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# Changes in workplace accommodations among employed Canadians with disabilities, 2017 to 2022



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# ***Changes in workplace accommodations among employed Canadians with disabilities, 2017 to 2022***

by Christoph Schimmele, Sung-Hee Jeon and Rubab Arim

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Work arrangements changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, as organizations switched to working from home on a large scale and used digital technologies to adapt to physical distancing mandates (Deng et al., 2020; Fuentes & Lindsay, 2023). About 20% of all employed Canadians aged 15 to 69 years were working primarily from home near the end of 2023, an increase from 7% shortly before physical distancing measures began in March 2020 (Morissette, 2024). It is largely unknown how changes to work arrangements since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Canada.

Modifications to work arrangements, such as working from home and flexible schedules, were among the most common types of workplace accommodations (WPAs) that PWDs requested before the pandemic, but these accommodations were difficult to obtain at that time (Fuentes & Lindsay, 2023). This article focuses on whether needs and unmet needs for WPAs among employed Canadians with disabilities have changed since 2017, with the widespread deployment of working from home and digital technologies.<sup>1</sup>

## **Needs for working from home increased from 2017 to 2022, while needs for other types of accommodations decreased or were stable**

In 2022, 35% of employed Canadians with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years needed at least one WPA<sup>2</sup> to be able to work, which was not significantly different from 2017 (Table 1). About 11% had needs for working from home in 2022, a significant increase from 8% in 2017. The absolute number of employed PWDs who needed an accommodation for working from home was 303,000 persons in 2022, up from 172,000 in 2017.

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1. The data for the study are from the 2022 and 2017 cycles of the Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD). In the CSD, PWDs are Canadians aged 15 and older whose everyday activities are limited because of health-related difficulties (Pianosi et al., 2023). The analytical sample excluded persons aged 15 to 24 years, because this age group includes many students, and those older than 64 years, because 65 years is the typical retirement age.
  2. See Appendix E, Table E.9, of the *Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022: Concepts and Methods Guide* for details on the questions in the WPA module (Pianosi et al., 2023).

**Table 1**  
**Needs and unmet needs for workplace accommodations among employed Canadians with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years**

	Needs for workplace accommodations		Unmet needs for workplace accommodations <sup>1</sup>	
	2017	2022	2017	2022
	percent			
<b>Total</b>	<b>37.8</b>	<b>35.4</b>	<b>40.4</b>	<b>35.4</b> †
<b>Types of workplace accommodations</b>				
Modified or different duties	13.7	11.6 †	33.6	31.5
Working from home	8.4	10.9 †	30.4	19.3 †
Modified work hours	19.3	16.3 †	26.2	22.8
Human support	2.7	2.4	42.4	35.3 <sup>E</sup>
Technical aids	1.7	1.3	55.5 <sup>E</sup>	50.1 <sup>E</sup>
Computer with specialized software or adaptations	3.2	3.1	54.6	39.0
Communication aids	1.1	0.8	F	F
Modified or ergonomic workstation	10.6	10.7	39.7	35.6
Special chair or back support	11.4	10.3	38.9	44.2
Handrails, ramps, or widened doorways or hallways	1.2	0.7	36.6 <sup>E</sup>	F
Adapted or accessible parking	2.5	1.2 †	41.8	32.8 <sup>E</sup>
Accessible elevators	1.7	0.8 †	37.4 <sup>E</sup>	F
Adapted washrooms	0.9	0.6	F	F
Specialized transportation	0.6	0.5	F	F
Other equipment, help or work arrangement	2.2	2.4	38.8 <sup>E</sup>	33.1 <sup>E</sup>

<sup>E</sup> use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

† significantly different from 2017 ( $p < 0.05$ )

1. The estimates of unmet needs for workplace accommodations are based on employed persons with disabilities who had accommodation needs.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017 and 2022.

The most prevalent need for WPAs in 2022 was modified work hours, but the percentage of employed PWDs who needed this accommodation was significantly lower (16%) than in 2017 (19%). The percentage of employed PWDs who needed modified or different duties was also lower in 2022 (12%) than in 2017 (14%). Needs for adapted or accessible parking and accessible elevators also decreased from 2017 to 2022. The changes in needs for other types of WPAs were not statistically significant.

## Unmet needs for workplace accommodations decreased from 2017 to 2022

Unmet needs for WPAs decreased from 2017 to 2022 among employed PWDs who required at least one WPA. Among those who had needs for WPAs, about 35% had unmet needs in 2022, a decrease from 40% in 2017 (Table 1).<sup>3</sup>

3. The measure of unmet needs used in this study is restricted to PWDs who reported a need for WPAs. Without this restriction, about 13% of employed PWDs had unmet needs for WPAs in 2022, down from 15% in 2017.

Among employed PWDs who had a need for working from home, 19% were not accommodated in 2022, a decrease from 30% in 2017. This finding indicates that this accommodation was made available to 8 in 10 employed PWDs who needed it in 2022. More PWDs had a need for working from home in 2022 than in 2017, and a greater number had this accommodation made available to them. The absolute number of PWDs who had this accommodation doubled from 2017 (120,000) to 2022 (245,000).

Among employed PWDs who needed a computer with specialized software or adaptations, the percentage of those with unmet needs for this WPA declined from 55% in 2017 to 39% in 2022, a marginally significant change ( $p < 0.06$ ). The changes in unmet needs for other types of WPAs were not statistically significant.

## The decrease in unmet needs for workplace accommodations varied across sociodemographic groups

A higher percentage of employed women with disabilities had needs for WPAs than men in 2017 and 2022 (Table 2).<sup>4</sup> Among employed PWDs who had needs for WPAs, the percentage of women with unmet needs decreased from 42% in 2017 to 35% in 2022. About 36% of men had unmet needs for WPAs in 2022, which was similar to 2017.

