



CANADIAN INSTITUTE
SAFETY, WELLNESS
& PERFORMANCE

**ACCESSIBLE SKILLED TRADES:
INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE
SKILLED TRADES EMPLOYMENT
FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

Research Report | 2026



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ACCESSIBLE SKILLED TRADES: INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE SKILLED TRADES EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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This report was written by Drs. Katherine Bishop-Williams, Marcus Yung, and Amin Yazdani, and Nicki Islic. Individual chapter authorship is listed on the title page of each report section.

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Underutilized Talent: Assessing Employer Preparedness to Include Persons with Disabilities in the Canadian Skilled Trades

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ABSTRACT

Persons with disabilities are an underappreciated source of workers in the Canadian economy, especially among skilled trades, where only 13.8% of workers identify as a person with a disability. This survey of skilled trades companies across Canada aimed to understand the barriers and informational needs that prevent companies from implementing equitable employment practices.

A cross-sectional, quantitative survey was distributed to eligible companies to elicit insights related to current worker demographics and readiness to provide accommodations for workers. Multivariable logistic regression models were fit to assess differences in accommodation readiness for various impairment types.

Most respondents reported their companies were unprepared to accommodate vision impairments (85%) and mobility impairments (79%). When controlling for province and company size, construction sector companies were significantly less prepared to accommodate mobility impairments (OR=0.316; p=0.047) and hearing impairments (OR=0.202; p=0.003) compared to other skilled trades sectors. Larger companies were significantly more prepared to accommodate mobility (OR= 3.771, p=0.043) and learning (OR= 5.425, p=0.002) impairments.

Overall, findings indicate that many Canadian skilled trades companies remain insufficiently prepared to accommodate several impairment types or implement common accommodations for employees with disabilities. This work will provide foundational evidence for future assessments aimed at identifying factors that improve organizational capacity to meaningfully, purposefully, and equitably integrate persons with disabilities into the skilled trades workforce in Canada.

KEYWORDS

Skilled trades; disability inclusion, vision impairment; hearing impairment; mobility impairment; cognitive impairment; speech impairment; equitable employment practices; employer readiness, workplace accommodation

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, approximately 1.6 million Red Seal certified skilled trades workers were employed in Canada, down 5.7 percentage points from 2016 (Su et al., 2024). The Red Seal program sets the national standard across roughly 50 trades and enables interprovincial mobility and mutual recognition of certification (Government of Canada, 2017). As Canada's trades workforce ages, further declines are expected; notably, the number of workers aged 45-54 fell by more than a 20% over this period, reflecting smaller cohorts advancing through age brackets (Su et al., 2024). In response, trades professions are designing recruitment strategies to reach untapped talent, including secondary students (i.e., ages 14-19; Alphonso, 2024; Hill and Liberty, 2025). Skilled trades remain viable path; using data from over 61,000 Canadian students, Milian et al. (2025) estimated that Red Seal certified workers earn higher average annual incomes than peers who attended college or university. Yet risks to retention persist: burnout prevalence among Ontario electricians was estimated 31.8% and lower job satisfaction was associated with greater intention to leave the trade (Shahzad et al., 2026). Sustainable recruitment and employment frameworks will therefore be essential to maintain participation in the skilled trades labour force.

Against this backdrop of workforce decline and retention pressures, broadening participation to underrepresented groups, including persons with disabilities, represents a timely, pragmatic strategy to sustain and stabilize the skilled trades workforce. Enhancing inclusion and accommodation may also contribute to retention by improving job fit with capacity, perceived fairness, and organizational climate. Equitable employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the skilled trades have not been achieved. In 2021 272,800 Red Seal certified workers in Canada identified as a person with a disability, defined as often or always experiencing difficulties with activities of daily living, such as seeing, hearing, walking, or learning (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (CAF), 2023). These workers represent only 13.8% of the Red Seal certified skilled trades workforce in Canada, five percentage points less than the employment rate of persons with disabilities for all occupational sectors (CAF, 2023; Su et al., 2024). The percentage of skilled trades workers who identified as a person with a disability was higher than the overall skilled trades average in oil and solid fuel heating (i.e., 17.6%), automotive parts (17.2%), baking (16.6%), cooking (16.2%), metal and platework fabrication (15.2%), heavy equipment operation (15.3%), and painting and decorating (15.2%) trades (CAF, 2023). The proportion of the general population who identified as persons with disabilities varied by

province and territory but increased in all regions by 1.1 to 8.6 percentage points from 2016 to 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023). Skilled trades employment for persons with disabilities also varied by province, with higher proportions in the Maritime provinces (i.e., 18.1%) compared to Ontario (13.5%) and Quebec (11.1%) (CAF, 2023). Taken together, these figures underscore a sizeable, underutilized talent pool and motivate a closer examination of employer readiness to enable equitable participation.

Differences in rates of employment among persons with disabilities and their counterparts without a disability are multifaceted and cannot be attributed to a single factor. However, experiences of discrimination play a substantial role in the career trajectories of persons with disabilities (Nittrouer et al., 2024). While some positive employment experiences among persons with disabilities are documented in the literature (Stokar and Orwat, 2018; Richards and Sang, 2015), they are less common than negative experiences and are often described in the context of the persistence of barriers and challenges. For example, Richards and Sang (2015) describe a positive response to an inclusion initiative for transportation workers with neurological impairments or who were neurodiverse in the United Kingdom, however, even these experiences were contextualized by prior negative experiences or gaps in inclusive employment practices. Similarly, Stokar and Orwat (2018) describe generally positive relationships between deaf restaurant workers and their managers without hearing impairment in the United States; however, the managers were considered unknowledgeable about the accommodation needs and abilities of their employees. In contrast, outright negative experiences marked by discrimination, biases, and lack of accommodation were common (Groschl, 2007; Nittrouer et al., 2024; Gupta et al., 2021; Soeker et al., 2018). Groschl (2007) described how aesthetic biases negatively impacted the hiring practices in the hotel industry in Canada. Discriminatory hiring practices against workers with mental impairments in the United States were described by Nittrouer et al. (2024) as stigmas that were “relatively automatic, negative biases;” stigmas toward some invisible impairments were sometimes exacerbated compared to visible impairments. For those who were working, a barrier described by persons with disabilities in South Africa was related to feeling they had reached a limit or ceiling in their training imposed by others indicating they felt they were not welcome to participate in higher levels of training or work, with discrimination limiting their ability to advance (Soeker et al., 2018). Domestically, Gupta et al. (2021), noted that 75% of eligible workers with vision impairments were out of the labour force when surveyed, noting the primary barriers were the lack of available employment opportunities, inadequate training, and unsuccessful attempts to seek employment previously. In Gupta’s study, 25% of participants noted that discrimination was the primary reason

