



# **The Transition to Adulthood for Young Adults with Disabilities in Manitoba: A "Winding Up-Hill Road"**

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Supporting Manitobans Toward Independent Living Equity (SMILE)

**Final Report  
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## Land Acknowledgement

This research was conducted on original lands of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation. We respect the Treaties that were made on these territories, we acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past, and we dedicate ourselves to move forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

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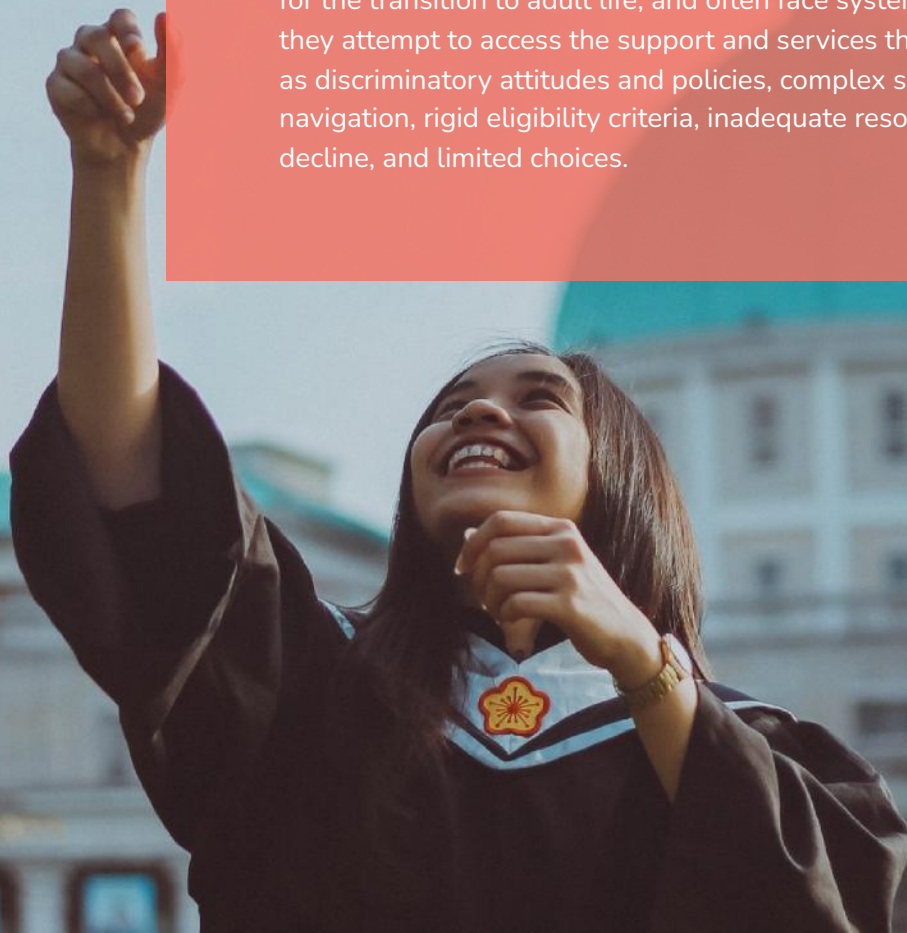
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# Executive Summary

The transition from school to adult life is often a stressful period as young adults face a multitude of changes and role transitions in education, employment, independent living, and social relationships. For young adult persons with disabilities (PwDs), the transition to adult life is particularly complex because in addition to role transitions, they often face unique challenges, which include the need to access, maintain, and coordinate services and support from caregivers, community, and service providers.

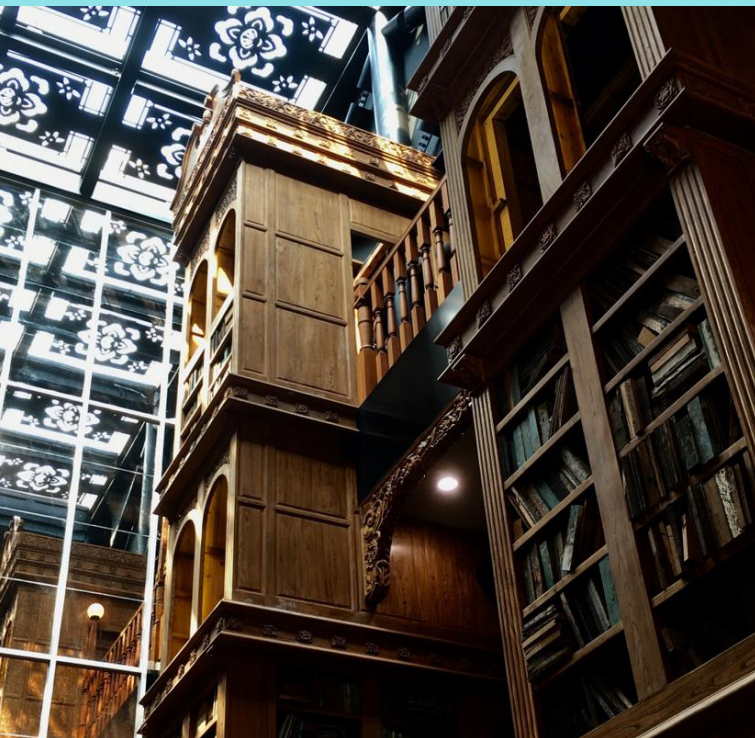
Recently, the preparation of PwDs for the transition to adult life has received increased attention as there is mounting evidence that an early, formal transition process and the provision of transition education during the school years, which includes skills and experiences that foster independence, are key determinants of a successful transition and improved life outcomes. In addition to formal transition processes, timely access to needed services and support during the post-school transition is essential for PwDs to participate fully and equitably in society. Despite the importance of adherence to a formal transition process and access to person-centred support, not all PwDs are adequately prepared for the transition to adult life, and often face systemic barriers as they attempt to access the support and services they require, such as discriminatory attitudes and policies, complex service navigation, rigid eligibility criteria, inadequate resources, service decline, and limited choices.



Given the critical role that a formal transition process and access to person-centred support play in improving life outcomes for PwDs, it is imperative to understand how the transition process is experienced in the province of Manitoba, so that the highest standards of quality transition planning may be provided, and systemic barriers removed.



To explore this issue, the current study examined the transition process from school to adult life for young adults with a range of self-reported disabilities in the province of Manitoba. The research employed a mixed-methods approach including an anonymous online cross-sectional survey (n=440) and semi-structured qualitative interviews (n=40) of four participant groups, which included: PwDs between the ages of 18 and 27 years, caregivers of PwDs within the same age range, educators at the secondary and post-secondary levels, and service providers who support the transition to adulthood. Data collection was conducted from September 2021 to December 2021.



Acknowledging that transition phases and processes overlap and intersect, transition experiences that primarily occur while in the K-12+ school system and the barriers experienced during the post-school period were examined. The *Revised Quality Indicators of Exemplary Transition Programs Needs Assessment Instrument-2* (QI-2) (Morningstar, 2011; Morningstar et al., 2016) was used as the framework of analysis in the examination of transition processes experienced while in the school system.





The QI-2 is comprised of seven domains:

1. Transition planning
2. Transition assessment
3. Family involvement
4. Student involvement
5. Transition-focused curriculum or instruction
6. Interagency and collaboration and community services, and
7. System-level infrastructure (policy and funding contexts)

Key findings during the school years reveal gaps and inconsistent adherence to several of the core tenets of exemplary transition practices as outlined in the seven domains and selected indicators of the QI-2. The barriers identified during post-school transition were multi-faceted and included challenges with accessing needed services, further education or training, employment, and independent living. Participants also described the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on access to transition support, with many participants emphasizing that barriers existed prior to COVID-19 but were exacerbated during this period. While participants in each group described obstacles that were specific to their experiences, there was much commonality in the gaps and unmet needs that were identified, indicating the pervasiveness of the barriers that PwDs face in the province of Manitoba as they transition to adulthood, signalling an urgent need for systemic changes. The findings in this study are similar to the findings of prior research conducted in Manitoba almost 20 years ago that explored the issues and opportunities for supporting broader participation in work, life, and community for persons with intellectual disabilities (Mactavish et al., 2004). The similarities in findings indicates that many longstanding issues, including the social devaluation of PwDs continue to persist.

Key findings related to transition processes experienced in K-12+ schools and the barriers experienced during the post-school period for PwDs are summarized on pages 7 - 58, and recommendations for policies and practices are made. It is important to emphasize that while the recommendations suggested reference government departments and/or service providers as responsible for specific recommendations, all recommendations in this study should be considered in consultation with PwDs, and where appropriate, with caregivers and the community.

### TRANSITION PLANNING



#### Eligibility

Some educators reported discrepant criteria for determining who would receive an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP). Not all students who would benefit from transition planning and education were deemed eligible for it, with PwDs, caregivers, and service providers reporting low rates of ITP development. This varied across schools and school divisions.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure a common understanding of who may require an ITP. This can be achieved through public sharing of legislation changes and the rationale behind them, along with professional learning opportunities when there are implications for professional practice. This should also include providing access to previous versions of the legislation to enhance clarity and transparency.

Revise and clarify disparate terminology such as exceptional needs, special learning needs and abilities, students who will need government support, students who will need adult support etc. to ensure alignment and clarity across all government support documents, protocols, and legislation.

Provide professional development for educators and human service providers regarding who may require individualized transition planning. Incorporate case studies in such training to demonstrate the range of needs and abilities of those who may require and benefit from individualized transition planning.

Manitoba  
Education

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Education

Manitoba Education  
Ministries involved in  
Human Services  
School Divisions

### TRANSITION PLANNING



#### Efficacy

Service providers described a high degree of variability in ITP processes across schools and divisions. Some educators reported the use of person-centred, comprehensive planning approaches such as Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) and Making Action Plans (MAPs) while others reported that ITPs did not always include individualized post-secondary goals. Transition planning primarily involved the completion of a checklist and referrals to outside agencies, and resource constraints prevented educators from following through on individualized transition goals because they did not have the time and resources to implement them, due to factors such as large caseloads and limited educational assistant support.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure that ITPs are person centered, incorporating approaches such as PATH, MAPS, and Personal Futures Planning.

Ensure that ITPs include a balance of outcome-oriented academic and post-secondary education or training, employment, and independent living goals, along with strategies and timelines to achieve them, respecting that such goals reflect the priorities of students and caregivers.



Manitoba  
Education  
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### TRANSITION PLANNING



#### Timing

Disparities in timing of ITP development were reported. Some PwDs, caregivers, and service providers conveyed that ITP processes started later than the provincially recommended time of high school entry while educators reported that planning began earlier than what was observed by other participants.

#### Case Management

A strength reported by PwDs and caregivers was that they or their adult children had access to a case manager while in school.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Revise provincial protocols and regulations to ensure that transition planning adopts a life course approach and begins in early years whenever possible, with a focus on linking short-term outcomes with long-term post-secondary goals as an expected practice.

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Education  
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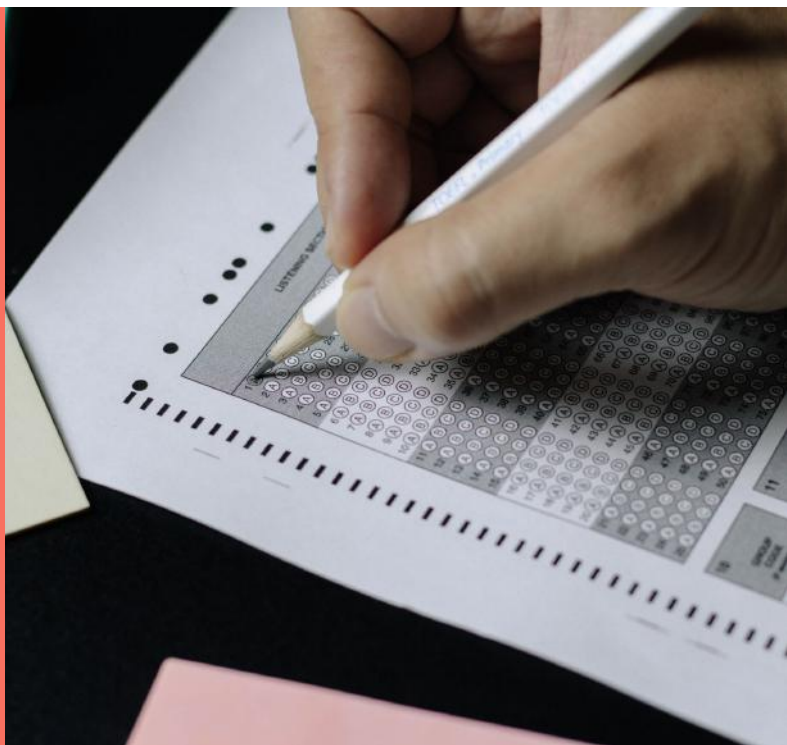
Provide resources to ensure that caseloads for case managers are manageable to enable the provision of comprehensive transition support.

Manitoba  
Education  
School Divisions  
School Principals

Ensure case managers receive ongoing cross-disciplinary professional development about the individualized transition planning process, and their roles and responsibilities as a member of a collaborative team. PwDs and their caregivers could be included in such trainings to empower them to lead the planning process.

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### TRANSITION ASSESSMENT



#### Limited Use of Transition Assessments

Most caregivers and PwDs reported that assessments to determine students' strengths, preferences, interests, and needs were not conducted to guide the transition to adulthood. A greater number of educators reported that transition assessments were completed, however, additional comments in surveys and interviews revealed a lack of specificity with respect to the assessments used and their frequency.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop provincial policy and guidance documents to address the need for transition assessment, which should include the identification and provision of culturally and linguistically sensitive assessment tools.

Provide professional development for educators in the administration of formal and informal transition assessments, the application of assessment data in setting outcome-oriented transition goals, as well as documenting and measuring outcomes.

Ensure that post-secondary transition goals are based on transition assessment results, respecting the priorities of students and caregivers.

Ensure that the transition assessment process is ongoing throughout the year, and assessment results are promptly shared with students, caregivers, educators, and service providers.

Provide students and/or caregivers with a summary of performance, which is a summative transition assessment that should include recommendations for meeting post-secondary goals when students leave high school.

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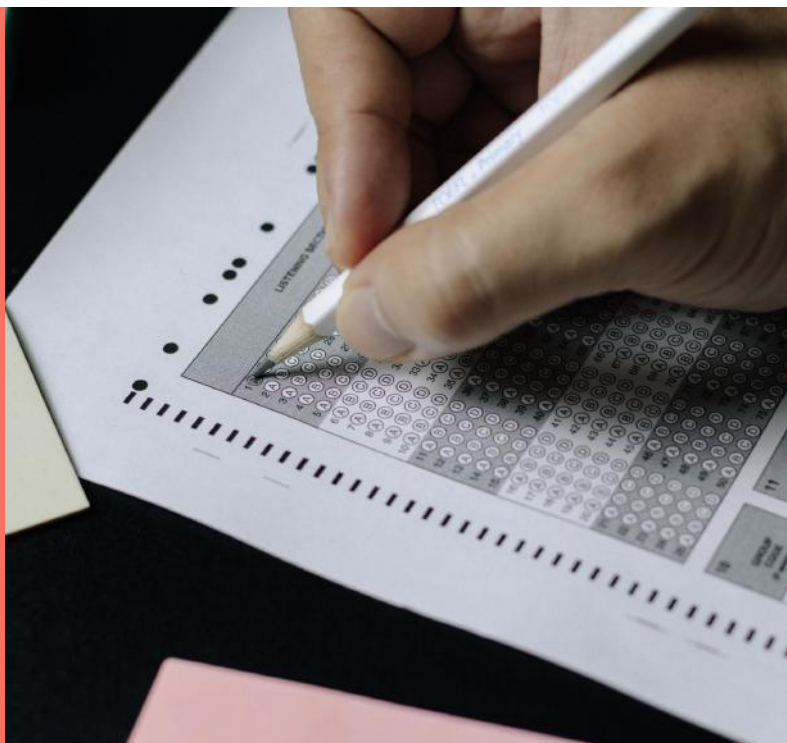
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School  
Divisions

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### TRANSITION ASSESSMENT



#### **An Emphasis on Determining Eligibility for Services**

Some educators indicated that clinical or specialized assessments were primarily administered to determine eligibility for services, with limited direct impact on students' individualized transition planning.

#### **Long Wait Lists**

Long waits due to limited clinical support were reported by educators.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Reduce reliance on schools to conduct clinical or specialized assessments to determine eligibility for services in the adult service system. This requires a significant paradigm shift across all sectors regarding how needs are conceptualized and how support is allocated.

Department  
of Families

Increase clinical support in schools to ensure that clinical or specialized assessment information can be applied in meaningful ways to support individualized transition planning and to allow for direct work with students to assist in the ITP process.

Manitoba  
Education  
School  
Divisions

Develop centralized clinical assessment waitlists in school divisions as opposed to school-specific waitlists, to expedite access to clinical services.

School  
Divisions

### FAMILY INVOLVEMENT



#### Limited Involvement and Evaluation

Some PwDs, caregivers, and service providers reported that while ITPs were in place, they were not reviewed at least twice per year with all relevant parties. More educators reported that a bi-annual review was completed.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure caregivers including extended family, friends, and service providers regularly participate in transition planning meetings and ITP reviews.

Elicit student and caregiver feedback through regular and accessible surveys or interviews to tailor transition support.

Increase the minimum expected frequency of ITP evaluation and review with caregivers and other parties involved from annually to bi-annually.

Require that the bi-annual review includes updated information from transition assessments.

Provide caregiver training in ITP processes, which may include mentorship.



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### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT



#### **Inclusion of Student Voice**

This was a relative strength reported by some participants. Some caregivers and PwDs described student involvement on a continuum, ranging from high levels of involvement to no involvement. Some caregivers also described a lack of student preparation for participation in the ITP process. Some educators and service providers also indicated the inclusion of student voice in the ITP, however, there were no references to evidence-based practices being used to teach students how to participate and incorporate student voice in the process.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide professional development for educators in the implementation of evidence-based practices to facilitate PwDs' leadership and self-advocacy in the ITP process.

Ensure that evidence-based practices are employed when teaching self-advocacy and leadership of the ITP process.

Initiate a youth advisory council with the ministries of Education, Families, Advanced Education, Economic Development and Trade, and Health on the transition to adulthood, to provide feedback, consultation, and recommendations on ways to strengthen the transition process, grounded in their lived expertise.

Manitoba  
Education  
School  
Divisions

Ministries  
of Education,  
Families, Advanced  
Education, Economic  
Development and  
Trade, and Health

### TRANSITION FOCUSED CURRICULUM OR INSTRUCTION



### Unmet Needs in Transition Education

Many PwDs and caregivers reported unmet needs in several critical areas of transition-focused curriculum or instruction, such as understanding one's school or workplace accommodations, self-advocacy, readiness for the job market, preparation for further education or training, and independent living skills.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure access to a balance of academic and transition-specific content as determined by transition assessments and priorities of students and caregivers.

Ensure the utilization of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the provision of accommodations to address students' priority learning needs in the regular classroom, including independent living skills relevant to ITP goals.

Provide ongoing professional development for educators or case managers in all aspects of transition education.

Develop a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Inclusive Education with a specialization in Transition to ensure adequate training for educators.

Manitoba  
Education  
School  
Divisions

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Divisions  
School  
Principals

Manitoba Education  
School Divisions  
Post Secondary  
Universities

Manitoba  
Education  
Post Secondary  
Universities

### TRANSITION FOCUSED CURRICULUM OR INSTRUCTION



#### **Absence of Curriculum**

Some educators reported barriers to providing transition education including the absence of curriculum, or guidance or support documents.

#### **Expectations to Fully Timetable in Core Courses and Limited Choices of Courses**

Some educators informed of the requirement to fully timetable students who were receiving modified credits in core courses, which interfered with addressing transition-related needs. Some educators also described situations where students with disabilities were given limited choices regarding the courses they could take and were placed in classrooms where they could be grouped with other students with disabilities, or were required to attend part time because of limited resources, such as lack of educational assistants and large class sizes.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a comprehensive provincial curriculum framework that incorporates evidence-based practices to address transition education and transition-related competencies.

Manitoba  
Education

Provide equitable access to all courses and programming options to ensure the provision of appropriate education.

School  
Divisions  
School  
Principals

### TRANSITION FOCUSED CURRICULUM OR INSTRUCTION



#### **Limited Availability or Participation in Career Development Courses**

Most PwDs and caregivers reported that they or their adult children did not participate in career development coursework. Educators reported higher participation rates in these opportunities. Some educators indicated that career development was not offered in their schools or that students with disabilities were not included in all career development courses.

#### **Inequitable and Limited Opportunities to Participate in Vocational Training, Work Experience and Volunteerism**

Some PwDs, caregivers and educators identified inequitable access to vocational training and work experience.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure equitable access to all career development curricula and provision of courses relevant to ITP goals for post-secondary life and developing independence.

Manitoba  
Education  
School Divisions  
School Principals

Ensure equitable access to all programming options and all reasonable accommodations.

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Education  
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School Principals

### TRANSITION FOCUSED CURRICULUM OR INSTRUCTION



### **Community-based Opportunities during High School**

All participant groups described difficulties in accessing community-based opportunities for PwDs, including not meeting entrance criteria for vocational programs, attitudinal barriers, and resource constraints such as educational assistant support or job coach, and transportation.

### **Employers Reluctance to Provide Work Experience**

All participant groups identified barriers associated with finding employers who were willing to include PwDs in their workplace.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand opportunities to participate in best and emerging practices including Project LIFE and Project SEARCH that provide vocational training and employment readiness skill development.

Ensure dedicated training for educational assistants in job coaching skills as a prerequisite to serving as a job coach and accompanying students to job sites.

Provide educational assistant or job coaching when needed to support participation in vocational training and work/ volunteer/ community-based opportunities as identified in the ITP.

Provide resources for transportation to support participation in vocational training, and work/ volunteer/ community-based opportunities as identified in the ITP.

Manitoba  
Education  
School  
Divisions

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Divisions  
School  
Principals

Increase access to designated career or community experiences teachers or liaisons to strengthen relationships with employers and enhance access for all students.

Provide or increase financial supports to employers to include students with disabilities in the workplace or work experience programs.

Provide professional development or training to employers to increase their understanding of the needs and abilities of individuals with disabilities, the duty to accommodate, and the role and benefits of a job coach.

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Divisions

Manitoba  
Economic  
Development,  
Investment &  
Trade

### Interagency Collaboration



### **Limited Communication and Information Sharing, and Accountability for Implementation of *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community***

Caregivers, educators, and service providers reported barriers to collaboration including limited communication and difficulties with information sharing. Large caseloads and staff turnover were described as interfering with the provision of support.



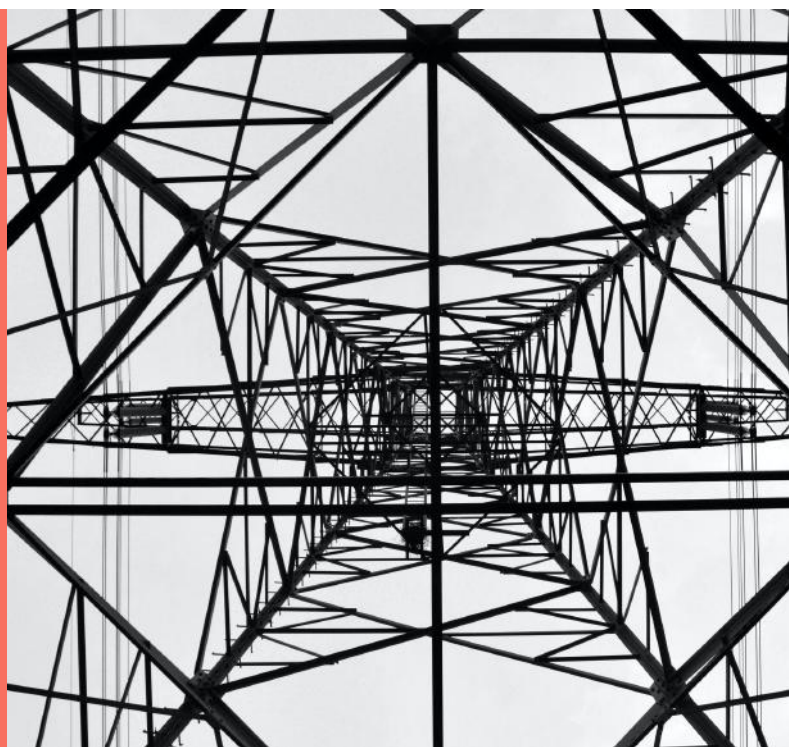
# RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a Transition Follow-up System (TFS) by merging data across systems and evaluating outcomes at various stages throughout the transition process to provide a more cohesive long-term approach to service delivery.

Implement a TFS to improve interagency collaboration, enhance communication, improve data sharing, reduce gaps and duplication, and reduce the reliance on caregivers and PwDs to take on the primary responsibility of service follow-up during the transition process.

Ministries  
involved in  
Human Services

### SYSTEM-LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE



#### ***Weak Legislative Mandate of *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community****

Many PwDs and caregivers reported limited awareness of the Bridging to Adulthood protocol despite the existence of youth- and parent-friendly versions outlining the phases and key activities, and their roles and responsibilities in the process. Many service providers also reported limited awareness of this protocol and associated practices.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen the legislative mandate of the Bridging to Adulthood protocol from a protocol or “soft law” to a legislative mandate that requires follow through and for which there are accountability mechanisms in place to ensure adherence to mandated ITP processes. This should include immediately enacting an Education Standard as a part of *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* (2013) that requires adherence to transition protocols, and the establishment of accountability mechanisms to ensure adherence.

Incorporate the recommendations from this report in the Bridging to Adulthood Protocol.

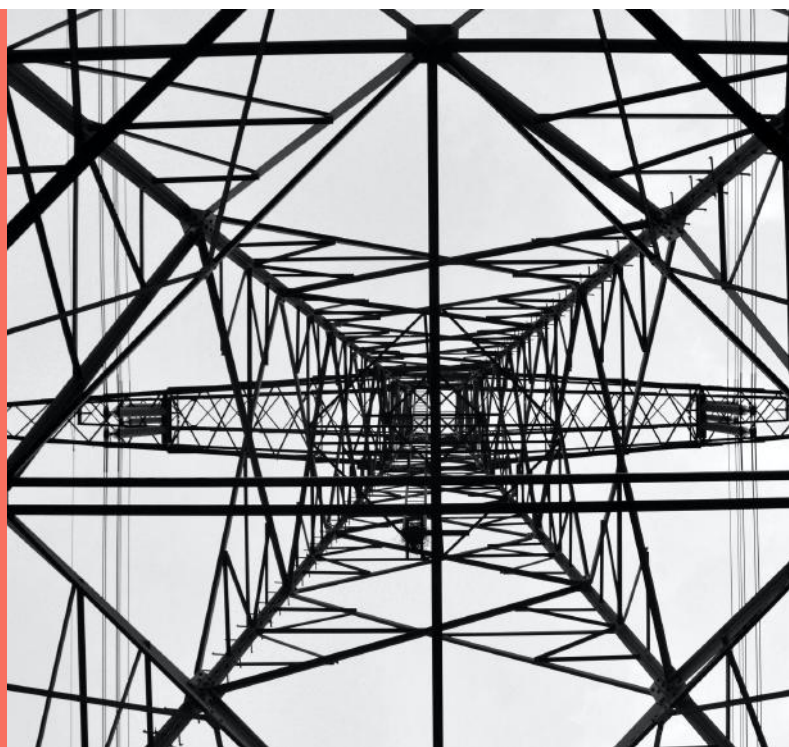
Ensure regular ongoing cross-disciplinary professional development regarding the transition to adulthood that also includes students and caregivers.

Implement a TFS to ensure accountability for adherence to transition practices and to measure outcomes.



Ministries  
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Human Services

### SYSTEM-LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE



#### **Inflexible Transition Timelines based on Chronological Age**

Many educators and service providers described the need to remain in school until 21 years of age to receive resources and support from agencies such as Community Living disABILITY Services (CLdS) as problematic as it contributes to students dropping out or falling through the cracks. The reported lack of resources for the 18 to 21 years age range in terms of community-based opportunities, educational assistant or job coach support, and transportation was reported to have further exacerbated this issue. Educators also described the adverse implications of this practice on youth in care who may move to new homes when they reach the age of majority, yet still be required to attend school.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Conduct a comprehensive policy review and revise policies or practices such as transition timelines based on chronological age and the Schools of Choice Legislation which contravene the provision of person-centred support during the transition to adulthood.

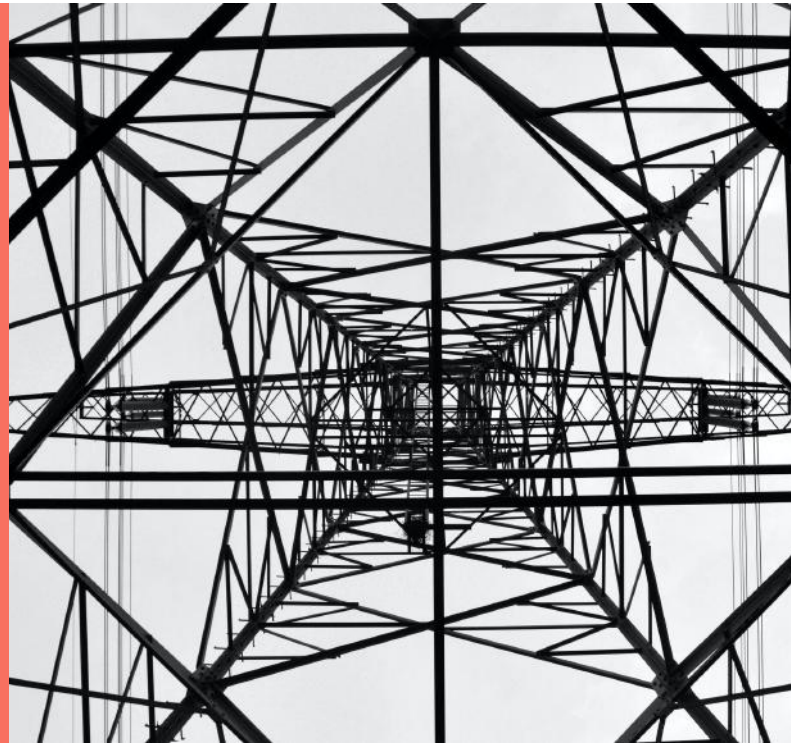
Implement flexible transition timelines for individuals who are eligible for CLdS that is based on developmental readiness, individual and caregiver choice, and personal circumstances as determined through the ITP process.

Ensure access to resources and supports so that individualized goals may be addressed with a focus on the 18 to 21 years age range, such as lower student-teacher ratios, access to educational assistants and job coaches, and transportation.

Ministries  
involved in  
Human Services

Manitoba  
Education  
Department of  
Families

### SYSTEM-LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE



#### **Variable Degrees of Inclusion in K-12+**

Almost half of the PwDs and caregivers indicated that they or their adult children spent 50% or more of the school day outside of the regular classroom during their K-12+ schooling. Educators reported that a similar percentage of students with disabilities were typically in placements outside of the regular classroom for 50% or more of the school day.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Determine the extent to which segregated educational classrooms and schools exist within Manitoba, and the number of students who are enrolled in these settings.

Publicly report the number of segregated educational classrooms and programs for students with disabilities.

Determine the number of students with disabilities who have shortened school days, such as bus pick-up before the end of the school day and/or arrival after the start of the school day, and the rationale for reducing the length of the school day.

Set targets to increase inclusivity and equity in Manitoba's schools and monitor progress toward achievement of targets.

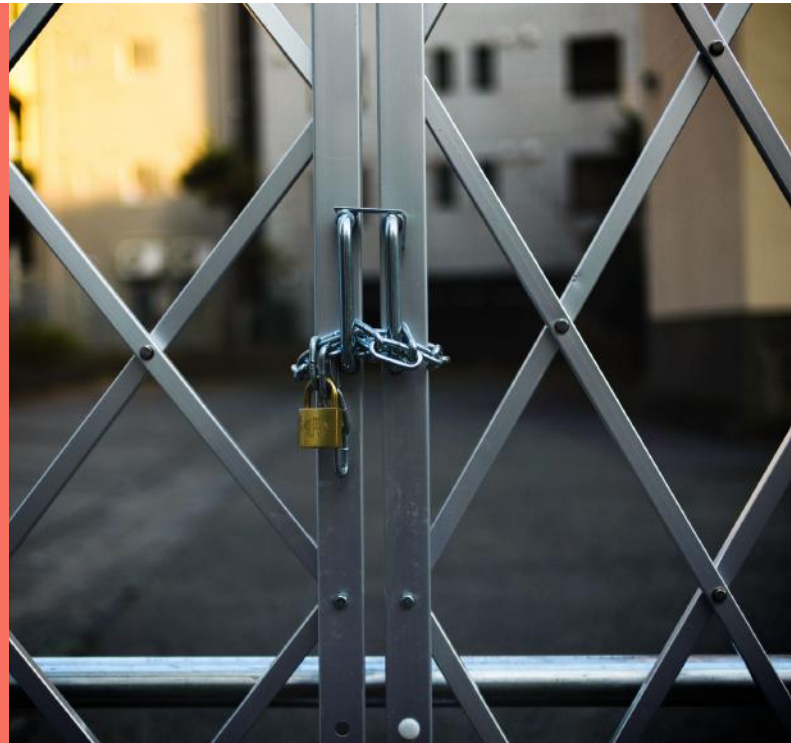
Immediately develop and implement an Accessible Education Standard.

Manitoba  
Education

Manitoba  
Education  
School  
Divisions

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Education  
Provincial  
Government

### BARRIERS IN ACCESSING SERVICES



#### **Service Navigation Difficulties**

The need for caregivers to advocate for support.

#### **Rigid Eligibility Criteria**

Precluded many PwDs from accessing needed support.

#### **Challenges with the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS)**

Inequities in the administration of the SIS and its use in determining categorical funding.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Create Service Navigator positions or roles to be assigned to young adults with disabilities and their caregivers for a minimum of one year prior to school leaving. This role would support identification and access to supports, services and accommodations according to the post-secondary pathway outlined in the ITP, and serve as a bridge between such young adults and adult service systems.

Provincial  
Government -  
Interdepartmental

Adopt a personalized rather than diagnosis-based resource allocation and reimbursement in all human services that include relevant environmental factors and the specific needs of the individual. The *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* framed within a Capabilities Approach should be explored as it may provide a framework to support this process.

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Discontinue usage of the SIS as a method of determining categorical funding, instead providing it as an optional tool to support person-centred planning.

