



<p>All educators, service providers, content creators, or public and commercial support services require comprehensive mandatory training on ableism and accessibility.</p> <p>This widespread training is essential to eliminate stereotypes and misperceptions about members of the Disability community and create attitudinal changes to eliminate ableism in all aspects of society.</p>	<p>are often not enforced.</p> <p>Decisions to cut or change programs and services are being made based on budget considerations rather than the best-interests of young people and their families. Programs do not need to be eradicated they can be adjusted to make them more effective and efficient.</p> <p><i>“Don’t balance the budget on the backs of Disabled children and youth. No government should be afraid to lift up the voice of its own people, the ones they pledge to serve, especially when the people are some of their most vulnerable.” – Youth Advisor</i></p>
<p><b>Accessibility:</b> The quality that enables everyone to access, use and benefit from services and environments in an inclusive and equitable manner. It must be considered in the design of all products, devices, services, and spaces in the social, educational, political, economic, and religious/spiritual aspects of life.</p>	<p><b>Intersectionality:</b> A sociological model and/or lens first developed by Kimberley Crenshaw, a Black feminist. It described the intersections of multiple, mutually-reinforcing systems of oppression, power, and privilege. Variables include, but are not limited to: race, gender, ethnicity, religion ability, education, sexual orientation, sexuality, gender identity, gender expression, class, first language, citizenship, and age (Beal, 2011).</p>
<p>Transportation is not universally accessible. There is limited to no access to essential needs and resources (e.g., public washrooms), and accessible options are often unreliable.</p> <p>Essential services and resources continue to have extensive wait lists. This poses negative consequences to young people’s health, wellbeing, mobility and ability to participate fully in school, employment or other aspects of their lives.</p> <p>Disability standards are often not created or implemented with input/feedback from the Disability community. This results in standards that are inadequate in ensuring universal accessibility. As a consequence much of Ontario’s infrastructure and services continue to be inaccessible.</p>	<p>There is a lack of understanding of intersectionality and how it affects access to supports and services. Training on intersectionality must be mandatory for all students, front-line workers, and decisions-makers, as well as incorporated into curriculum used for preparing service professionals.</p> <p>There is a lack of representation from the Disability community in the media, political decision-making and other aspects of public life. When members of the Disability community are invited to participate, it is often people of privilege who are included, which excludes a number of voices, such as those from the Indigenous community and People of Colour.</p> <p>We need a commitment to including the voices of young people and families from rural, northern and Indigenous communities while recognizing and addressing their unique needs.</p>

Family and Home		Overall Grade: D
Subject	Strengths and Next Steps for Improvement	
Respite	N	<p>Respite services are difficult to navigate, and there is a lack of information on what services are available to the Disability community. Once a program/resource is established, the referral and application process can be tedious, the intake process complicated, the waitlist long, and eligibility criteria overly strict. Those who do access respite services often find them to be a positive experience and provide a much-needed break for themselves and their families.</p> <p><i>“You have to go to a meeting to get the support. But if you don't have someone to go with you to the meeting, you can't access the supports you need?” - Youth Advisor</i></p> <p><i>“Passport funding is near impossible to be approved for!” - Youth Advisor</i></p> <p><i>“Special Services at Home, which provides respite care for families, has been in a ‘funding freeze’ since January 2018. This means caregivers are unable to access support and are at an increased likelihood of experiencing burnout. There are some support groups for parents, siblings, and other caregivers, however they are not well advertised and these are often the people providing care to Disabled children/youth. This lack of respite care results in an inability for caregivers and siblings to engage in self-care.” – Youth Advisor</i></p>
Siblings	N	<p>Siblings of young people from the Disability community are often overlooked or feel invisible. Due to the lack of, or difficulty accessing, respite services, siblings often take on caregiver responsibilities. Siblings see their parents struggling to balance the needs of all their children, and can feel a responsibility to support the family as a caregiver. When they do, they can skip over stages necessary in their development, like simply being a child.</p> <p>Siblings want someone to talk to who understands their unique situation. They want coping strategies and to feel less isolated.</p>
Youth and Family Voice	N	<p>Service professionals need to acknowledge the lived experiences of those they support as expertise and give it value.</p> <p>Family background and cultural traditions are rarely considered when providing services to children and youth in the Disability community.</p> <p><i>“Government must recognize the expertise and knowledge of families and provide them opportunities to give feedback on various programs and services. Up to date research, evaluation, and advisory tables should be utilized in decision making and when developing plans of care.” - Youth Advisor</i></p>