they could not advance and 45% described discrimination as the primary factor that disadvantaged them throughout their career. Although several of these studies draw on only some very specific contexts (e.g., hospitality, food service), they illuminate mechanisms, such as stigma, aesthetic bias, and limited accommodation literacy, that plausibly operate within skilled trades workplaces and may contribute to observed disparities.

Literature that describes experiences of discrimination and employment barriers for persons with disabilities underscores the dramatic and pressing need for inclusive hiring practices, including within the skilled trades (De Raaf et al., 2024). Inclusive pathways into skilled trades have been described as requiring elements such as employer capacity for apprenticeship training and supports that are open and inclusive, on-site job training that supports inclusion for diverse apprentice populations, and long-term employment settings that are inclusive and offer ongoing accommodation (De Raaf et al., 2024). However, the ability to accommodate and to develop and implement inclusive hiring practices varies across company characteristics, such as company size (Bruyere et al., 2006; Macpherson et al., 2022; Jasper and Waldhart, 2013) and access to accommodation resources and opportunities (Groschl, 2007). Informational gaps persist regarding how employers in different skilled trades sectors develop, resource, and operationalize inclusive hiring and accommodation practices. Additionally, sector-specific differences influence the readiness of companies to employ persons with disabilities, such as a knowledge gap that persists within the construction sector compared to other sectors (Bailey et al., 2022). Ongoing issues with lack of equity and diversity in the construction industry have been well documented, warranting two special issues of the *Construction Management and Economics* journal in 2005 (Dainty and Baglihole, 2005) and 2013 (Powell and Sang, 2013). Despite the salience of these issues, there is limited national-level evidence on employers' readiness to accommodate diverse impairment types within the skilled trades, and on sector-specific differences after accounting for company size and province. This represents a critical evidence gap with direct implications for policy and practice.

To address this gap, we conducted a national cross-sectional survey of skilled trades employers to characterize current worker demographics and assess "accommodation readiness" across impairment types. Multivariable models were used to examine sectoral differences while controlling for province and company size. This study aimed to describe the current landscape of skilled trades employment across the construction, automotive power, industrial, and service sectors for persons with disabilities and identify sector-specific readiness to meet

the needs of employees with various impairments. Specifically, this paper aimed to:

- i) Describe and characterize the employment of persons with disabilities across skilled trades sector companies in Canada;
- ii) Identify the informational needs of companies across the skilled trades to develop inclusive procedures that may help overcome the barriers to equitable employment practices;
- iii) Assess the readiness of skilled trades companies to accommodate various impairment types and determine factors that influence the ability of companies to readily accommodate employee needs; and
- iv) Evaluate the feasibility for companies to implement common accommodations when requested.

Collectively, these objectives position the study to generate actionable, sector-specific insights to inform employer guidance, training, and policy interventions.

METHODS

Study Design and Approach

This study reports findings from a cross-sectional quantitative survey examining the perspectives and practices of Human Resources (HR) professionals and company owners in the Canadian skilled trades sector. A non-probabilistic sampling approach was used, and all responses were anonymous. The survey aimed to identify challenges related to attracting, hiring, and retaining persons with disabilities in the skilled trades, as well as assess organizational practices, resources, and levels of preparedness to accommodate employees with disabilities. Skilled trades were defined to include the construction, motive power, industrial, and service sectors. This design enabled a broad snapshot of employer readiness across diverse organizational contexts.

Ethics approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Board at Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning (REB #603). All participants provided written informed consent.

Target Population

The target population comprised HR professionals and company owners employ at organizations with skilled trades workers. Eligible participants were required to represent a Canadian company operating within the skilled trades and to have sufficient knowledge of organizational hiring, accommodation, or workforce practices. While recruitment messaging focused on HR professionals, hiring managers, health and safety representatives, and company owners, individuals in other roles were not excluded if they possessed adequate organizational insight. The survey was offered in English and open nationwide, allowing participation from respondents involved in workplace decision-making and accommodation processes.

Survey Development

The survey instrument was developed iteratively, drawing on existing literature, exploratory research (Bishop-Williams et al., under review), and partner input. A Project Advisory Committee composed of individuals with lived experience of disability and professionals supporting persons with disabilities in skilled trades, provided guidance throughout development. This involvement helped ensure the clarity, relevance, and practical applicability of survey items and strengthened face validity.

The survey was administered online using Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT, USA) and was pre-tested with approximately 30 individuals from targeted population to assess clarity, navigation, and completion time. Revisions were made based on feedback. The final survey was designed to be brief; the average completion time was 12 minutes and 32 seconds, excluding three cases with extended pauses.

Survey content included organizational characteristics (sector, company size, and proportion of employees identifying as persons with disabilities) and focused on employer needs related to inclusive hiring, perceived barriers to hiring persons with disabilities, and organizational readiness to provide workplace accommodations across impairment type. Questions also assessed attitudes toward hiring, retaining, and advancing employees with disabilities in skilled trades. Accommodation readiness was examined across five impairment categories: hearing, mobility, vision, cognitive/ learning, and speech impairments.

