



CANADIAN INSTITUTE
SAFETY, WELLNESS
& PERFORMANCE

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

Research Report | April 2026



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The Canadian Institute for Safety, Wellness, and Performance (CISWP) operates on the traditional territory of the Anishnaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral people. This acknowledgement recognizes and honours the Indigenous people who – for thousands of years – have been living and working on the land upon which CISWP now resides.

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.



Executive Summary

Purpose

This executive summary provides a high-level overview of key findings, insights, and recommendations outlined in the Accessible Skilled Trades: Inclusive and Accessible Skilled Trades Employment for People with Disabilities report prepared by the Canadian institute for Safety, Wellness, and Performance (CISWP). This research was funded by Accessibility Standards Canada/ the Government of Canada. Additional information and detailed methodology, research findings, and implications for this work can be found in the main report.

Introduction

Skilled trades play an important role in supporting and growing Canada's economy. Skilled trades workers build community structures like roads and bridges, support important services, and are a critical part of industries ranging from construction and manufacturing to transportation and service sectors. Skilled trades may be a promising pathway toward fair employment outcomes for people living with disabilities. Skilled trades jobs can provide stable employment and long careers for workers. Skilled trades jobs also have potential for

good and fair incomes and opportunities for career growth or advancement. Even with these strengths, people living with disabilities continue to be less included in skilled trades careers.

Research has shown that hiring people with disabilities is still unfair. For example, many people with disabilities have fewer opportunities to grow their career. People with disabilities also report that their employers do not know how to support them. People with disabilities often report that they face stigma, bias based on how they look, and judgement about whether they are productive or qualified. In skilled trades workplaces, these problems may be worse because of the type of work tasks and workplace cultures. Trades workplaces often focus on physical strengths, technical or hands-on skill, and how fast a worker does the work. This can cause people to make assumptions about a worker, like whether they are able to do the work. It may also limit a worker with disabilities from accessing opportunities.

The Accessible Skilled Trades report fills gaps in understanding about the work experience for people with disabilities. The research in the report looks at accessibility in skilled trades from multiple different points of view: workers, employers, and previous scientific studies.

The projects described in this report explore many parts of this research area. Projects included looking at whether employers are ready to support and accommodate workers with disabilities and what workers experience in their daily life as a skilled trades worker. Projects also looked at technologies and workplace support solutions and what types of assistive devices are available for skilled trades work. The research in this report used mixed-methods, including interviewing, surveys, scoping reviews and environmental scans. Together, these methods provide a more complete understanding of accessibility in skilled trades.

The research findings have direct usefulness for preparing new accessibility standards. With this research, the standards can reflect the real safety and cultural experiences of skilled trades workplaces.

Research Findings

The research in this report tells a clear message: people with disabilities face many barriers to skilled trades employment. However, the research also shows that people with disabilities are a major source of good workers for skilled trades in Canada. Practical, flexible solutions for training, personal protective equipment (PPE) and purchasing, accommodation

support, and whether an employer is ready to support workers, can improve skilled trades entry, safety, and keeping people employed.

Workers & Risk

People with disabilities make up about 20% of people in apprenticeships but are still less included in the trades workplaces. People with disabilities are also less included in promotions or leadership in skilled trades.

Apprentices with disabilities reported they had less occupational health and safety knowledge. Apprentices with disabilities were more likely to be injured at work and had more chronic and short-term pain. This might mean that there is a need to change safety training and workplace safety controls.

Workplace Barriers

Rules or systems at work, like complicated paperwork, unclear ways to ask for help, and hard certification requirements, can make it harder for people to get into trades or grow in their careers.

Workplace cultures, especially stigma and groups that feel like the “old boys’ club”, shape whether workers tell people about their disability, ask for support, or even stay in skilled trades careers. People with disabilities bring strengths to skilled trades, but assumptions about not being qualified or physically able to do the work are more common.

Most people only tell others about their disability in skilled trades when it is important for safety or trust to avoid stigma from other workers or their employer. This highlights that making it feel safe to tell others about a disability in skilled trades is very important.

Training & Learning Preferences

Hands-on learning was the most preferred way to learn. Apprentices with disabilities described accommodations about making learning hands-on, providing more support and resources, and physical accommodations.

PPE Design

PPE is used to keep workers safe, but many workers had problems wearing or using PPE. Those problems were mostly about PPE that did not fit or work properly or were uncomfortable. Another problem was that some workers with disabilities described being overwhelmed or overstimulated by PPE. When PPE and disability connect, these issues can cause bigger problems that prevent people with disabilities from working in skilled trades.

Employer Readiness & Accommodations

Many companies said they were not ready to accommodate people with different disabilities. Companies were less ready to support vision and mobility impairments. Construction companies were less ready to accommodate mobility and hearing impairments than other sectors.

Company size matters. Larger organizations were more ready to accommodate mobility and learning-related accommodations. This may mean that larger companies have more resources and capacity to accommodate.

Assistive Technologies & Workplace Solutions

Scans of other research show an uneven focus on physical impairments, with limited research about solutions for vision, hearing, and cognitive needs. This was also where many employers felt least prepared to provide accommodation.

Employers don't have the same level of understanding or use of assistive technologies in the workplace. For these tools and solutions to be useful, they need to match the trade-specific tasks or individual needs of each job and worker.

Implications and Next Steps

A key story becomes clear from this research: trade-specific standards are important to increase accessibility in skilled trades. Without these trade-specific standards, companies decide whether to provide support for people with disabilities. This allows companies to follow different rules, and not all companies are supporting people with disabilities well. Employers may not understand their responsibilities and workers may have uneven access to supports at work. Also, accountability, such as what is required, is still weak. Trade-specific

standards are not just nice to have; they are necessary to fairly support people with disabilities in real skilled trades jobs across Canada.

Conclusions

These findings show there is an urgent need to create trade-specific accessibility standards. These trade-specific standards need to reflect the different cultures, tasks, and safety of skilled trades work. Systems are still set up well for workers with disabilities. Many workers are still excluded, and workplace practices are still different across companies. Also, deciding if a worker feels safe and has enough trust in their employer to tell them about their disability is a challenge. Workers still have trouble getting the accommodations they need in many workplaces. Workplaces are still not designed to meet the needs and experiences of many people with disabilities.

Applying this research to accessibility standards presents an important opportunity to shift skilled trades cultures and accessibility. These standards will support the change of high-level rules into actionable, practical guidance. Otherwise, accessibility will continue to be ineffective. With these specific standards, Canada can meaningfully improve accessibility in the skilled trades and strengthen the workforce. Together these standards will build inclusive skilled trades systems that will meet Canada's future social and economic needs.

