



Report summary
Work Integration Social Enterprise
Research Program, 2017 to 2022

2024



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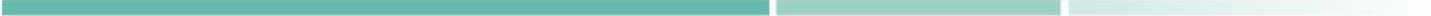
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Official title of the full report: Work Integration Social Enterprise (WISE) Research Program (2017 to 2022)

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Why this study

A social enterprise is an organization with a social goal that generates revenue. Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) are a subset of social enterprises. Their main goal is the work integration of people who are struggling to find and keep employment. They provide on-the-job training and work experience to these clients who often face many barriers.

There is a lack of knowledge about the impact of WISEs on the economic and social outcomes of their clients. Quality data and research on this topic are lacking. The government needs this information to support the development of policies and programs to aid labour market inclusion.

What we did

We launched a 5-year longitudinal research program (2017 to 2022). The goal of the program was to shed light on the following questions:

- do the efforts of WISEs work to promote social and labour market integration?
- which WISE models and types of training work best?
- how does the success of interventions vary when the situation and characteristics of recipients differ?
- what is the return on investment for government?

The program consisted of 6 research projects. Four were in Ontario, 1 was in Quebec, and 1 was in British Columbia.

The WISEs in the sample targeted a variety of different groups, including:

- persons with disabilities
- youth
- recent immigrants
- homeless or individuals at-risk of homelessness, and
- Indigenous peoples

This was a longitudinal study. The researchers followed a sample of WISE clients over several years. They conducted surveys and interviews with these clients at different points in time.

The program was funded under the Employment Insurance Part II Expenditure Plan for Pan-Canadian Projects.

What we found

WISE interventions generally led to improvements in employment and financial outcomes. This included improvements in:

- the ability to find and keep employment
- income, and
- feelings about financial well-being

Many WISE participants reported skills improvements in areas such as:

- on-the-job skills (for example, professionalism, problem-solving, technical skills), and
- their ability to adapt to change

WISE clients also reported social benefits, such as:

- the expansion of their social networks, and
- stronger community relations

The research presented mixed results about which WISE models and interventions work best.

Funding WISE programs can have a positive return on investment. For example, 1 study reported a return on investment of \$1.89 for every \$1 of funding.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the collection of data for most of the research projects. It also created employment challenges for participants in the study. Even so, some reports have demonstrated that WISEs enable their clients to overcome these difficulties. This suggests that WISEs can have a positive impact in times of uncertainty.

What it means

The findings provide evidence that WISEs help improve the labour and social inclusion of people who can't find or keep employment.

The findings will help the government:

- expand the knowledge base on this topic
- improve policy in the WISE sector and social economy, and
- strengthen future research

We need to conduct more research to fill the remaining data gaps. This could include examining the impact of WISEs in other regions. Such research could also include groups of people not covered in this study.

To this effect, the Department launched a WISE Phase II research program in March 2023. This new program will look at the effects of social enterprises in the social and labour market integration of Black and racialized persons in Canada.



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