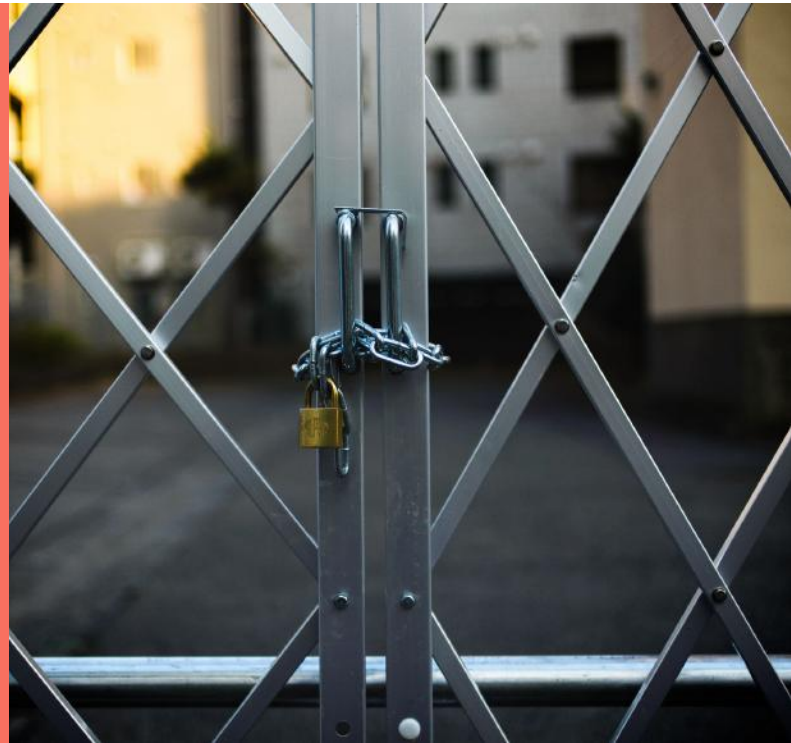
Critically examine and where necessary, take steps to ensure the questions in the SIS uphold the personal dignity of the participant and their caregivers.

Provincial  
Government  
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Families

# KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS IN ACCESSING SERVICES



### Delays and Inadequacies

Decline in services in adulthood, bureaucratic delays in accessing services, inadequate access to person-centred support, and a lack of access to support for Indigenous young adults.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide sufficient resources to enable access to quality needs-based supports throughout PwDs' lives, with a focus on culturally relevant supports for Indigenous young adults.

Monitor the receipt of services and support for PwDs and establish metrics for tracking and improving outcomes at the individual, service provider, and provincial levels, with support from a TFS.

Provide sufficient resources to increase access to and choice of quality day programming for PwDs.

Develop *Leading Practice Guidelines* (Abilities Manitoba, n.d.) into standards of practice and provide dedicated resources so that service providers can adhere to the standards.

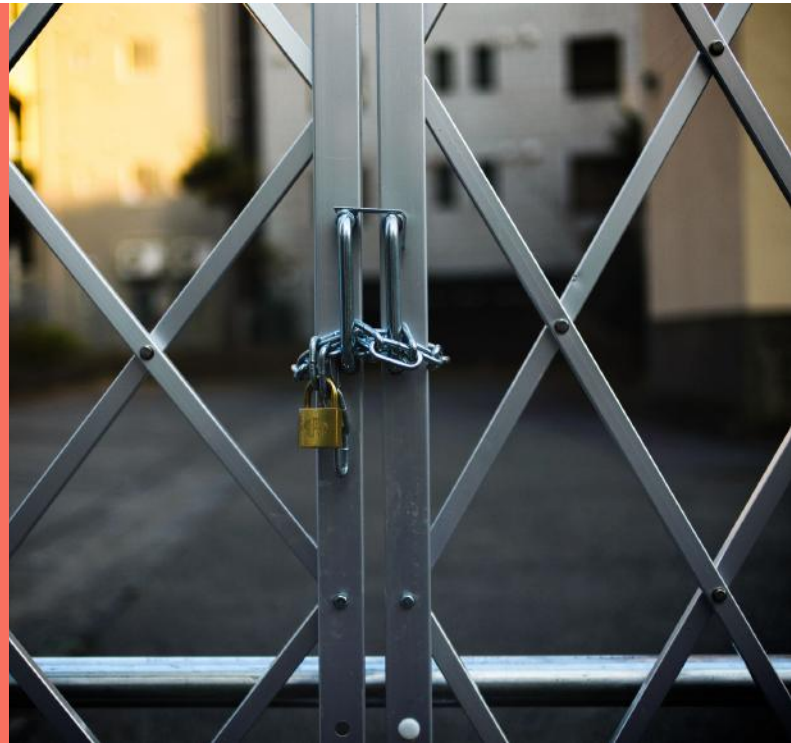
Provincial  
Government -  
Interdepartmental

Provincial  
Government  
Department of  
Families

# KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS IN ACCESSING SERVICES



#### **Insufficient Availability of Trained Staff**

High turnover of direct service providers, low wages, and waitlists interfered with access to support.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Facilitate and incentivize accreditation for service providers who provide direct support to PwDs through organizations such as the Council on Quality Leadership.

Establish a centralized public portal identifying day programs, the services they provide, and wait lists to monitor access to services and ensure the timely receipt of support.

Require service providers for PwDs track and report staff turnover ratios and to set targets to reduce current rates.

Significantly increase the wages of direct service providers.

Establish provincial training standards as a part of the accreditation process of service providers for PwDs to increase the professionalization of the direct service providers workforce.

Establish a professional learning hub for direct service providers of PwDs and communities of practice, and ensure access to ongoing professional development and training, including learning opportunities related to the needs of PwDs.

Establish a centralized public portal identifying respite support, the services they provide, and wait lists to monitor access to services and ensure the timely receipt of support.

Provincial  
Government  
Department of  
Families

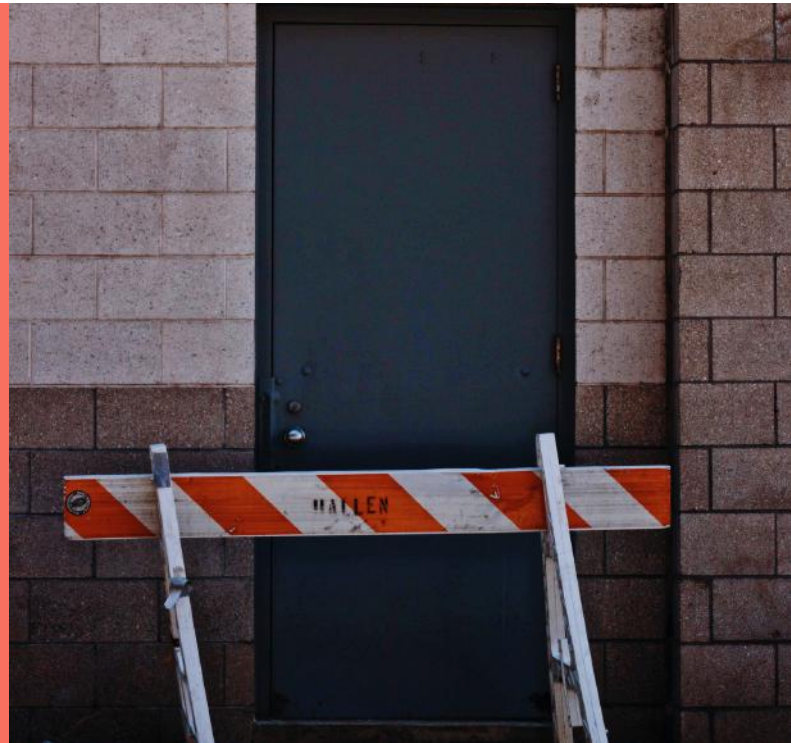
Provincial  
Government

Provincial  
Government  
Department of  
Families

# KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS TO FURTHER EDUCATION OR TRAINING



#### **Limited Post-Secondary Options Restrictive Entrance and Eligibility Criteria**

Access to post-secondary education and limited post-secondary options for PwDs were described.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop, expand and improve inclusive post-secondary education and training options at all colleges and universities for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This may include micro-credentialing and badging as ways to acknowledge learning and expertise.

Incorporate inclusive post-secondary education for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in multi-year strategic plans addressing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), and evaluate and report on progress in this area.

Update *Towards Inclusion: A Handbook for Modified Course Designation, Senior 1-4* document and clarify the profile of learners who may receive modified credits. Modified credits involve in-school transition processes but were described as barriers during the post-school period. Provide professional training to educators on how to best support these students as they transition to adulthood.

Develop common documentation to be used by all school divisions to guide the decision-making processes involving the use of modified credits and student or caregiver consent.

Develop accessible online information for students and parents about modified credits and the implications of receiving modified credits.

Identify post-secondary programs that accept modified credits as a part of their entrance requirements and develop an online resource with this information.

Identify alternate options to pursue post-secondary education when the modified course designation has been used, for example, working through the General Educational Development (GED) process, applying as a mature student, micro-credentialing, badging, online learning, etc.

Post-secondary  
Institutions  
Manitoba  
Advanced  
Education

Post-secondary  
Institutions  
Manitoba  
Advanced  
Education

Manitoba  
Education

Manitoba  
Education

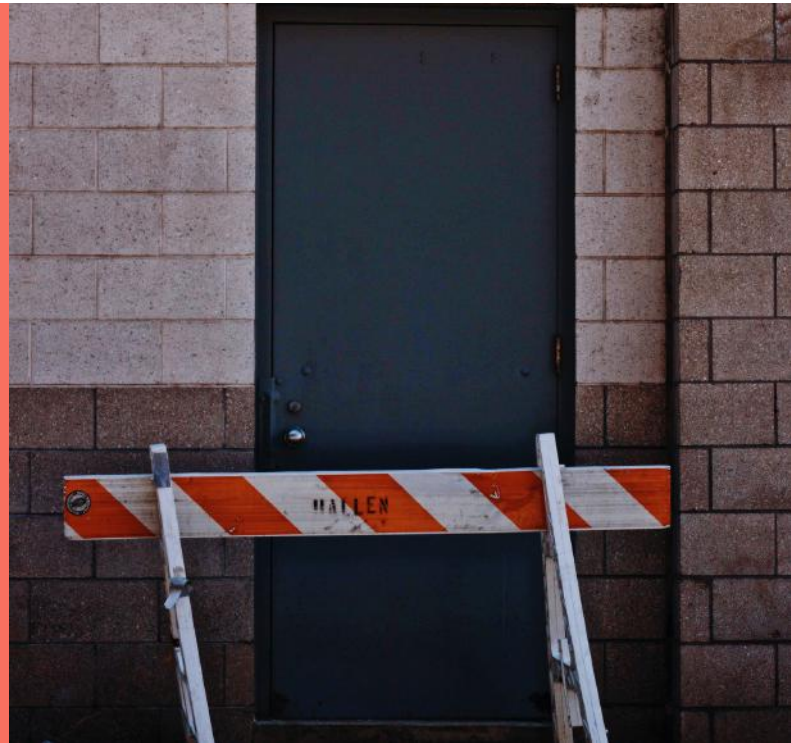
Manitoba  
Education

Manitoba  
Education  
Post-secondary  
Institutions

# KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS TO FURTHER EDUCATION OR TRAINING



**Lack of Access to Accommodations**

**Inadequate or Inflexible Resources to Provide Accommodations**

**Inadequate Preparation For and Consideration of Post-Secondary Education or Training**



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure post-secondary teaching staff and/or faculties are aware of the duty to accommodate and provide inclusive pedagogies including UDL.

Ensure enhanced collaboration between post-secondary institutions and secondary schools so that students with disabilities are aware of accommodations available to them through Student Accessibility Services (SAS) within post-secondary educational settings (colleges, universities and vocational schools) and how to access them prior to and during programming.

Review the eligibility criteria in place to access SAS at post-secondary institutions to ensure services can be provided on a needs-based versus diagnosis-based manner. Reduce reliance on medical diagnoses, certificates and notes.

Ensure that a flexible continuum of resources is available to support individualized accommodation needs in the full range of programs available to students at post-secondary institutions.

Ensure that post-secondary education and training goals are identified and addressed early in the individualized transition planning process and are included in the ITP. This is related to an in-school transition process but emerged as a barrier during the post-school period.

Manitoba  
Education  
Post-secondary  
Institutions  
Manitoba  
Advanced  
Education

School Divisions  
Post-secondary  
Institutions  
Manitoba  
Advanced  
Education

Post-secondary  
Institutions  
Manitoba  
Advanced  
Education

Post-secondary  
Institutions  
Manitoba  
Advanced  
Education

Manitoba  
Education  
School  
Divisions

# KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT



**A Lack of Willingness of Employers to Hire PwDs**

**Limited Accommodations in the Workplace**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt and implement *Moving Forward Together: A Canadian Strategy for Disability and Work*, which includes developing disability-inclusive workplaces and providing comprehensive support for PwDs. Tailor action plans to address local needs such as sector, size, and location of businesses in consultation with PwDs, community members and business partners.

Create a resource hub to support employers through the employment cycle, with a focus on building disability inclusive workplaces.

Incentivize the participation of employers in job matching tools such as Jobs Ability AI (<https://jobsability.ca>).

Provide flexible, customizable resources and support for employers and employment service agencies to support recruitment, training, on-boarding, and accommodations throughout the employment cycle.

Increase awareness of incentives for employers as well as the value of diverse and inclusive workplaces and workforces through focused campaigns.

Establish a comprehensive outcomes framework to assess progress and determine the achievement of the Accessible Employment Standard (AES), and the objectives of becoming a disability confident and inclusive workplace and providing comprehensive support to PwDs.

Manitoba Economic  
Development,  
Investment & Trade  
Department of  
Families Business  
Partners

Manitoba  
Economic  
Development,  
Investment &  
Trade

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Economic  
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Investment &  
Trade

Manitoba  
Economic  
Development,  
Investment &  
Trade

# KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT



**Limited Employment Opportunities**

**Claw Backs to Financial and Programmatic Supports When  
Employment is Obtained**

**Lack of Transportation**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide a stable, reliable living wage. Include access to health, dental health, and mental health supports, especially when these are not offered by the employer.

Provincial  
Government  
Manitoba Economic  
Development,  
Investment & Trade  
Business Partners

Ensure that the Employment and Income Assistance Program (EIA) promotes its employment first/ pro-work focus, such that employment is prioritized and PwDs are not penalized through claw backs for being employed.

Unbundle income benefits and employment support. Eliminate conflicting eligibility criteria.

Provide flexible support tailored to the individual needs and circumstance of PwDs.

Provincial  
Government

Provide resources to support the implementation of the Accessible Transportation Standard (ATS), particularly in rural areas, including the expansion of the infrastructure of accessible transportation options that exist in these areas.

Increase transportation support for PwDs to and from work.

Provincial  
Government

# KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS TO INDEPENDENT LIVING



**A Lack of Safe, Affordable, Accessible Housing**

**The Need to be Moved to Crisis to Access Supported Housing**

**Inadequate Preparation to Live Independently**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Significantly increase the supply of accessible housing through construction and conversion, with a focus on social housing.

Explore innovative approaches to the provision of social housing such as containers or modular housing.

Repair and renovate vacant housing to reduce waitlists.

Ensure affordability of housing by increasing rent supplements and allowances, and ensuring rent is less than 30% of total before tax household income.

Provincial  
Government  
Manitoba Housing  
and Renewal  
Corporation

Ensure independent living skills are developed and assessed as a part of the ITP process. This relates to an in-school transition process but was identified as a barrier during the post- school period.

Continue to develop and assess independent living skills into adulthood, such as through day programming, and education or training opportunities, aligning with a life course approach.

Ensure ongoing access to supported independent living including assistance to secure housing, develop or recover independent living skills, pay rent, perform budgeting and housekeeping, and mental health, physical health, social, recreation, employment, and peer support.

Ensure ongoing access to supported living resources.

School  
Divisions

Department  
of Families

Provincial  
Government  
Manitoba Housing  
and Renewal  
Corporation  
Department of  
Families

# KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS TO INDEPENDENT LIVING



**Insufficient Income**

**Rigid Eligibility Criteria for Supported Independent Living**

**Rigid Rental Requirements**



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide stable, reliable, and sufficient income to PwDs to offset the cost of living including rent, accessing nutritious food, transportation costs, and medical and dental expenses outside of those covered by Manitoba Health.

Provincial  
Government

Streamline the application process for supported independent living, supported living and other options that may be available to CLdS clients. This may be accomplished with a centralized application process.

Develop policies in partnership with other government systems so that supported independent living and supported living can be accessed seamlessly without bureaucratic delays and competing and contradictory eligibility criteria.

Provincial  
Government  
Human Services  
Departments

# KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### IMPACTS OF COVID-19



**Limited Access to Essential Supports, Particularly Day Programs**

**Increased Caregiving Responsibilities**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt a Disability Inclusive Response and Recovery Plan to COVID-19 informed by the pre-conditions outlined by the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD).

Ensure continuity of care-giving support for PwDs.

Increase the number and scope of available day programs.

Increase availability of highly trained direct support staff, the professionalism of the workforce and their wages .

Provincial  
Government  
Human Services  
Departments

Provincial  
Government  
Department of  
Families

Develop a policy framework in consultation with caregivers that includes economic and social supports, to support the implementation of *The Caregiver Recognition Act* (2011).

Establish metrics and monitor the impact of the implementation of *The Caregiver Recognition Act* (2011).

Provincial  
Government  
Human Services  
Departments

Provincial  
Government

## Disability in Canada

Inclusive societies embrace diversity and the fundamental equality of all individuals. While these guiding principles are largely agreed upon in government policies and appear in the mission statements of many social programs, their practical implementation remains challenging (Abbott et al., 2016). Even in countries that espouse to be “societies for all”, there is evidence that norms of exclusion and marginalization continue to persist and PwDs are disproportionately impacted (Lutfiyya & Bartlett, 2020). Research examining the outcomes of PwDs in Canada indicates that they (a) are less likely to complete high school or pursue additional education, (b) have low levels of labour market participation and earn significantly less than non-disabled individuals, (c) receive inadequate government transfers and thus are more likely to qualify as low income, (d) often live in housing that does not meet standards for adequacy, suitability and affordability, and (e) are more likely to live with and be cared for by a family member in adulthood (Berrigan et al., 2020). Negative attitudes towards disability also lead to stigmatization and discrimination, further limiting the rights of PwDs to equitable participation in society (Statistics Canada, 2017).

According to the *Canadian Survey on Disability* (Statistics Canada, 2017), one in five Canadians or 22% of the population aged 15 years and older reported having a disability. The employment rate for PwDs is a key indicator of inclusion in society and of progress toward equity and shared prosperity (Morris et al., 2018). However, this survey revealed marked disparities in the overall employment rates for PwDs and persons without disabilities (PwoDs) between the ages of 25 to 64 years at 59.4% and 80.1% respectively.

## Disability and Youth in Canada

The *Canadian Survey on Disability* (Morris et al., 2018) revealed that youths with disabilities between the ages of 15 and 24 years represent the largest segment of the population that is neither in school nor employed, and youths with more severe disabilities are twice as likely to be represented in this category. Employment rates for youths also differ depending on the types of disabilities they have, particularly, those with developmental, cognitive, and mental health related disabilities face greater employment challenges than those with sensory or physical disabilities. However, untangling the relationship between disability and employment is difficult because of the high co-occurrence of disabilities (Arim, 2015).

The above-mentioned survey also found that of the 108,790 youths who were neither in school nor employed, 83,440 were described as having the potential to work with accommodations and supports (Morris et al., 2018). Youths with disabilities who were employed were also more likely to work part time and earn significantly less than those without disabilities. In terms of the disability profile of the youths in this survey, the most prevalent disabilities included mental health-related disabilities and learning disabilities, with 77% reporting to have one or both disabilities.

A landmark document, *Canada's First State of Youth Report: For Youth, with Youth, by Youth* (Canadian Heritage, 2021) affirmed that youths with disabilities were much less likely to be employed compared to their non-disabled peers, and Indigenous youths with disabilities had the highest unemployment rate. The report cited several youth concerns, specifically the “disproportionate number of youths with disabilities who are unemployed,” the concern that potential employers would not consider them “a viable candidate . . . due to their perceived/misperceived accommodation needs,” and the possible perception of them as “expensive” due to their disabilities (p. 53).

The importance of educational attainment must also be underscored as it has been found to be a strong predictor of future employment for PwDs (Grigal et al., 2019). The *Canadian Survey on Disability* found that having a trade or college certificate as compared to a high school equivalency increased the employment of persons with severe disabilities from approximately one third to one half (Morris et al., 2018).

Regardless of the disability severity, PwDs with post-secondary education were more likely to be employed than those with only secondary school education or less. There is also increasing awareness about the importance of obtaining employment experience during the course of formal education and the positive impact it can have on successful school-to-work transitions, yet a lack of training and/or prior employment experience were reported by PwDs as the top barriers that they faced when looking for work (Morris et al., 2018).

The survey also reported that housing outcomes for PwDs are poor, with 15.9% of PwDs indicating that they were in core housing need compared to 10.1% of PwoDs. A household is deemed to be in core housing need if it does not meet one or more of the following criteria: affordability (costs more than 30% of total before-tax income to pay rent), suitability (not having sufficient bedrooms), or condition (in need of major repairs). Of the PwDs who resided in rental properties with subsidies, 44.5% were found to be in core housing need as compared to 39.6% of PwoDs. Not surprisingly, many adult PwDs continue to live with family members, as 6 in 10 who live alone report living below the poverty line (Randall & Thurston, 2022).

# Disability in Manitoba

According to the *Canadian Survey on Disability* conducted in 2017, 24.8% of Manitobans 15+ are living with a disability. The employment rate of PwDs between the ages of 25 to 64 in Manitoba is 64.7% compared to 82.6% for PwoDs (Labour Market Information Directorate, 2021). According to the Manitoba Department of Families Annual Report 2020-2021 (Manitoba Department of Families, 2021), of the 67,376 Manitobans receiving Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), 25,874 or 38.4% are PwDs. The Manitoba Alternative Provincial Budget of 2020 highlighted how EIA often traps PwDs in a cycle of poverty because its benefits do not provide for liveable basic needs, and the claw backs imposed for working are punitive (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2020).

# Indigenous Peoples and Disability in Canada and Manitoba

According to the 2017 *Aboriginal Peoples Survey*, of the individuals living off-reserve, 32% of First Nations, 30% of Metis, and 19% of Inuit peoples reported having disabilities that impacted their daily lives, with the rates of disability increasing with age and being higher for women than men (Hahnmann et al., 2019). Of the provinces, Manitoba is second to Ontario in the number of First Nation peoples living on reserve and in total population. Of the 63 First Nations communities in Manitoba, 17 are not serviced with an all-weather road, and such geographic isolation creates unique challenges in accessing and navigating services and systems for PwDs in First Nations communities (Indigenous Services Canada, 2022a). Jurisdictional divisions between federal, provincial, and band governments further complicate access to services for First Nations peoples. Despite the enactment of *Jordan's Principle*, a child-first standard that requires First Nations children and youths receive access to the same services as other children in Canada, regardless of government interests (Indigenous Services Canada, 2022b), access to services remains challenging and jurisdictional disputes persist. Some of the service shortfalls experienced by First Nations peoples include but are not limited to: "(a) respite, (b) financial assistance for families caring for children with disabilities, (c) parent/foster parent training and support groups, (d) community-based therapeutic services (e.g., speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, psychological services, child development counsellors), (e) early diagnosis and intervention services, and (f) services for youth with disabilities when they reach adulthood" (Dion, 2017, p. 29). The lack of much needed resources in First Nations communities has also contributed to children and youths with disabilities being placed in the care of child welfare agencies (Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, 2015). This is particularly concerning in the province of Manitoba because there are nearly 10,000 children and youth in the care of child welfare agencies, of which 72% are permanent wards, and 91% percent are First Nations people (Manitoba Department of Families, 2021).

Determining the number of First Nations children and youths with disabilities in care is difficult due to inconsistent provincial tracking, however, research exploring the educational outcomes of this group in Manitoba affirmed that First Nations children and youths have a higher incidence of disability compared to other populations (Brownell et al., 2015; Healthy Child Manitoba, 2017). These statistics are alarming and reflect the harmful intergenerational effects of colonization and the residential school system and highlight the critical need for child welfare reforms. In addition, comprehensive, culturally appropriate transition planning is required as First Nations youths transition out of care so that the cycle of disadvantage can be broken.

Overall, the experiences and outcomes of PwDs in Canada and Manitoba paint a rather bleak picture and illustrate the need for systemic changes to ensure that all PwDs have access to a “decently dignified life” (Nussbaum, 2006, as cited in Hanisch, 2007, p. 170). Importantly, preparation for the transition to adulthood and the provision of person-centred support in the post-school transition play a key role in this process.

## The Transition to Adulthood

The transition to adulthood for PwDs, including how they are prepared for further education and training (e.g., post-secondary education or vocational training), employment, community participation, and independent living, have received increased attention for the pivotal role they play in supporting equitable access to full participation in society and improved life outcomes (Hart & Trainor, 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2021). The overall intent of the transition process is to support the early and ongoing development of academic, social, and functional skills that will facilitate engagement in post-school activities and enhance quality of life (QOL) (Patton & Kim, 2016).

The transition process, as described in literature, is intended to be highly collaborative and directly involve PwDs, caregivers, service providers within and outside of school, and community supports in the development, implementation, and monitoring of an outcome-oriented Individualized Transition Plan (ITP). The importance of transition planning for PwDs is well established, as it has been found to enhance self-determination, improve self-confidence, encourage greater social participation or networks, and result in education, employment, and independent living success.

A recent systematic review of the research conducted by Mazzotti et al. (2021) confirmed the prior findings of Test, Mazzotti, et al. (2009), which identified 16 predictors of positive post-school outcomes for PwDs. These predictors include: inclusion in general education, paid employment or work experience, self-care or independent living skills, student support, career awareness, interagency collaboration, occupational courses, self-advocacy or self-determination, social skills, transition programs, vocational education, community

experiences, high-school diploma status, parental involvement, program of study and work study. Mazzotti et al. (2021) also affirmed that goal setting, parental expectations, travel skills, and youth autonomy or decision-making are correlated with post-school success. This systematic review further identified three new predictors of positive post-school outcomes including psychological empowerment, self-realization, and technology skills.

Identifying and understanding the predictors of post-school success for PwDs is critical as this provides important information about the processes (e.g., inclusion in regular education, parental involvement, interagency collaboration, and access to services), as well as the education and skills (e.g., opportunities for paid employment or work experience, instruction in self-care or independent living skills, and self-advocacy or self-determination) that are essential for a successful transition to adult life. Identifying what constitutes exemplary transition planning and support provides a framework through which current practices may be assessed and quality improvements may be made (Morningstar & Kurth, 2017).

## The Transition to Adulthood as a Human Right

PwDs' transition from school to adult life may be examined through a human rights lens. Specifically, the degree to which the process respects and prioritizes the strengths, personal dignity, and freedom of choice of the individual is a key indicator of adherence to basic human rights principles. Canada's ratification of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD; United Nations, 2006) reflects a commitment to promoting, protecting, and ensuring the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by all. Within the CRPD, there are specific articles to be considered in the transition to adulthood, including the equal right to live independently and to be included in the community (Article 19), the equal right to an inclusive education (Article 24) and the equal right to work and employment (Article 27).

*The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2007) emphasizes that Indigenous peoples have the right to the improvement of their economic and social conditions such as education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, and social security without discrimination. It further describes the right to special protections for Indigenous PwDs, Elders, women, children, and youths (Articles 21 and 22) and the need to ensure that these rights are upheld.

In a study exploring the transition to adulthood for PwDs in New Zealand, Hart et al. (2019) applied a human capabilities framework articulated by philosopher and legal scholar Nussbaum, which conceptualized the transition to adulthood as a fundamental human right, stating:



“Imagine that the intersections of freedom, choice, wellbeing, and dignity” (Nussbaum, 2006) are upheld as integral components of transition . . . Picture young adults having control over their future, where preferences for postschool life were actioned and they had “practical reason to engage in critical reflection about the planning of [their] own life” (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 78). Envision that community supports became places to “live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other humans, to engage in various forms of social interaction” (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 78). In all, imagine if young adults with significant disabilities were “treated as dignified beings whose worth is equal to that of others” (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 78). (pp. 144-145)

This description of the transition to adulthood as a human right provides an achievable vision for what the process should be in an inclusive and equitable society. To attain this vision, the fundamental human rights of those at the centre of the process must be upheld and the barriers that violate personal dignity, freedom of choice, and equitable access to support must be eliminated.

## Federal and Provincial Legislation

At both the federal and provincial levels, there are laws that provide protection of the rights of PwDs. *Section 15* Equality Rights of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) states that every individual has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination based on race, religion, national or ethnic origin, colour, sex, age, or physical or mental disability. The *Canadian Human Rights Act* (1985) recognizes that all individuals should have an equal opportunity to live the lives that they desire and to have their needs accommodated without discrimination. Canada also recently proclaimed the *Accessible Canada Act* (2019) to address the barriers PwDs face in their day to day lives. This act seeks to identify and remove barriers and prevent new barriers from being created in the areas of employment, the built environment, information and communication technologies (ICT), communication other than ICT, the procurement of goods, services and facilities, the design and delivery of programs and services, as well as transportation.

Provincially, the *Manitoba Human Rights Code* provides protection from discrimination based on “physical or mental disability or related characteristics or circumstances, including reliance on a service animal, a wheelchair, or any other remedial appliance or device” and further outlines the duty to provide reasonable accommodations for PwDs (The Human Rights Code, 1987). *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* (2013) and its supporting *Standards for Customer Service, Employment, Information and Communication, the Built Environment and Transportation* are being implemented to eliminate the barriers PwDs face, by creating substantive improvements in accessibility in both the private and public sectors.

# The Manitoba Context: Individualized Transition Planning

In addition to the protections of human rights, the transition to adult life is regulated and guided by specific legislation, policies, protocols, and support documents in the province of Manitoba, which include, but are not limited to:

- *The Public Schools Amendment Act: Appropriate Educational Programming* (2005)
- *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community* (Healthy Child, Manitoba, 2008)
- *Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba* (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022), formerly *Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship & Youth, 2006), and
- *Community Living DisABILITY Services – Age of Majority Planning: Youth in Care Transitioning to Adult Services* (Manitoba Department of Families, n.d.)

## The Public Schools Amendment Act: Appropriate Educational Programming (2005)

*The Public Schools Amendment Act: Appropriate Educational Programming* (2005) provides guidance related to the provision of appropriate educational programming, including individualized education planning in accordance with the provincial philosophy of inclusion. In Manitoba, the term “student specific planning” is used to encompass a broad range of planning practices, including individualized education planning and individualized transition planning.

The regulation states that “if it is determined that differentiated instruction and adaptations will be insufficient to assist the pupil in meeting the expected learning outcomes, what the pupil requires to meet or approximate (i) the expected learning outcomes, or (ii) the learning outcomes the pupil can reasonably be expected to achieve,” then “the principal must ensure that an individualized education plan is prepared.” In other words, when differentiated instruction and adaptations do not result in a student meeting the expected learning outcomes, then an IEP should be developed. References to transition planning are vague and simply state that the IEP “must be consistent with provincial protocols respecting a pupil's transition to and from school.”

## **Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community (2008)**

The interdepartmental provincial protocol, *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2008) “mandates a coordinated approach by the staff of departments and related organizations (schools, regional health authorities, child and family services agencies and other designated agencies) who work with children, youth, and families in the transition to adulthood” (p. 5). This protocol is the guiding document in Manitoba that outlines expected transition planning processes at high school entry, from ages 14 to 16, for students with “exceptional needs.” It further describes the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders and indicates timelines when transition processes should take place. In addition to describing that individuals with “exceptional needs” should receive an ITP, it further states that, “students with mental, learning, physical and psychiatric disabilities, persons with spinal cord injuries and persons with a visual disability or who are deaf or hard of hearing” (p. 6) should receive this kind of planning. Other descriptors used to identify the population who should receive an ITP include students who will require “government supports when they move from school to life in the community” (p. 14), as well as students who will require “adult supports” (p. 16).

## **Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services (2006) and Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba (2022)**

*Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship & Youth 2006) which was in place when this research was conducted, and its current iteration, *Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba* (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022) are guiding documents that are based upon provincial regulations and reference the need for transition planning to occur. The former described the need for transition planning to occur for students with “exceptional needs,” and the latter only cursorily addresses transition planning, stating that transition plans should be in place and align with provincial protocols regarding transition planning.

Concerningly, the current *Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba* (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022) uses the descriptor “special learning needs and abilities” to

identify the population of students who may require a “student specific plan” such as an IEP or ITP (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022). However, the *Public Schools Amendment Act: Appropriate Educational Programming* (2005) focuses on the effectiveness of instructional practices in determining who requires an IEP. It is unclear why the regulation and Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming use such highly discrepant terminology to describe who may require an IEP and why the dated and contested term “special learning needs and abilities” was included in the standards.

## **Community Living disABILITY Services (CLdS) – Age of Majority Planning: Youth in Care Transitioning to Adult Services**

*Community Living disABILITY Services – Age of Majority Planning: Youth in Care Transitioning to Adult Services* (Manitoba Department of Families, n.d.) outlines the transition process for PwDs who are eligible for CLdS and who are transitioning from the child welfare system to adult services. CLdS is a division of the Department of Families that provides support for persons with intellectual disabilities and their families. According to this policy, transition planning must occur for persons with intellectual disabilities, who are eligible for CLdS, and who are in care, and it stipulates that the process should begin by the age of 15. This timeline for transition planning differs from the *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2008), which indicates that transition planning should begin at high school entry, which for some may be the age of 14.

To summarize, a review of the legislation, policy, and support documents in Manitoba that are intended to guide and regulate PwDs’ transition to adulthood reveals the use of disparate terminology to identify who may require individualized support and variability in age requirements regarding when planning should begin. It further demonstrates why it may be difficult for PwDs, caregivers, educators, and service providers to ensure that a comprehensive and consistent approach to transition planning is followed.

While the provincial documents described above provide evidence of an uneven policy and practice landscape, little is known about how the transition to adulthood is experienced by PwDs in Manitoba. Therefore, it is necessary to examine this issue from the perspectives of insiders directly involved in the process so that supports may be enhanced, and policies and practices may be strengthened. The next section presents the methodology of this study.

### Study Objectives

The objective of the current study was to examine the transition process from school to adult life for young adult PwDs in the province of Manitoba, from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. The participants included young adult PwDs (with a range of self-reported disabilities) between the ages of 18 and 27, caregivers of PwDs in the same age range, educators, and service providers who are involved in the transition to adulthood. Specifically, this study explored adherence to the core tenets of transition planning during the K-12+ school years and the barriers to equitable access to services, further education and training, employment, and independent living, which are experienced during the post-school transition. Recommendations for policies and practices that will strengthen transition processes and foster equity and shared prosperity are also provided.

This research received ethical approval from the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board (REB 2) and employed a mixed-methods design that consisted of two phases. In Phase 1, a cross-sectional online survey was administered, and in Phase 2, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sub-set of participants who participated in the online survey and expressed an interest in participating in the interview by providing their contact information at the end of the survey. Purposive sampling was used to recruit survey and interview participants. Survey participants (n=440) included 107 PwDs, 122 caregivers, 80 educators, and 131 service providers. A total of 40 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 PwDs, 13 caregivers, 11 educators, and 9 service providers. Data was collected from September 2021 to December 2021.