Survey Recruitment

Recruitment involved multiple outreach strategies, including social media posts, email newsletters distributed by HR and skilled trades employer organizations, direct emails to known skilled trades employers, and direct email outreach sent to employers identified through publicly available contact information (e.g., websites and online directories). Recruitment materials requested that recipients forward the survey link to the individual within their organization most qualified to respond, such as the company owner or Director of HR. No financial or other incentives were offered for participation. This multi-modal strategy helped increase reach across sectors and regions despite the non-probabilistic sampling approach.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analyses summarized participant and company characteristics. Frequencies and percentages were estimated for all quantitative survey responses. Distributions of company characteristics among completed survey responses and all (i.e., abandoned and completed) survey responses were compared by Chi-square (χ^2) tests.

Participants responded to eight statements about hiring and retaining persons with disabilities in the skilled trades. Statements reflected common opinions or misconceptions of employers that may influence inclusive HR practices for persons with disabilities. Responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. These items were intended to capture attitudinal factors that may shape organizational decision-making around disability inclusion.

Statistical Analyses

Based on sample distribution, responses were classified by province as “Ontario” and “Other Provinces,” by skilled trades sector as “Construction” and “Other Sectors,” and by company size as “Less than 50” and “50 or More” for logistic regression analyses. To assess accommodation readiness, responses were dichotomized as “Prepared to Accommodate” (collapsing “Very Prepared” and “Somewhat Prepared”) and “Not Prepared to Accommodate” (collapsing “Not Prepared” and “Accommodating this impairment would be impossible”) =. These categories simplified interpretation and reflected practical differences in organizational readiness. Percentages were estimated to examine the relationship between skilled trades sector (i.e., Construction or other), province (i.e., Ontario or other), or company size (i.e., less than 50 and 50 or more) and organizational readiness to accommodate each assessed impairment type. Then adjusted logistic regression models were estimated. In total, five logistic regression models were fit: one adjusted model each for the five impairment types. Adjusted odds ratios (AORs) controlled for theoretically and empirically relevant covariates, specifically sector, province, and company size. Ontario was included to account for variation in disability-related legislation and accommodation requirements across jurisdictions (Kovacs Burns et al., 2010; Bishop-Williams et al., under review). Company size was considered a covariate to account for documented differences in workplace disability experiences (Macpherson et al., 2022), access to accommodation resources and opportunities (Groschl, 2007), and occupational health and safety practices (Gibb et al., 2017), organizational concerns (Jasper and Waldhart, 2013) and return to work procedures (Macpherson et al., 2022). Interaction terms (e.g., sector × size) were examined but not retained due to sample size limitations..

All statistical analyses were conducted in Stata version 19 (StataCorp LLC, College Station, TX, USA). Results are reported as AORs with 95% confidence intervals (95% CI; i.e., an alpha of 0.05 was used throughout). Multivariable models were assessed to ensure assumptions were met (i.e., observations were independent and outcome was binary) and that cell counts were reasonable (i.e., no cell counts were less than 5). Model diagnostics were minimal as predictors were binary (i.e., sector: Construction compared to all others; province: Ontario compared to all others; company size: less than 50 compared to 50 or more). Each multivariable model was assessed for Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), Likelihood Ratio Test (LRT) against the null model (i.e., sector only), and Hosmer-Lemeshow Goodness of Fit (GOF, with 10 bins). No major violations were identified.

RESULTS

Recruitment

Across all distribution channels, the survey was distributed to over 5,000 companies that employ skilled trades workers across Canada and resulted in 251 clicks to the survey. The survey's non-probabilistic recruitment means that the survey frame cannot be well defined; characteristics of companies that did not click to open the survey are not available. The survey was open from October 5, 2025, to January 15, 2026. In total, 162 respondents provided consent to participate and initiated the survey. Company demographics were completed by 141 company respondents. Among the 141 respondents who completed the demographics portion of the survey, three (2.1%) reported not employing skilled trades workers; these respondents were ineligible for the study and excluded from further participation.

Following the demographics section of the survey, questions focused primarily on current disability employment characteristics within each company. Nearly all partially complete surveys were abandoned at some point in this section. In total, 91 surveys, each representing a unique company across the country, were completed and included in this analysis. All questions in the survey were voluntary; counts of responses for each question are provided in the tables and figures. The pattern of survey attrition suggests that questions about disability employment practices may have required more detailed organizational knowledge or may have been considered sensitive for respondents.

Company Characteristics

Completed survey responses were distributed across provinces/ territories, sector, companies with one or more sites (i.e., multisite), and company size (Table 1). Companies that completed the survey primarily represented Ontario (50.6%), construction sector (65.9%), single-site companies (68.1%), and small-to-medium sized companies (e.g. 5 to 50 employees; 42.9%). Company characteristics from completed responses did not statistically differ from company characteristics from incomplete responses. This similarity suggests minimal non-response bias amongst companies that abandoned the survey with respect to core organizational demographics, although it does not speak to companies that did not open the survey or complete the demographics questions and does not address potential response biases related to social desirability or interest in the topic.

Table 1. Company characteristics from complete and incomplete responses to the survey of employers of skilled trades people, from October 2025 to January 2026, with statistical comparison of differences in respondent groups by Chi-square (x2) test.

Company Characteristics		Complete responses (only)		Incomplete responses		Differences between respondents and incomplete responses
		Frequency (n=91 unique companies)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n=50 unique companies)	Percentage (%)	
Province/ Territory	British Columbia	8	8.8	3	6.0	X2 = 11.44 p= 0.324
	Alberta	10	11.0	5	10.0	
	Saskatchewan	5	5.5	3	6.0	
	Manitoba	9	9.9	1	2.0	
	Ontario	46	50.6	21	42.0	
	Quebec	1	1.1	2	4.0	
	New Brunswick	2	2.2	3	6.0	
	Nova Scotia	6	6.6	2	4.0	
	Prince Edward Island	1	1.1	1	2.0	
	Newfoundland & Labrador	2	2.2	5	10.0	
	Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon	1	1.1	0	0	