Education		Overall Grade: D
Subject	Strengths and Next Steps for Improvement	
Teacher Training	N	<p>There is significant room for improvement in the curriculum of Bachelor of Education programs in Ontario. As part of their training, all teachers need to learn about ableism, Disability studies and spend time with young people from the Disability community.</p> <p>Educators of all kinds, guidance counselors, and occupational therapists are not given enough training about the Disability community, how to recognize and confront ableism and stigma, and how to address bullying. It is important for educators to help change attitudes toward persons from the Disability community and create a more positive environment for all students. Strength based, harm reduced and Disability community-led trainings and workshops need to be given to all educators on a continual basis.</p> <p>Teachers should be encouraged to work collaboratively with children and their guardians to make decisions regarding safe(r) ways of adapting the classroom and curriculum content to ensure it is as accessible as possible.</p>

<p>Accessible Schools</p>	<p>N</p> <p>Increasing class sizes will create inaccessible environments for students. When class sizes are too big, it makes it impossible for teachers to properly implement IEPs and meet the diverse needs of all students in their classrooms.</p> <p>All school spaces should be accessible. This includes front doors, portables, washrooms, and all classrooms and hallways. Timely access to assistive technologies to support students to participate in the classroom in an accessible way is needed.</p> <p>All teachers need to learn more about creating accessible learning environments. This includes understanding sensory stimulation and properly reading and implementing Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Students from the Disability community need to be involved in determining what accessibility means. We have seen time and again inaccurate assumptions made by those in charge about the needs of the Disability community. This includes considering accessibility for all, not just for those with physical disabilities.</p> <p><i>"I have seen individual students, student groups, parents, parent groups, teachers/professors, support staff, administrative staff, and schools/institutions work to implement changes to ensure their students have equitable access to all educational opportunities. However, I have yet to see any signs of systemic change and worry the current provincial government could worsen this situation."</i> - Youth Advisor</p>
<p>Identification Placement and Review Committees (IPRCs) and Individual Education Plans (IEPs)</p>	<p>N</p> <p>The Education Act needs to be revised to allow all students, including those under the age of 16, to be included in their Identification Placement and Review Committee process.</p> <p><i>"Nothing about us, without us!" Simple. -Youth Advisor</i></p> <p>IEPs and the IPRC process need to be more accessible and inclusive for parents and students. This means providing more information about IPRC meetings ahead of time, ensuring these meetings are not rushed, and using plain-language.</p> <p>IEPs can be helpful when they are accurate, tailored to the specific student, and implemented appropriately. However, this is not the experience of Youth Advisory members. Many students have IEPs that contain mistakes, are too general, or are not properly implemented by their teachers.</p> <p>There are no accountability measures in place for students to safely provide feedback on their IEPs and to report when they have not been properly implemented. There is also a blatant lack of consistency and expectations across School Boards and educators in supporting the needs of young people.</p>

<b>Supports and Services</b>		<b>Overall Grade : D-</b>
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Strengths and Next Steps for Improvements</b>	
<p>Navigating Services</p>	<p>C</p> <p>Navigating services is difficult and confusing. Parents often rely on each other to know where and how to access supports. There should be a single point of contact, like a 211 for Disability services.</p> <p>There needs to be opportunities for families to build capacity when it comes to gaining knowledge about navigating the system. Wherever possible the young person must be included when making choices about which services to access.</p>	
<p>Waitlist for Diagnosis and Services</p>	<p>C</p> <p>Information about waitlists needs to be more transparent, for example, length of waitlists and how many children are on the list.</p> <p>There needs to be continuity of services from the child to adult systems to avoid having to spend time on waitlist during this vulnerable transitional stage of life.</p> <p>Waitlist times need to be addressed, but in a manner that does not compromise the quality of care and service.</p> <p><i>"Waiting lists are a never ending problem. Timely diagnosis and access to other resources is extremely important and needs to be greatly improved."</i> - Youth Advisor</p>	