### Survey Design

The survey was structured based on an extensive literature review on the transition from school to adult life. The surveys for PwDs and caregivers consisted of 117 and 113 questions respectively, some of which were administered based on participants' previous answers. The questions included single-choice, multiple-answer, and open-ended questions with the opportunity to provide additional comments. PwDs were asked about their firsthand experiences, while caregivers were asked to describe the experiences of their adult children. The survey included a comprehensive section on demographics for these stakeholder groups including age, gender, location, disability, degree of support required, education, employment, and living status. This demographic information was important because it helped to contextualize the perspectives of

PwDs and caregivers. The educators' and service providers' surveys consisted of 64 and 62 questions respectively. Demographic questions included information about their professional roles, geographic location, and the populations that they serve. Educators and service providers were asked to respond to the questions by describing their professional experiences supporting PwDs between the ages of 18 and 27 in their transition to adulthood.

All participant groups were asked about the core tenets of transition planning that were based on the Revised Quality Indicators of Exemplary Transition Programs Needs Assessment Instrument-2 (QI-2) (Morningstar et al. 2016), which was developed based on a comprehensive synthesis of the literature and includes validated transition quality indicators. The core tenets of exemplary transition programs identified in this tool include seven overarching domains: transition planning, transition assessment, family involvement, student involvement, transition-focused curriculum or instruction, interagency collaboration and community services, and systems-level infrastructure, all of which are necessary to facilitate high quality transition planning.

Recognizing that the QI-2 was developed in the United States to assess the quality of transition support and planning, and that a comparable tool does not exist in the Canadian context, the research team applied the domains of this framework and selected relevant key indicators to facilitate the examination of reported transition practices in the Manitoba context. This would help to identify strengths and weaknesses in transition planning and inform quality improvements. In addition to using selected key indicators of the QI-2, the transition planning domain was expanded to include case management provided at school and the transition-focused curriculum or instruction domain was expanded to include eleven key areas of transition education outlined by Patton and Clark (2014) which include:

- independent living skills,
- readiness for the job market (career choice and planning, employment knowledge and skills),
- opportunities for internships/ work experience/ volunteering,
- understanding one's educational and workplace accommodations,
- preparation for further education (vocational training, college, university),
- self-advocacy,
- functional communication,
- personal money management,
- community participation and leisure activities,
- personal health and wellness management, and
- relationship and social skills development.

Questions about transition processes that primarily occur post-school, including experiences with and barriers to accessing adult services, further education and training, employment, and independent living were also posed according to relevancy to specific participant groups. The in-depth semi-structured interviews were

based on a standardized semi-structured interview schedule that addressed the same topics that were included in each participant groups' surveys. The semi-structured interviews provided participants the opportunity to expand on the answers provided in the survey and allowed for the exploration of unanticipated responses. While specific questions about the COVID-19 pandemic were not posed in the survey or interviews, given that this research was conducted during the global pandemic, issues related to the pandemic were raised by the participants. Interview durations ranged from approximately 60 to 90 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were anonymized to ensure participant confidentiality. A member checking process was used to determine the accuracy of the transcriptions and to provide participants with the opportunity to review and edit their transcripts.

## Analysis

A deductive a priori template of codes (Crabtree & Miller, 1999) comprised of the seven domains of exemplary transition planning and selected key indicators was developed and used as a framework to analyze the transition experiences during the K-12+ school years. Interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses were coded using NVivo and analyzed thematically within and across participant groups, and an ad hoc expansion of the template of codes was carried out where necessary. Open-ended survey responses and interview transcripts relating to the barriers experienced during the post school transition were also coded using NVivo and analyzed thematically within and across participant groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Quantitative survey data was integrated with qualitative data through narrative using the weaving approach. The weaving approach involves writing both qualitative and quantitative findings together on a theme-by-theme basis.

Verbatim representative quotes are provided to illustrate the participants' perspectives. Where themes were specific to a participant group, quotes are provided from that group, and where themes spanned multiple participant groups, quotes from each participant group are included. In some instances, multiple representative quotes relating to the same theme are provided to highlight the participants' unique experiences and perspectives (Fetters et al., 2013).

## Limitations

While the insights obtained from this study provides critical information about the first-hand experiences of PwDs, caregivers, educators, and service providers in the transition to adulthood in Manitoba, there are several limitations that must be noted. First, given the small sample size we cannot ensure that the sample is representative of the perspectives of all PwDs, caregivers, educators, and service providers in Manitoba. Second, the survey was shared and administered online and anonymously, therefore participant profile,



response rate, and fulfillment of inclusion criteria cannot be determined. Third, although every effort was made to include individuals from all backgrounds, ethnicities, socioeconomic levels, abilities, and regions of Manitoba, because the survey was conducted online it may have precluded some individuals from participating. Fourth, our protocol permitted any number of survey questions to be skipped. This meant that respondents could choose not to answer any number of questions, and we hypothesize that some participants may have chosen not to respond to some questions for reasons such as discomfort or comprehensibility. The research team considered removing survey responses that fell below a minimum threshold of completion; however, it was decided that all responses would be included to ensure that all voices were acknowledged, and critical data was not overlooked. Fifth, the surveys and interviews are self-reports and thus subject to response bias. Finally, the application of the QI-2 as a framework to analyze transition processes that occur during the K-12+ schooling must be regarded as exploratory, as only the overarching domains of transition planning and selected key indicators that were deemed applicable to the Manitoban context were adapted and applied.

## Profile of Survey Respondents

A total of 440 participants responded to the survey. Each survey collected demographic information about the respondents. This section examines this data in detail.

### Profile of PwDs and Caregivers' Adult Children

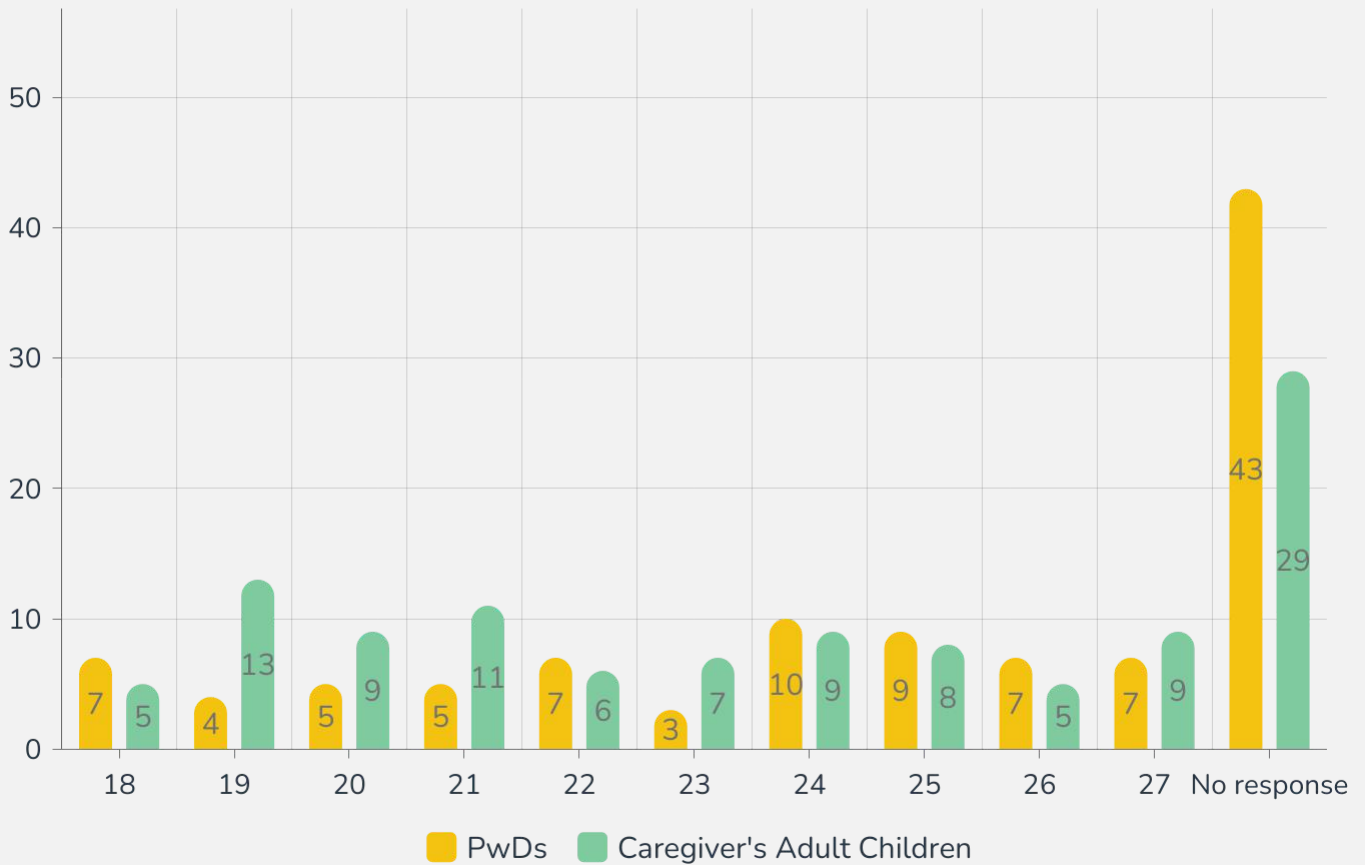
Demographic information about PwDs and caregivers' adult children was obtained through survey data and included age, gender, self-identification as First Nation, Metis, or Inuit (FNMI), and geographic location, shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. The mean age of PwDs was 22.9 years, while caregivers reported a mean age of 21.8 for their adult children. Similar percentages of PwDs and caregivers' adult children identified as FMNI at 14% and 11.5% respectively. Most survey participants across both respondent groups resided in Winnipeg, with 15% of PwDs and 19.7% of caregivers' adult children residing in a rural setting.



Table 1: Distribution of Age, Gender, Location and FNMI Status of PwDs and Caregivers' Adult Children

	PwDs (n=107)(%)	Caregivers' Adult Children (n=122)(%)
<b>Age</b>		
Mean Age	22.9	21.8
Non-response	43	29
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	62 (50.8)	30 (28.0)
Female	30 (24.6)	31 (29.0)
Non-binary	1 (0.8)	2 (1.9)
Non-response	29 (23.8)	44 (41.1)
<b>FMNI Status</b>		
FMNI	15 (14.0)	14 (11.5)
Non-FMNI	48 (44.9)	79 (64.8)
Non-response	44 (41.1)	29 (23.8)
<b>Location</b>		
Rural	16 (15.0)	24 (19.7)
Winnipeg	42 (39.3)	55 (45.1)
Other Urban	3 (2.8)	10 (8.2)
First Nations Community	2 (1.9)	-
Non-response	44 (41.1)	29 (23.8)
Other/Prefer not to answer	-	3 (2.5)
Northern/Remote	-	1 (0.8)

**Figure 1: Age Distribution of PwDs and Caregivers' Adult Children**

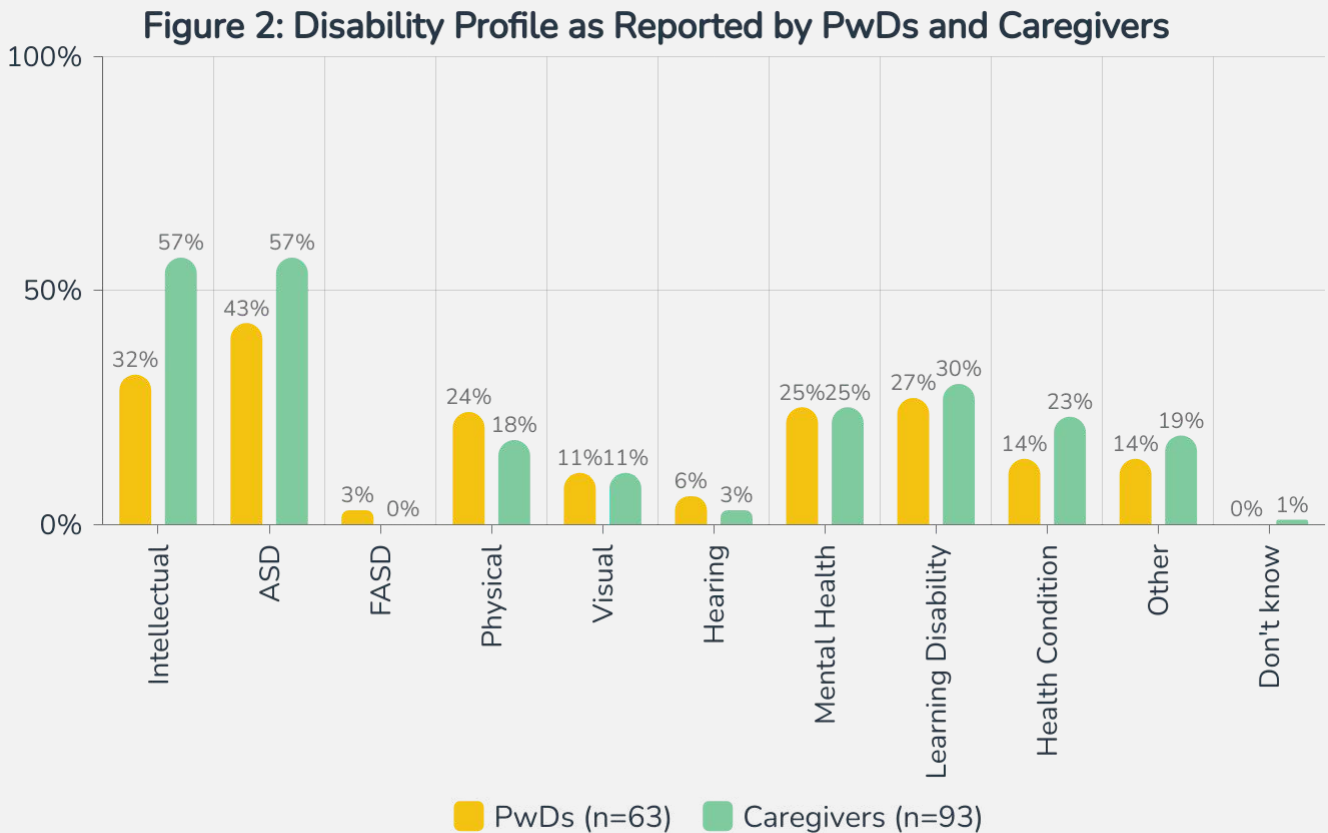


The PwDs and caregivers' adult children in this study exhibited a diverse range of abilities, needs, and experiences. Additional information was obtained about these respondent groups through survey data in order to contextualize their experiences, which included:

- a. types of disability,
- b. degree of support required,
- c. receipt of provincial disability supports,
- d. support needs,
- e. current educational program if applicable,
- f. highest level of educational attainment,
- g. past and current employment status including job searching,
- h. current living situation, and
- i. experiences with homelessness.

## Disability Profiles as Reported by PwDs and Caregivers

The disability profiles reported by PwDs and caregivers often included multiple disabilities. The disabilities most frequently reported by PwDs and caregivers were similar, with PwDs most often reporting autism spectrum disorder (ASD), followed by intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, and mental health. Caregivers most often reported intellectual disability and ASD, followed by learning disabilities, and mental health, presented in Figure 2 below. It is important to note that a much higher percentage of caregivers as compared to PwDs reported that their adult child had an intellectual disability. Caregivers also more often reported that their adult child had ASD.



Multiple choice allowed – most individuals had several disabilities.

# Degree of Support Required as Reported by PwDs and Caregivers

There were distinct differences in terms of the degree of support required by PwDs and caregivers. Overall, caregivers reported that their adult children had higher support needs as compared to PwDs according to the following 4-point continuum:

- 1. Intermittent (occasional or infrequent small group support in a limited number of settings; occasional consultation with professionals)
- 2. Limited (regular, but frequency varies, small group support in several settings; occasional or regular contact with professionals)
- 3. Extensive (regular, but frequency varies, individualized support in several settings; regular contact with professionals at least once per week)
- 4. Pervasive (frequent or continuous individualized support in nearly all settings; continuous contact and monitoring by professionals)

The most frequently reported level of support required according to caregivers was pervasive (31.9%), followed by limited (29.7%), extensive (24.2%), and intermittent (14.3%), while the most frequently reported level of support required by PwDs was limited (36.1%), followed by intermittent (27.9%), pervasive (19.7%), and extensive (16.4%), as shown in Figure 3. In addition, most of the caregivers who reported pervasive or extensive needs for their children also indicated that their children had intellectual disabilities.

Figure 3: Degree of Support Required as Reported by PwDs and Caregivers



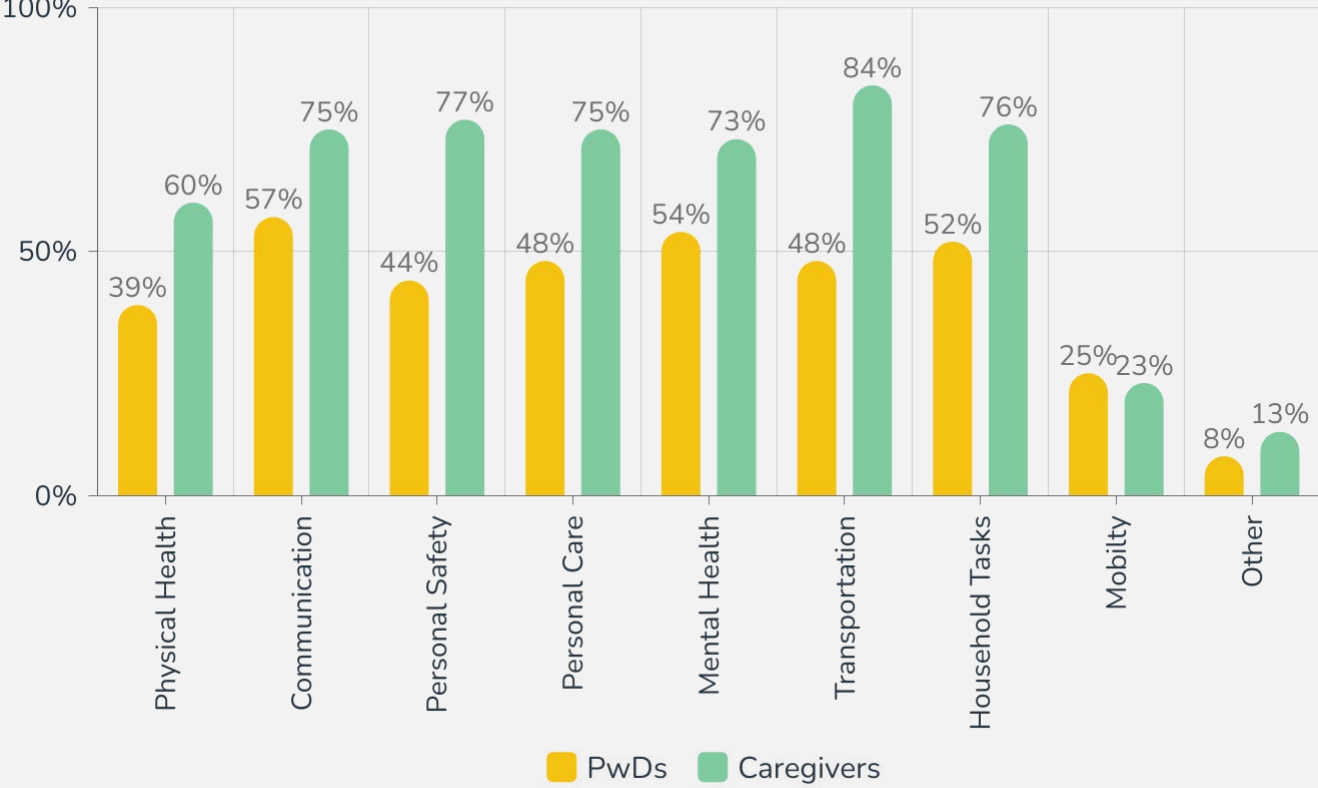
# Receipt of Provincial Disability Supports as Reported by PwDs and Caregivers

58% of the PwDs and 65.9% of caregivers reported having received support from Children’s DisABILITY Services (CdS), while 49% of PwDs and 57% of caregivers reported that their adult children were receiving support from CLdS.

## Support Needs Reported by PwDs and Caregivers

PwDs and caregivers were asked to identify the areas in which they or their adult children required support by selecting all applicable options in the survey, results of which are illustrated in Figure 4. Caregivers consistently reported greater support needs for their adult child in all areas assessed. Overall, transportation was the most reported support need, followed by personal safety, household tasks, communication and personal care, and mental health. PwDs most frequently identified communication, followed by mental health, household tasks, transportation, and personal care as support needs.

Figure 4: Support Needs as Reported by PwDs and Caregivers



## Current Educational Program as Reported by PwDs and Caregivers

Over half (53.3%) of the PwDs reported that they were currently enrolled in an educational program and of that group 38.7% reported that they were attending a university degree program and 19.4% were attending another form of post-secondary college, trade, or vocational training. 12.9% were in high school receiving modified credits, 9.7% were in high school receiving an individualized program, 3.2% were in high school receiving vocational programming, and 3.2% were in high school receiving regular credits. 9.7% indicated they were receiving another form of educational programming, and 3.2% indicated that they preferred not to answer.

Approximately one third (34.1%) of caregivers reported their child was enrolled in an educational program. Of that group 43.3% were in high school receiving an individualized program, followed by 13.3% who were in high school receiving regular credits, 6.7% were in high school receiving vocational programming, and 3.3% were in high school receiving modified credits. While 20% of caregivers indicated “Other” and commented, for example, “Online course with a tutor.” Only 6.7% of caregivers reported their adult child was attending university and the same percentage reported that their adult child was attending post-secondary college, trade, or vocational training.

## Highest Level of Educational Attainment as Reported by PwDs and Caregivers

45.5% of the PwDs indicated they were a high school graduate with a diploma or equivalent (which could include modified credits, regular credits, or individualized programming), while 14.6% indicated they had completed some high school with no diploma. 21.8% indicated receiving university credits but no degree, 7.3% indicated they were a college, trade, or vocational graduate, 3.6% indicated a Bachelors’ degree, 1.9% indicated middle school, and 1.8% had some college, trade, or vocational training but no diploma. While 3.6% indicated “Other” and responded with comments such as “still in high school”, indicating that the percentage of respondents who had completed some high school may have been slightly higher.

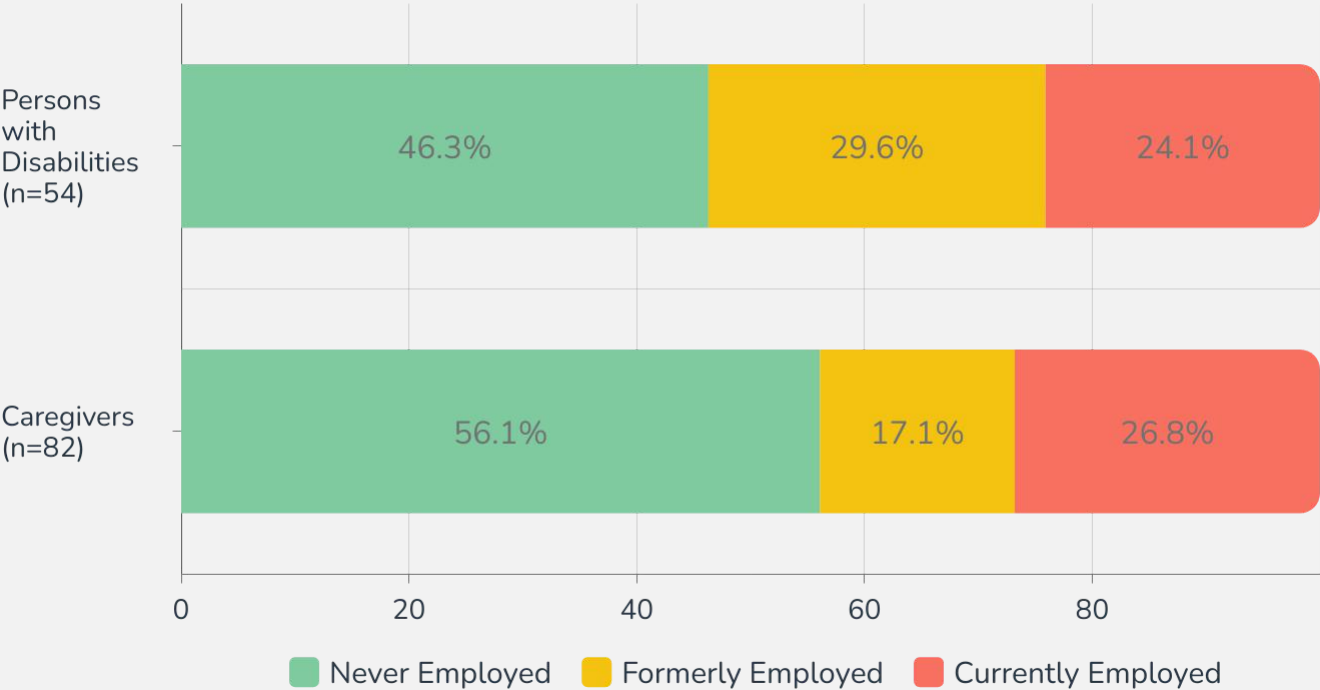
53.3% of the caregivers indicated that their adult child was a high school graduate with a diploma or equivalent (which could include modified credits, regular credits, or individualized programming), while 20% indicated they had completed some high school with no diploma, 4.4% indicated they had completed middle school, 3.3% indicated they had some college, trade, or vocational training but no diploma, 2.2% indicated a college, trade, or vocational graduate, 1.1% indicated they had some university credits but no degree. 15.6% indicated “Other” and responded with comments such as “extended high school credits so he could stay in high school past 18 due to no support” or “still in high school”, indicating that the percentage of respondents who had completed some high school may be slightly higher. Overall, fewer caregivers reported their adult child was enrolled in or had completed any form of post-secondary education.

# Past and Current Employment Status including Looking for Work as Reported by PwDs and Caregivers

46.3% of PwDs reported that they had never been employed, of which 48.0% had looked for work. 24.1% of PwDs reported that they were currently employed while 29.6% indicated that they were not currently employed but had been employed in the past. When asked about their employment experiences, 37% of PwDs reported they had part-time supported employment, 37% indicated part-time competitive employment, 11.1% indicated full-time competitive employment, 11.1% responded that they engaged in work while attending a day program, 3.7% indicated full-time supported employment, 3.7% indicated they engaged in volunteer work. While 3.7% responded “Other” and included comments such as “I had summer jobs that would not rehire me.”

56.1% of caregivers indicated that their adult child had never been employed, of which 20% indicated they had looked for work. 26.8% of caregivers reported that their adult child was currently employed, while 17.1% indicated they were not currently employed but had been employed in the past. Of those who had been employed 29.7% reported that their adult child had supported employment, 24.3% reported volunteer work, 21.6% indicated part-time competitive employment, 8.1% indicated they engaged in work while attending a day program, 5.4% indicated full-time competitive employment, and 10.8% responded “Other” and included comments such as “casual employment” or “Unpaid internship because she could not obtain paid employment”. See Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Past and Current Employment Status as Reported by PwDs and Caregivers**



## Current Living Situation as reported by PwDs and Caregivers

70.4% of PwDs indicated that they resided with parents, 12.9% reported living in a group home, 7.4% lived with a friend or relative, 5.6% resided with a spouse or partner, and 3.7% reported living alone. 88.5% of caregivers indicated that their adult child lived with them, 3.5% resided in a group home, 2.3% lived with a paid caregiver, 1.2% lived alone, and 4.6% indicated “Other” and responded with comments such as, “Living 3 days a week with family and 4 days a week in a group home.” or “Half-time between parents.”

## Experiences with Homelessness

PwDs were asked if they had ever experienced homelessness in their lifetime. This question was disaggregated by self-reported FMNI status, with 2.2% of PwDs who did not report FNMI status indicating that they had experienced homelessness while 33% of those who self-identified as FNMI reported that they had experienced homelessness at some point in their lifetime.

## Summary of Caregivers and PwDs Profiles

Overall, the PwDs who participated in this study had relatively low support needs and were less likely to have an intellectual disability when compared to the caregivers’ adult children. Additionally, more than half of the PwDs were currently enrolled in an educational program, which often included some form of post-secondary education. The high participation rates of PwDs in post-secondary education are encouraging, but it is important to note that because the research used an online survey, it may have precluded PwDs with more pervasive support needs from participating.

Regrettably, the current and former employment experiences of PwDs reflect employment disparities. Despite having relatively low support needs, almost half of the PwDs reported that they had never been employed, and of those, approximately half reported that they had actively looked for work. Moreover, PwDs were more often employed on a part-time as opposed to full-time basis. These PwDs may have been employed part-time voluntarily because they were also enrolled in an educational program, but the low rates of full-time employment and inability of some to obtain a job appears to mirror the underemployment of PwDs reported in the *Canadian Survey on Disability* (Statistics Canada, 2017).

The caregivers’ adult children were more likely to have an intellectual disability and/or ASD, and overall had more intensive support needs. Approximately one third of the caregivers reported that their adult children were currently enrolled in an educational program in high school, with almost half receiving individualized programs. The low participation rates in any form of post-secondary education or training reported by caregivers also are similar to the findings of the *Canadian Survey on Disability* (Statistics Canada, 2017), which indicated that those with intellectual disabilities and/or higher support needs may have fewer opportunities to participate in further education, including college, trade, or vocational training.



Slightly over half of the caregivers indicated that their adult children had never been employed, and of that group, 20% had looked for work. This finding affirms that those with more severe disabilities experience greater barriers to employment and may not search for work because they believe that employment may not be an option (Morris et al., 2018). It may also indicate that employment may not have been possible for some of the caregivers' adult children given the nature and severity of their disabilities. While the percentage of young adults residing with their parents or caregivers has been on upward trajectory in Canada for several decades, indicating a later transition to independent living, the number of PwDs and caregivers who reported that their adult children resided with their parent or caregiver exceeded the national average reported in the 2016 Census (Statistics Canada, 2016), which indicated that 62.6% of young adults between the ages of 20 to 24 resided with their parents.

## Profile of Educator and Service Providers

Educators in this research included individuals who were employed in an educational capacity in K-12+ schools or post-secondary education, and who supported PwDs' transition to adulthood. Service providers included those working in a service capacity, and who were also supporting PwDs' transition to adulthood. Educators and service providers were invited to provide the following information:

- a. professional role,
- b. work setting or sector,
- c. geographical region, and
- d. disability profile of the population they serve.

### Professional Role

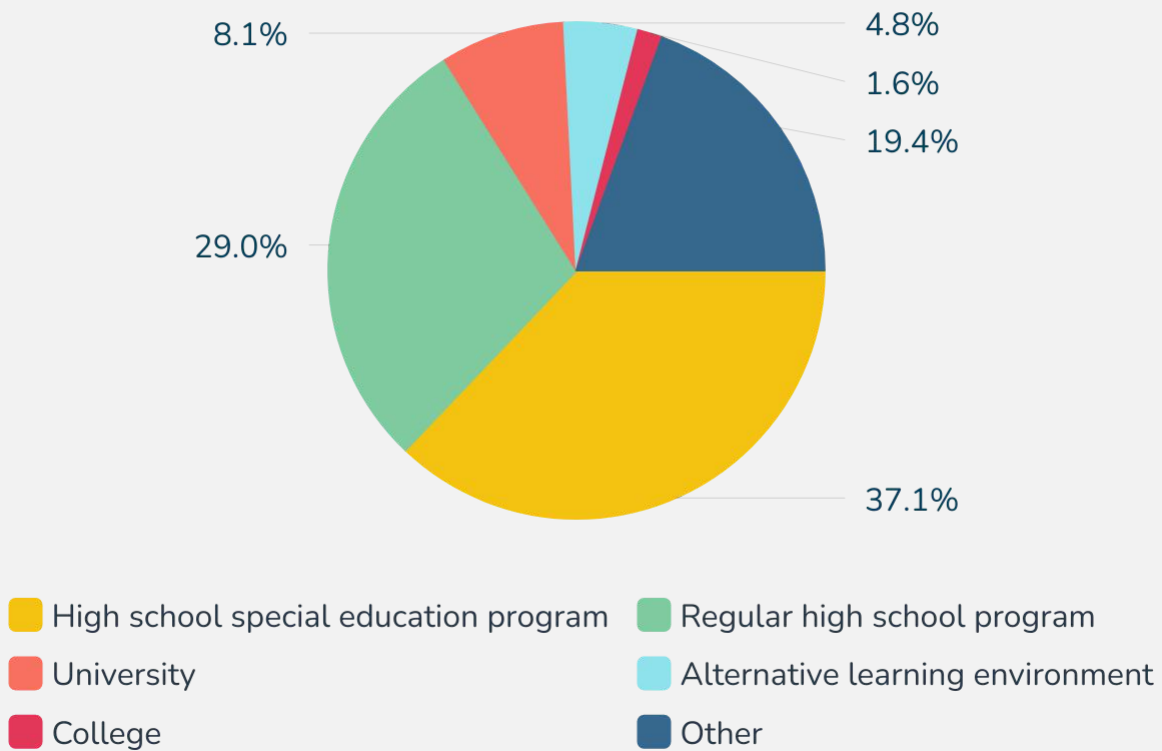
Of the 80 educators who responded to the survey, 55% were either a resource teacher, counsellor, learning support teacher or special education teacher. While 10% reported they were a clinician in schools (e.g., speech and language pathologist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, etc.), 10% were university instructors, 6.7% were classroom teachers, 5% were divisional administrators, 3.3% were school administrators, 3.3% were educational assistants, and 6.67% indicated "Other" and responded with "school social worker" or "school psychologist," which indicates that the number of clinicians who participated in the survey may be slightly higher than 10%.

Of the 133 service providers who responded to the survey, 28.97% reported that they worked in an administrative capacity, 21.5% were social workers, 12.2% were support workers, 3.7% were clinicians, and 3.7% were counsellors. A significant percentage of respondents indicated "Other" and reported "vocational counsellor," "employment facilitator," "outreach worker," "case worker," "case manager" and "mental health services," which illustrates the broad range of professionals that participated the survey.