Company Characteristics		Complete responses (only)		Incomplete responses		Differences between respondents and incomplete responses
		Incomplete responses				
		Frequency (n=91 unique companies)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n=50 unique companies)	Percentage (%)	
Sector	Accommodation and Food Services	1	1.1	2	4.0	$\chi^2 = 5.779$ $p = 0.449$
	Construction	60	65.9	29	58.0	
	Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	5	5.5	5	10.0	
	Manufacturing	8	8.8	3	6.0	
	Services	9	9.9	2	4.0	
	Transportation and Warehousing	1	1.1	1	2.0	
	Other	7	7.7	7	14.0	
Multisite	No	62	68.1	38	76.0	$\chi^2 = 1.364$ $p = 0.506$
	Yes	28	30.8	11	22.0	
	Unsure	1	1.1	1	2.0	
Company Size	Less than 5 employees	12	13.2	8	16.0	$\chi^2 = 1.968$ $p = 0.742$
	5-50 employees	39	42.9	25	50.0	
	51-100 employees	12	13.2	4	8.0	
	101-500 employees	16	17.6	6	12.0	
	More than 500 employees	12	13.2	7	14.0	

Disability Employment Characteristics

27.3% of companies reported that they currently employed at least one trades worker with a disability (Table 2). Most companies (73.4%) reported that less than 1% of their current workforce identified as a person with a disability. Only 18.2% of companies surveyed reported that they had knowingly hired a person with a disability in the past 12 months. When asked if their company actively recruited persons with disabilities for skilled trades positions, 11.4% of companies reported doing so. However, when asked how companies actively recruit persons with disabilities, no responses were provided (i.e., n=0). This gap between stated recruitment intentions and actual strategies highlights an operational disconnect from inclusive hiring practices.

Table 2. Reported disability employment characteristics from complete survey responses of employers of skilled trades workers, from October 2025 to January 2026.

Disability Employment Characteristics	Frequency (n)		Percentage (%)
Currently Employ Skilled Trades Workers with Disabilities (n=88)	Yes	24	27.3
	I don't know	7	7.7
	No, not to my knowledge	57	64.8
Proportion of Skilled Trades Employees with a Disability (known to employer) (n=64)	Less than 1%	47	73.4
	1-2%	12	18.8
	2-5%	3	4.7
	More than 5%	2	3.1
Have Hired a Skilled Trades Worker with a Disability in the Past 12 Months (n=88)	Yes	16	18.2
	I don't know	9	10.2
	No, not to my knowledge	63	71.6
Actively Recruiting Skilled Trades Worker with Disabilities (n=88)	Yes	10	11.4
	I don't know	16	18.2
	No, not to my knowledge	62	70.5

Information Needed

The types of information needed for developing inclusive hiring practices for persons with disabilities and for hiring, retaining, and advancing persons with disabilities at skilled trades companies was distributed similarly (Figure 1). In both instances, the most needed information was related to the types of accommodations available to support a person with disability (n= 58 of 80; n= 59 of 88, respectively). Other frequently needed information included the impacts on worker productivity (n= 47 of 80; n= 45 of 88); cost-benefit analysis of hiring persons with disabilities (n= 42 of 80; n= 53 of 88); and cost of accommodation (n= 40 of 80; n= 51 of 88). While less frequently requested than the information types listed above, nearly one-third of respondents reported needing information about increasing retention rates of persons with disabilities (n= 28 of 80; n= 31 of 88) and how to promote persons with disabilities to advance their career (n= 23 of 80; n= 31 of 88). The close alignment between these informational needs suggests that employers view inclusive hiring, retention, and advancement as interconnected challenges rather than isolated issues.

