipment or indicate a particular need. Although not perfect, many of the workplaces that seemed to exercise the best accessibility practices were government workplaces.

On the other hand, many participants also explained that despite their organization's best intentions "on paper", it can be very difficult, and sometimes impossible, to obtain certain accommodations, especially if they are expensive.

- Many participants with moderate to severe disabilities explained that they have encountered employers who discriminate against persons with disabilities. This discrimination will occur either at the hiring stage, or if the disability surfaces or evolves while employed, the employer will create an environment that eventually sees persons with disabilities quit. A few explained how they did not reveal their disability to their employer out of concern that they might not be treated the same way, such as face certain forms of discrimination, including not being provided certain accommodations.

Very few were aware if there is or was any policy in place that included information about purchasing goods, services and facilities that are accessible for persons with disabilities. None had directly participated in their employer's procurement process beyond providing their feedback when specifically asked about their own workspace.

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