## Work Setting or Sector

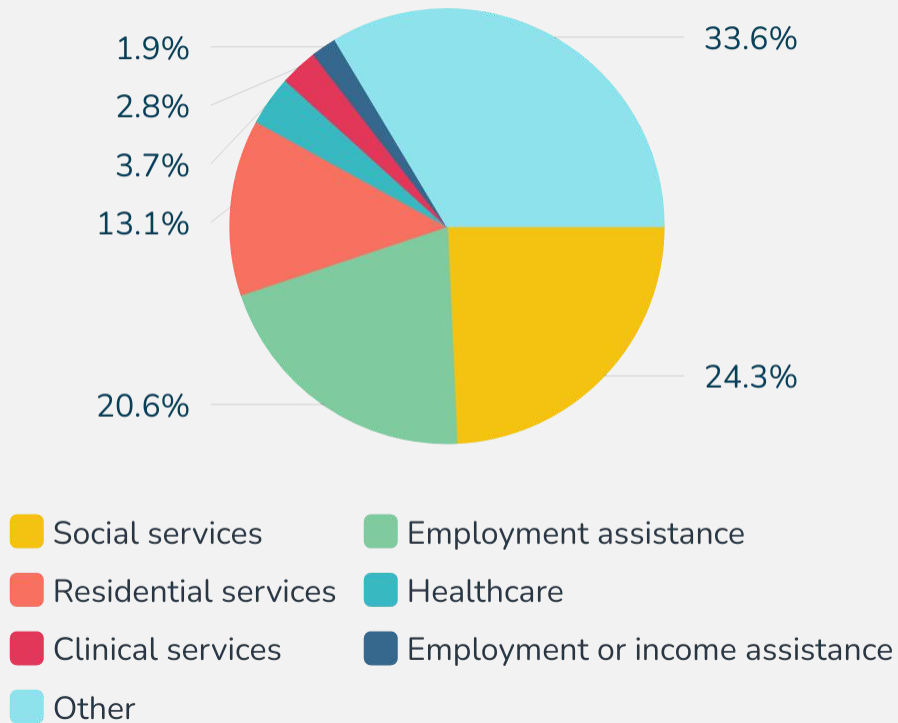
37.1% of educators reported that they worked in a high school special education program, 29% indicated a regular high school program, 8.1% reported university, 4.8% reported an alternative learning environment, 1.6% reported college, and 19.4% reported “Other” which included “multiple schools in K-12,” “divisional support,” “K-12 school,” “high school special and regular education” and “First Nations regular program school,” illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Educators Work Setting



For service providers, 24.3% reported working in social services, 20.6% indicated employment assistance, 13.1% were in residential services, 3.7% in healthcare, 2.8% in clinical services, 1.9% in employment or income assistance, and 33.6% reported “Other” which included “respite,” “non-profit disability organization,” “day services (including supported employment, prevocational training, recreation/leisure, and transportation),” “residential,” “crisis,” “clinical autism” and “advocacy,” shown in Figure 7.

**Figure 7: Service Providers Work Setting**



## Geographical Region

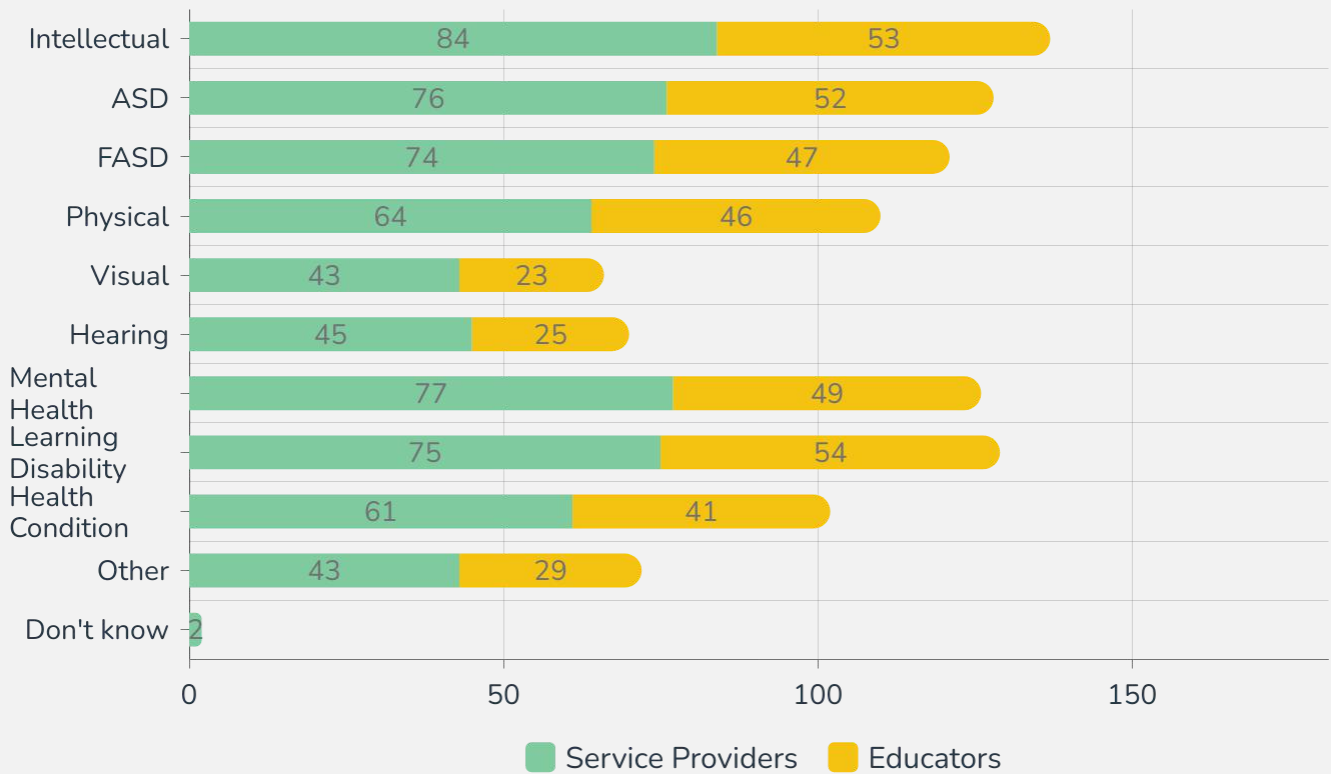
For the educators, more than half at 59.0% worked in Winnipeg, 27.9% in rural areas, 6.6% indicated other urban areas, 1.6% Northern, and 1.6% First Nations Community. 3.3% reported “Other” and provided responses such as, “Winnipeg and Northern” and “South and Southeast.”

Most service providers at 64.5% reported that they worked in Winnipeg, 23.4% in rural areas, 3.7% indicated other urban areas, 2.8% Northern, and 0.1% First Nations Community. 4.7% reported “Other,” and provided responses such as “Winnipeg and Westman,” “Winnipeg and Eastman” and “province wide.”

## Disability Profile of Individuals

Educators and service providers were asked to identify the disability profile of the PwDs that they support in their transition to adulthood by selecting all applicable options in the survey. Almost all educators and service providers reported multiple entries. The disability profiles of the population served by educators and service providers can be found in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Disability Profiles of Population Served by Educators and Service Providers**



### Summary of Educator and Service Provider Profiles

The educators and service providers in this study encompass a broad range of professional roles and experiences. Their diverse backgrounds add to the richness of the data by providing a truly multidisciplinary perspective on the transition to adulthood. The next section presents the findings of this study.

# TRANSITION PROCESSES AND SUPPORTS IN THE K-12+ SCHOOL SYSTEM

## Part 3

To examine transition processes and supports primarily experienced in the K-12+ school system in Manitoba, participants were asked about the core tenets of transition planning as outlined in seven domains of the Revised Quality Indicators of Exemplary Transition Programs Needs Assessment Instrument-2 (QI-2) (Morningstar et al. 2016). In the following subsections, each of the seven domains of high-quality transition planning is described, quantitative survey data is reported, and a thematic analysis of the open-ended survey responses and interview data related to each domain are provided. At the conclusion of each of the seven domains, a discussion of the findings and recommendations for policies and practices are presented.

## Domain 1: Transition Planning

A comprehensive individualized transition planning process is the cornerstone for ensuring that transition needs are identified and addressed and post-school goals are set (Morningstar et al., 2016; Trainor et al., 2020). According to the QI-2, transition planning should build upon students' strengths, interests, and needs and include the identification of individualized post-secondary goals and the development, implementation, and monitoring of a formal transition plan. This process should begin early and incorporate person-centred approaches (Morningstar et al., 2016).

Moreover, case management is critical in ensuring the development, implementation, and monitoring of individualized transition planning. Case management provided by schools was incorporated into the transition planning domain of the QI-2, given the important role that it plays in facilitating the transition process and its emphasis in provincial regulations, protocols, and support documents in Manitoba. For example, *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2008) emphasizes the role of case managers in the transition planning process and outlines their roles and responsibilities, which included

scheduling and facilitating transition planning meetings, determining graduation dates along with students, parents or legal guardians, determining members of transition planning teams in consultation with students and parents, facilitating agreement about the roles and responsibilities of members, monitoring implementation of transition planning, maintaining transition planning documents (e.g., student assessments, transition planning file, documentation of the plan, meeting notes and other related materials), updating plans annually and keeping pupil files current, maintaining communication with team members, students, parents or legal guardians, helping the student and parents find services and resources available in the community, ensuring appropriate referrals are made to the necessary adult support programs. (p. 17)

In the domain of transition planning the following indicators of exemplary transition programs were explored: (a) whether an ITP was developed for students with disabilities to prepare for adulthood in areas like employment, further education, and independent living, (b) the timing of ITP development, (c) access to a school-based case manager, and (d) satisfaction with case management. (e) A thematic analysis was conducted of participants' open-ended survey and interview responses related to the domain of transition planning and the following themes were identified:

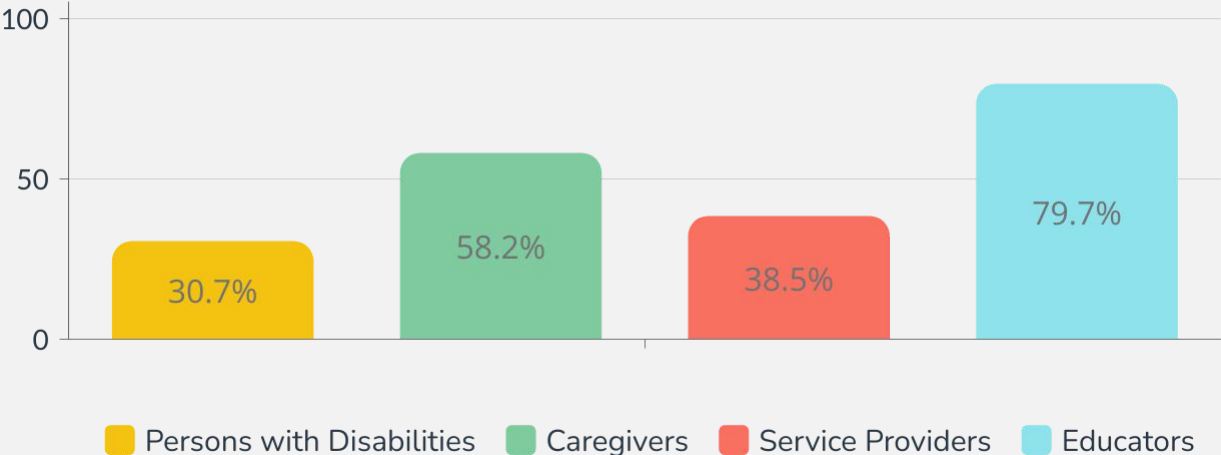
1. The value of person-centred planning processes that begin early
2. The critical role of a case manager in school
3. Disparate expectations regarding the contents of ITP's
4. Subjective criteria for determining who should/could receive a documented plan
5. A lack of standardization in transition planning processes across the province
6. The need for parents to advocate with case managers to receive support

## Findings

### ITP Development

When asked about the presence of an ITP to support the transition to adulthood in areas like employment, further education and independent living, results varied with PwDs, caregivers and service providers, reporting a low level of ITP development at 30.7%, 58.2% and 38.5% respectively. Importantly, 20.8% of service providers indicated they did not know whether the students with disabilities that they supported had ITPs, while educators reported the highest level of ITP development for students with disabilities at 79.7%, as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Reported ITP Development



## The Timing of ITP Development

43.5% of educators reported that ITPs were developed in Grade 9 or sooner. However, PwDs and caregivers reported that ITPs, if developed, were developed much later than recommended in provincial protocols with 37.5% of PwDs and 37.8% of caregivers reporting that ITPs were developed in Grade 12 or Grade 12+, tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2: ITP Development Timelines for Students with Disabilities in Manitoba Schools

Onset of ITP Development	Educators	PwDs	Caregivers
Before Grade 8	6.5%	18.8%	4.4%
Grade 8	2.2%	0.0%	4.4%
Grade 9	34.8%	6.3%	11.1%
Grade 10	13.0%	12.5%	17.8%
Grade 11	19.6%	25.0%	17.8%
Grade 12	6.5%	25.0%	15.6%
Grade 12+	13.0%	12.5%	22.2%
Don't know	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%

## Access to a School-Based Case Manager

PwDs and caregivers were asked if they or their adult child had a case manager in school, such as school counsellor, resource teacher, special education teacher or learning support teacher to help them to achieve their goals. 70.0% of PwDs and 85.9% of caregivers reported that they had access to a case manager in school, thus this was an area of strength.

## Satisfaction with School-Based Case Management

All participant groups were asked about their satisfaction with the case management provided by school personnel. See Table 3. 55.5% of PwDs and 41.9% of caregivers reported being satisfied or very satisfied. 65.1% of educators reported that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the case management provided by their sector. Service providers had the highest percentage of neutral responses and overall, fewer service providers reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with the case management provided by schools at 23.2%.

Table 3: School Case Management Satisfaction

Case Management Satisfaction	Educators	PwDs	Caregivers	Service Providers
Very Satisfied	18.6%	11.1%	11.9%	4.9%
Satisfied	46.5%	44.4%	30.0%	18.3%
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	18.6%	25.0%	28.4%	47.6%
Dissatisfied	14.0%	13.9%	17.9%	22.0%
Very Dissatisfied	2.3%	5.6%	11.9%	7.3%

## Themes Related to Transition Planning

### The Value of Person-Centred Approaches that Begin Early

Some educators described the use of person-centred approaches that commenced early and included the development of individualized, multi-year plans that incorporated backwards planning with the students' graduation date in mind.



“

The PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) is done in Grade 8 . . . So, then that would happen in Grade 8 and then the planning starts in Grade 9. This allows us to do some pre-planning. So, when we talk about how valuable that individual education plan or student specific plan is, it just good as we make the grad plan that has been developed.

**Educator**

“

Well, we have a transition meeting in Grade 8, so that's when we start that transition piece. That's where I think it's sort of been in the earlier years, they start talking about the transition plan and then you just pick up from the school, maybe to see the building. But when they get to me, then it's like, okay, so we're graduating at this age, we're going to be applying for this or, you know, so that stuff starts in Grade 9.

**Educator**

## The Critical Role of the Case Manager in School

PwDs and caregivers also provided examples of committed case managers who worked with them and on their behalf to address transition goals.

“

His case manager has become like a go to person for him. It takes a while to build a relationship with my son, where he will actually express his needs and thoughts. So, she would be his point person. So, if he's struggling with something, confused about that or not liking something, he will probably go to her if or else he'll come home and say something to me, and I'll encourage him to go to her to talk it out. And it's definitely like she has become that important person to him. And that's huge.

**Caregiver**

“

[With reference to case management] It was excellent, you know, I would think of other things that would have been nice to have in retrospect. But I know in my last year of high school that my resource teacher encouraged me to be independent as much as possible.

**PwD**



As far as they were able to with limited resources and placements [they] did whatever they could to make sure I got what was needed.

**PwD**

## Disparate Expectations Regarding the Content of an ITP

While 79% of educators surveyed reported that students with disabilities received ITPs, educators' open-ended survey responses and interviews revealed that there was variability regarding what educators thought an ITP should include. Some educators referred to the ITP as a checklist as opposed to a plan with individualized goals to be achieved.



It's (the transition plan) really sort of just a checklist. Have you done that? It includes our current checklist, includes things like do they have a SIN number or do they have a substitute decision maker, but not necessarily those specific goals.

**Educator**



Sometimes it feels as though those plans are kind of just going through the motions of, you know, making sure that we're sort of checking all the boxes of what we need to do, especially for students who are spending significant amounts of time in regular classes in high school.

**Educator**



[With reference to transition planning] It's not necessarily in the realm or scope of what is expected of us to be done.

**Educator**

## Subjective Criteria for Determining who Should/Could have a Documented Plan

Educators also described disparate criteria for determining who should receive an ITP. Some educators described how only students with intellectual disabilities received a transition plan and students with other learning profiles, such as learning disabilities or ASD, who were deemed to have less severe disabilities did not have a documented plan.

“

Maybe they're doing it in a standard way somewhere else, but in our school unless a student presents with an intellectual disability, we aren't typically doing transition plans. Whether we should or shouldn't, I think we should.

**Educator**

“

I had a student who had dyslexia. And by all appearances, she was very popular and involved in all the different clubs and sports and was struggling so much in class. I met with the family . . . And they were on board.

They were thrilled. They said yes.

Absolutely. Let's do it, but it really didn't happen because, I guess from our administration, it's easier - they said, no, she's fine. It's not necessary to have that kind of plan... We only have to get that piece for students who have modified coursework.

**Educator**

“

I can recall now there was a student who just graduated last year with autism. So quite academically strong in most in most cases could manage their work without too many adaptations. But, you know, socially, there's obviously there were social, pragmatic issues that would sometimes get in the way of his success . . . I did have an adaptive plan and I uploaded it and I was asked to take it down because it wasn't necessary because it doesn't meet the criteria for an intellectual disability.

**Educator**

## A Lack of Standardization across the Province

In open-ended survey responses and interviews, service providers described inconsistency in ITP processes, with frequent references to variability in the approaches used within schools and school divisions.

“

I find it inconsistent among most divisions. Some are structured, set meetings with agenda and take minutes. Others invite me to meetings that are solely about [agency name] and expect me to lead the meeting. It was most difficult when I started in this role and never knew what to expect when going to a school for a transition meeting. To me, the expectations should be standard to ensure all Manitobans are receiving the same quality planning.

**Service Provider**

“

The schools need more consistency, then the agencies would know which gaps need to be filled or how to guide and support through the process. Some students come with no planning/no work experience/no transition plan and others come with some sort of a plan.

**Service Provider**

“

It depends on the school. Some schools are very good at supporting students and other students get lost in the process, especially if the parents don't know how to advocate for them.

**Service Provider**

## The Need for Caregivers to Advocate with School-Based Case Managers

Access to a case manager in school or a primary point of contact to facilitate the transition process is an important strength to highlight. It is also important to explore the reasons why 29.8% of caregivers reported dissatisfaction with this support. Open-ended survey responses and interviews with caregivers revealed that the need for parent advocacy to obtain supports was an area of concern.

“

I'm satisfied [in reference to case management by school], and also aware that I did a lot of pushing to make sure it got done.

**Caregiver**

“

It's hard to be on all the time as a parent that you know, you can't be you can't be 100 percent advocating . . . we've just found that you cannot take your eye off the ball for one second.

**Caregiver**

“

Hard as a mom to always be the one seeking information and advocating. We always had to initiate any support and seek out resources. We had to conduct all of the research into her career interests and preparation on our own and then essentially advocate and force the school to review and consider options outside of their small view of her abilities.

**Caregiver**

## Discussion

The variability in reported ITP processes including discrepant criteria for determining who should have an ITP (e.g., only individuals with intellectual disabilities), what the plan should entail (e.g., a checklist as opposed to individualized goals), and processes beginning late in high school raises several concerns. It indicates that some PwDs in Manitoba may not be receiving the appropriate, individualized preparation for adulthood that they require, within a timeline that allows for early, comprehensive planning and support. It also reveals that the receipt of an ITP and associated supports may be dependent upon the school or school division in which one resides. Further, the absence of transition planning for students whose disabilities may be deemed less severe may adversely affect post-secondary education, employment, and independent living success. As one service provider aptly stated, “Many fall between the cracks if their disability is not deemed “severe” enough to warrant attention or focus.” Related research involving students with ASD who did not have an intellectual disability also found that educators may focus on academic performance for these students as opposed to providing comprehensive transition support (Lee & Carter, 2012).

There is an urgent need for clarity regarding who should receive an ITP, the content required, and when the process should begin. Differing terminology across legislation, protocols, and support documents further complicates transition planning, and may preclude some students from receiving the transition supports they require. Regrettably, this confusion has not been remedied given the discrepant information and terminology in the provincial regulations and guidance documents that were previously described in this report. Related research suggests that transition planning should adopt a life course approach beginning in early and middle years, with a focus on linking short-term grade specific goals with long-term post-school goals (Patton & Kim, 2016; Shogren & Whittenburg, 2020). Therefore, provincial regulations and *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2008) should be revised to ensure that transition planning begin in the early years whenever possible.

Access to a case manager at school was a relative strength. Research examining the post-school outcomes of youths with ASD found that youths without a case manager in high school were at increased risk for poor community participation and limited social participation after leaving high school (Myers et al., 2015). Given the important role that school-based case managers play in supporting the transition to adulthood, caseload sizes must be manageable. Maintaining manageable caseloads may reduce the need for caregivers to advocate for support, as case managers may have increased time to provide exemplary transition support during this critical period. Case managers should also be assured of ongoing, cross-disciplinary professional development about the transition process and their roles and responsibilities as members of a collaborative team. This training could include PwDs and caregivers to disrupt traditional hierarchies and to empower PwDs play a leadership role in their own transition planning process.



# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### TRANSITION PLANNING



#### Eligibility

Some educators reported discrepant criteria for determining who would receive an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP). Not all students who would benefit from transition planning and education were deemed eligible for it, with PwDs, caregivers, and service providers reporting low rates of ITP development. This varied across schools and school divisions.



# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure a common understanding of who may require an ITP. This can be achieved through public sharing of legislation changes and the rationale behind them, along with professional learning opportunities when there are implications for professional practice. This should also include providing access to previous versions of the legislation to enhance clarity and transparency.

Revise and clarify disparate terminology such as exceptional needs, special learning needs and abilities, students who will need government support, students who will need adult support etc. to ensure alignment and clarity across all government support documents, protocols, and legislation.

Provide professional development for educators and human service providers regarding who may require individualized transition planning. Incorporate case studies in such training to demonstrate the range of needs and abilities of those who may require and benefit from individualized transition planning.

Manitoba  
Education

Manitoba  
Education

Manitoba Education  
Ministries involved in  
Human Services  
School Divisions

# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### TRANSITION PLANNING



#### **Efficacy**

Service providers described a high degree of variability in ITP processes across schools and divisions. Some educators reported the use of person-centred, comprehensive planning approaches such as Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) and Making Action Plans (MAPs) while others reported that ITPs did not always include individualized post-secondary goals. Transition planning primarily involved the completion of a checklist and referrals to outside agencies, and resource constraints prevented educators from following through on individualized transition goals because they did not have the time and resources to implement them, due to factors such as large caseloads and limited educational assistant support.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure that ITPs are person centered, incorporating approaches such as PATH, MAPS, and Personal Futures Planning.

Ensure that ITPs include a balance of outcome-oriented academic and post-secondary education or training, employment, and independent living goals, along with strategies and timelines to achieve them, respecting that such goals reflect the priorities of students and caregivers.



Manitoba  
Education  
School  
Divisions

# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### TRANSITION PLANNING



#### **Timing**

Disparities in timing of ITP development were reported. Some PwDs, caregivers, and service providers conveyed that ITP processes started later than the provincially recommended time of high school entry while educators reported that planning began earlier than what was observed by other participants.

#### **Case Management**

A strength reported by PwDs and caregivers was that they or their adult children had access to a case manager while in school.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Revise provincial protocols and regulations to ensure that transition planning adopts a life course approach and begins in early years whenever possible, with a focus on linking short-term outcomes with long-term post-secondary goals as an expected practice.

Manitoba  
Education  
Ministries involved  
in Human Services

Provide resources to ensure that caseloads for case managers are manageable to enable the provision of comprehensive transition support.

Manitoba  
Education  
School Divisions  
School Principals

Ensure case managers receive ongoing cross-disciplinary professional development about the individualized transition planning process, and their roles and responsibilities as a member of a collaborative team. PwDs and their caregivers could be included in such trainings to empower them to lead the planning process.

Manitoba  
Education  
Ministries involved  
in Human Services

## Domain 2: Transition Assessment

According to the QI-2, the ongoing use of a variety of formal and informal assessments are critical in determining an individual's strengths, interests and needs, and for identifying personally tailored objectives to guide the transition planning process ( Morningstar et al., 2016; Trainor et al., 2020). *The Public Schools Amendment Act: Appropriate Educational Programming* (2005) emphasizes the need for school principals to ensure that students receive timely assessments and specialized assessments if students are unable to meet or approximate expected learning outcomes. The *Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services* (Manitoba Education, 2006) and the current *Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba* (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022) also recognize the need to “use assessment results to make programming decisions, develop Student Specific Plans (SSP), and assign support services” (p. 13). The provincial protocol *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2008) also provides general information regarding the importance of conducting assessments (e.g., informal, formal, vocational, academic, cognitive, behavioural, and adaptive) to inform the transition planning process.

The indicators of exemplary transition programs that were examined under the domain of transition assessment included (a) whether schools conducted psychological, vocational and/or functional assessments to assess students' strengths, interests, and needs to guide transition planning, and whether PwDs and caregivers thought such transition assessments were needed, if not conducted. (b) A thematic analysis also was conducted of participants' open-ended survey and interview responses regarding transition assessments and the following themes were identified:

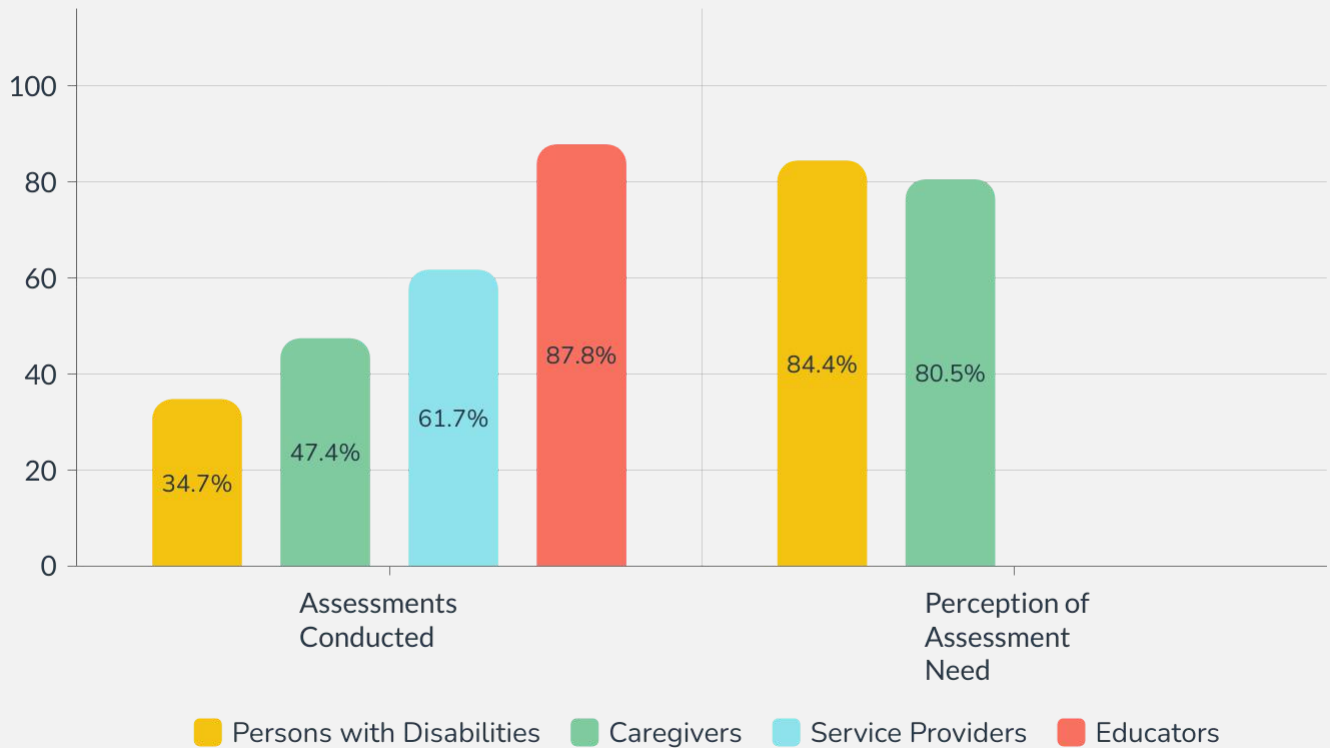
1. Prioritizing assessments to determine eligibility for services
2. Limited clinical support
3. Limited familiarity with or use of transition assessments to guide planning

## Findings

### Provision of Transition Assessments and Perception of Need

Illustrated in Figure 10, 47.4% of caregivers and 34.7% of PwDs indicated that assessments (e.g., psychological, vocational and/or functional) were conducted at school to assess strengths, interests, and needs to guide transition planning processes. Despite the low numbers of PwDs and caregivers who reported receiving these assessments, most PwDs and caregivers, at 84.4% and 80.5% respectively, thought this kind of assessment was needed and would have been very helpful as they or their adult child proceeded towards adulthood. In contrast, 87.8% of educators indicated that such assessments were completed at school.

Figure 10: Provision of Transition Assessments and Perception of Need



## Themes Related to Transition Assessments

### Prioritizing Assessments to Determine Eligibility for Services

In open-ended survey responses and interviews educators frequently referenced specialized assessments conducted by clinicians (e.g., cognitive, and adaptive) as the assessments that were most frequently completed in schools to support the transition to adulthood. They described how specialized assessments that are used to determine eligibility for support in the adult system were often prioritized. Service providers also described tensions between the adult service system and schools regarding who should be responsible for conducting such assessments, which had led to some students' non-referral for services.



The focus is on psychological assessments to determine eligibility and not on learning about their strengths and challenges or use to support programming or goal setting.

**Educator**



Our schools do assessments to determine student programming needs at our school if the assessment is only needed for a transition to adult[hood].

**Educator**



Our program requires current documentation of both formal diagnosis in order to be eligible for the program. So, it needs to be within the past five years, generally from a psychologist or psychiatrist. So that has been a thorn in our side for quite a few years, with some of the schools and school divisions. Because, as I'm sure you're aware, they typically won't do new assessments if the student isn't having any significant challenges. But for us, it's first of all, we need it for eligibility. And second of all, we need current information to understand what kinds of supports the student may need. So that's been a pretty big barrier. And unfortunately, there have been some schools that just stopped referring to us because the I guess we were told by their department head that they couldn't get new assessments, where they couldn't get the school psychologist to even write a letter. So there, I don't even know how many students would be missing out on services that they likely would need because somewhere down the line, someone decided that they can't do the paperwork for it.

**Service Provider**



Technically we do not do assessments for adult services. So, this is also a sticking point because before we could get our applications rejected, because the psych assessment is too old. And so then now what they do. They send us a letter saying, Can you confirm that this is still valid? And then our psychologist has to, and I guess for them, it's somewhat of a conflict of interest because unless they've done this, the original assessment, right? They shouldn't be commenting on someone else's assessment, whether or not it's valid. So that's where you know, it's getting a bit sticky. And the only students that really get an assessment done for transition to adult services are kids that are in care because they have a social worker. But now they're even starting to fight back, saying, no, you guys should be doing it like, well, we don't do it that and this issue goes above my pay grade.

**Educator**



## Limited Clinical Supports

Limited clinical supports were also described as interfering with the timely completion of specialized assessments and limiting the ability to assess a broad range of students' profiles and apply assessment information in meaningful ways to inform programming.



The limited OT/ SLP/ Psych resources in many divisions mean that you are stuck in this assess then dump some consultative resources cycle without a lot of time for capacity development of staff, and for innovative programming.

**Educator**



We do our best to make sure psych reports are complete but that's out of our hands timeline-wise, we just tell the psychologist to add a student to the list.

**Educator**



Assessments have been very slow and are years behind in our division.

**Educator**



Not enough staff to support and too many students to assess to get things done in a timely manner. Even after assessments are complete, the lack of adequate resources and programming leads to no supports.

**Educator**

## Limited Familiarity with or Use of Transition Assessments to Guide Transition Planning

Some educators comments regarding the transition assessments that they completed lacked specificity with respect to the type of transition assessment, the frequency of use, and how they were applied to support goal setting and the ongoing evaluation of students' progress – as they most often referenced the assessment conducted by clinicians. One assessment specifically designed to support individualized transition planning in a program called Project LIFE (Butler Tech, n.d.) was referenced, but it was described as under-utilized.

“

There isn't any standard one [transition assessment]. So, I would just kind of find some on the internet that other life skills teachers around the country have used, like kind of a baseline of what skills they thought were important . . . every teacher does their own thing, and what they think is a priority is what the kids get.

**Educator**

“

Project LIFE does have that component [an assessment]. One we use... I think that one's really thorough and I think that it's underutilized.

**Educator**

“

Assessments are devised by each teacher, so there's nothing uniform happening throughout the province.

**Educator**

“

I can't think of any formal assessments, but informally, well, we use lots of anecdotal comments, lots in consultation with the job coach. So what skills are the most challenging? What gaps need to be filled in?

**Educator**

## Discussion

According to Rowe et al. (2015), “transition assessment is an essential process to identify student’s individualized post-secondary goals, determine necessary transition services to strive for such goals during the transition period and lead the IEP team in making sound instructional decisions” (p. 301). They further describe transition assessment as the first step in transition planning and as the building block of a transition plan. However, some educators indicated limited familiarity with transition assessments and emphasized that most assessments were conducted to determine eligibility for services as opposed to guide planning.

Given these gaps, policy and guidance documents should be developed that focus on transition assessments including the identification of culturally and linguistically sensitive, formal, and informal assessment tools.

Guidance in the provision of transition assessments should also include ongoing professional development for educators regarding the administration of transition assessments and application of assessment data in setting transition goals, as well as documenting and measuring outcomes.

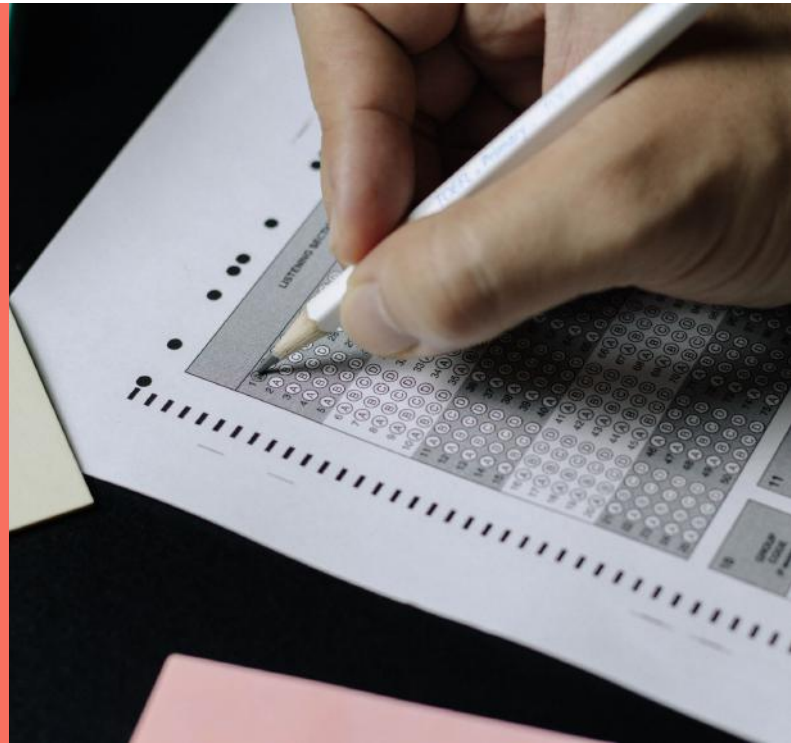
As outlined in the QI-2, transition assessments should include a wide variety of formal and informal transition measures and an evaluation of specific transition needs, strengths, preferences, and interests. The transition assessment process should be ongoing throughout the year, and results should be shared with students, caregivers, and staff in meaningful ways. Students' post-secondary goals should be based on transition assessment results, and a Summary of Performance (SOP) with recommendations for meeting post-secondary goals should be developed when the student exits high school (Morningstar et al., 2016).