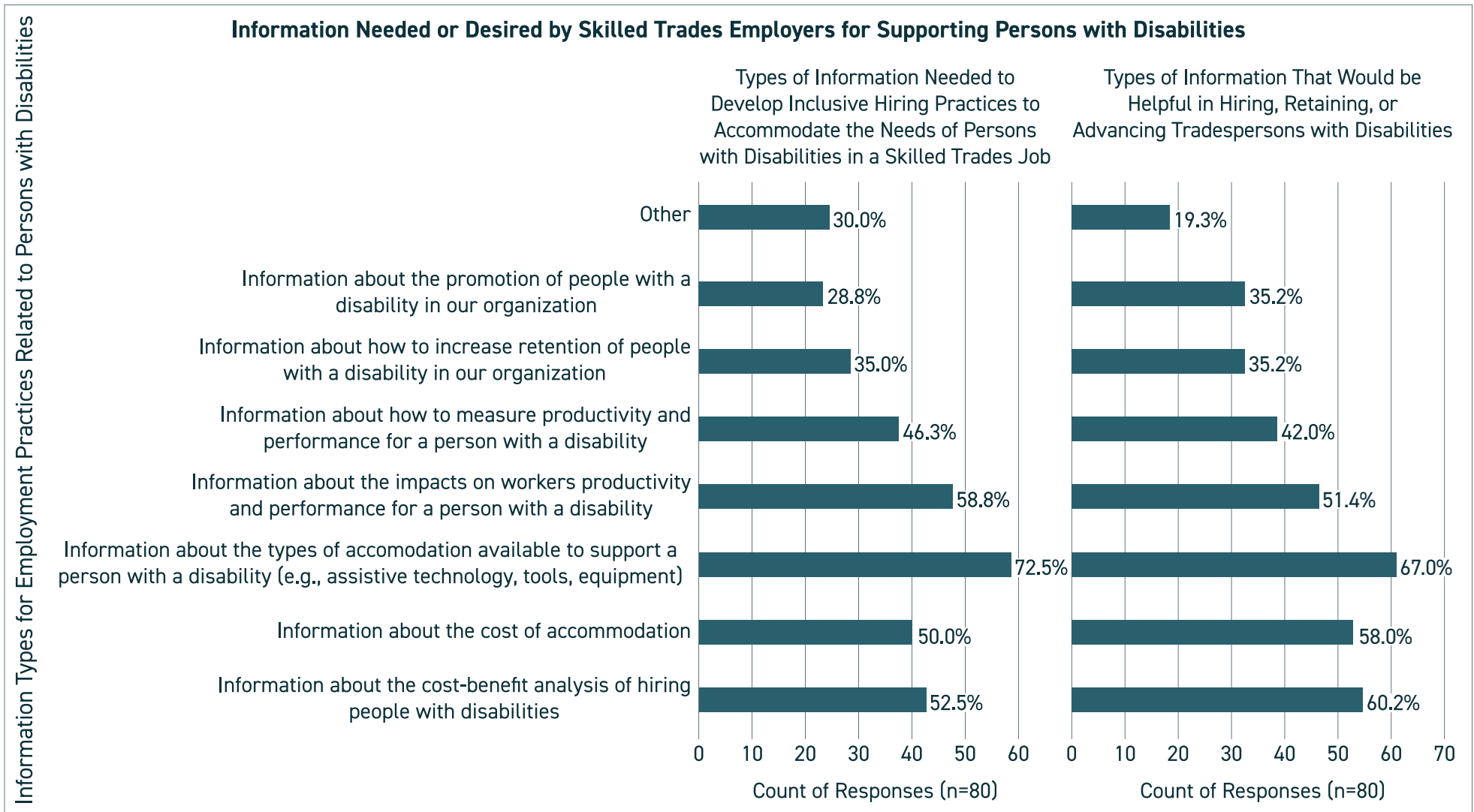


Figure 1. Percentage of companies reporting information needed for developing inclusive hiring practices for persons with disabilities and for hiring, retaining, and advancing persons with disabilities from complete survey responses of employers of skilled trades workers, from October 2025 to January 2026.

Related to inclusive hiring practices, most companies reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that their company's hiring practices focused on finding the best person for the job, regardless of their disability status (n=65, 82.3%). However, most companies also agreed or strongly agreed that they 'rarely receive job applications from persons with disabilities' so these practices do not impact their organization, although companies were not asked how they determined this (n=64, 82.1%). Despite the needs for information (Figure 1) and the statements above, only 17.1% (n=12) of respondents disagreed that their workplace provides equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. This discrepancy indicates that many employers perceive their practices as equitable while simultaneously acknowledging low application rates and limited knowledge regarding accommodations.

Organizational Barriers to Hiring Persons with Disabilities

Organizational barriers present hurdles that prevent companies from accessing and attracting large portions of the skilled trades workforce. In total, 50-80% of companies identified each specific hiring-related barrier investigated as a challenge (i.e., major challenge or somewhat of a challenge) for their company (Figure 2). The most noted challenge was organizational concern about the applicant's functional ability to perform required duties (n=74, 81.3%) followed by organizational concern about the applicant's ability to work safely (n=61, 67.0%). Findings related to organizational concerns about safety were substantiated by 47.8% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that the organization sees employing persons with a disability as a major risk for the employer (neutral= 22, 31%; disagree or strongly disagree=15, 21.1%). The least common barrier in the skilled trades was supervisor discomfort in managing persons with disabilities at the company (n=48, 52.2% of companies reported this barrier).

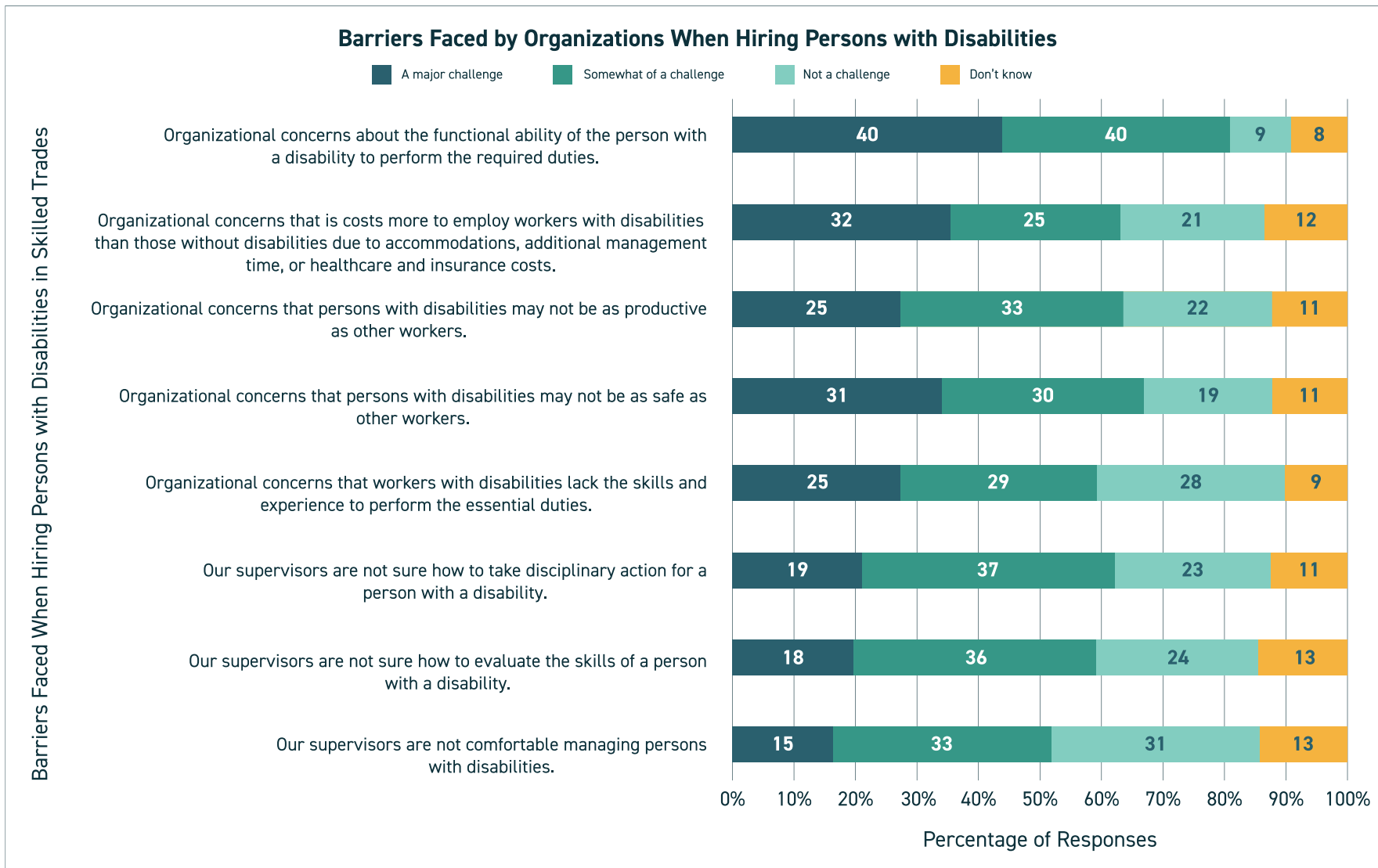


Figure 2. Frequency and percentage of barriers faced when hiring persons with disabilities from complete survey responses of employers of skilled trades workers, from October 2025 to January 2026.