Across age groups, the percentage of employed PWDs who had needs and unmet needs for WPAs was fairly similar between 2017 and 2022. However, the percentage of employed PWDs aged 55 to 64 years with unmet needs for WPAs decreased from 43% in 2017 to 31% in 2022 among those who had needs for WPAs.

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4. The 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) asked questions on sex at birth and gender, while the 2017 CSD asked respondents if they were male or female (i.e., their sex). The concept of gender is used to disaggregate respondents, which is consistent with the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's [Policy Direction to Modernize the Government of Canada's Sex and Gender Information Practices](#) (see Statistics Canada [2023] for further information).

**Table 2**  
**Workplace accommodations among employed Canadians with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years by sociodemographic and disability-related characteristics**

	Needs for workplace accommodations		Unmet needs for workplace accommodations <sup>1</sup>	
	2017	2022	2017	2022
	percent			
<b>Sociodemographic characteristics</b>				
<b>Gender</b>				
Men (ref.)	32.1	28.5	37.4	35.7
Women	42.7 *	40.8 *	42.3	35.3 †
<b>Age group</b>				
25 to 34 years	35.8	35.3	38.5	32.7
35 to 44 years	39.2	37.1	40.2	38.8
45 to 54 years (ref.)	38.0	34.6	39.8	38.2
55 to 64 years	37.6	34.5	42.7	31.3 †
<b>Educational attainment</b>				
Bachelor's degree or higher (ref.)	41.6	37.5	43.4	32.4 †
Some postsecondary education <sup>2</sup>	40.0	36.9	40.2	34.6
High school diploma	31.8 *	29.9 *	39.2	41.6
Less than a high school diploma	36.0	32.2	33.4	42.1 <sup>E</sup>
<b>Disability-related characteristics</b>				
<b>Severity of disability</b>				
Milder (ref.)	29.6	27.7	36.6	31.0
More severe	63.1 *	57.9 *	45.8 *	41.6 *
<b>Type of disability<sup>3</sup></b>				
Sensory	37.3	34.6	47.3 *	41.2 *
Physical	43.8 *	41.9 *	41.2	36.9
Cognitive	51.7 *	47.3 *	48.6 *	43.2 *
Mental health-related	47.8 *	42.5 *†	44.9 *	35.0 †
Developmental	63.8 *	53.5 *	25.2 *	33.3

<sup>E</sup> use with caution

\* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ( $p < 0.05$ )

† significantly different from 2017 ( $p < 0.05$ )

1. The estimates of unmet needs for workplace accommodations are based on employed persons with disabilities who had accommodation needs.

2. This category includes trades certificate or diploma; college, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate or diploma; and university certificate or diploma below the bachelor's level.

3. The reference group for this variable is persons without a particular type of disability (e.g., persons with a sensory disability versus those without this type of disability). The sensory category includes seeing and hearing disabilities; the physical category includes mobility, flexibility, dexterity and pain-related disabilities; and the cognitive category includes learning and memory disabilities. The Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) also has a category for other or unknown disabilities, but the estimates for this group cannot be released because of CSD confidentiality rules.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017 and 2022.

In 2017 and 2022, employed PWDs with a high school diploma as their highest educational attainment were less likely than their counterparts with a bachelor's degree or higher to have needs for WPAs. There were no other significant differences across educational groups in needs or unmet needs for WPAs. The prevalence of unmet needs decreased from 2017 to 2022 for employed PWDs who had a bachelor's degree or higher and had needs for WPAs. The changes in unmet needs for WPAs among employed PWDs with lower levels of education were not statistically significant.

## Unmet needs for workplace accommodations were higher among persons with more severe disabilities

In 2022, 58% of employed persons with more severe disabilities<sup>5</sup> had needs for WPAs, a marginally significant ( $p < 0.07$ ) decrease from 2017, when 63% had needs for WPAs. In 2017 and 2022, a significantly higher percentage of employed persons with more severe disabilities had needs for WPAs than employed persons with milder disabilities. Among those who had needs for WPAs, about 42% of persons with more severe disabilities and 31% of those with milder disabilities had unmet needs for WPAs in 2022. There were no significant changes from 2017 to 2022 in the percentages of persons with milder or more severe disabilities who had unmet needs for WPAs.

The percentage of employed persons with mental health-related disabilities who had needs for WPAs decreased from 48% in 2017 to 43% in 2022. Among these persons, the percentage of those with unmet needs decreased from 45% in 2017 to 35% in 2022. There were no statistically significant changes in needs and unmet needs for WPAs for persons with other types of disabilities.

In conclusion, the increase in working from home appears to have benefited PWDs through a decrease in their unmet needs for WPAs; however, this decrease varied across groups. Working from home is an important WPA but may not be sufficient to achieve and sustain employment equity among PWDs. Many PWDs are concentrated in jobs where their physical presence is required at the workplace (Fuentes & Lindsay, 2023). Further research is needed on unmet needs for WPAs among employed PWDs in jobs that have low levels of telework feasibility or have an on-site requirement.

## Authors

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5. A global severity score was developed for the Canadian Survey on Disability, and it was calculated for each person using the number of disability types that a person has, the level of difficulty experienced in performing certain tasks and the frequency of activity limitations. To simplify the concept of severity, four severity classes were established: mild, moderate, severe and very severe. The “mild” and “moderate” classes were collapsed into “milder,” while the “severe” and “very severe” classes were collapsed into “more severe.” It is important to understand, however, that the name assigned to each class is simply intended to facilitate the use of the severity score and is not a label or judgment concerning the person’s level of disability (Statistics Canada, 2023).