The importance of transition assessments have been emphasized in other jurisdictions like in the United States, where the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEIA; 2004) mandates that “the IEP must include: (1) appropriate measurable post-secondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills; and (2) the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the student with a disability in reaching those goals.” Schools are also required to provide an SOP. *IDEIA* (2004) states that in a student's final year of high school, regardless of program of study, the high school “shall provide the child with a summary of the child's academic achievement and functional performance, which shall include recommendations on how to assist the child in meeting the child's postsecondary goals.” The SOP should include the most updated information on student performance, abilities, and aspirations. The SOP facilitates collaboration during the transition process as current, relevant information is easily shared with other service providers and other members of the planning team. It also promotes accountability and follow-through in that an individual's strengths, needs and goals are shared and prioritized in a formal way. The use of a self-directed SOP has also been described in the literature as a way to increase student involvement and facilitate self-advocacy in the transition to adulthood (Morgan et al., 2017). A similar requirement in Manitoba to develop an SOP as a part of the ITP may help to strengthen transition planning in this context.

# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### TRANSITION ASSESSMENT



### Limited Use of Transition Assessments

Most caregivers and PwDs reported that assessments to determine students' strengths, preferences, interests, and needs were not conducted to guide the transition to adulthood. A greater number of educators reported that transition assessments were completed, however, additional comments in surveys and interviews revealed a lack of specificity with respect to the assessments used and their frequency.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop provincial policy and guidance documents to address the need for transition assessment, which should include the identification and provision of culturally and linguistically sensitive assessment tools.

Provide professional development for educators in the administration of formal and informal transition assessments, the application of assessment data in setting outcome-oriented transition goals, as well as documenting and measuring outcomes.

Ensure that post-secondary transition goals are based on transition assessment results, respecting the priorities of students and caregivers.

Ensure that the transition assessment process is ongoing throughout the year, and assessment results are promptly shared with students, caregivers, educators, and service providers.

Provide students and/or caregivers with a summary of performance, which is a summative transition assessment that should include recommendations for meeting post-secondary goals when students leave high school.

Manitoba  
Education

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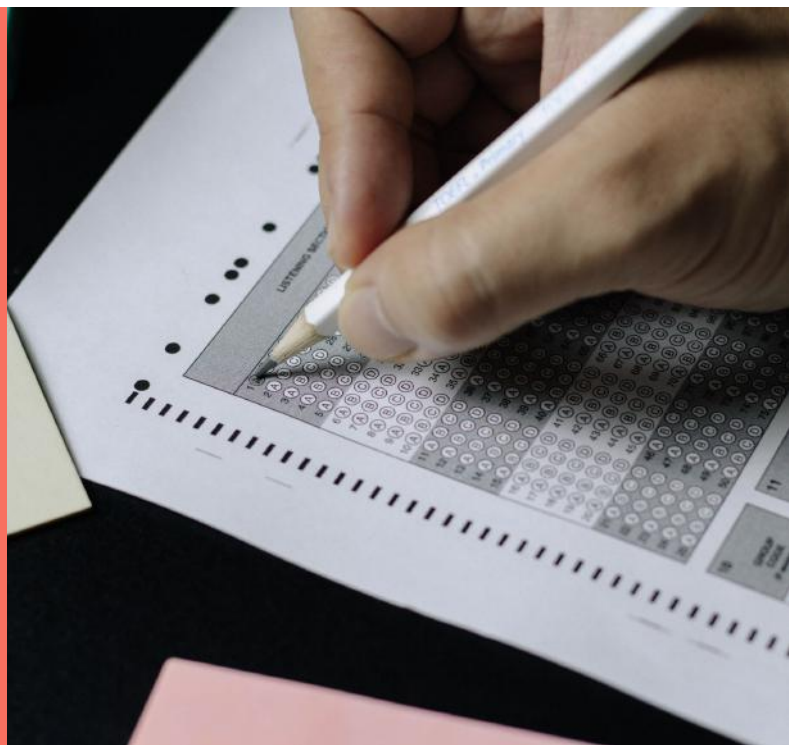
Manitoba  
Education  
School  
Divisions

School  
Divisions

# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### TRANSITION ASSESSMENT



### **An Emphasis on Determining Eligibility for Services**

Some educators indicated that clinical or specialized assessments were primarily administered to determine eligibility for services, with limited direct impact on students' individualized transition planning.

### **Long Wait Lists**

Long waits due to limited clinical support were reported by educators.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Reduce reliance on schools to conduct clinical or specialized assessments to determine eligibility for services in the adult service system. This requires a significant paradigm shift across all sectors regarding how needs are conceptualized and how support is allocated.

Department  
of Families

Increase clinical support in schools to ensure that clinical or specialized assessment information can be applied in meaningful ways to support individualized transition planning and to allow for direct work with students to assist in the ITP process.

Manitoba  
Education  
School  
Divisions

Develop centralized clinical assessment waitlists in school divisions as opposed to school-specific waitlists, to expedite access to clinical services.

School  
Divisions

# Domain 3: Family Involvement

Family-centred approaches that engage and empower caregivers to actively participate in all aspects of the transition to adulthood are essential, as caregivers often have an in-depth understanding of their child's needs and provide critical insights that may strengthen the transition process (Kumpiene, 2019). The regular review of transition plans is an important way to engage caregivers and planning partners in the process, and is thus an indicator of quality transition planning according to the QI-2 (Morningstar et al., 2016). The importance of parental involvement is also a central tenet within *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2008) where it is suggested that "transition planning may follow the same process as individual education planning" and that plans should be reviewed at least annually with parents, the individual and other support providers (p. 32).

Under the domain of family involvement, the following indicator of exemplary transition programs was examined (a) if PwDs and caregivers indicated they or their adult child had an ITP, they were asked if it was reviewed bi-annually with caregivers and support providers, while educators and service providers were asked whether in their experience, ITPs were reviewed bi-annually with caregivers and support providers. (b) A thematic analysis was also conducted of participants' open-ended survey and interview responses about participation in the ITP review and the following theme was identified:

1. The need to engage all planning partners

## Findings

### ITP Reviews with Caregivers and all Support Providers

60% of PwDs and 63.7% of caregivers who indicated that there was an ITP in place reported that it had been reviewed twice per year with all support providers. Slightly more educators at 70% indicated that ITPs were reviewed bi-annually, while only 37.8% of service providers indicated that ITPs were reviewed bi-annually and 32.4% indicated that they did not know whether bi-annual reviews of ITPs took place.

### Theme Related to Family Involvement

#### The Need to Engage all Planning Partners

Some educators described the need for a more structured approach and schedule regarding the review of an IEP/ITP, and the need for an increased emphasis on the active engagement of caregivers and planning partners.



“

At times all stakeholders take part in the planning while other times only the student and I are working out the next steps.

**Educator**

“

I think there should be more of a structured protocol around how often we meet or how we meet and who is part of those kind of meetings. Yeah, I wish it was better.

**Educator**

“

I still feel like the only time that we truly meet with parents is to have this official signing moment where we all meet and present the IEP and then the parent signs that.

**Educator**

## Discussion

The relatively low rates of bi-annual ITP reviews that were reported and the limited awareness of service providers regarding such reviews indicates the need to formalize review timelines and ensure the engagement of all planning partners. While the *Public Schools Amendment Act: Appropriate Educational Programming* (2005) states that a review of the IEP must occur annually or sooner if the student's needs change, the caveat “or sooner if needs change” may be insufficient to ensure the regular evaluation and monitoring of these plans with all interested parties. In other jurisdictions including the province of Nova Scotia, it is recognized that an annual review may be insufficient to adequately address students' needs, interests and goals in a timely and ongoing way, thus IEPs are reviewed bi-annually (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2005). Increasing the minimum frequency with which ITPs are reviewed in Manitoba from once annually to bi-annually may be a progressive way to ensure that planning processes are more responsive to the needs of PwDs. The involvement of all planning partners also must be prioritized and the requirement to meet bi-annually should

be clearly articulated in provincial regulations. More frequent reviews of the ITP with all planning partners may strengthen collaboration, facilitate more holistic planning, and further reduce the onus on caregivers to initiate contact and advocate for information about the transition process. Virtual/online meetings may help to facilitate more frequent contact. More frequent contact may also provide an opportunity to enhance parents' knowledge regarding the transition to adulthood. Some innovative approaches to strengthen parental engagement, understanding, and participation in transition processes include the provision of parental mentorship, which could be provided by other caregivers with lived expertise (United States Department of Education, 2020).



# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### FAMILY INVOLVEMENT



#### Limited Involvement and Evaluation

Some PwDs, caregivers, and service providers reported that while ITPs were in place, they were not reviewed at least twice per year with all relevant parties. More educators reported that a bi-annual review was completed.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure caregivers including extended family, friends, and service providers regularly participate in transition planning meetings and ITP reviews.

Elicit student and caregiver feedback through regular and accessible surveys or interviews to tailor transition support.

Increase the minimum expected frequency of ITP evaluation and review with caregivers and other parties involved from annually to bi-annually.

Require that the bi-annual review includes updated information from transition assessments.

Provide caregiver training in ITP processes, which may include mentorship.



Manitoba  
Education  
School Divisions  
School Principals

# Domain 4: Student Involvement

The use of evidence-based practices that foster student involvement in transition planning and self-determination skills is an indicator of high-quality transition programs on the QI-2 (Morningstar et al., 2016), and it is a predictor of post-school employment and independent living (Morningstar et al., 2016; Kohler & Gothberg, 2016; Wei et al., 2016). The *Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba* (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022) emphasizes the need to provide students with opportunities to participate in student specific planning (e.g., IEP/ITP processes), which was also indicated in the previous iteration of this document, *Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship & Youth, 2006). *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2008) also emphasizes the importance of student-centred approaches and outlines the need for student participation in the ITP process.

Under the domain of student involvement, the following indicators of exemplary transition programs were examined (a) if an ITP was in place, PwDs and caregivers were asked if they or their adult child had a voice in the ITP process. Similarly, educators and service providers were also queried if students with disabilities had a voice in their ITP. (b) A thematic analysis was conducted of participants' open-ended survey and interview responses about student involvement in the ITP and the following themes were identified:

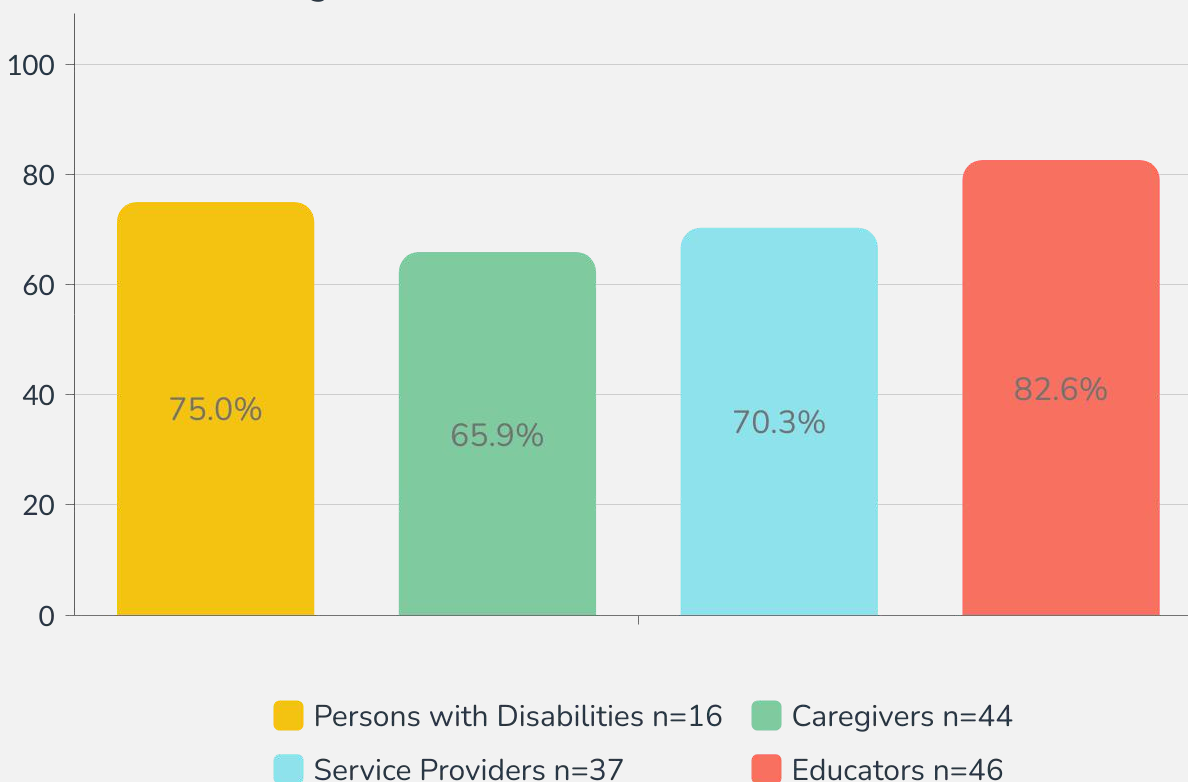
1. Student involvement as a continuum
2. A lack of student readiness to participate in the ITP

## Findings

### Student Voice in the ITP

75% of PwDs and 65.9% of caregivers who indicated the presence of an ITP, also indicated that they or their adult child had a voice in setting their own goals. While 82.6% of educators and 70.3% of service providers indicated that students with ITPs had a voice in setting their own goals, which is a relative strength as shown in Figure 12.

Figure 11: Student Voice in ITP Process



## Themes Related to Student Voice in the ITP

### Student Involvement as a Continuum

Some PwDs and caregivers' described high levels of direct involvement in goal setting and determining priorities, whereas others indicated moderate levels of involvement, such as being present but not having decision-making power, and others described no involvement, such as not being included in meetings and/or asked to provide input.



Yes . . . I got to say my thoughts and feelings about it, and I put my own opinions on that too.

PwD



She was always involved in setting goals.

Caregiver

“

Always made/ make sure he was/ is part of the process as this affects him and he should have a say and input. It's important he knows how to have a voice and being a part of the process.

Caregiver

“

In high school, he has some input as to what he would like them to focus on . . . although he has continually asked them for job experience, and he is still waiting for it to happen . . . even though it is included [in the plan].

Caregiver

“

He was asked but I don't feel his needs were adequately considered.

Caregiver

“

Teachers in the past did not feel it was relevant to have him in the room, though in recent years I have requested that he be given the opportunity to participate. That has not happened yet.

Caregiver

“

I don't believe I was ever asked. Yeah, no. Like, my perspectives of transitioning, what I'm looking into or what I would like to see or if I had any concerns or no, I don't believe so.

PwD

“

My junior high principal banned me from my own meetings because “the grown ups needed to talk”. I was only allowed back in after decisions were made.

PwD



## A lack of Student Readiness to Participate in the ITP

Some caregivers also described that their adult child lacked readiness to participate in the ITP process.

“

They were offered a voice but often was not able to participate due to their challenges and found it overwhelming.

Caregiver

“

I believe the offer was made but he didn't know how to begin to respond.

Caregiver

“

He had opportunity for voice but generally remained silent.

Caregiver

## Discussion

The inclusion of student voice in the ITP process was an area of relative strength reported by all participant groups. Despite this relative strength, there was evidence of variability in the degree to which student voice was incorporated in the process and limited reference to the use of evidence-based practices to teach this skill. Providing exemplars of evidence-based curriculum that may facilitate PwDs' leadership of the ITP process such as the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) (Shogren et al., 2017) along with focussed professional learning opportunities for teachers in these approaches may be important components to consider as a part of a comprehensive reform of transition processes. Initiating a youth advisory council with the ministries involved in education, health, families, and employment to provide feedback, consultation, and recommendations on the ways in which the transition to adulthood might be strengthened would also be an important way to amplify the voice of PwDs and ensure that their needs are addressed.

# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT



### **Inclusion of Student Voice**

This was a relative strength reported by some participants. Some caregivers and PwDs described student involvement on a continuum, ranging from high levels of involvement to no involvement. Some caregivers also described a lack of student preparation for participation in the ITP process. Some educators and service providers also indicated the inclusion of student voice in the ITP, however, there were no references to evidence-based practices being used to teach students how to participate and incorporate student voice in the process.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide professional development for educators in the implementation of evidence-based practices to facilitate PwDs' leadership and self-advocacy in the ITP process.

Ensure that evidence-based practices are employed when teaching self-advocacy and leadership of the ITP process.

Initiate a youth advisory council with the ministries of Education, Families, Advanced Education, Economic Development and Trade, and Health on the transition to adulthood, to provide feedback, consultation, and recommendations on ways to strengthen the transition process, grounded in their lived expertise.

Manitoba  
Education  
School  
Divisions

Ministries  
of Education,  
Families, Advanced  
Education, Economic  
Development and  
Trade, and Health

# Domain 5: Transition-Focused Curriculum or Instruction

A balance between teaching academic, social, and transition-specific skills are indicators of high-quality transition programs as outlined in the QI-2 (Morningstar et al., 2016). This balance should include instruction in academics as well as skills that foster adult independence, such as enrollment in occupational and vocational coursework, and work-based learning opportunities (Morningstar et al., 2016).

While the *Public Schools Amendment Act: Appropriate Educational Programming* (2005) does not address the range of domains that might be included in an IEP/ITP, it does emphasize that planning should address students' individual needs and align with provincial protocols that involve the transition into and out of school. *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2008) describes the need for a comprehensive, functional approach to transition education, including the development of vocational, social, independent living, health and daily living skills, as well as academic knowledge, opportunities for life-long learning, employment or career development, inclusion, social networks and living in the community with independence. Moreover, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning has Career Development or Life Work curricula in grades 9 to 12, Career Development Internship (CDI), which provides students with the opportunity to earn up to two high school credits by completing an unpaid internship, Credit for Employment (CFE), which provides students with the option to earn up to two high school credits through paid employment, and Community Service Student-Initiated Project (CSSIP), which enables students who volunteer to receive credits for the skills obtained in the volunteer activity.

Under the domain of transition focussed curriculum or instruction the following indicators of exemplary transition programs were examined (a) whether PwDs received transition education, according to PwDs and caregivers, in each of Patton and Clark's (2014) 11 areas of transition education, and where PwDs and caregivers reported that an area of transition education was not provided, whether they thought it was needed, (b) whether PwDs participated in Career Development/Life Work courses in grades 9-12+. (c) A thematic analysis was conducted of participants' open-ended survey and interview responses about transition focussed curriculum or instruction and the following themes were identified:

1. Prioritizing self-advocacy and independent living skills
2. Innovative work experience and employment-related skill development opportunities
3. The importance of dedicated career and community experiences personnel
4. Difficulty balancing the instruction of academics and independent living skills
5. The absence of provincial curriculum or guidance documents for teaching independent living skills

6. The expectation to fully timetable students in core courses
7. Resource limitations interfering with community-based opportunities and individualized support
8. Not wanting transition focused curriculum or instruction
9. Inequities in accessing vocational programming in high school
10. A lack of availability or access to career development curricula
11. Employers' reluctance to provide work experience placements
12. COVID-19 restrictions

## Findings

### Provision of Transition Education and Perceptions of Need

Table 4 presents a summary of PwDs' and caregivers reported receipt of transition education and their perception of the need for this support. Gaps and unmet needs were reported by PwDs and caregivers in all 11 areas of transition education that were examined, including understanding one's educational and workplace accommodations and self-advocacy skills. Other areas of unmet needs included preparation for further education and training, readiness for the job market, and personal money management. Relative strengths in transition education reported by PwDs and caregivers included personal health and wellness management skills, relationship and social skills, and functional communication.

### Career Development and Life Work Course Participation by Students with Disabilities

13.7% of PwDs and 30.3% of caregivers indicated they or their adult child had been enrolled in a Career Development and Life Work course. While 50% of educators indicated that in their experience students with disabilities are enrolled in these courses. When asked if they or their adult child had received CFE, neither the PwDs nor caregivers indicated that this had occurred. Participation in a CSSIP was also limited with only 12.00% of PwDs and 10.3% of caregivers reporting participation. A higher percentage of educators indicated students with disabilities take Career Development Courses and receive CFE at 50% and 52% respectively, and 26.5% indicated that students with disabilities participate in CSSIPs. See Table 5.

Table 4: Provision of Transition Education and Perceptions of Need

Transition Education Domain	PwD Did Not Receive	PwD Need	Caregivers Did Not Receive	Caregivers Need
Independent Living Skills	60.0%	67.7%	61%	88.9%
Job Market Readiness	70.6%	69.4%	62.2%	68.9%
Internship, Work Experience, and Volunteering Opportunities	51.0%	73.0%	40.8%	76.7%
Understanding One's Educational and Workplace Accommodations	74.5%	75.6%	77.8%	76.8%
Preparation for Further Education	72.0%	78.6%	86.3%	52.2%
Self-Advocacy	76.0%	78.4%	74.3%	77.4%
Functional Communication	50.0%	68.0%	41.9%	77.4%
Personal Money Management	61.2%	79.3%	74.0%	76.9%
Community Participation and Leisure Activities	67.4%	75.8%	60.3%	74.4%
Personal Health and Wellness Management	38.8%	83.3%	40.3%	79.3%
Relationship and Social Skills Development	49.9%	87.0%	44.6%	93.9%

Table 5: Participation in Career Development and Job Readiness Curriculum in High School

Course	Educators	PwDs	Caregivers
Career Development	50.0%	13.7%*	30.3%
Credit for Employment	54.0%	0	0
Community Service Student Initiated Project	26.5%	12.0%	10.3%

\*21.6% of PwDs reported that they did not know whether they had taken part

## Themes Themes Related to Transition Focussed Curriculum or Instruction

### Prioritizing Self-Advocacy and Independent Living Skills

Most PwD and caregivers reported gaps in key areas of transition education, as described in Table 5. However, some educators and caregivers described how the development of self-advocacy and independent living skills had been prioritized and expressed a desire for effective programming to be shared province wide.



We have started to look at K-12 continuums, work as a self-advocacy timeline so that some of those skills start to get taught a little earlier. Regardless of a student's profile. We're starting at kindergarten, actually. And it will just be like a picture book as far as who's on my support team so they can recognize the people around the table and then we'll build every year from there so that they can learn how to greet people and being able to contact.

**Educator**



We spend quite a bit of time on what the goals are that are centered around self-advocacy. I wouldn't say that it's being taught through classes. I would say it's probably the same as a lot of the other programming I do - very individualized, more of like a counseling role with students as to how they can self-advocate. Lots of scripting. Lots of opportunities for practice, that kind of thing.

**Educator**



[Name of High School] has a program that is an excellent example of transition programming - with the school environment set up to function as an economy where they can practice budgeting, business type skills, job applications - they have created a great environment that simulates real life experiences. We are trying to get something like that running in our division - but it is difficult with limited clinician availability and limited time to plan.

I would love to see sharing of successful resources/programs province wide!

**Educator**



I think when she was in high school, she was really happy there. I think she would have been happy staying there. But they really pushed her a little bit outside of her comfort zone. You know, for independence, learning to take the bus was a big thing, and learning to just even to walk to the bus stop or to cross a busy street and knowing how to get to where she was going. Those were all really helpful and important and I think gave her some confidence and really made her proud of herself, that she was able to do these things that maybe she never thought of doing.

**Caregiver**

## Innovative Work experience and Employment-Related Skill Development Opportunities

Educators referenced Project SEARCH, an innovative program that provides the opportunity for students with disabilities to develop employability skills in work settings during the final year of high school, and Project LIFE; a pilot project being introduced in a school division to prepare students for participation in Project SEARCH, as instrumental in the development of employment readiness. Remote job coach applications were also described as innovations that hold much potential to assist PwDs in developing and maintaining employment related skills and in facilitating greater independence in the workplace.



The most helpful factor to make that transition successful is a range of experiences before they turn 21, including the ability to do a work experience in a supportive work environment. Those things are key if we can give them those experiences prior to leaving. And you know, if they have family support. It's even better, so whoever we can - we try to apply to Project SEARCH

**Educator**



While it's a good program there are very limited spots - I think we should draw attention to that for the province! [referencing the number of students admitted to Project SEARCH]. So, we have to be very selective of who we refer. And even that becomes stressful because I get to be the keeper of who I think gets to be in it?

**Educator**



“

I'll just use the example of a student with 30 credits, M designated credits. We're just launching Project LIFE. And they would have the opportunity to be part of Project LIFE, which would be a pre-work program or programing, which offers the kids an opportunity to work on work skills to be able to do an internship. It could be one to two years and for some of our kids, three years, if needed to work on those skills, that would increase the chances of them gaining competitive employment or being more successful if they applied to Projects SEARCH. We would be working with whatever agency they're part of to build on the skills that they have already secured through the Project LIFE, like training. So that if they didn't have access to some type of employment, we would be able to provide a portfolio of information about what they were able to do as far as to show their strengths and just show what has been successful for them, so the person taking over from adult services would be able to help and have a better idea about a good match for them.

**Educator**

“

We also are just working through [an organization] doing a project around some remote job coaching apps that are really showing some good promise. And I think that might help us. There's a couple of different ways that they can be used, but basically a set workstation could have a UPC (QR) code. Each student would be able to put their phone or iPad on the QR code, and then it'll pop up some pictorial step by step sequence of events that have to take place for them to complete that job task. And then once they've completed that, the system, that's going to show that they've completed that task, they can move on to their next task. And so, the hope will be that we will be able to increase independence on the work sites by allowing, the people that are supervising to give them enough space to do the job, but not too far that they feel that they don't have support.

**Educator**

## The Value of Dedicated Career and Community Experiences Personnel

Educators also described the benefits of having dedicated personnel to support the provision of career and community experiences and/or the desire to have this kind of support.

“

We need staff or a school/divisional program whose only responsibility is supporting work/volunteer experience opportunities, job skills etc.

**Educator**

“

I would love if there was like a workplace coordinator, right where they knew all the workplaces that we didn't all have to reinvent the wheel each time we were looking for something.

**Educator**



In our school, we're very well supported in getting work experience placements and our career and community experiences teacher is really involved with all of our students with disabilities, especially when work experience is a part of their learning plan.

**Educator**

## Difficulty balancing the Instruction of Academics and Independent Living Skills

Some PwDs, caregivers, and service providers expressed the concern that educators experienced difficulty balancing the instruction of academics and independent living skills, and described that sometimes independent living skills were not prioritized.



Had an EA K-8 but when I went to high school, I had no one. I also had no help with social skills or independent living or transition to life after high school even though my parents kept asking and even said they would drive me to other schools if they could find something.

**PwD**



I was not taught how to support myself and find opportunities. I learned knowledge and skills but not what to do with it.

**PwD**



He wants to get a job. And we assured him that going into modified would be OK, (I mean, he didn't fully understand it back then). But the school assured me that choosing modified he would still get support in helping to find jobs as he got older. And so, as we got into the high school years, he was going to class. We get our stuff and all that, and they said, oh, don't worry, don't worry, as he gets older, we'll transition more into more life skills like job type stuff. But as the years progress, it just hasn't been happening.

**Caregiver**



Can you read a menu? Can you understand what five dollars is? He bought something for three dollars and you should get two dollars back. He still doesn't get it... But those are the kinds of things that it just feels like, even though we articulated it. And maybe shame on us for not, you know, not advocating as much in high school as we could have or should have. I think we kind of we kind of fell asleep under the guise of the IEP and woke up two years later and were like, well, what happened here?

**Caregiver**

“

Some teachers tried, there was inconsistency in support personnel, it was difficult for teachers to balance academic and life skills needs.

Caregiver

“

The focus in school is on academics and time for the adaptive skill aspect is lost.

Service Provider

## The Absence of Provincial Curriculum or Guidance Documents for Teaching Independent Living Skills

Some educators described how the lack of provincial guidance documents or curriculum to support instruction in independent living skills contributed to educators creating their own resources and/or searching online for materials, and in some instances not prioritizing this area.

“

There is no set provincial current curriculum. There is one that I designed . . . I really just tapped into my just two years of experience of working with students with disabilities and trying to highlight the key areas that they would need to practice that they don't typically get during Grade 9 to 12 these days.

Educator

“

I think it would be nice to have like a guidebook per se of what the areas - I know we have some resources that people rely on, but because kids are moving from division to division, experiences change even across schools from division to division. What they get looks a little bit different wherever they are. And I think that's a struggle.... And I think it can be incorporated into some of their classes as well. When you think about that, like the relevant life skills to be able to hold down a job, the grooming, getting up in the morning, what to do in a staff room, how to problem solve that are specific to jobs versus school.

Educator

“

For understanding relationships and building healthy relationships...I divide it into different categories. And from those categories I sourced online, I went online.

Educator

“

But I do hear often well, life skills are not a curricular outcome.

**Educator**

“

We were told all of our students need to be fully timetabled right until the age of 21. Yeah, it's a little frustrating when for the student, when he or she has been in geography for the third or fourth time.

**Educator**

“

They [administrators] want them to be on the credit system and have so many math and so many, so many English and all the things that the regular kids have to have to graduate, even though their credits will be modified. So, if you have a kid that has to take certain credit hours for the time to graduate and their bus comes at 2:30 so they can't take the slot right then that's denied. And that's it. You don't have time for anything else.

**Educator**

## The Expectation to Fully Timetable Students in Core Courses

Some educators also described their inability to provide instruction in independent living skills because school administrators and/or divisional administrators required them to fully timetable students who were receiving modified course designations in core courses. This reduced the opportunity to provide transition education such as independent living skills, work experience and community-based opportunities, even when the educators felt it was required and should be prioritized for a student.

“

I think because specifically the kids that have been on modified programming, they are so focused on getting their credits that some of them don't have any extra time within their schedule to be able to work on some of those pieces . . . So, I think that's one of the reasons, you know, if their high school grad plan was to only do three credits per year or per semester and then maybe one credit or one block of time working on life skills or non-academic domains, then I think we probably would have more success throughout the whole school piece.

**Educator**

## Resource Limitations Interfering with Community-Based Opportunities and Individualized Support

Some educators described the detrimental impacts that cuts to the number of educational assistants, who may serve as job coaches, and a lack of resources to support transportation as significantly impeding opportunities to provide PwDs with community-based employment readiness skills, vocational, and volunteer opportunities. Resource constraints were also described as limiting the choice of courses that students with disabilities could take and the ability of educators to attend to their individualized goals.

“

Unfortunately, there isn't enough support . . . We need additional staff who can do the best training with them [PwDs] or take them to their location, be with them, be that, you know, coach on the side to help them through it. We don't. We don't have enough people right now to do that.

**Educator**

“

The primary one [barrier] as I see it is a lack of EAs and job coaches. So, we have students who could be going more frequently or could be going to a wider variety of experiences or having an experience at all. If we had more resources in terms of job coaches, so that's a primary limitation. Transportation issues often get in the way. If we can't get to a place by bus in a reasonable amount of time, that can be really limiting as well.

**Educator**

“

The lack of support has drastically changed how I can see the objectives that I include [in the ITP] because if they can't be matched due to a lack of staffing, then those objectives are removed from the ITP. For example, a student that only last year that would have had one on one, now has three to one. And their courses are greatly limited because you need to find a class for three of those students to fit into, so there's a lot of frustration from the parents in that - Why does my student, my child only have four options of classes to go to when there's more classes offered? I said, well, this student can't be in this class for this reason, that student can't be in this class for that reason, and we're tripling up.

**Educator**

“

We have had 40% of our EAs cut in the past year and a half . . . It is impossible to send EAs to help with the transition process to day programs, work placement etc. Unless the choices are drastically limited, and they are paired up with 1 or 2 other transitioning students who may have very different needs.

**Educator**

## Not Wanting Transition Focussed Curriculum or Instruction

Affirming the need to conduct transition assessments and prioritize students' and caregivers' goals in the transition to adulthood, some educators, PwDs, and caregivers elaborated on the point that in some instances, instruction in transition focussed curriculum or instruction was not desired.

“

I don't know what percentage, but I would say about twenty five percent of the kids really feel that they don't want to be working on that stuff [transition education] at school and they have support from their families for that. But the families are also not doing it consistently. I would say about 25 percent of our kids would be in that population, and it's limiting them because they don't know how to take the bus. They don't know how to make a simple snack for themselves. They're relying on a debit card with a really limited understanding of withdrawals and budgeting, just like withdrawal rate. This leads to adults already taking over their monetary pieces when they start getting their assistance.

**Educator**

“

I did not want the school to focus on life skills more for me because I am disabled. I wanted the same educational opportunities as other people.

**PwD**

“

I wanted my child to have the opportunities to be exposed to more of the same school and educational experiences and knowledge as her same age peers. Pulling her out of school to 'volunteer' at a useless task or in a capacity unrelated to her interests, so she can develop life skills or skills that will not serve her in her desired future denies her educational opportunities similar to students without disabilities..

**Caregiver**

## Inequities in accessing Vocational Programming in High School.

Inequities in accessing vocational programming were also described by some educators, PwDs, and caregivers, where students with disabilities were unable to access vocational programming because they did not have the prerequisite coursework or because the program would not accommodate students with disabilities.

“

It's somewhat of a competitive process to get into those (vocational programs). If you live within that catchment of that school, it's for sure. But if you don't, you may be accepted, but you have to cover that transportation yourself. And a lot of the times, if a kid comes with a plan, that affects their desirability as a future student.

**Educator**

“

Our division has a cooperative vocational education program and we run everything from, health care programs to hospitality to culinary to construction, trades, plumbing and pipe fitting, electrician, sustainable energy, carpentry. There are a number of them, though not all of them are accessible to students who would have graduated with modified credits, but some are.

**Educator**

“

Wanted automobile shop training in high school but did not meet school expectations to qualify.

**PwD**

“

Entrance and participation in one vocational institute was available via one school district as part of the special education program in high school, however not offered to special needs students in our new school division, only available to mainstream high school students.

**Caregiver**

“

The kitchen would have been vocational training but there was no interest there. So, then we requested the vocational program, which is a [name] program. And she was denied. They said students with intellectual disabilities cannot go. And then we just, for a year and a half, continued to lobby until they acquiesced.

**Caregiver**

## Lack of Availability or Access to Career Development Curricula

Some educators revealed variability among schools and school divisions regarding whether career development courses were offered and whether students with disabilities were eligible to take them.

“

Career development - So we don't offer that class here in our building.

**Educator**

“

Right now, that program really isn't being used for that. I know the students in it, and it's not really a lot of students who are on modified credits. We used to have a work experience program that was geared for students on modified credits, and that's now been dissolved. It was, you know, over the years - we've changed things and that was one of the things that was left out of this program.

**Educator**

“

We do have students who take those courses and are working through some of those work experience pieces. But I think what's still missing is those soft skills to help them become successful in a job place. There's some other skills that the kids need, and the career development programs don't really go into that in detail.