Barriers related to cost and productivity also surfaced. Respondents agreed or strongly agreed (n=26, 39.4%; compared to n=11, 16.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed) that they expected accommodating an employee who becomes disabled will cost less than supporting a new employee who requires accommodation. Further, respondents mostly agreed or strongly agreed (n=31, 46.3%; compared to n=23, 34.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed) they expected employees with a disability would be less productive than their peers. Together, these findings point to pervasive misconceptions about safety and productivity that may deter employers from pursuing inclusive hiring strategies.

Accommodation and Changes to Support Persons with Disabilities

Across impairment types, less than half of all companies were prepared to accommodate each disability, excluding speech impairments. Respondents most often reported that vision (n=44, 51.8%) and mobility (n=40, 47.1%) impairments were impossible to accommodate (i.e., “Accommodating this impairment would be impossible in our organization”). A small number of employers reported being very prepared to accommodate speech impairments (n=7, 8.5%) and overall, less than 10% of companies reported that they were very prepared to accommodate any impairment type.

Table 3. Reported preparedness to accommodate each impairment type from complete survey responses of employers of skilled trades workers, from October 2025 to January 2026.

Preparedness to Accommodate		Impairment Type									
		Mobility n (%)		Hearing n (%)		Vision n (%)		Learning n (%)		Speech n (%)	
Not Prepared	Impossible	40 (47.1)	67 (78.8)	19 (23.5)	43 (53.1)	44 (51.8)	72 (84.7)	15 (18.8)	42 (52.5)	14 (17.1)	32 (39.0)
	Not prepared	27 (31.8)		24 (29.6)		28 (32.9)		27 (33.8)		18 (22.0)	
Prepared	Somewhat prepared	15 (17.7)	18 (21.2)	33 (40.7)	38 (46.9)	12 (14.1)	13 (15.3)	32 (40.0)	38 (48.2)	43 (52.4)	50 (61.0)
	Very Prepared	3 (3.5)		5 (6.2)		1 (1.2)		6 (7.5)		7 (8.5)	
n		(n=85)		(n=81)		(n=85)		(n=80)		(n=82)	

+ Impossible: In the questionnaire, this response option was “Accommodating this impairment would be impossible in our organization”

Readiness to accommodate varied across company characteristics (Table 4). By percentage of respondents, the construction sector was less prepared to accommodate all impairments than other sectors, although the difference was most pronounced for mobility impairments and hearing impairments. Employers in Ontario generally reported higher readiness to accommodate impairments than those in other provinces, especially learning impairments and speech impairments. Larger companies (i.e., 50 or more workers) were more prepared to accommodate all impairments than their smaller counterparts. In adjusted models, controlling for all three conceptually relevant covariates, similar patterns emerged for sector: the construction sector was significantly less prepared to accommodate mobility impairments (AOR=0.316; $p=0.047$) and hearing impairments (AOR=0.202; $p=0.003$). In adjusted models, province was not a statistically significant predictor for readiness to accommodate across impairment types ($p>0.05$). Larger companies were significantly more prepared to accommodate mobility (AOR: 3.771, $p=0.043$) and learning (5.425, $p=0.002$) impairments. These findings suggest that sectoral and company size differences in readiness are robust, whereas provincial differences may be partially confounded by company size or sector.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics by impairment type and adjusted (multivariable) logistic regression models of preparedness to accommodate each impairment type from complete survey responses of employers of skilled trades workers, from October 2025 to January 2026.

Characteristics			Adjusted Model				
	Frequency Prepared to Accommodate	Percentage	Company Characteristic	Odds Ratio	p-value	95% CI	Diagnostics^
Model 1			Mobility (n=82)				
Other Sectors	10	35.7%	Other Sectors	Ref	0.047*	0.102,0.984	Assumptions met VIF: all variables < 5 LRT: p= 0.030 GOF: p=0.180
Construction	8	14.8%	Construction	0.316			
Other Provinces	12	26.7%	Other Provinces	Ref	0.610	0.393,4.898	
Ontario	6	24.6%	Ontario	1.388			
Company Size Less than 50	5	11.1%	Less than 50	Ref	0.043*	1.043,13.632	
Company Size 50 or More	13	35.1%	50 or More	3.771			

Characteristics			Adjusted Model				
Frequency Prepared to Accommodate	Percentage	Company Characteristic	Odds Ratio	p-value	95% CI	Diagnostics^	
Model 2			Hearing (n=78)				
Other Sectors	19	73.1%	Other Sectors	Ref	0.003*	0.070,0.581	Assumptions met VIF: all variables < 5 LRT: p= 0.294 GOF: p=0.493
Construction	18	34.6%	Construction	0.202			
Other Provinces	16	42.1%	Other Provinces	Ref	0.166	0.370,3.003	
Ontario	21	52.5%	Ontario	1.054			
Company Size Less than 50	16	38.1%	Less than 50	Ref	0.166	0.736,5.986	
Company Size 50 or More	21	58.3%	50 or More	2.098			