Accountability	<p><b>C</b></p> <p>Families and children don't know where to go when they have complaints about services. The information available varies between agencies and is often unclear. Resources, such as workshops, need to be created to educate children and families so they know what to do if they run into problems or have complaints.</p> <p>There needs to be an oversight body to ensure that funding is being allocated appropriately. Participation (round tables) of folks from the Disability community are needed to establish funding allocations and complaints processes.</p>
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<b>Transitions Across the Lifespan</b>		<b>Overall Grade: D</b>
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Strengths and Next Steps for Improvement</b>	
Education	<p><b>N</b></p> <p>Although we still have a long way to go, we would like to note that there have been some improvements in accessing earlier assessments and identification for young people in the Disability community in schools. However, this is not consistent across the province. Assessments are essential to ensuring that young people are supported through transitions and that they are able to access appropriate resources once the transition is complete.</p> <p>Educators need to understand the value and importance of transition planning as a part of the educational process. The goal of education is to prepare students for the rest of their lives. This is only possible when there are clear plans to prepare young people for the transition from school to higher education, employment opportunities, or other programs. The creation and quality of these plans are not consistent across schools and School Boards.</p> <p>Too often, educators make quick decisions about students' capabilities based on ableist attitudes. This can result in students being streamed in high school without the involvement or consent of the student or their family. These short-term quick decisions have long-term impacts since students who complete basic-level classes are limited in their options for post-secondary education.</p>	
Employment	<p><b>N</b></p> <p>The <i>Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)</i> promotes accessibility of spaces, but does not require or encourage employers to hire employees from the Disability community. In addition, the AODA does not work systematically to address ableist attitudes that prevent employers from hiring and understanding people from the Disability community. There are grants, assistive technologies, and resources available to employers, but this information is not readily available, and often gets lost in translation because of confusion and lack of understanding.</p> <p>The EnAbling Change program provides funding for nonprofits to promote educational projects focused on accessibility beyond the AODA obligations. These trainings should be available and well-advertised to all Ontario organizations and employers to ensure full inclusion across multiple sectors.</p> <p>It is of critical importance that government revise or drop policies that have the effect of discouraging or interfering with people from the Disability community from seeking or maintaining employment. Often, the policies of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) create obstacles to accessing meaningful employment and equitable compensation. Faulty policies keep the unemployment rates high for persons with disabilities. ODSP Rules can result in low wages and or to having their pay docked for absences that are beyond their control. Consequently, persons with Disabilities struggle to rise above the poverty line.</p> <p><i>"Unemployment is still high for disabled folks and programs like ODSP often work to keep us in poverty, docking our minimum wage pay and ensuring we can't earn a living wage."</i>- Youth Advisor</p> <p>Stigma is one of the biggest challenges related to finding and maintaining employment for the Disability community. As a result, members of the Disability community are often reluctant to seek support because they feel like they are burdening their employer. This</p>	

		<p>is particularly the case for persons with invisible Disabilities. The quality of jobs offered by employment agencies does not match the level of skill or education of applicants.</p> <p><i>“Employment is still very low and jobs offered are often below our ability/ambitions. Job centers often focus on finding jobs not careers. Because of this we are often left earning well below the poverty line.” - Youth Advisor</i></p>
Transition from Childhood to Adulthood	N	<p>The transition from the children’s system to the adult system is disjointed and often results in temporary or permanent loss of service.</p> <p>There is a dire need for more system navigators or advocates to advise young people about the programs that are available to them and their families.</p> <p>Accessing essential services has become more challenging of late. ODSP workers are harder to get a hold of which poses a risk to young people’s safety and quality of life.</p> <p>There are not enough services and programs for adults. There is also an urgent need for life skills resources and supports for young people over 18 as the programs that do exist are hard to access and filled to capacity.</p> <p><i>“Services end at 18 and the few adult services available are hard to get onto. This puts pressure on us and our caregivers and leaves the province only supporting 25% of our lifespan.” – Youth Advisors</i></p>

Letter Grade	Provincial Achievement
A	Recommendations in this area have been fully implemented.
B	Significant positive action has been taken.
C	Some action has been taken. Continued improvement is needed.
D	Very little action had been taken. Significant improvement is needed.
F	Nothing has happened, or things have gotten worse.

*This document is a reflection of the experiences and the opinions of the WHSTS Youth Advisory. We acknowledge that there are voices, opinions and experiences missing from this document. We encourage anyone working within the Disability community to reach out and engage directly with young people to learn more.*