**Educator**

“

There was a change of administration at the same time and that program, that course, [Career Development] just wasn't offered anymore.

**Educator**

## Employers' Reluctance to Provide Work Experience for Students with Disabilities

Additional challenges related to obtaining work experience placements were reported by educators, which included attitudinal barriers, the stigma associated with having a job coach in the workplace, and the requirement to pass workplace safety requirements.



“

It has been such a challenge for us to find these places and for them to accept our students as their needs are . . . They (employers) want programs. They want to know who's paying for it.

**Educator**

“

The workplace health and safety pieces, the WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) training for working with hazardous materials. Sometimes there are some safety pieces as far as specific equipment, even though we know the kids aren't going to be using that specific equipment, but they still have to pass because they're going to be in that area. So that's a bit of an issue.

**Educator**

“

We need to have more community advocates to be able to push some of those business pieces or even legislation to be able to mandate businesses to take a look and open up maybe a percentage or something to positions or work so that everyone in the community can be included.

**Educator**

“

There's some stigma attached to having a job coach.

**Educator**

## COVID-19 Restrictions

Some educators and caregivers described how the pandemic had interfered with opportunities to participate in work experience, volunteering, and community-based programming. Some participants also emphasized that the barriers to providing transition education pre-dated COVID-19.

“

Even before COVID, we were making decisions to keep our students at the school because we didn't have the support to take them to job opportunities outside of the school.

**Educator**

“

Even if we can find a place that will take us, we're no longer allowed to drive them in our cars. Like if you are in a school that doesn't have easy bus access or quick bus access to get somewhere, you have to drive kids. There's no way I could get a student on a bus from where I work to somewhere else and back again by 2:30 when their school bus comes. It's just it's not going to work out. And then if that student is in a wheelchair or has some kind of mobility issue, then that kicks it up a notch as well.

**Educator**

“

He wasn't considered a student that could stay at school every day (during the pandemic). He wasn't considered to have special needs, according to their school. He was considered modified, and that division said modified students aren't considered - they don't fall under what the government had said as far as special needs students. So, he was only allowed to go to school every second day. And so, it ended up being that he went three hours every second day and was just kept in a learning center. And that was it.

**Caregiver**

“

What's in the IEP isn't actually being accomplished because of COVID. So, in the IEP there are actually goals as far as job experiences and stuff, but it's all been put on hold. They haven't met these IEP goals. Like even transit experience. They haven't done that because they just shut it all down. So, he hasn't had any of those. Those are all goals that he wanted and agreed on. Yes, we wanted and they're great goals, but they haven't been able to work on them because of COVID and the restrictions that are in place... I've seen a document, yes. And they keep those goals in there and they just click on hold at this time.

**Caregiver**

## Discussion

The gaps and unmet needs in transition education that were reported by PwDs and caregivers clearly illustrates the need to strengthen instruction in the essential skills and competencies that foster independence and improved life outcomes. For example, self-advocacy and understanding one's school and workplace accommodations were areas of unmet need reported by PwDs and caregivers. Self-advocacy is an essential part of self-determination and includes knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication and leadership (Wehmeyer, 2015) and it is correlated with higher levels of employment, further education and independent living (Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2017), and yet many PwDs and caregivers reported that instruction in this critical skill was not received.

The reasons for the gaps in transition education that were provided by participants provide some important insights with respect to how instruction in these skills and competencies might be strengthened. For example, a comprehensive provincial curriculum framework to address transition education and transition-related competencies is required, as currently none exists in the province of Manitoba. As described by Trainor et al. (2020) exemplary transition education utilizes curriculum that focuses on specific transition-related skills and balances academic instruction with transition skills and competencies. As such, a provincial curriculum framework for independent living, that incorporates evidence-based approaches should be developed.

Other areas of unmet needs that were reported by PwDs and caregivers included readiness for the job market and preparation for further education and training, both of which are correlated with positive post-school outcomes (Mazzotti et al., 2021; Trainor et al., 2020). This finding is also significant because enrolment in post-secondary education and employment are critical areas where PwDs often fall behind their peers, which may be lessened if a comprehensive approach to provide these opportunities is provided (Lipscomb et al., 2017). Despite the significant benefits of providing job readiness training and career development for PwDs, some participants in this study reported that PwDs are not receiving equitable access to these opportunities. A lack of resources to ensure the provision of community-based educational opportunities, limited choice of courses, as well as being denied access to vocational training and career development curriculum are worrisome indicators of what Doyle et al. (2020) have referred to as a “de facto two-tiered educational system,” whereby students from marginalized groups are denied their right to an appropriate, equitable and accessible education. Given the overwhelming evidence that job readiness skills significantly increase the likelihood of future employment, a targeted approach to ensure that these opportunities are provided is required.

Educational assistants or trained job coaches and transportation must also be provided to ensure that the goals outlined in ITPs are addressed in a comprehensive way. The need for educational assistants to receive training to serve as job coaches must also be underscored, as enhancing their skills in critical areas such as systematic instruction, antecedent prompts, video self-modeling, supporting the interview process, communication skills, and technology will help to ensure PwDs’ right to a quality education and enhanced job performance (Goh & Bambara, 2013; Pachoud & Corbière, 2014; Zappella, 2015). Research affirms that the knowledge, competencies, and skills of a job coach are critical to employment success (Corbière & Lanctot, 2011; Corbière et al., 2014).

Remote job coach applications including, but not limited to, Cognitopia ([www.cognitopia.com](http://www.cognitopia.com)) and Canplan ([www.inc.ca](http://www.inc.ca)) also have much potential to support instruction in job tasks and routines, providing prompts, check-ins, and anxiety-reducing supports that enhance independence, and should also be expanded and may be particularly beneficial in times when in-person contact is restricted and/or when individuals live in rural and Northern locations.

Expanding access to programs like Project SEARCH (2018), a school-to-work transition program where students receive over 600 hours of hands-on work experience, and Project LIFE (Butler Tech, n.d.), a multi-year transition program that teaches skills that foster independence and work-related skills in preparation for participation in Project SEARCH, will allow a greater number of students to benefit from these employment readiness opportunities. Statistics from Project SEARCH in the United States indicates that between 2018 to 2021, the overall employment rate for individuals participating in this program was approximately 75%, and individuals who met all of the criteria for competitive employment (e.g., employed in an integrated setting with individuals without disabilities, year-round, 16 hours per week or more, at the prevailing wage) had a 65% to 70% employment rate (Project SEARCH, 2018). Moreover, Butterworth et al., (2017) have emphasized the importance of building coalitions with businesses in order to expand work experience opportunities and increasing dedicated career and community experiences teachers may help to facilitate these partnerships (Butterworth et al., 2017).

Professional development in transition education and transition processes must also be prioritized for educators. This should include professional learning opportunities at the school and school division levels and the development of a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Inclusive/Special Education with a specialization in Transition to ensure adequate training for educators. Some post-secondary institutions in the United States provide this training (e.g., Arizona State University, Kent State University). The Council for Exceptional Children has outlined an *Advanced Specialty Set* for the role of a *Special Education Transition Specialist*, recognizing the knowledge and skills that this critical role requires, which could help to inform program design in this province (Council for Exceptional Children, 2015).



# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### TRANSITION FOCUSED CURRICULUM OR INSTRUCTION



### Unmet Needs in Transition Education

Many PwDs and caregivers reported unmet needs in several critical areas of transition-focused curriculum or instruction, such as understanding one's school or workplace accommodations, self-advocacy, readiness for the job market, preparation for further education or training, and independent living skills.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure access to a balance of academic and transition-specific content as determined by transition assessments and priorities of students and caregivers.

Ensure the utilization of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the provision of accommodations to address students' priority learning needs in the regular classroom, including independent living skills relevant to ITP goals.

Provide ongoing professional development for educators or case managers in all aspects of transition education.

Develop a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Inclusive Education with a specialization in Transition to ensure adequate training for educators.

Manitoba  
Education  
School  
Divisions

School  
Divisions  
School  
Principals

Manitoba Education  
School Divisions  
Post Secondary  
Universities

Manitoba  
Education  
Post Secondary  
Universities

# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### TRANSITION FOCUSED CURRICULUM OR INSTRUCTION



### **Absence of Curriculum**

Some educators reported barriers to providing transition education including the absence of curriculum, or guidance or support documents.

### **Expectations to Fully Timetable in Core Courses and Limited Choices of Courses**

Some educators informed of the requirement to fully timetable students who were receiving modified credits in core courses, which interfered with addressing transition-related needs. Some educators also described situations where students with disabilities were given limited choices regarding the courses they could take and were placed in classrooms where they could be grouped with other students with disabilities, or were required to attend part time because of limited resources, such as lack of educational assistants and large class sizes.



# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a comprehensive provincial curriculum framework that incorporates evidence-based practices to address transition education and transition-related competencies.

Manitoba  
Education

Provide equitable access to all courses and programming options to ensure the provision of appropriate education.

School  
Divisions  
School  
Principals

# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### TRANSITION FOCUSED CURRICULUM OR INSTRUCTION



### **Limited Availability or Participation in Career Development Courses**

Most PwDs and caregivers reported that they or their adult children did not participate in career development coursework. Educators reported higher participation rates in these opportunities. Some educators indicated that career development was not offered in their schools or that students with disabilities were not included in all career development courses.

### **Inequitable and Limited Opportunities to Participate in Vocational Training, Work Experience and Volunteerism**

Some PwDs, caregivers and educators identified inequitable access to vocational training and work experience.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure equitable access to all career development curricula and provision of courses relevant to ITP goals for post-secondary life and developing independence.

Manitoba  
Education  
School Divisions  
School Principals

Ensure equitable access to all programming options and all reasonable accommodations.

Manitoba  
Education  
School Divisions  
School Principals

# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### TRANSITION FOCUSED CURRICULUM OR INSTRUCTION



### **Community-based Opportunities during High School**

All participant groups described difficulties in accessing community-based opportunities for PwDs, including not meeting entrance criteria for vocational programs, attitudinal barriers, and resource constraints such as educational assistant support or job coach, and transportation.

### **Employers Reluctance to Provide Work Experience**

All participant groups identified barriers associated with finding employers who were willing to include PwDs in their workplace.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand opportunities to participate in best and emerging practices including Project LIFE and Project SEARCH that provide vocational training and employment readiness skill development.

Ensure dedicated training for educational assistants in job coaching skills as a prerequisite to serving as a job coach and accompanying students to job sites.

Provide educational assistant or job coaching when needed to support participation in vocational training and work/ volunteer/ community-based opportunities as identified in the ITP.

Provide resources for transportation to support participation in vocational training, and work/ volunteer/ community-based opportunities as identified in the ITP.

Manitoba  
Education  
School  
Divisions

School  
Divisions  
School  
Principals

Increase access to designated career or community experiences teachers or liaisons to strengthen relationships with employers and enhance access for all students.

Provide or increase financial supports to employers to include students with disabilities in the workplace or work experience programs.

Provide professional development or training to employers to increase their understanding of the needs and abilities of individuals with disabilities, the duty to accommodate, and the role and benefits of a job coach.

School  
Divisions

Manitoba  
Economic  
Development,  
Investment &  
Trade

# Domain 6: Interagency Collaboration

Inter-agency collaboration is an indicator of exemplary transition programs as outlined in the QI-2 and it is a predictor of positive post-school outcomes for PwDs (Morningstar et al., 2016). Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2008) emphasizes the need for interagency collaboration by outlining the interactive roles and responsibilities of youth, caregivers and human service providers in the transition process, in order to ensure the seamless provision of transition support.

In the domain of interagency collaboration, the following indicator of exemplary transition programs was examined (a) satisfaction with the way schools and service providers collaborated to assist PwDs to achieve their goals in the transition to adulthood. (b) A thematic analysis was also conducted of participants' open-ended survey and interview responses about the way that schools and services collaborate in the transition to adulthood, and the following themes were identified:

1. Limited communication and information sharing
2. Resource constraints and personnel unavailability

## Findings

### Satisfaction with Collaboration between Schools and Services

Approximately one third of both PwDs and caregivers, at 32.3% and 36.9% respectively, were satisfied or very satisfied with the way that schools and other services worked together. Whereas only 19.1% of service providers reported they were satisfied to very satisfied with the way that schools and services worked together compared to 44.2% of educators. There was also a significant number of neutral responses, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Participant Satisfaction with Collaboration Efforts between Schools and Other Services

Satisfaction	Educators	PwDs	Caregivers	Service Providers
Very Satisfied	7.7%	0	7.9%	4.8%
Satisfied	36.5%	32.3	29.0%	14.3%
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	28.9%	48.4%	31.6%	32.9%
Dissatisfied	21.2%	6.5%	15.8%	32.1%
Very Dissatisfied	5.8%	12.9%	15.8%	6.0%

## Themes Related to the Collaboration between Schools and Services

### Limited Communication and Information Sharing

Caregivers, educators, and service providers described the need for enhanced communication and information sharing with respect to transition planning.



I would like more communication. I would have loved if there was somebody that could have helped with transition planning - where you could sit down with the children's worker and the adult worker and figure out that crossover.

Caregiver



I find that this is a process that would benefit from a lot more communication. That wouldn't have to involve pinning people down to actually meet or have a conversation which sometimes seems impossible.

Educator



Sometimes they may refer to us. And then in their eyes, they did their job and they're done. So, there isn't much collaboration in some cases when we would really ideally like to be having group meetings, talking about what they've been doing in school, what works, what doesn't work as a team.

**Service Provider**

## Resource Constraints and Personnel Unavailability

Educators and service providers described how limited resources including a lack of time to collaborate, large caseloads, and separate or siloed funding interfered with collaboration. This resulted in the unavailability of key planning partners in the transition process.



We are all doing the best we can with the limited resources available.

**Educator**



Everyone is working at the best they can with what they have to work with. It's not for a lack of ability on the service providers side but again a lack of professionals is creating the lack of being able to be more effectively.

**Service Provider**



We do our best but again, turnover of workers is a problem, and these people aren't always available to attend team meetings. Parents report not knowing who to contact for information.

**Service Provider**



Not enough time/ people/ funding/ supports to make this go well - we're doing the very best with what we have.

**Educator**



## Discussion

Overall, participants reported relatively low rates of satisfaction with the way that schools and services work together to support PwDs in the transition to adulthood. Participants cited multiple barriers to collaboration including a lack of communication, limited information sharing, the absence of key planning partners in transition planning processes, limited resources, and high staff turnover. There is a critical need to strengthen collaboration across sectors and establish accountability mechanisms that span multiple services to reduce service fragmentation and ensure that transition processes are followed, supports are provided, and outcomes are measured. In order to address these issues, there have been repeated calls for a Transition Follow-up System (TFS) to be developed in Manitoba (Park, 2008; Park, 2014). According to Park (2014), a TFS is a data management system that can be used to:

- a. measure students' school outcomes,
- b. identify ways to improve educational and social services and policies,
- c. ensure the accountability of programs and services,
- d. provide an accurate picture of the adult outcomes of PwDs (e.g., employment, residential placement, and community integration), and
- e. examine the effects of a specific intervention or system change (p. 32).

A TFS may improve interagency collaboration by facilitating enhanced communication, improved data sharing, and reduce gaps and duplication during the transition process (Park, 2014). A TFS may also reduce the expectation for caregivers to take on the primary responsibility for service follow-ups, as the TFS would provide a structure to monitor service provision. Shogren and Whittenburg (2020) describe how the use of a data management system like a TFS can support a life course perspective in the transition to adulthood, by merging data across systems and evaluating outcomes at various stages throughout the transition process to provide a more cohesive long-term approach to service delivery.

# SUMMARY

## KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### Interagency Collaboration



### **Limited Communication and Information Sharing, and Accountability for Implementation of *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community***

Caregivers, educators, and service providers reported barriers to collaboration including limited communication and difficulties with information sharing. Large caseloads and staff turnover were described as interfering with the provision of support.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a Transition Follow-up System (TFS) by merging data across systems and evaluating outcomes at various stages throughout the transition process to provide a more cohesive long-term approach to service delivery.

Implement a TFS to improve interagency collaboration, enhance communication, improve data sharing, reduce gaps and duplication, and reduce the reliance on caregivers and PwDs to take on the primary responsibility of service follow-up during the transition process.

Ministries  
involved in  
Human Services

# Domain 7: System-Level Infrastructure

System-level infrastructure underpins the provision of transition supports. According to the QI-2, it encompasses the policy context including the structures and processes through which transition supports are provided, monitored, evaluated, and resourced, as well as the degree to which inclusion is fostered (Morningstar et al., 2016).

In Manitoba, the policy context includes *The Public Schools Amendment Act: Appropriate Educational Programming* (2005) and *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2008), which delineate transition planning practices and their timelines, and outlines the interactive roles and responsibilities of transition planning partners.

The indicators of exemplary transition programs examined under the domain of system-level infrastructure were (a) awareness of *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community* (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2008), and (b) the degree to which students with disabilities are included in the regular classroom for 50% or more of the school day during K-12+. (c) A thematic analysis was also conducted of participants' open-ended survey and interview responses about system level factors that influence the transition to adulthood and the following themes were identified:

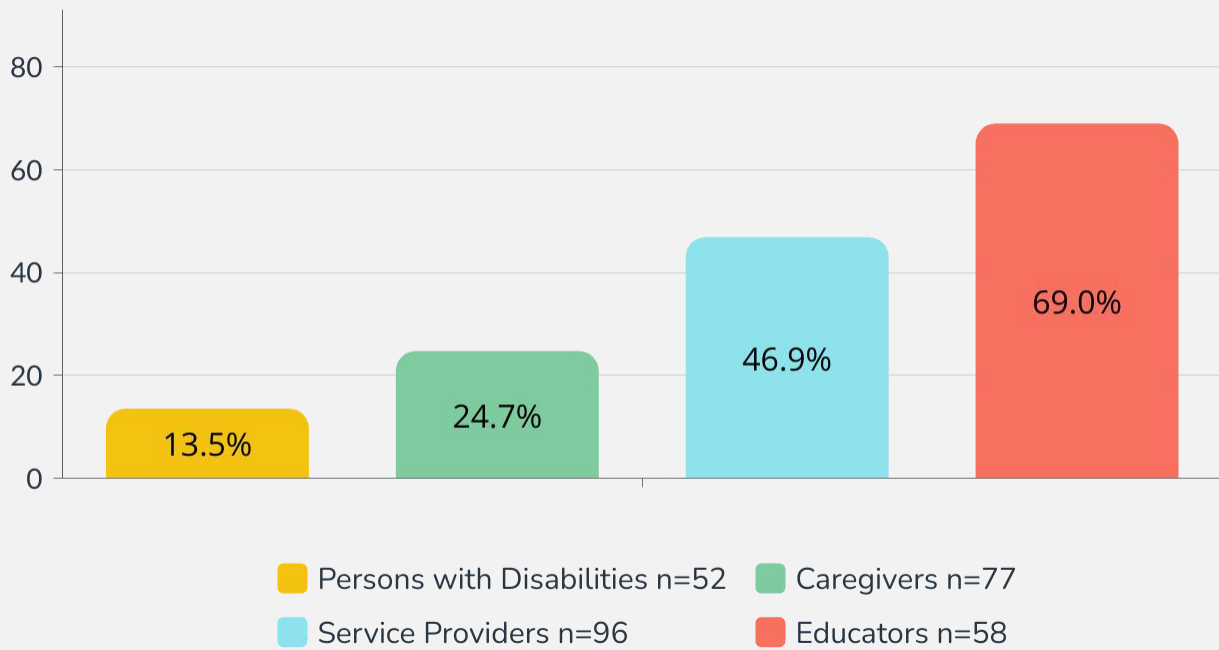
1. Insufficient resources to effectively implement the Bridging to Adulthood Protocol
2. A lack of accountability for adherence to the Bridging to Adulthood Protocol
3. The principal's role in determining inclusion
4. Inflexible transition timelines based on chronological age

## Findings

### Awareness of Protocol

Only 13.5 % of PwDs, 24.7 % of caregivers and 46.9% of service providers indicated they were aware of the protocol. Educators indicated the greatest awareness of the provincial protocol at 69%, illustrated in Figure 12.

**Figure 12: Participant Awareness of Bridging to Adulthood Protocol**



### Inclusion in K-12+

54.2% of both PwDs and educators reported that they or students with disabilities are included in the regular classroom for 50% or more of the school day. While slightly fewer caregivers at 48.9% reported that their adult age children spent 50% or more of the school day in a regular classroom. See Table 7.

**Table 7: Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in K-12+ for 50% or More of the School Day**

Placement	PwDs (n=59)	Caregiver (n=90)	Educator (n=59)
Regular Classroom	54.2%	48.9%	54.2%
Special Classroom	30.5%	42.2%	30.5%
Alternative Program	6.8%	2.2%	3.4%
Other	8.5%	6.6%	11.9%

## Themes Related to System Level Infrastructure

### Insufficient Resources to Effectively Implement the Bridging to Adulthood Protocol

Educators and service providers also indicated that there were insufficient resources to support adherence to many of the transition processes outlined in the protocol, particularly for students between the 18-21 age range.

“

There are some components that the school has no control over that are inadequately funded and make the transition plan protocol difficult to implement. (e.g., Lack of day program options, social workers/ CLdS with such large caseloads.)

**Educator**

“

Implementing the protocol within the prescribed time frames is difficult due to the lack of resources (professionals and time).

**Service Provider**

“

Technically, we are not responsible for transitioning kids to their programing. It's not part of our budget, but it's in that document. But give us the money to do it right. If they don't want to pay for transportation for these kids to this program... And then they say, well, get the parents to drive but they are working... So, some of this stuff is like, if this is what you want us to do, then give us the money to do it properly. It's all laid out and it sounds good on paper, but in reality, right? How do you make that happen?

**Educator**

## A Lack of Accountability for Adherence to the Bridging to Adulthood Protocol

Educators and service providers described inconsistent implementation of the protocol and a need for greater accountability for following it.

“

There is no regulating how the protocol is applied.

**Service Provider**

“

The protocol itself is good, not always applied consistently or adhered to consistently.

**Service Provider**

“

I think [the Protocol] it's absolutely needed, as far as how well it's being implemented in our system? I think that's one of the reasons why we're linking it to our grad plan just as those checks and balances for accountability. I think it is the least effective when we have kids who are transient across school divisions. And I think that's when some of the pieces around things that are required for the kids. I think that's where it gets lost sometimes.

**Educator**

“

In some cases, the protocol is followed quite closely; in others, not at all.

**Educator**

## The Principal's Role in Determining Inclusion

Educators and caregivers also described the key role that the school principal plays in determining the extent to which students with disabilities are included, which was reported to contribute to variability from school to school and division to division.

“

Divisions leave it up to principals on how they want to handle inclusion support in each individual school. So even within the division, you can have a huge range of experiences for your student.

**Educator**

“

The school leadership allowed my child to be siloed with the EAs (adults) and student services teacher and did nothing to hold the other teachers accountable for his learning and social development.

**Caregiver**

“

If you have an admin that's quite against inclusion, a parent will need to pretty much take it all the way to the top to have their kid continue in classes. And in fact, when we went through those four years where no one was allowed to be included in anything, we did have one student that could still go to regular classes. And that's because his parents, you know, really, really, really pushed and went up to like a superintendent and board level to make sure that their kids stayed included. But that's really rare in this school anyway. A lot of parents have lots of stuff on their mind. I find they're just sort of content to not rock the boat.

**Educator**

“

Schools set the stage for inclusive practices that lead into life beyond school. The principal in the school is the lynchpin to making the experience good.

**Caregiver**



## Inflexible Transition Timelines Based on Chronological Age

Educators 'and service providers' described the expectation for students who are eligible for CLdS to remain enrolled in the school system until the age of 21 to receive resources and support, even though they have reached the age of majority, as not always respecting PwDs' personal choice, needs and best interests, and as contributing to students dropping out and "falling through the cracks." The detrimental impacts of conflicting age of majority regulations on youths in care with disabilities were also highlighted by educators.

“

They [students] know that they have an intellectual disability and know that they're different than their peers and they don't understand why they have to stay in high school until they're 21 years old. And that's a really unfortunate situation because what can happen then and has happened a couple of times, they drop out and then we lose them. I don't know what happens to them after three years because, you know, they're in their last year. I highly doubt that their parents call up at 21 and say, hey, now my kid qualifies. It's just, you know, I don't know what they do, to be honest.

**Educator**

“

We have students who just find that coming back to school for whatever reason doesn't fit their ideas, you know feelings around school. I mean I've heard students say they've earned their degree. They're like, well, I'm a graduate now. I want to go to work. I want to do things like my friends . . . and often times the student or the adult is sitting at home waiting for their programs to kick in.

**Educator**

“

There is a need to have support from adult services to support transition plans for students who may be ready to transition earlier than 21. Students are not able to move on as there is no support for them until that time.

**Service Provider**

“

The one that stands out the most egregiously to me is that students in the CFS system are forced to leave their foster home or group home when they turn [18] to go to an adult one. When they move, if the new address isn't in the school catchment area, they have to go to a new school. They are treated as adults in one system (CLdS) and children in another system (education). It is a huge problem, and no one advocates for change because these kids don't have parents to speak up. It's pretty heartbreaking.

**Educator**



Individuals have wanted to graduate with their peers and not come back to school. The school system holds the funding piece for those last two years, I think there's some work to be done in this transition piece and in terms of ownership of it, who owns it, you know.

### Service Provider

## Discussion

A key indicator of exemplary transition practices is the degree which system-level policies and practices support the provision of effective transition support. Given the lack of awareness of the *Bridging to Adulthood* protocol outside of education, its inconsistent implementation, and the lack of accountability for adhering to the transition processes, it is important to examine the policy context in the province of Manitoba and the barriers it may create to the receipt of essential transition supports.

Reliance on a provincial protocol or what Sossin and Smith (2003) refer to as a “soft law” to delineate the details of transition planning processes may be insufficient to ensure adherence to expected processes. The implementation context for transition planning has been further weakened due to the absence of accountability mechanisms to ensure that the procedural criteria in this protocol are followed by all planning partners. To overcome these limitations, a detailed legislative framework that mandates the implementation of exemplary transition practices and includes accountability and oversight over adherence is urgently required. While the *IDEIA* (2004) and the *Workforce, Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA, 2014) are federal laws used in the United States to provide legislative guidance over transition processes, and some aspects may not be applicable in the Canadian context, these frameworks may provide valuable insights regarding how individualized transition planning might be formalized, articulated, and subsequently regulated at the provincial level to ensure that transition processes are implemented as intended.

The system-level infrastructure for transition planning would also be strengthened through the implementation of a TFS, as recommended in Domain 6. The literature is replete with examples of PwDs “falling through the cracks” during the transition to adulthood because they do not receive the supports that they require (Pearson et al., 2020), and a TFS may be a proactive way to minimize this threat. The number of PwDs and caregivers in this study who reported not receiving an ITP, transition assessments, and transition education raises similar concerns about service delivery, and reinforces the need for accountability and oversight that may be achieved through a TFS. Not only would a data-based management system help to determine the efficacy of transition supports by monitoring outcomes, it would also create a means by which to ensure accountability for adherence to transition planning processes across sectors (Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2017).

Another key indicator of exemplary transition programs is inclusion in a regular classroom, as it is a predictor of improved outcomes in employment, further education, and independent living (Mazzotti et al., 2021; Trainor et al., 2020). Only slightly more than half of PwDs and educators, and slightly less than half of caregivers reported that 50% or more of the school day during kindergarten to Grade 12+ was spent in a regular classroom setting. A greater percentage of caregivers reported that their adult child had an intellectual disability and pervasive or extensive support needs, which may account for the higher percentage of caregivers reporting that their adult child was educated in a segregated setting. Such findings that individuals with pervasive and extensive support needs are more likely to be educated in segregated settings is well documented in the literature (Morningstar & Kurth, 2017). However, it is important to note that most of the PwDs in this study reported relatively low and intermittent support needs, yet over a third reported placement outside of the regular classroom for 50% or more of the school day in the K-12+ schooling.

These findings provide critical information about the extent to which PwDs, regardless of support needs, may be placed in segregated educational settings in the province of Manitoba. It also affirms the critique by Bartlett and Freeze (2019) that the educational system in Manitoba reflects what Slee (2011) has referred to as “neo-special education,” where exclusion persists under the guise of inclusionary philosophies.

There is a critical need for Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning to prioritize this issue by identifying the number of segregated educational classrooms and programs for students with disabilities in Manitoba and the number of students in these settings. When this information is brought to public attention, it may encourage government bodies and school divisions to set aspirational targets to increase the inclusivity of Manitoba’s schools. In the province of Ontario, where there is greater transparency regarding the number of students in segregated settings, recent research has revealed its detrimental impacts on access to secondary education, in particular for students from racialized groups, who may be disproportionately placed in these settings, and recommendations to enhance inclusivity in that province have resulted (Parekh & Brown, 2019).

For the transition to adulthood to be enhanced in Manitoba, the provision of an inclusive education must be prioritized, not just in a provincial philosophy statement, but in the form of concrete, systemic change. The province of New Brunswick’s *Policy 322 Inclusive Education* (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013) which has been recognized as one of the top five inclusive education systems in the world, may serve as a model to guide policy and practice reforms in this area. The findings from this research also affirm the urgent need to develop and implement an Accessible Education Standard that requires compliance with the provision of an inclusive education for all.

There is also much variability in Manitoba regarding the age at which support, and services can be accessed. For those eligible for CLdS, day programming supports begin in July of the calendar year that the individual turns age 21, with the expectation that the school system will provide appropriate educational programming

until that time. According to CLdS (2018) they are “committed to ensuring that employment and day service programming is available for individuals graduating from the education system at age 21 and that transition planning is as seamless as possible” (p. 43). However, the findings from this study have revealed that transition planning is not seamless and that inflexible transition timelines based on chronological age may contribute to PwDs not having their needs met by either the child or adult service systems. This prominent theme, along with the compounding impact of Schools of Choice legislation and the need for youths in care with disabilities to change their place of residence after the age of 18, further illustrates the fragmented nature of the system-level infrastructure in Manitoba, and the detrimental, intersectional effects on marginalized groups such as Indigenous youths with disabilities who are in care.

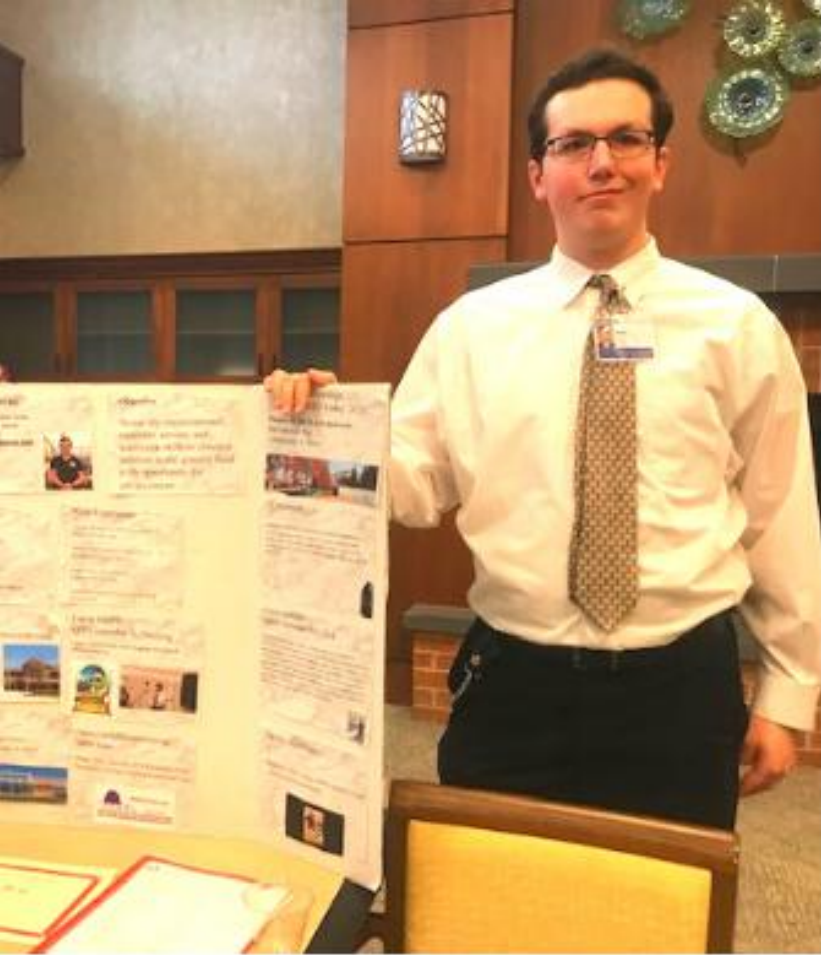
Flexible transition timelines based on developmental readiness, individual and family choice, and personal circumstances are required in the province of Manitoba. A recent position paper from the Canadian Pediatric Society highlighted this issue and described flexible transition timelines as an essential component of person-centred care for youth with complex needs (Toulany et al., 2022). The Canadian Pediatric Society also emphasized that the individualization of transition timelines aligns with the concept of “evolving capacities” outlined in Article 5 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989):

Children in different environments and cultures who are faced with diverse life experiences will acquire competencies at different ages, and their acquisition of competencies will vary according to circumstances. It also allows for the fact that children’s capacities can differ according to the nature of the rights to be exercised. Children, therefore, require varying degrees of protection, participation and opportunity for autonomous decision-making in different contexts and across different areas of decision-making. (Lansdown, 2005, p. xi)

The individualization of transition timelines acknowledges that youths should be active agents in determining their own life course. According to Sawyer et al. (2018), employing flexible transition timelines also aligns with recent research which calls for an expanded definition of adolescence:

An expanded and more inclusive definition of adolescence is essential for developmentally appropriate framing of laws, social policies, and service systems. Rather than age 10-19 years, a definition of 10-24 years corresponds more closely to adolescent growth and popular understandings of this life phase and would facilitate extended investments across a broader range of settings. (Sawyer et al., 2018, p. 223)

Given that the current inflexible timelines that use chronological age to determine eligibility for services are interfering with the receipt of person-centred support, and that they do not align with current understandings of evolving capacities and adolescence, individualized timelines should be adopted.