Characteristics			Adjusted Model				
Frequency Prepared to Accommodate	Percentage	Company Characteristic	Odds Ratio	p-value	95% CI	Diagnostics^	
Model 3			Vision (n=82)				
Other Sectors	5	18.5%	Other Sectors	Ref	0.595	0.196,2.54	Assumptions met VIF: all variables < 5 LRT: p= 0.258 GOF: p=0.772
Construction	7	12.7%	Construction	0.706			
Other Provinces	4	9.76%	Other Provinces	Ref	0.496	0.401,6.601	
Ontario	8	19.5%	Ontario	1.627			
Company Size Less than 50	4	9.1%	Less than 50	Ref	0.278	0.536,8.724	
Company Size 50 or More	8	21.1%	50 or More	2.163			

Characteristics			Adjusted Model				
Frequency Prepared to Accommodate	Percentage	Company Characteristic	Odds Ratio	p-value	95% CI	Diagnostics^	
Model 4			Learning (n=77)				
Other Sectors	14	51.9%	Other Sectors	Ref	0.934	0.326,2.802	Assumptions met VIF: all variables < 5 LRT: p=<0.001* GOF: p=0.956
Construction	23	46.0%	Construction	0.955			
Other Provinces	13	32.5%	Other Provinces	Ref	0.136	0.776,6.460	
Ontario	24	64.9%	Ontario	2.240			
Company Size Less than 50	11	26.8%	Less than 50	Ref	0.002*	1.886,15.608	
Company Size 50 or More	26	72.2%	50 or More	5.425			

Characteristics			Adjusted Model				
Frequency Prepared to Accommodate	Percentage	Company Characteristic	Odds Ratio	p-value	95% CI	Diagnostics^	
Model 5			Speech (n=79)				
Other Sectors	19	67.9%	Other Sectors	Ref	0.560	0.261,2.069	Assumptions met VIF: all variables < 5 LRT: p= 0.007* GOF: p=0.019
Construction	30	58.8%	Construction	0.735			
Other Provinces	20	48.8%	Other Provinces	Ref	0.100	0.847,6.747	
Ontario	29	76.3%	Ontario	2.391			
Company Size Less than 50	21	48.8%	Less than 50	Ref	0.065	0.938,7.727	
Company Size 50 or More	28	77.8%	50 or More	2.693			

* Indicates statistically significant findings at alpha-value of p<0.05

^VIF= Variance Inflation Factor

LRT= Likelihood Ratio Test (Null Hypothesis: Restricted model of sector only fits as well as the full model.)

GOF= Hosmer-Lemeshow Goodness of Fit (Null Hypothesis: Model fits reasonably well.)

Model diagnostics indicated that multivariable models generally fit well. VIFs for all predictors in all models were less than 5. LRTs indicated that the models for hearing and vision impairments showed univariable models fit as well as the multivariable models. However, for mobility, learning and speech impairments, the LRTs demonstrated that the multivariable models accounting for province and company size fit better than the models for sector only ($p < 0.05$). This may reflect the associations between province and readiness to accommodate for both learning and speech impairments, which showed marginal associations in adjusted models. All GOF tests, except the model for speech impairment, indicated that the models fit reasonably well. Collectively, the statistical findings support the reliability of observed sectoral and company size differences in accommodation readiness.

Company respondents were presented with seven common changes intended to support or accommodate a person with disabilities and asked to report the feasibility of making each change in their organization (Table 5). Apart from providing accessible parking spaces for employees with disabilities (48.8%), fewer than 20% of companies reported that any of the potential changes were very feasible (range: 0-17.7%). Changes including allowing employees to work from home ($n=51$, 63.0%) and transferring people or jobs to other premises ($n=23$, 33.8%) were most frequently reported as impossible. Respondents rarely agreed or strongly agreed that they had flexible work procedures that allow them to hire or retain persons with disabilities in the skilled trades ($n=14$, 23.0%). In contrast, respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were prepared to retain an employee who becomes disabled ($n=49$, 69.0%). This contrast suggests that employers may feel more confident responding to disability that emerges internally, from existing employees, rather than accommodating new hires with disabilities.

Feasibility of Changes at Company	Changes to Support or Accommodate Persons with Disabilities						
	Transferring people or jobs to other premises to assist disabled employees n (%)	Adapting work environment to help employees with disabilities (e.g., adapting premises, furniture, lighting) n (%)	Creating flexible work organization (e.g., transferring persons with disabilities to other jobs, rearranging work duties) n (%)	Offering flexible working time, or varying hours for employees with disabilities n (%)	Providing appropriate assistive devices/ tools/ technologies (e.g., hearing aids for someone who has a hearing impairment) n (%)	Allowing working from home for disabled employees n (%)	Providing accessible parking spaces for employees with disabilities n (%)
Very Feasible	0	7 (9.0)	5 (6.3)	5 (6.2)	14 (17.7)	4 (4.9)	39 (48.8)
Somewhat Feasible	14 (18.2)	21 (27.0)	22 (27.8)	24 (29.6)	29 (36.7)	12 (14.8)	27 (33.8)
Difficult	20 (26.0)	12 (15.4)	17 (21.5)	21 (25.9)	15 (19.0)	2 (2.5)	2 (2.5)
Very Difficult	17 (22.1)	22 (28.1)	20 (25.3)	17 (21.0)	9 (11.4)	12 (14.8)	5 (6.3)
Impossible	26 (33.8)	16 (20.5)	15 (19.0)	14 (17.3)	12 (15.2)	51 (63.0)	7 (8.8)
n	77	78	79	81	79	81	80

DISCUSSION

Inequity in hiring remains a pressing issue that requires urgent, intentional action to counter workforce shortage in the skilled trades and improve outcomes for Canadians (Su et al., 2024). These findings indicate that many Canadian skilled trades employers are not prepared to accommodate various impairment types or implement common accommodations for employees with disabilities. Readiness appears to vary by impairment type, sector, and company size, and may differ by province. Information gaps and limited awareness of accommodations were common discrimination and stigma likely continue to influence hiring and accommodation decisions (Bailey et al., 2022). Notably, only 17% of respondents reported that their company did not provide equal opportunities, highlighting a disconnect between perceived and actual readiness, potentially amplified by social desirability pressures. Consistent with this concern, Boring and Delfgaauw (2024) observed substantial social desirability bias regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion policies, particularly among managers, leading firms to overstate support for equitable hiring.

