

Fact Sheet 4: Onboarding

Evidence-Based Disability Employment Practice Recommendations for Canadian Employers

About this fact sheet

This fact sheet presents the onboarding recommendations from An Employer Guide to Disability Employment Practices in Canada (Anyinam et al., 2026), a convergence synthesis of 95 Canadian grey literature documents produced by 53 independent organizations. The full guide covers eight domains across the employment lifecycle. This sheet addresses Onboarding.

The recommendations below are condensed for ease of use. Jurisdictional notes, full source document lists, and detailed quality appraisals appear in Chapter 6 of the full guide.

About the evidence

Canadian federal departments, provincial and territorial human rights commissions, accessibility offices, and national disability organizations all publish guidance for employers. The convergence synthesis identified practices where multiple independent organizations arrived at the same recommendation without coordinating with one another.

Convergence classification reflects how many independent organizations support the practice: Strong (six or more sources), Moderate (four to five sources), Low (three sources). Each supporting document was appraised using the CRAAP framework (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, Purpose). The quality flag reports the proportion of sources that scored High on this appraisal: Full confidence (75% or more), Moderate confidence (50–74%), Quality flag (below 50%).

Why onboarding matters

Onboarding establishes the conditions for long-term retention. For employees with disabilities, it is the stage at which accommodation plans are put into practice and workplace supports are tested against actual job demands. The seven recommendations in this fact sheet draw on convergence from up to 20 independent Canadian sources.

Recommendations

Recommendation 4.1 Provide job coaching, mentoring, buddy systems, or natural supports for new and existing employees

Convergence: Strong Quality: Full confidence (90%) Sources: 20 independent organizations

Assign every new employee a workplace buddy, mentor, or go-to person during their first weeks and months. Mentoring programmes for persons with disabilities increase knowledge of

employment services, preparation for employment, and employment outcomes. Consider engaging an external job coach, particularly for employees with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, or other disabilities where on-the-job coaching can accelerate workplace success.

Integrate mentoring into onboarding to build trust, provide guidance, and offer a safe space for questions. Provide training visuals, step-by-step task lists, and clear daily schedules. Ask each new hire how they learn best: some benefit from written instructions or photo-based job aids, others learn by watching, and others learn by doing. Extend these supports to existing employees as well, particularly after role changes.

Recommendation 4.2 Communicate the accommodation policy to new employees during onboarding and orientation

Convergence: Strong **Quality:** Full confidence (92%) **Sources:** 12 independent organizations

Share your accommodation policy with every new employee during onboarding. Include information about how to request accommodations in all onboarding packages. Provide the policy in accessible formats. Discuss accommodation needs early and develop individualized accommodation plans together. Create clear channels for new employees to share feedback on the onboarding process, accommodations, and the workplace environment. Offer employees the opportunity to review their contracts and onboarding materials with HR staff. If your organization is covered by provincial accessibility legislation, you are legally required to inform new employees about your accommodation policies as soon as practicable after they begin employment and whenever those policies change.

Recommendation 4.3 Embed disability awareness and accessibility into the onboarding process

Convergence: Strong **Quality:** Full confidence (100%) **Sources:** 9 independent organizations

Integrate disability awareness and accessibility into onboarding as a standard component, not a supplementary addition. Provide all new employees with information about disability in the workplace, with visible support from senior management. Make this inclusive hiring guide part of your onboarding for hiring managers and HR staff. Train all staff on disability awareness, equity, and inclusion. Ensure onboarding materials are available in accessible formats. Have assistive technology and accommodations in place before the employee's first day. Highlight accessibility features of your workspace during facility tours: accessible washrooms, entrances with automatic doors or ramps, and break rooms. Have a conversation with the new staff member about what, if anything, coworkers need to know about their accommodation or disability, and follow the employee's lead on disclosure.

Recommendation 4.4 Ask new employees about accommodation needs upon hiring or during onboarding

Convergence: Moderate **Quality:** Full confidence (75%) **Sources:** 4 independent organizations

After a job offer is accepted, advise the new employee of their right to workplace accommodation and ask whether accommodation is needed. Do not wait for the employee to

raise it. Include standard language in your onboarding process that invites employees to share any adjustments they identify as they begin work. Ask each new hire how they learn best. Follow up on accommodation needs as the employee settles into the role, since needs may change once the person experiences the actual work environment.

Recommendation 4.5 Provide structured, accessible orientation to job and workplace

Convergence: Moderate **Quality:** Full confidence (100%) **Sources:** 4 independent organizations

Provide a structured, accessible orientation to the job and workplace. Share an onboarding schedule a few days in advance and avoid last-minute changes, as employees with disabilities may rely on planning. Use plain language and universal design principles in onboarding materials. Provide an individualized orientation that accounts for the employee's needs regarding format and timing. Plan the first day in advance: everything the person needs to do the job should be set up and ready. A well-organized first day establishes the conditions for sustained engagement and retention. Ensure facility tours are accessible for people who use mobility devices.

Recommendation 4.6 Engage disability employment service providers during onboarding

Convergence: Low **Quality:** Moderate confidence (67%) **Sources:** 3 independent organizations

Bring disability employment service providers into the onboarding process when appropriate. External specialists can help implement accommodations, provide job coaching, raise team awareness, and reassure the new employee. Ask service providers what supports they offer post-placement and for how long. Prepare plain language guides, step-by-step audio instructions, visual guides, and daily task lists for employees who need them. Support the direct supervisor as well, since their confidence in the process shapes the employee's experience.

Recommendation 4.7 Extend the onboarding period and follow up regularly

Convergence: Low **Quality:** Full confidence (100%) **Sources:** 3 independent organizations

Extend your onboarding period beyond the first week. Research indicates that one-day or one-week orientations are insufficient to improve retention, productivity, or engagement. It generally takes 12 to 18 months for new hires to settle in fully. Follow up regularly, particularly during the first six weeks. Schedule check-ins to confirm accommodations are working and adjust as needed. Ensure ongoing access to supports, not just during the initial hiring and onboarding stages.

For the full evidence base

Each recommendation in this fact sheet is drawn from Chapter 6 of *An Employer Guide to Disability Employment Practices in Canada*.

Anyinam, C., Coffey, S., Da Silva, C., Graham, L., & Godin-Jacques, C. (2026). An employer guide to disability employment practices in Canada: Evidence-based recommendations from a convergence

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