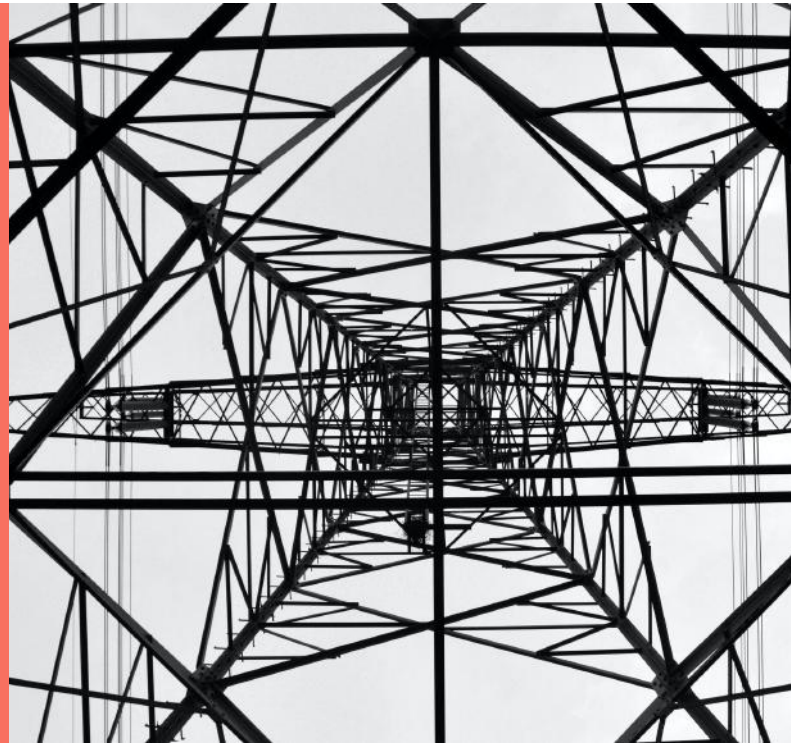


# SUMMARY

## KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### SYSTEM-LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE



### ***Weak Legislative Mandate of *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community****

Many PwDs and caregivers reported limited awareness of the Bridging to Adulthood protocol despite the existence of youth- and parent-friendly versions outlining the phases and key activities, and their roles and responsibilities in the process. Many service providers also reported limited awareness of this protocol and associated practices.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen the legislative mandate of the Bridging to Adulthood protocol from a protocol or “soft law” to a legislative mandate that requires follow through and for which there are accountability mechanisms in place to ensure adherence to mandated ITP processes. This should include immediately enacting an Education Standard as a part of *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* (2013) that requires adherence to transition protocols, and the establishment of accountability mechanisms to ensure adherence.

Incorporate the recommendations from this report in the Bridging to Adulthood protocol.

Ensure regular ongoing cross-disciplinary professional development regarding the transition to adulthood that also includes students and caregivers.

Implement a TFS to ensure accountability for adherence to transition practices and to measure outcomes.



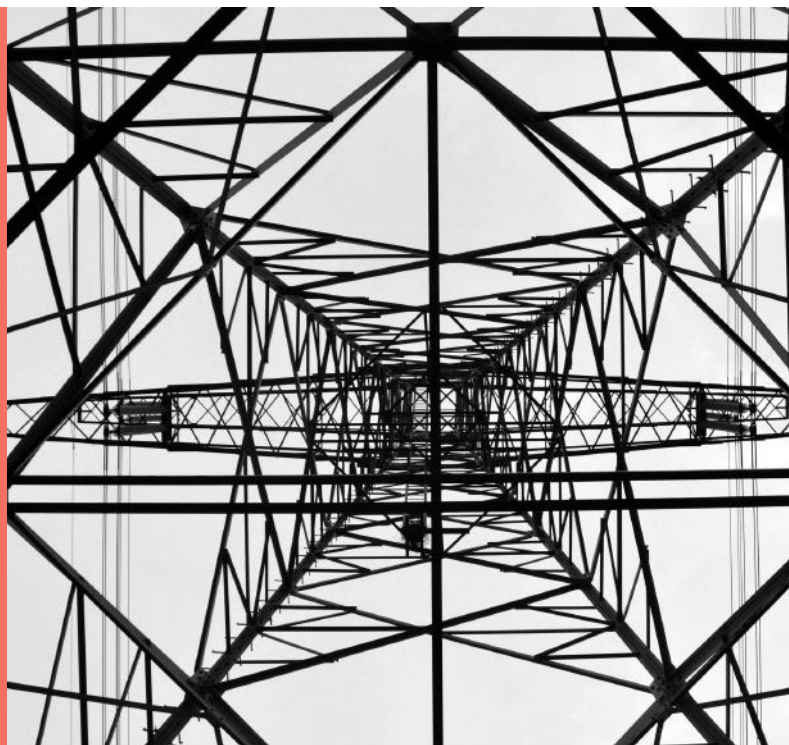
Ministries  
involved in  
Human Services

# SUMMARY

## KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Processes

### SYSTEM-LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE



### **Inflexible Transition Timelines based on Chronological Age**

Many educators and service providers described the need to remain in school until 21 years of age to receive resources and support from agencies such as Community Living disABILITY Services (CLdS) as problematic as it contributes to students dropping out or falling through the cracks. The reported lack of resources for the 18 to 21 years age range in terms of community-based opportunities, educational assistant or job coach support, and transportation was reported to have further exacerbated this issue. Educators also described the adverse implications of this practice on youth in care who may move to new homes when they reach the age of majority, yet still be required to attend school.



# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Conduct a comprehensive policy review and revise policies or practices such as transition timelines based on chronological age and the Schools of Choice Legislation which contravene the provision of person-centred support during the transition to adulthood.

Implement flexible transition timelines for individuals who are eligible for CLdS that is based on developmental readiness, individual and caregiver choice, and personal circumstances as determined through the ITP process.

Ensure access to resources and supports so that individualized goals may be addressed with a focus on the 18 to 21 years age range, such as lower student-teacher ratios, access to educational assistants and job coaches, and transportation.

Ministries  
involved in  
Human Services

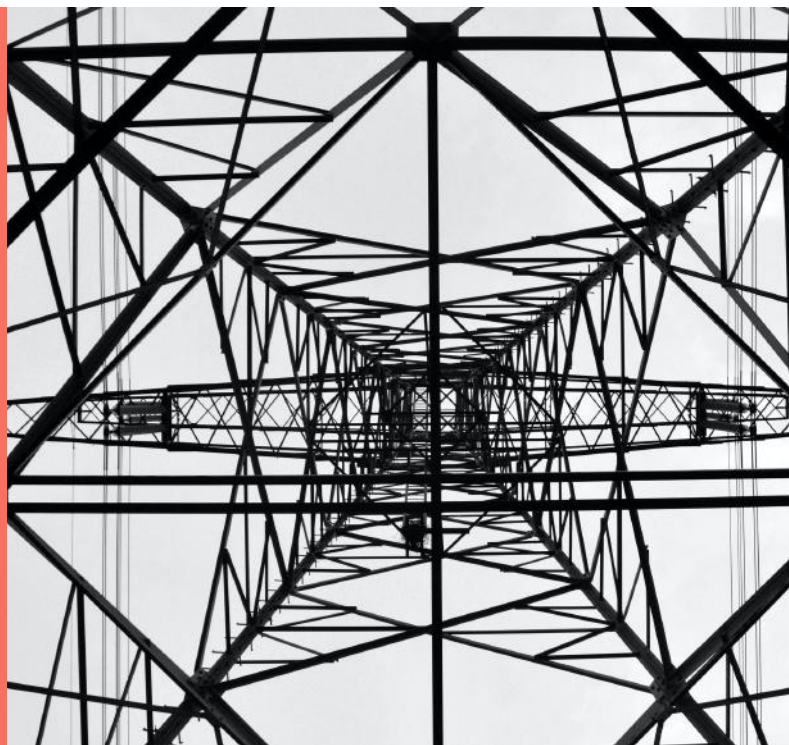
Manitoba  
Education  
Department of  
Families

# SUMMARY

## KEY FINDINGS

### Transition Processes

#### SYSTEM-LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE



#### **Variable Degrees of Inclusion in K-12+**

Almost half of the PwDs and caregivers indicated that they or their adult children spent 50% or more of the school day outside of the regular classroom during their K-12+ schooling. Educators reported that a similar percentage of students with disabilities were typically in placements outside of the regular classroom for 50% or more of the school day.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Determine the extent to which segregated educational classrooms and schools exist within Manitoba, and the number of students who are enrolled in these settings.

Publicly report the number of segregated educational classrooms and programs for students with disabilities.

Determine the number of students with disabilities who have shortened school days, such as bus pick-up before the end of the school day and/or arrival after the start of the school day, and the rationale for reducing the length of the school day.

Set targets to increase inclusivity and equity in Manitoba's schools and monitor progress toward achievement of targets.

Immediately develop and implement an Accessible Education Standard.

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School  
Divisions

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Provincial  
Government

## Summary of Transition Processes in K-12+

The examination of transition processes and supports during the K-12+ school years in the province of Manitoba revealed gaps and inconsistencies in all seven overarching domains of the QI-2. While areas of strength were also identified within these domains, there remains much opportunity for growth. While these domains of exemplary transition planning were applied only in an exploratory manner and adapted for the Manitoba context, the QI-2 provided an analytical framework to assess adherence to the core tenets of exemplary transition planning and identify recommendations for strategic improvements. The next section discusses the barriers experienced by PwDs during post-school transition.

The complex nature of transition planning, including the intersection of multiple systems, policies, agencies, service providers, and employers, each with their respective mandates, funding structures, eligibility criteria, and models of professional practice often create barriers to the receipt of appropriate, person-centred support for PwDs during post-school transition (Pearson et al., 2020). To examine the experiences of PwDs during the post-school transition and the gaps that exist, all participant groups were asked to identify the barriers experienced by PwDs in the following areas:

- a. Accessing Services
- b. Further Education and Training
- c. Employment
- d. Independent Living

Closed-ended survey questions invited participants to identify whether they or PwDs experience barriers in the aforementioned areas, and then in a “check all that apply” question they were asked to identify the type of barriers faced. In open-ended survey responses and interviews if participants indicated that PwDs face barriers, they were asked to provide an example of the barrier.

## Most Pervasive Barriers Reported by Participant Group

Of the barriers experienced by PwDs that were examined, barriers to employment were most frequently cited by educators at 97.8%, followed by service providers at 92%, and PwDs at 81.4%, while caregivers most frequently identified barriers to independent living at 88.5%. The fact that almost all the educators indicated that PwDs experienced barriers to employment in the post-school period highlights the significance of this issue. Interestingly, despite a relatively high percentage of PwDs in this study attending some form of post-secondary education, which is a predictor of future employment (Mazotti et al., 2021), they also reported experiencing barriers to equity in labour market participation, which may indicate that post-secondary education may be insufficient in ameliorating the barriers PwDs face in this area.

Caregivers' overwhelming concern over barriers to independent living should also be highlighted, as it affirms the findings of a survey conducted by Manitoba Housing (n.d.) during the summer of 2021, which found that the availability of safe and affordable housing for vulnerable groups including PwDs was a critical need that required redress, particularly in rural areas. Barriers to accessing services and further education were also reported by many participants, with educators and service providers more often identifying challenges in these areas as compared to PwDs and caregivers. See Table 8 for a summary of the percentage of participants that reported PwDs experience barriers in the areas assessed and the most frequently cited barrier in the check all that apply question.

Table 8: Barriers Experienced by PwDs During the Post School Transition

Area	PwDs	Caregivers	Educators	Service Providers
Accessing Services	65.3% Service navigation	51.9% Service navigation	87.2% Insufficient funding	88.3% Insufficient funding
Education and Training	66.8% Insufficient training for staff in accommodations	70.5% Insufficient training for staff in accommodations	76.1% Rigid entrance criteria	74.3% Insufficient funding for access to support
Employment	81.4% Inadequate education/training to obtain desired job	75.3% Inadequate education/training to obtain desired job	97.8% Insufficient funding to access support in workplace	92.0% Only able to obtain low paying/ minimum wage jobs
Independent Living	28.3%* Lack of safe, affordable housing, Insufficient income, Policy programmatic	88.5% Lack of safe, affordable housing	78.7% Lack of available safe, affordable housing	85.1% Lack of safe, affordable housing

\*PwDs were asked if they had the living arrangements that they desired and most indicated they were satisfied with their living arrangement. However, 28.3% reported they were unsatisfied and subsequently identified the barriers they faced. In the check all that apply question, lack of safe, affordable housing, insufficient income, and policy programmatic barriers were reported equally.

# Barriers to Accessing Services

Open-ended survey responses and interview data about the barriers to accessing services are summarized thematically below and they include:

- 1. Service navigation
- 2. The need for parent advocacy to access support
- 3. Rigid eligibility criteria which precluded access to needed support
- 4. A marked decline in support during post-school transition
- 5. Challenges with the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS)
- 6. Inadequate access to person-centred programming
- 7. Insufficient availability of trained staff to provide support
- 8. A lack of support for Indigenous young adults with disabilities

## Service Navigation

All participant groups described service navigation as highly complex because of multiple points of entry, siloed systems, and a lack of information sharing and communication among service providers, and with PwDs and caregivers.



Families are given the run around (call this person - that person says to call the other person), waiting unnecessarily long time to receive funding like [name of an agency], navigating a system that isn't user-friendly, hard time locating the necessary information.

**Educator**



I would say, when she [child] was in a [name of agency], there were always things that I needed that I never knew were available to me. It was until it was too late: it's sort of like they don't want to tell you. What I would like right now is to know what my daughter could be using in terms of services and respite. But I don't know if that's just because she's so far down the (SIS) scale for her level of funding or if that's just the way they are - they just prefer not to tell you

**Caregiver**

“

Navigating the systems to obtain my medical supplies is a nightmare! My case manager [name of manager] no longer [connects] with [name of agency]. I'm responsible for obtaining all doctor's letters for supplies/ formula and getting it to [name of agency] case manager. Items are still disallowed, or quantities lowered. There's a different department that randomly takes previously approved supplies and deletes them from my "file". I'm told that supplies I've used for years were never given to me. It's so frustrating. I can't speak because of my trache, so the emails just go round and round until I give up and my parents buy it out of pocket. They shouldn't have to do that. I have not met a single one of my case managers nor do they know the extent of my medical needs. There is no flow chart or contact list of appropriate staff to contact when you have a problem, so I often get passed back and forth between departments/ programs. The turnover in staff is high so there's little if any continuity (no detailed explanations in my file for the next person). I'm tired of being a number, a name on a list. I'm fully capable, yet everything is a struggle because the systems are filled with red tape and not easily navigated. Communication through a letter with only a phone number to reply to is a huge barrier for me.

PwD

“

Many families have a hard time navigating the system - there are so many different services and service providers for different things. I often hear from families, "oh, the [name of agency] worker is different than the [name of agency] worker? I don't know who either of my workers are..." It is not made clear. Services are very disjointed and as soon as a child turns 18 there are so many moving pieces for families to navigate – [List of agencies].

**Service Provider**

## The Need for Parent Advocacy

Caregivers, educators, and service providers described that parent advocacy was needed to access services, which put undue pressure on caregivers to try to obtain the services required. In the absence of parent advocacy, it was noted that individuals might not receive the support they require, which served to disadvantage certain groups.



“

I think for what I've seen, parents with children, with disabilities, it's always an uphill battle trying to get support. And I know there are lots of cases where what they're requesting, whether it's an assessment or a therapy service, whatever it may be, are extremely needed and a lot of the time after enough advocacy, they can get that. But then it's concerning to think about the cases where the parents or guardians don't have the time or energy to do all of that because it's tough. It's very time consuming, very emotionally draining. So, there are probably a lot of times where young people don't get the supports that they need because they're not easy to access. You have to fight for them.

**Service Provider**

“

It's especially challenging for - I have some parents who themselves have intellectual disabilities, some parents who themselves are, you know, living with issues of poverty or are learning English as a second language and don't necessarily have the skills or the resources to advocate strongly.

**Educator**

“

It is not streamlined with a single contact. It is a very scattered process and again, I don't know how caregivers without contacts and advocacy skills get it done.

**Caregiver**

## Rigid Eligibility Criteria

All participant groups described how rigid eligibility criteria significantly restricted access to needed supports and services in adulthood, particularly for individuals who have complex profiles and may not meet the eligibility criteria of CLdS, such as individuals with mental health conditions, FASD, ASD, learning disabilities, etc., which also contributed to increased reliance on support from caregivers.

“

Said my IQ was too high for most supports after high school, but I cannot get a job or live alone without some help, and I want to do both those things. My parents aren't going to be able to take care of me forever.

**PwD**

“

Someone with an IQ of 76 with additional diagnosis like FASD or ASD that only qualifies for EAPD. Diagnosis being out of date which is ridiculous for pervasive disorders like ASD or FASD. It doesn't go away!!!

**Educator**

“

My son was diagnosed as an adult, and in addition to ASD he has a serious physical health issue (rheumatoid arthritis). We also have a son with severe profound autism. That son has a much higher quality of life because of all the supports and services he has. Our “high-functioning” son is left out in the cold. We have been making calls, talking to doctors, and can't seem to find services to help him.

Caregiver

“

I have seen many youths aging out of CFS care who are not able to take care of themselves but are told their IQ is too high to qualify for CLdS. These youth then end up in the justice system, shelters, and addiction services because they are not able to properly take care of themselves.

Service Provider

## Decline in Support during Post-School Transition

All participant groups emphasized that there was a marked decline in the availability of services and supports for adults with disabilities in Manitoba post-school, especially those related to clinical and therapeutic measures.

“

We are not pleased at all that after receiving physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy from age two until graduation, that at age 21, the system is that therapists from an outside agency – [name of agency] - meet with the high school therapists to find out the child's current therapies, then go to the day program and train staff there, and then, once that's done, they close the file with no therapies being given, tweaked or changed until staff at the day program, who are not trained in knowing about what signs to look for, determine the files need to be re-opened.

Caregiver

“

I think for youth with complex health conditions, no one really prepares you for how different adult healthcare is. In Pediatrics, I had 24/7 access to a doctor, a whole team of allied health professionals for free, and plenty of program-based resources. Plus, my physicians were very patient-centred and supportive. I have found adult care to be a complete 180, it's like "you're on your own - fend for yourself!" and with little wrap around support... It's very challenging to have my mental and physical health needs met and have to do incredible amounts of self-advocacy to get the care I need.

PwD

“

The problem is that parents believe their children are going to get continued services after they graduate, and nothing could be further from the truth. It was only when during a meeting with [name of agency] that we discovered this service was merely transitional and quite frankly they want to finish it and get out of the picture ASAP. It's only because of our strenuous objections that she hasn't been cut off from all services sooner.

**Caregiver**

“

Families are expected to take on the case management role for their youth beyond graduation.

**Educator**

“

This looks like it almost wasn't a transition, it was just a cut off. And so, it's starting over again with CLdS, to a large degree.

**Caregiver**

## Challenges with the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS)

All participant groups identified challenges with the SIS, which included the nature of the questions, its perceived subjectivity, and the inadequacy of supports provided because of the assessment.

“

Based on the assessment [Supports Intensity Scale], her level is so low for funding she doesn't qualify for any programs. It is inaccurate for her needs.

**Caregiver**

“

Scale testing puts me more capable than I am. Services held back because of the testing. I need more support than CLdS was going to give. Family was able to find a placement that would give me the support I needed and still my independence. CLdS only funded what Income Assistance would give, plus some support hours.

**PwD**

“

This can be a heart wrenching and skills deficit approach. It highlights all of the things a student can't do. Many times, the teams (especially the families) leave feeling distraught and saddened. It is long and emotionally tough.

**Educator**

“

There are several reasons: the language used in phrasing the questions, tendency to not mention challenges or support needs by families because of the need to present the best features of their loved one, because it reduces students/ clients to a number, because it is focused on fiscal constraint, not on quality of services needed, and so much more.

**Service Provider**

“

Depending on who attends the Assessment and is able to accurately articulate and capture the needs of the individual can be crucial for the level of support that the individual receives.

**Service Provider**

“

What I found was the SIS assessment: it was done in the school, which was good, but the resource teacher again, you know, if I had said for a certain level that my child couldn't do it then the resource teacher would say, oh no, she can do that, I see her do that here all the time. So, it kind of undermined what I said. I think that was the reason that her level is so low. I found that it was extremely long, extremely tiring. I think at some point you just wanted it to be done and I think my husband felt this as well. Sometimes you felt like you couldn't understand the question anymore. Sometimes it felt like the same way a dozen of times. And sometimes you'd have to question what they were actually asking.

**Caregiver**

“

My personal opinion is that the supports intensity scale focuses quite heavily on medical and severe behavioural needs, it does not always focus or has a bit of a gap for individuals on the autism spectrum who may have may have less behavioural needs but have intensive black and white thinking and stuff and in ways like that, so it's not always - I didn't use it as a gauge.

**Service Provider**

## Inadequate Access to Person-Centred Programming

All participant groups described challenges with the availability of appropriate supports within the adult service system for PwDs who were deemed to be eligible for CLdS. These included limited and inaccessible day programs, day programs with long waitlists or no waitlists at all, and a lack of choice in selecting the most appropriate programming based on the PwDs' profile of strengths, interests, and needs.

“

Wanting to get into a program but not able to because of funding. Also, a day program I would like to go to is full and there are no wait lists.

**PwD**

“

Most of my students require really specific person-centred supports. Yet they are required to align with an existing program.

**Educator**

“

There are only 2 options, and you only get into one or the other . . . it's very upsetting to only qualify for one or the other and within that next "path" you don't have many options either . . .

**Caregiver**

“

Well, it could be strengthened by empowering the transition planning team to be able to look beyond just where the vacancies are and truly create an individual plan for this individual that will lead to a successful and meaningful place in his community and whether that's employment or whether that's not an option for somebody that it's volunteering or whatever. And you know, that probably comes down to money.

**Service Provider**

“

Workers aren't aware of what people's strengths and needs are, but I think they are most aware of what their needs are. And so, the priority becomes to match them with the program somewhere that will meet those needs instead of thinking about how can we look at their strengths and abilities and find a place where those strengths and abilities can be enhanced and develop so that the opportunity for that person is much greater than it is.

**Service Provider**

## Insufficient Availability of Trained Staff to Provide Support

Staffing shortages, large caseloads, high staff turnover, and low wages for direct support providers were identified by all participant groups as key factors limiting access to direct support workers, respite workers, and other support staff. This lack of support not only negatively impacted the youths and adults being supported, but also their caregivers and families, resulting in undue stress and anxiety, and was exacerbated in rural areas.



Finding a good respite support worker at the low pay is a challenge and even when we pay extra, the good ones find other jobs because I have limited budgets.

**PwD**



The lack of consistent staffing in group homes, and direct support workers creates more insecurity . . . I wish support staff for adults with disabilities were paid better so they could retain staff.

**Educator**



One of the challenges is - it's not even a living wage (referring to the pay for direct services workers and how this leads to their high turnover). There's a lot of them that, you know, maybe you wouldn't hire, but you've got to hire somebody. And second, a lot of them, there in transit. They don't stay around for long. They quit and go find something else, you know better.

**Caregiver**



Staffing crisis in a rural area means individuals may need to be part of a collective as opposed to individualized supports.

**Service Provider**



The wage for direct support workers needs to be better. We need our staff to be accessible and to continue. We need respite care!

**Caregiver**

## A Lack of Support for Indigenous Young Adults with Disabilities

Educators and service providers described how there was limited access to supports for Indigenous young adults with disabilities, including culturally appropriate services, particularly for those living in First Nations Communities.



There is a HUGE lack of services for students who live on First Nations Communities in our area, if they don't move to town before the age of 18 there are NO services for them. This is a huge issue!

**Educator**



The majority of folks we work with are Indigenous, from the north end and are living on a low income. Most the families we work with have a significant distrust of any government system, especially ones that have family services in their name so the opt out of accessing resources and supports.

**Service Provider**



The transition to adulthood is terrible for young Indigenous people with disabilities who are street involved and substance using. The adult system is set up for compliant white individuals who have families to advocate and support them. The adult system is terrible for Indigenous people whose families may be rural or fractured due to colonization and residential schools. [name of agency] appears to view these individuals as a problem and they "discharge" them for non-compliance and they end up in the homeless shelter system.

**Service Provider**

## Discussion

To overcome the barriers to accessing services reported in this study, including challenges with service navigation and the ongoing need for parent advocacy to access support, Doucet et al., (2019) have emphasized the importance of providing service navigators. Service navigators can play a key role in reducing service fragmentation by serving as a primary point of contact, providing timely access to critical information, and advocacy. For Indigenous PwDs and caregivers, the support of a community member or Elder as a service navigator may be particularly effective in establishing trusting relationships and breaking down barriers to accessing supports. The use of service navigators is currently being employed by the Southern Chiefs Organization to assist First Nations Families in navigating the Child and Family Services (CFS) system (Southern Chiefs Organization, n.d.).

Moreover, the province of British Columbia provides service navigators to support the transition to adulthood for individuals between the ages of 16 and 24, who have developmental disabilities, ASD, FASD, or who require significant support with daily living tasks. In this instance, service navigators are employed through the Ministry of Children and Family Development as a part of a cross-ministry initiative that supports the development of person-centred transition plans and facilitates connections to organizations and services during the transition process. A secure online platform called *Collaborate* has also been developed to facilitate information sharing and co-planning for individuals, caregivers, service navigators, and other natural supports involved in the transition process (Community Living British Columbia, n.d.). The service navigation model in British Columbia may serve as an example for how the provision of this support might be established in Manitoba.

All participant groups emphasized that the rigid eligibility criteria, including IQ and Adaptive Functioning, precluded many individuals with significant needs from receiving CLdS support in adulthood, which meant they were denied essential supports and services. This highlights the need for a significant paradigm shift in how needs are conceptualized and supports delivered in the province of Manitoba, as it is evident that many individuals are being left behind under the current system, contributing to significant social and economic costs. To address this issue, alternative, holistic, person-centred approaches should be explored. The World Health Organization (2001) *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)* provides a comprehensive biopsychosocial framework and common language to understand and identify an individual's abilities, disabilities, and functioning, as well as the contextual factors influencing individual functioning. The *ICF's* focus on contextual factors differs from the American Psychiatric Association's (2013) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.) which is impairment focused, and does not adequately address the influence of contextual variables on individual functioning. While the *ICF* is meant to be applicable to all people, it is primarily used with individuals with chronic conditions and disabilities (van der Veen et al., 2022), and in order to make the tool more manageable for use, *ICF* Core Sets of shorter, more user friendly identifiers of functioning for ASD, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Cerebral Palsy for age-specific groupings have been identified and validated (Bölte et al., 2018; 2019).

The emphasis on determining an individual's functioning as a part of a range of person-centred practices is a progressive approach that may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the strengths and needs of an individual. The *ICF Core Sets* for ASD have been described as enriching "diagnostic decision-making and treatment planning with a broad range of information that considers relevant environmental factors and the specific needs of the individual, for example, in the form of a functioning profile" (Bölte et al., 2019, p. 465). Moreover, there is evidence to indicate that the *ICF* may support more personalized as opposed to diagnosis-based resource allocation (Escorpizo & Stucki, 2013; Escorpizo et al., 2015; Hopfe et al., 2018). The *ICF* also may provide a more flexible alternative when determining the need for support because it acknowledges that individuals with the same diagnosis may have very different levels of functioning (van der Veen et al., 2022).



To enhance the person-centred nature of the *ICF*, van der Veen et al. (2022) suggest integrating a Capabilities Approach (CA) by eliciting input from the individual about their personal functioning and goals. This suggestion reveals the potential to combine the *ICF* and a CA to ensure the planning processes prioritize the strengths, needs, abilities, and personal choices of PwDs in person-centred and rights-based ways.

There is further evidence that the *ICF* can provide a framework for service delivery that enhances collaboration across health, education, and social services sectors. A recent study examining the use of the *ICF* in Poland for children and youths with neurodevelopmental disabilities demonstrated how the *ICF* can be embedded into a service delivery structure, which may include, for example, a child and family needs assessment, team allocation, individualized, integrated, rehabilitation, social and educational interventions, and outcome evaluations (Schariti et al., 2018).

Given the concerns that were raised in this study about the use of SIS as a standardized measure of support needs for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, particularly its deficit focus, dehumanizing questions, and potential for inaccuracies and bias, as well as the troubling way that the results have been used to determine a categorical funding level, the use of the SIS as a means of determining funding levels should be discontinued. Instead, the SIS should be provided as an option to PwDs to support the development of a person-centred plan.

There is recent research that affirms there are shortcomings with the SIS, including difficulties with estimating support needs when referring to activities that may not necessarily be a part of an individual's daily life, procedural inconsistencies, ceiling effects, and measurement problems associated with more significant intellectual disabilities (Arias et al., 2020; Verdugo et al., 2020). It is not surprising that when the SIS was adopted in the province of Alberta, as a means of translating support needs into categorical funding levels, it met with much public opposition, and was subsequently discontinued in 2016. Illustrating the potential for inaccurate assessments, government documents in Alberta in 2014 revealed that of the 118 SIS assessments that had been appealed, 100 or approximately 85% had resulted in the determination of a higher support need (Ibrahim, 2014). In addition to the inaccurate determination of support needs, perhaps the most compelling arguments against the use of the SIS in Alberta were the perspectives of caregivers that were gathered by the Alberta Association of Community Living (2014). Caregivers described how the process of having their loved one equated to a single number reflected deindividualization and dehumanization. Similar concerns were echoed by the participants in this study, and should the SIS continue to be used in this province, even as an optional tool to support person-centred planning, the nature of some of the questions, and the degree to which they infringe upon the personal dignity of PwDs should be closely examined and steps should be taken to ensure that necessary protections are put in place.

Participants' descriptions of the overall decline in services in adulthood, bureaucratic delays in accessing services, and inadequate access to appropriate, person-centred supports, particularly for Indigenous young adults, and those living in rural areas, provide evidence of an under resourced system, a lack of emphasis on service quality, and limited opportunities for informed, personal choices of services and supports. Given these shortcomings, the provincial government should adopt a life course approach and ensure that PwDs receive quality, needs-based, culturally competent supports throughout the lifespan. This will require an acknowledgement that support needs may not decline when a person exits the school system, and may in fact, increase during this critical transition period.

As previously recommended, the implementation of a TFS would provide the infrastructure to monitor the receipt of services and support for PwDs and may help to ensure continuity of care. The implementation of a TFS would also require the establishment of metrics at the individual, service provider, and provincial levels to monitor access to services and measure outcomes.

A recent report, *Quality Framework: Final Report* from Abilities Manitoba (2019) identified *Leading Practice Guidelines* or “best practice for organizations striving for excellence in services and supports to adults labelled with intellectual disabilities”. The *Leading Practice Guidelines* (Abilities Manitoba, n.d.) while sound in principle, should not be optional or suggested, but rather, they should be developed into clearly articulated Standards of Practice that are required by all services supporting PwDs. Such a requirement will also necessitate the provision of dedicated resources so that agencies can adhere to the standards. In addition to establishing standards, the province of Manitoba should also facilitate and incentivize the participation of service providers in the accreditation system established by *The Council on Quality Leadership* to enact system-wide transformative change and ongoing quality improvements to the supports for PwDs.

A centralized public portal that identifies day programs, the services they provide, and real-time waitlists should also be established to monitor access and help to ensure the timely receipt of support. However, access to a portal that identifies day programs, and their availability will have limited impact on the QOL of PwDs and their caregivers if there are insufficient resources dedicated to these services. Therefore, resources are needed to expand day programs so that PwDs are provided with choices with respect to the supports that they receive, which will help to ensure that supports align with, and are responsive to, their person-centred plan. This should include increasing funding for culturally relevant resources for Indigenous PwDs and their caregivers in consultation with Indigenous peoples.

Concerns over high rates of staff turnover among direct service providers and an insufficient supply of trained direct service providers were also critical issues described by the participants in this study. Issues related to chronic staff turnover and shortages must urgently be addressed given the detrimental impact these shortfalls have on PwDs. In a recent study conducted in the United States examining the impact of direct

service provider turnover on PwDs, it was found that regardless of support needs, PwDs who experienced high levels of direct service provider turnover had more visits to the emergency room, more instances of abuse and neglect, and more injuries (Friedman, 2021b). Moreover, high turnover of direct service providers has also been found to have detrimental impacts on PwDs' interpersonal relationships, community participation, and opportunities for personal choice (Friedman & Rizzolo, 2018). The reasons for high turnover of direct support providers are well established and include low pay, lack of training, and limited opportunities for career advancement (Friedman, 2021a; Pettingell et al., 2022).

To address these shortcomings, a comprehensive multi-faceted approach to the recruitment and retention of direct support providers is required. To understand the scope of this issue, the provincial government should require government-funded agencies for PwDs to track and report staff turnover ratios and set targets for improvement.

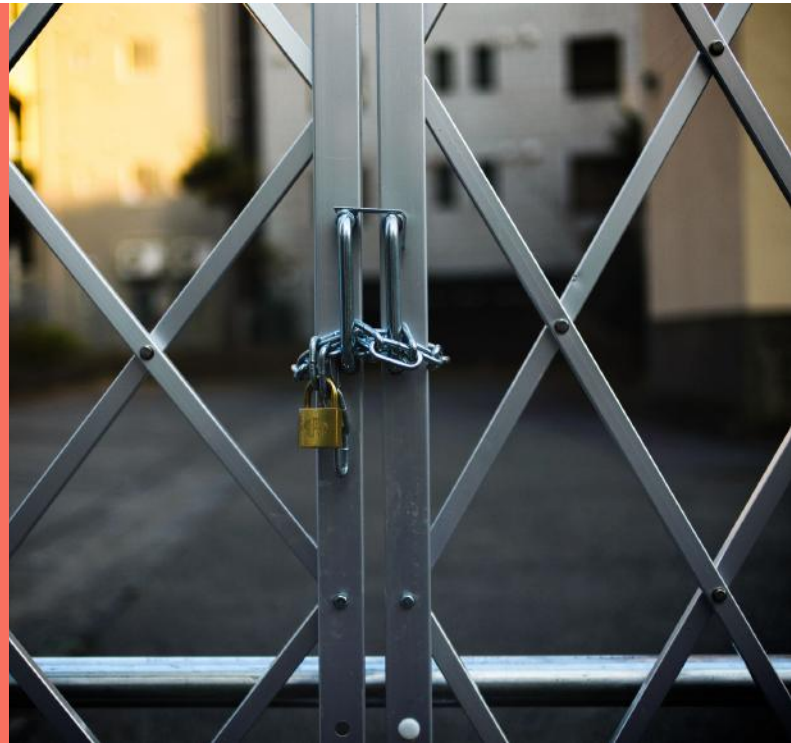
As part of the recommended accreditation process for service providers of PwDs, the provincial government should establish training standards for direct support providers for PwDs to increase the professionalization of the workforce. This should involve establishing a professional learning hub and communities of practice to ensure access to ongoing professional development and training, including e-learning opportunities related to the needs of the population served. Opportunities for professional learning for direct service providers were also described in the *Quality Framework: Final Report from Abilities Manitoba* (2019). However, the critical need for training standards and the professionalization of the workforce should also be prioritized. Given the shortage of respite support, particularly in rural areas, a centralized public portal identifying respite support, the services provided, and waitlists to monitor access to services should also be established.

# SUMMARY

## KEY FINDINGS

### Transition Barriers

## BARRIERS IN ACCESSING SERVICES



### **Service Navigation Difficulties**

The need for caregivers to advocate for support.

### **Rigid Eligibility Criteria**

Precluded many PwDs from accessing needed support.

### **Challenges with the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS)**

Inequities in the administration of the SIS and its use in determining categorical funding.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Create Service Navigator positions or roles to be assigned to young adults with disabilities and their caregivers for a minimum of one year prior to school leaving. This role would support identification and access to supports, services and accommodations according to the post-secondary pathway outlined in the ITP, and serve as a bridge between such young adults and adult service systems.