Nearly three-quarters of companies reported that fewer than 1% of employees identified as a person with a disability, far below the national estimate of 13.8% among red seal workers (CAF, 2023) and estimates for apprentices in Ontario (Bishop-Williams et al., under review), or the broader employment rate for persons with disabilities (Su et al., 2024). Only 11.4% of companies reported actively recruiting for persons with disabilities, and respondents provided no examples of how such recruitment occurred. This gap suggests limited understanding of active recruitment and weak linkages to disability employment services (Ormerod and Newton, 2013). More than 80% reported rarely receiving applications from persons with disabilities. In practice, then, hiring and accommodation challenges may be infrequent not because practices are equitable, but because persons with disabilities may be deterred from entering skilled trades roles (Ormerod and Newton, 2013; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008).

Respondents frequently requested more information, especially about available accommodations for skilled trades roles. This aligns with calls for resource inventories that provide practical strategies and assistive technologies for workplace accommodation (Du et al., under review; Du et al., in preparation; Kaye et al., 2011). Insufficient employer information can fuel misconceptions, which were commonly reported and align with long-standing beliefs that the construction sector is not a viable pathway for youth with disabilities due to safety or training concerns (Ormerod and Newton, 2013). Misconceptions remain a persistent barrier to disability hiring (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008; Baker et al., 2018; Kaye et al., 2011; Sepulveda, 2021).

Employers most often cited functional ability, safety, and liability as barriers (Ormerod and Newton, 2013; Kaye et al., 2011). Additional information needs included clarity about productivity expectations and cost-benefit considerations (Bailey et al., 2022). The consistency of these needs across hiring, retention, and advancement implies that organizations lacking inclusive hiring practices are uncertain about how to begin engaging workers with disabilities at any stage of employment.

Accommodation readiness varied by impairment type, with particularly low readiness for vision and mobility impairments. In Canada, 26% of vision-impaired participants reported that needed accommodations were not provided (Gupta et al., 2021). Built environments often complicate accommodation and inclusive hiring (Ormerod and Newton, 2013). Although differences for vision and speech impairments were not statistically significant in this study, effect sizes suggested lower readiness in construction settings, warranting further investigation. Consistent with this, Bailey et al. (2022) identified substantial gaps in the construction literature, including lived-experience research, agency partnerships, and persistent stigma and inequity in recruitment and hiring.

Associations between readiness and province were complex and merit additional study. While differences in accessibility legislation are documented (Bishop-Williams et al., under review; Kovacs Burns and Gordon, 2009), their practical effects on employer readiness remain unclear. Company size showed mixed relationships with readiness: it significantly predicted preparedness for mobility and learning impairments but not for hearing, vision, or speech. This pattern suggests that readiness gaps may be widespread across sizes, or that other contextual factors (e.g., work organization, unionization, supply-chain pressures) play a greater role.

Companies generally reported low feasibility for many common accommodations (e.g., job-site transfers, work-from-home). A scoping review of small and medium-sized enterprises identified cost, stigma, policy limits, challenges in accessing external agencies, and legislative barriers as common obstacles (Sepulveda, 2021), aligning with our feasibility findings. Interestingly, although many employers reported that accommodating mobility impairments would be “impossible,” the most feasible accommodation rated was providing accessible parking. This may indicate that structural adjustments are perceived as more feasible than process-based or operational changes. Skilled trades roles may also present unique constraints (e.g., tool/equipment dependence, safety protocols), underscoring the need to identify alternative accommodations aligned with job demands when options like remote work are infeasible.

These results have several implications. First, targeted information campaigns for skilled trades employers should directly address prevalent misconceptions and stigma and highlight evidence-based safety and productivity outcomes for workers with disabilities. Second, resources should be developed to meet employer-identified information needs (e.g., accommodation menus by impairment and task, cost/benefit examples, case studies), improving readiness while reducing perceived risk. Third, findings provide context for systemic barriers faced by workers with disabilities and can inform more meaningful supports (e.g., mentorship, job carving, modified rotations). Fourth, sector-tailored guidance can support the design of accommodation strategies that align with skilled trades environments. Finally, the study establishes a baseline to guide future interventions and to evaluate policies and practices intended to strengthen equitable integration of persons with disabilities in the skilled trades workforce. Partnerships with apprenticeship authorities and disability-serving organizations can accelerate adoption and evaluation of inclusive practices through scalable, evidence-informed tools and training across regions nationwide.

This study has limitations. Although national in reach, the survey was not available in French, likely reducing responses from Quebec and other Francophone regions. Employer-reported disability prevalence may underestimate true rates, as it reflects disclosed or visible disabilities (CAF, 2023). Nonresponse and partial response may introduce bias: although incomplete respondents did not differ statistically on observed employer characteristics, perceptions may still vary, and the characteristics of non-responders are unknown. The non-probabilistic sampling design precludes inference about representativeness and may capture more extreme views (Sedgwick, 2014). Finally, responses may reflect social desirability bias (Grimm, 2010), leading to overestimation of equitable practices.

Future research should deepen explanation of observed patterns. Qualitative interviews or focus groups could explore employer rationales, barriers, and decision processes in greater depth. Larger samples would support disaggregation by sector, province, and company size and enable testing of interactions. Work should examine trade-specific misconceptions and barriers (Baker et al., 2018) and develop sector-tailored accommodation guidelines. Equally important, research should center the experiences of persons with disabilities in skilled trades to ensure that proposed solutions address lived realities.

CONCLUSION

Persons with disabilities continue to face inequitable employment practices across the skilled trades, rooted in insufficient information, misconceptions, and a lack of awareness of available accommodations. Sector-specific differences, especially in construction, suggest that supports should prioritize matching skills and capacity to ask demands with sector-specific constraints. Attention to provincial context and company sizes will help target implementation. Advancing equitable employment in the skilled trades can strengthen Canada's workforce and should be prioritized by employers, policymakers, and industry organizations.

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