Provincial  
Government -  
Interdepartmental

Adopt a personalized rather than diagnosis-based resource allocation and reimbursement in all human services that include relevant environmental factors and the specific needs of the individual. The *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* framed within a Capabilities Approach should be explored as it may provide a framework to support this process.

Provincial  
Government  
Department of  
Families

Discontinue usage of the SIS as a method of determining categorical funding, instead providing it as an optional tool to support person-centred planning.

Critically examine and where necessary, take steps to ensure the questions in the SIS uphold the personal dignity of the participant and their caregivers.

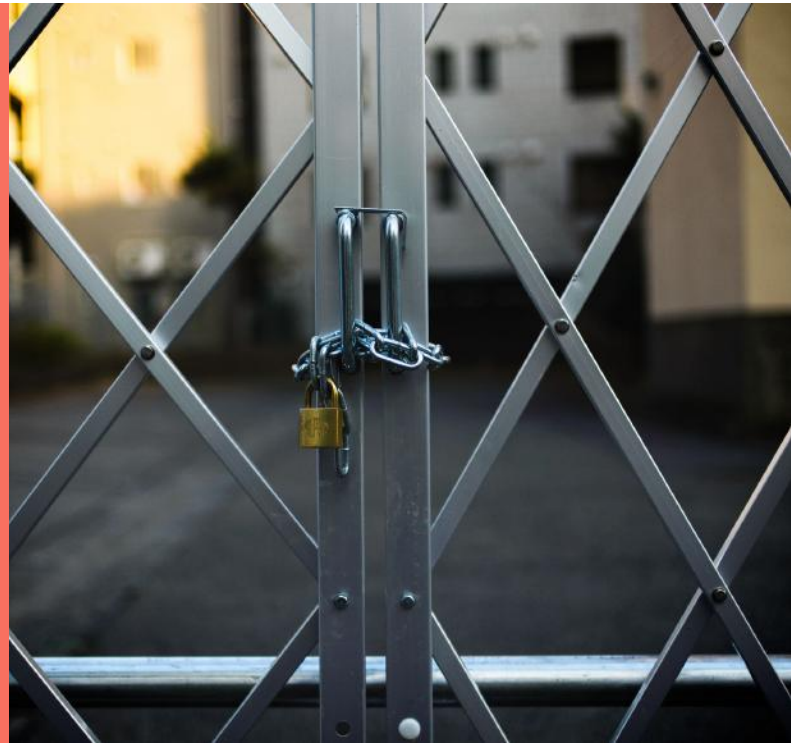
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# SUMMARY

## KEY FINDINGS

### Transition Barriers

#### BARRIERS IN ACCESSING SERVICES



#### **Delays and Inadequacies**

Decline in services in adulthood, bureaucratic delays in accessing services, inadequate access to person-centred support, and a lack of access to support for Indigenous young adults.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide sufficient resources to enable access to quality needs-based supports throughout PwDs' lives, with a focus on culturally relevant supports for Indigenous young adults.

Monitor the receipt of services and support for PwDs and establish metrics for tracking and improving outcomes at the individual, service provider, and provincial levels, with support from a TFS.

Provide sufficient resources to increase access to and choice of quality day programming for PwDs.

Develop *Leading Practice Guidelines* (Abilities Manitoba, n.d.) into standards of practice and provide dedicated resources so that service providers can adhere to the standards.

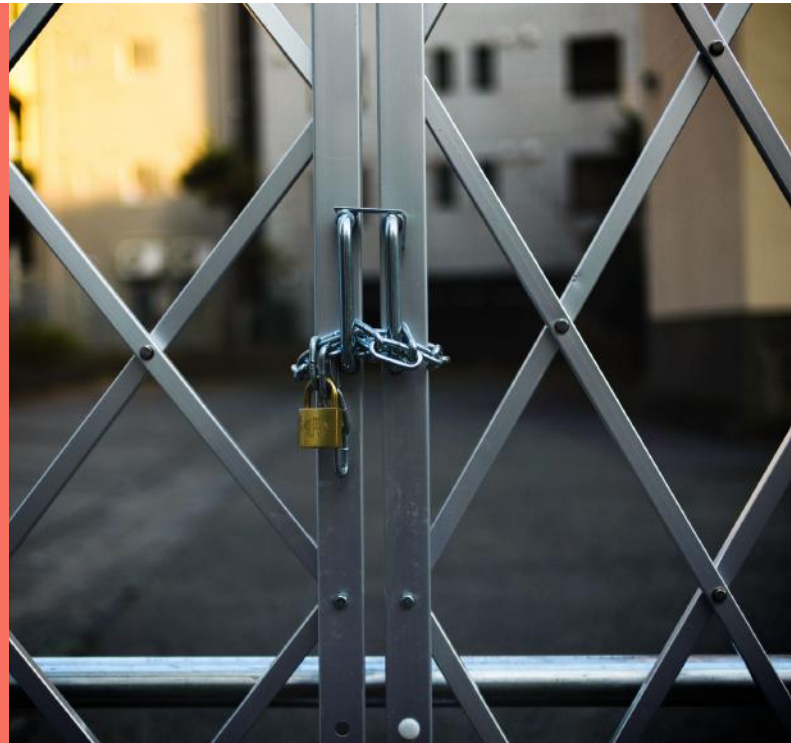
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# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS IN ACCESSING SERVICES



#### **Insufficient Availability of Trained Staff**

High turnover of direct service providers, low wages, and waitlists interfered with access to support.



# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Facilitate and incentivize accreditation for service providers who provide direct support to PwDs through organizations such as the Council on Quality Leadership.

Establish a centralized public portal identifying day programs, the services they provide, and wait lists to monitor access to services and ensure the timely receipt of support.

Require service providers for PwDs track and report staff turnover ratios and to set targets to reduce current rates.

Significantly increase the wages of direct service providers.

Establish provincial training standards as a part of the accreditation process of service providers for PwDs to increase the professionalization of the direct service providers workforce.

Establish a professional learning hub for direct service providers of PwDs and communities of practice, and ensure access to ongoing professional development and training, including learning opportunities related to the needs of PwDs.

Establish a centralized public portal identifying respite support, the services they provide, and wait lists to monitor access to services and ensure the timely receipt of support.

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## Barriers to Further Education or Training

Open-ended survey responses and interview data about the barriers to obtaining post-secondary education and/or training are summarized thematically below and they include:

1. A lack of access to accommodations in post-secondary education/training
2. Limited post-secondary education/training options
3. Restrictive eligibility or entrance criteria
4. Inadequate or inflexible resources or funding for post-secondary education/training
5. Lack of preparation for and consideration of post-secondary options

### A Lack of Access to Accommodations in Post-Secondary Education or Training

PwDs, caregivers and service providers reported inadequate access to accommodations in post-secondary education and training, including a lack of understanding of appropriate educational accommodations within these settings, especially for those with mental health challenges.



Accessibility offerings focused on very rigid things like having longer to take tests or having a note taker. I need help understanding or interpreting what is important so a peer tutor or staff person with knowledge of curriculum and requirements would have been very helpful. Too much going on and it is hard to pick out the priority expectations.

PwD



He has academic strengths and wants to attend university but requires a support system as he has dexterity issues (hyper mobility in fingers causing dislocation or subluxations in fingers with overall/muscle weakness which makes it hard to write and type and take notes, needs help with writing and essay assistance, limited and/or no post-secondary opportunities and support services.

Caregiver

“

She really liked working in schools and elementary schools, and she did a lot of work experience in a classroom. So, a thought was, you know, if she actually wanted a job, she would have to take a course at [name of post-secondary institution]. But I was told that for her to take a course like that, she would need somebody with her to help her. It wouldn't be available, that she wouldn't be allowed to have somebody with her to take the course. So that was about the only post-secondary education that was considered.

**Caregiver**

“

Lack of understanding and accommodation for those with mental health issues leads to incomplete training and education, limiting their ability to qualify for other programming.

**Service Provider**

## Limited Post-Secondary Education/Training Options

Educators and service providers referenced that there were limited options for post-secondary education for PwDs, particularly for persons with intellectual disabilities.

“

There are so few programs available. The one post-secondary at Red River college is no longer an option and there is not a lot of support built into the limited programs available at the universities.

**Educator**

“

There are inclusive adult education opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Alberta has something like 21 sites where people can choose a field of study, be supported in that field of study, and receive the support they need while building natural supports around them so that they have an authentic adult education experience and an employment outcome at the end, which may need to be supported, which may not be full-time, but is a meaningful, authentic experience for people. And they grow from that... And so, I think that that is lacking in Manitoba, that options aren't out there.

**Service Provider**

“

Beyond individualized job support training and the U of M Campus Life, that's about it for further education. The Leisure Guide is pretty good about providing some support but not personal care or transportation or costs, so that's a barrier to even leisure education.

**Educator**

“

I don't think there's enough spots available. We do like put on the table as part of the grad planning to let parents know that there are some opportunities available. But I think there could be some increased partnerships between the provincial school system and post-secondary just to make it a little bit more transparent about what has to happen.

**Educator**

## Restrictive Eligibility or Entrance Criteria

Caregivers, educators, and service providers also describe restrictive eligibility or entrance criteria as limiting access to educational opportunities, especially for persons who have received modified credits.

“

My son has a modified high school diploma and doesn't meet criteria to go to college.

**Caregiver**

“

I've had to dig pretty deep for families and for students that I've felt would benefit from going to [name of post-secondary institution] or to post-secondary education. [name of post-secondary institution] has this [name of program] I believe for students with autism, but it was something that wasn't necessarily easy to find and or easy to get into and involved with. And then even once we were connected to them, it seemed like the criteria were pretty high. My student was considered to be too high needs and did not qualify. So, I would say that is somewhere that could definitely use some improvement.

**Educator**

“

We attended [name of post-secondary institution] to see if he could enter a trade. The requirements for admission were not met by his previous education level, notwithstanding a grade 12 equivalency.

**Educator**



Student who wants to take an ECE course but is not accepted to the post-secondary institution because they do not accept modified credits for entrance.

**Educator**



Many people have their education designated as modified and they are unaware of how that impacts them with further education.

**Service Provider**

## Inadequate or Inflexible Resources or Funding for Post-Secondary Education or Training

Caregivers and service providers referenced challenges with accessing funding for accommodations that were required at post-secondary and described how inflexible funding also limited the choice of educational options for PwDs.



It [post-secondary education] also has to be in an occupation, that there's a demand for employment. So even though a child may want to take an Arts degree, they may say no, because what are you going to do with it? And so, then if it's not a demand occupation like Arts isn't, then they don't receive funding necessarily. So that is kind of pushing individuals into other areas that maybe they don't want to pursue.

**Caregiver**



Accessibility to programs and funding is a problem. People don't know where to go to get support.

**Service Provider**



Unable to get funding for an education assistant in university for a young adult who uses a wheelchair.

**Service Provider**



Inability to access an attendant to assist with their personal care, feeding, getting material/ computer from bag, remove, put on jacket, etc.

**Service Provider**

## Lack of Preparation for and Consideration of Post-Secondary Options

Educators and service providers described post-secondary options not being considered, which limited the choices of PwDs and resulted in low-paying unsatisfying employment, or unemployment upon leaving school.

“

No one speaks to these students about what their options are and what assistance is available.

**Educator**

“

Insufficient training to be successful in post-secondary education.

**Educator**

“

I think if we had been able to talk about a post-secondary option for a young person who graduated 10 years ago and talk about this option, they would have said, that's great. The family would have said that's what we want and that would have happened. And that individual's life might be much different right now, but you could only do - you can only look at the options that are available to him.

**Service Provider**

“

Low expectations starting in middle school therefore continue along a pathway that typically leads to day services as the number one choice.

**Service Provider**

“

Very seldom is an [educational] option provided to students on my caseload; more often suggest day programs.

**Service Provider**

“

People are not encouraging them [PwDs] to consider this route due to stereotypes and assumptions.

**Service Provider**

## Discussion

Participants reported that there were very limited post-secondary options for persons with intellectual disabilities in Manitoba. There is only one program at the University of Manitoba called Campus Life that provides an opportunity for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities to audit university courses. However, enrolment in this award winning program is extremely limited. Students in Campus Life are included in university classes with support from a Campus Life Tutor and the Program Director to facilitate the student's success (University of Manitoba, n.d.). The limited number of inclusive post-secondary options in Manitoba contrasts sharply with the province of Alberta, where 20 inclusive post-secondary options exist for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The province of British Columbia also has Inclusive Post-Secondary Facilitators that are provided by the British Columbia Initiative for Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (BC-IPSE), a not-for-profit organization working with several colleges and universities to support students attending post-secondary (Beschen, 2018).

In addition to inclusive post-secondary university programs, transitional vocational programs are also offered in other jurisdictions in Canada. For example, Mount Royal University is one of four colleges in Alberta that provides transitional vocational programs for individuals with developmental disabilities, including a full-time Employment Preparation Certificate, which supports students to find and maintain competitive employment, and part-time studies in subjects such as Tablets and Smartphones, and courses such as Introduction to Computer Coding, Graphic Design, and the Wonderful World of Music (Mount Royal University, n.d.).

In 2014, Red River College Polytechnic in Manitoba launched a pilot program called *Transforming Futures*, which provided an opportunity for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to explore career options based on their interests and strengths. Students were introduced to college-level studies, as well as personal management, job searching, interviewing and essential workplace skills, and could earn a certificate in Academic and Career Essential Skills (ACES). In phase two of the program, students could choose to leave the program or pursue a college certificate in the Administrative Assistant or Culinary Arts Program (Red River College Polytechnic News, 2016). Regrettably, the pilot program at Red River College Polytechnic was discontinued several years ago and a comparable program has not been offered.

Despite evidence that inclusive post-secondary opportunities are increasing in other jurisdictions (Beschen, 2018), the opposite appears to be true in Manitoba. This is not only concerning from a social justice perspective, but also from an economic standpoint given that individuals with intellectual disabilities with post-secondary educational experience have higher rates of employment, work more hours, earn higher wages, and are employed across a wider range of occupations as compared to those without post-secondary experience (Grigal et al., 2021; Wehman et al., 2018).

The social benefits of inclusion in post-secondary education for PwDs are also significant, and include fostering a sense of belonging and creating opportunities to establish friendships (Xueqin et al., 2018). The province of Manitoba, in collaboration with post-secondary institutions, must prioritize the development, expansion, and improvement of inclusive post-secondary options for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities to remedy these inequities. These objectives should be included in all post-secondary educational institutions' multi-year strategic plans to support equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), and should involve evaluating and reporting on progress in this area.

The barriers to post-secondary education related to the receipt of modified credits also raises several important questions that should be considered. Firstly, are students and caregivers being adequately informed about the implications of receiving modified high school credits on future post-secondary educational options? Secondly, are students who have some learning differences, but who do not have a “significant cognitive disability determined by a specialized assessment” (Manitoba Education and Training, 1995, p. 3) (which is the criteria to receive a modified credit in the province of Manitoba) receiving modified credits when they shouldn't be?

Given the implications of receiving modified high school credits on future post-secondary options, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning should prioritize updating *Towards Inclusion: A Handbook for Modified Course Designation, Senior 1-4* (Manitoba Education and Training, 1995), a support document that explains modified course credits and who may receive them. There should also be common documentation developed by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning that should be used by all school divisions to guide both the decision-making processes involving the use of modified course credits, and student or caregiver consent. Additionally, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning should develop accessible, online information for students and parents about modified credits and the implications of receiving modified credits to create consistency and shared understanding throughout the province. This should involve collaboration between Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, and post-secondary institutions in identifying the programs that may accept modified course credits as a part of their entrance requirements and providing this information in an online user-friendly resource. Post-secondary institutions should also be required to clearly identify whether programs accept modified course credits as a part of their admissions criteria.

There has been progress in the provision of Student Accessibility Services (SAS) for students who are admitted to post-secondary institutions in Manitoba. However, the feedback from some participants in this study revealed that once admitted to a post-secondary program, the attitude and awareness of instructors regarding the duty to accommodate students with disabilities interfered with access to needed accommodations. This finding aligns with a survey completed in Manitoba in 2018, which found that the



attitudinal barriers of instructors prevented some students from receiving educational accommodations (Education Solutions Manitoba et al., 2018). According to McCarron (2020), some post-secondary instructors may be reluctant to provide accommodations for invisible disabilities like learning disabilities because they may, “question the needs for accommodations, and question whether accommodations provide an unfair advantage or compromise course integrity,” and “they may also resent the intrusion on their time, teaching style, and academic freedom” (McCarron, 2020, p. 339). These concerns highlight the need for ongoing training for post-secondary teaching staff regarding the duty to accommodate PwDs, as well as the need for support in employing inclusive pedagogies including universal design for learning (Fleet & Kondrashov, 2019).

It is equally important for students to know how to access accommodations at post-secondary institutions and to self-advocate (Toutain, 2019). This will require increased collaboration between post-secondary institutions and secondary schools to ensure that information is provided to students early on, so that expected processes can be followed, and accommodations can be received in a timely way. It is also critical to ensure that the criteria to access accommodations in post-secondary does not discriminate against those experiencing barriers to post-secondary education (Toutain, 2019).

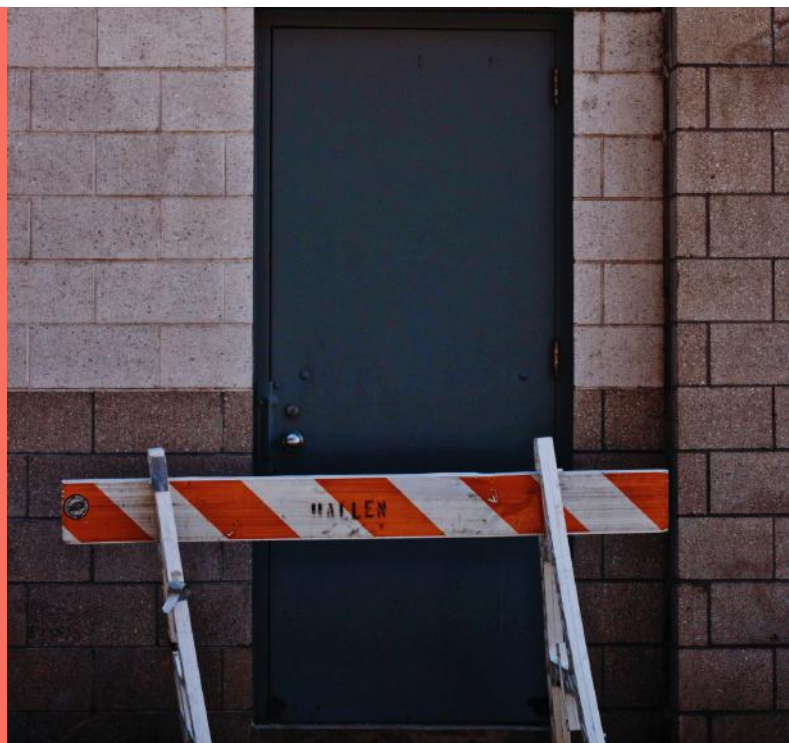
Some participants also described how a lack of funding sometimes precluded PwDs from receiving required accommodations in post-secondary education and how some PwDs were unable to access funding for post-secondary education because their chosen field of study was not deemed to be a ‘demand’ area (e.g., a liberal arts degree). This finding illustrates the need for flexible pools of resources to be made available to allow for individualized accommodations to support PwDs in choosing their own post-secondary educational paths.

Participants also highlighted how post-secondary education was sometimes not considered for PwDs, which contributed to a lack of preparation including not taking prerequisite course work or not being provided with information about post-secondary options. This finding affirms that stereotypes and low expectations for students with disabilities may preclude some PwDs from accessing post-secondary education and/or training (Reid et al., 2018). In the United States, IDEIA (2004) requires that in preparation for the transition to adulthood, all IEPs must include “appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills.” In this regulation, the only optional domain to be addressed in transition planning is independent living. Post-secondary education and training are not defined in this regulation, which enables the planning team to decide what kind of post-secondary education and/or training would be appropriate to explore based on the strengths, needs, and priorities of the individual and caregivers. The key is that post-secondary education and training must be considered in the planning process. Adopting a similar requirement in Manitoba would help to ensure that post-secondary education and training are not prematurely dismissed and that PwDs are afforded equitable opportunities to advance in these areas.

# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS TO FURTHER EDUCATION OR TRAINING



#### **Limited Post-Secondary Options Restrictive Entrance and Eligibility Criteria**

Access to post-secondary education and limited post-secondary options for PwDs were described.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop, expand and improve inclusive post-secondary education and training options at all colleges and universities for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This may include micro-credentialing and badging as ways to acknowledge learning and expertise.

Incorporate inclusive post-secondary education for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in multi-year strategic plans addressing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), and evaluate and report on progress in this area.

Update *Towards Inclusion: A Handbook for Modified Course Designation, Senior 1-4* document and clarify the profile of learners who may receive modified credits. Modified credits involve in-school transition processes but were described as barriers during the post-school period. Provide professional training to educators on how to best support these students as they transition to adulthood.

Develop common documentation to be used by all school divisions to guide the decision-making processes involving the use of modified credits and student or caregiver consent.

Develop accessible online information for students and parents about modified credits and the implications of receiving modified credits.

Identify post-secondary programs that accept modified credits as a part of their entrance requirements and develop an online resource with this information.

Identify alternate options to pursue post-secondary education when the modified course designation has been used, for example, working through the General Educational Development (GED) process, applying as a mature student, micro-credentialing, badging, online learning, etc.

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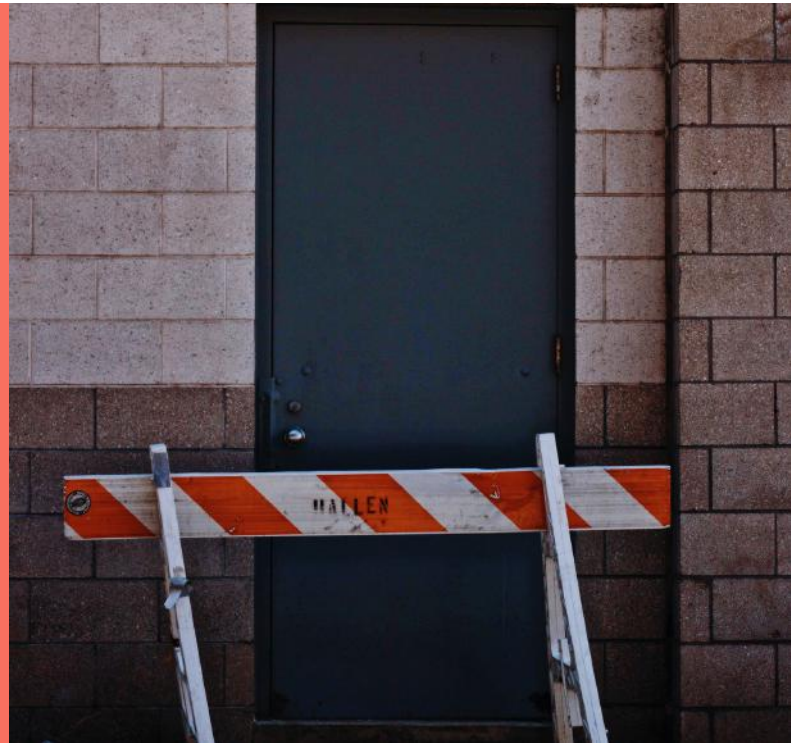
Manitoba  
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# SUMMARY

## KEY FINDINGS

### Transition Barriers

#### BARRIERS TO FURTHER EDUCATION OR TRAINING



**Lack of Access to Accommodations**

**Inadequate or Inflexible Resources to Provide Accommodations**

**Inadequate Preparation For and Consideration of Post-Secondary Education or Training**

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure post-secondary teaching staff and/or faculties are aware of the duty to accommodate and provide inclusive pedagogies including UDL.

Ensure enhanced collaboration between post-secondary institutions and secondary schools so that students with disabilities are aware of accommodations available to them through Student Accessibility Services (SAS) within post-secondary educational settings (colleges, universities and vocational schools) and how to access them prior to and during programming.

Review the eligibility criteria in place to access SAS at post-secondary institutions to ensure services can be provided on a needs-based versus diagnosis-based manner. Reduce reliance on medical diagnoses, certificates and notes.

Ensure that a flexible continuum of resources is available to support individualized accommodation needs in the full range of programs available to students at post-secondary institutions.

Ensure that post-secondary education and training goals are identified and addressed early in the individualized transition planning process and are included in the ITP. This is related to an in-school transition process but emerged as a barrier during the post-school period.

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## Barriers to Employment

Open-ended survey responses and interview data about the barriers to employment are summarized thematically below and they include:

1. Limited access to accommodations in the workplace
2. Employment limited to low-paying or volunteer positions
3. A lack of willingness of employers to hire people with disabilities
4. Claw backs to financial and programmatic supports when employment is obtained
5. Lack of transportation, interfering with the ability to obtain employment

### Limited Access to Accommodations in the Workplace

PwDs and caregivers described limited access to accommodations in the workplace, which precluded PwDs from obtaining and/or maintaining employment.



The reality was when she transitioned to the service provider after high school there was just seemed to be nothing there. It seemed like there was a lot of expectation for me to find employers or contacts for her. And if I did find something, you know, sometimes they would just say that if she couldn't do every aspect of the job, they couldn't even apply. And what I'm finding is that, of course, she can't do every aspect of the job.

Caregiver



Having health conditions means my health is often unreliable. As a result, I sometimes miss work when my conditions are particularly bad. Employers have refused to give me a recommendation for a new job because of these absences and did not work with me to find a schedule that works for me or be flexible, even though it was quite possible in my role.

PwD



Employers not understanding how to modify work or recognize the value of the modified work even when the work my child can do is aligned with many of the bonafide requirements.

Caregiver

## Employment Opportunities Limited to Low-Paying or Volunteer Positions

Caregivers, service providers and PwDs reported that employment opportunities were often limited to entry level, low-paying jobs, or volunteer work.

“

Since diagnosis, has been job seeking through [agency] with no success. Any job opportunities are low paying, do not take advantage of his skills. Any that may take advantage of his skills do not provide accommodations.

**Caregiver**

“

Having my son work as a volunteer (no pay) . . . not giving him enough responsibility (not working to his potential). When a paid job was available, it was barely minimum wage and he was the first to be cut when downsizing, or not paid at all.

**Caregiver**

“

I think one of the barriers is just not getting positions that are as secure as they could be. The promoting doesn't seem to be as quick, and they seem to just have kind of entry level positions from what I've seen.

**Service Provider**

“

I was a part of an adult day program before moving to a group home. The adult day program only provides one workplace option in the community. They would not seek other employment options on my behalf. My parents tried to find other employment I would prefer in the community. I was able to gain a position at [name of company] but they would not pay me it had to be volunteer.

**PwD**

“

Day programs claim to prepare us for work, but we only end up volunteering and are asked for more money from these programs to cover activities. We don't even get anything for the free work we do to cover a day program activity.

**PwD**

## A Lack of Willingness of Employers to Hire People with Disabilities

PwDs, caregivers, and service providers described a lack of willingness on the part of employers to hire people with disabilities after school leaving, often due to a lack of understanding and misperceptions related to those with disabilities, which contributed to a reluctance of PwDs to disclose their disability.

“

I would need help - interviews are terrible for me. I never do well but would be better if they could just see my work. I could be an excellent and loyal worker, but I don't do well being 100% independent, so an employer thinks that is lazy or unmotivated if I don't disclose my disability, but if I do disclose, I likely won't even get the job.

**PwD**

“

Worked in two summer jobs prior to being diagnosed with the disability. This resulted in not being hired back without explanation, and impact on confidence.

**Caregiver**

“

He can "pass" as neurotypical and tries to do so in interviews. This can cause problems later if anxiety brings out the typical ASD adaptations to stress - not asking for clarification, not hearing verbal instructions. He ends up not getting the simple accommodations that would make everyone's life easier because to get the job, he didn't mention the disability.

**Caregiver**

“

The lack of employers who are willing to provide opportunities to people who are vulnerable, particularly opportunities that would involve a worker and working with the person. I believe that that's a barrier oftentimes that they might give a chance to a person who is more self-sufficient. But the fact that they need a worker is discouraging, as though if the person needs a worker, then they're not going to get a lot of work out of this person. So, "it's not worth my time."

**Service Provider**



## Claw backs to Financial and Programmatic Supports when Employment was Obtained

PwDs and service providers described how supports were reduced when paid employment was obtained, which acted as a deterrent to seeking employment. In some cases, the payment of a job coach also was described as reducing the wages of PwDs.

“

A lot of the people I support want to work to have purpose but are also not capable of supporting themselves fully with work alone. In my opinion, there is too much claw back of social assistance to those who do want to work that it prevents them from working.

Service Provider

“

EIA for persons with disabilities earnings exemptions impact their ability to earn enough to support themselves.

Service Provider

“

As long as we need job coaches, and they get paid we can't access pay due to their wages needing to be covered first.

PwD

“

Funding limitations also get in the way of individuals seeking work . . . the more money they make, the more it affects their EIA and other services.

Service Provider

## Lack of Transportation

Caregivers, PwDs, and service providers cited a lack of transportation, as well as inadequate public transportation to and from potential work sites as barriers to accessing employment, especially in rural settings,

“

Transportation! I work full time and have to do daughters' schooling and we all have therapies in evenings, which make it hard to provide transportation, [child] does not qualify for handicap transit as he needs a support person to which we do not have.

**Caregiver**

“

I cannot drive and live in rural Manitoba so impossible to get to work. Moving to the city is an option, but there would be lots of change and I don't cope well with change of routine.

**PwD**

“

No funding for support to allow my son to work. Transportation will not be provided.

**Caregiver**

“

Transportation in the rural area - Persons with disabilities who are unable to drive and live in remote areas with no public transportation [cannot access employment].

**Service Provider**

“

Best job is night shift stocking, but no way to get there safely or too expensive for cab fare.

**Service Provider**

## Discussion

The findings in this study revealed the presence of pervasive systemic barriers to employment for PwDs. While the adoption of the *Accessible Employment Standard* under the *AMA* (2013) is an important step in addressing the barriers faced by PwDs, more needs to be done to ensure equitable and sustainable employment opportunities. *Moving Forward Together: A Canadian Strategy for Disability and Work* (Farquhar et al., 2019) has been developed by the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work, the Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy, Inclusion Newfoundland, and the Ontario Network of Injured Workers' Groups, in consultation with PwDs, disability organizations, labour unions, employers, businesses, service

providers and government representatives from across Canada, including Manitoba, and provides a roadmap to address many of the employment barriers identified in this study. While this strategic framework is Pan-Canadian, it provides flexibility to tailor action plans to address local needs in consultation with PwDs, as well as with community and business partners, and it should be adopted in a comprehensive way in the province of Manitoba to support the provision of inclusive and equitable employment for PwDs (Farquhar et al., 2019).

The Pan-Canadian strategy is underpinned by two guiding pillars which include (1) creating disability confident and inclusive workplaces, and (2) providing comprehensive supports for PwDs. A disability confident and inclusive workplace is one in which “Employers will understand the value of, and be committed to, hiring, managing, accommodating, supporting, and retaining persons with disabilities. And they will be confident in their ability to successfully do so” (Farquhar et al., 2019, p. 3).

An emphasis on fostering disability confident and inclusive workplaces is urgently needed in the province of Manitoba. Participants in this study described employers' unwillingness to hire PwDs and a lack of access to accommodations as significant barriers. Some participants also reported that PwD were denied accommodations, and that PwDs were reluctant to disclose their disabilities out of fear that they might not be hired. This means that PwDs could not and did not receive the accommodations they required, ultimately reducing job satisfaction and job performance. These barriers indicate the need for a comprehensive plan to build the capacity of employers, including the knowledge and skills to be disability confident. Recent research has affirmed the need to focus on the attitudes, practices, and concerns of employers at all phases of the employment cycle in areas such as recruitment, employment selection, social integration, and performance management, as employers play a key role in determining employment opportunities and employment outcomes for PwDs (Bonaccio et al., 2020).

Programs like Ready, Willing and Able ([www.readywillingable.ca](http://www.readywillingable.ca)) developed by the Canadian Association for Community Living and the Autism Alliance of Canada, and Hire for Talent developed by Restigouche Community Business Development Corporation address the demand side of employment, and are already implemented in Manitoba with local partnering agencies. These programs may serve as exemplars and may help to inform part of a more robust approach to building the disability confidence of employers.

In the immediate term, flexible financial supports for employers and employment service providers to facilitate recruitment, onboarding, training, and providing accommodations that can be tailored to meet the needs of PwDs may be beneficial (Tompas, 2022). These may be used in tandem with focused campaigns to increase employer awareness of the supports that are available, as research indicates that employers are often unaware of the supports that may exist for hiring PwDs (Lewis & Dijkema, 2022).

The second pillar of *Moving Forward Together: A Canadian Strategy for Disability and Work*, describes the importance of providing comprehensive supports for PwDs including meaningful employment and an income and benefits “that provide a life with dignity above the poverty line” (Farquhar et al., 2019, p. 3). Participants in this study reported that if PwDs were employed, they often had low-paying, entry level jobs. There were further examples of PwDs engaging in unpaid work and having wages clawed back to support the wages of a job coach, or because of the receipt of government income support. This finding illustrates the need to ensure a stable and reliable living wage for all (Lewis & Dijkema, 2022). Furthermore, all income support programs should embrace a pro-work focus, meaning that employment is prioritized and PwDs are not penalized for obtaining employment (Lewis & Dijkema, 2022). This would involve unbundling supports including income benefits and employment supports and eliminating conflicting eligibility criteria with a focus on improving income and QOL for PwDs. Flexible support that is tailored to the individual needs and circumstance of PwDs is also required and should include portable support that can transition from work to school or school to work when needed (Farquhar et al., 2018, p. 3).

The provision of comprehensive support for PwDs must also address the critical role that access to transportation plays in enabling participation in the workforce and activities of daily life. Participants in this study described how a lack of access to transportation, particularly in rural areas, interfered with the ability of PwDs to obtain work. The implementation of the *Accessible Transportation Standard* of the AMA (2013) may help to address this issue. However, as noted by Barrier Free Manitoba (2019) in their *Response to the Proposed Transportation Standard*, resources are urgently required from the provincial government, particularly for rural areas, to enhance the infrastructure and access transportation to support adherence to the Standard. Other research has also suggested that funding for PwDs to support transportation to and from work is critical in enabling PwDs to obtain and sustain employment (Tompas et al., 2022).

Progress monitoring metrics must also be established and enacted to ensure that disability-confident and inclusive workplaces are developed and comprehensive supports for PwDs are provided. Prior to the implementation of the *Accessible Employment Standard*, Barrier Free Manitoba (2017) affirmed this need by recommending that the province “require employer participation in a measurement and monitoring system that provides the basis for assessing the standard’s impact and the province’s progress toward achieving substantial progress toward achieving a fully accessible labour market” (p. 65). This recommendation is critical and could be expanded to include a comprehensive outcomes framework. *Moving Forward Together: A Canadian Strategy for Disability and Work* identifies a range of qualitative and quantitative data sources that could also be collected in Manitoba to monitor progress in this area (Farquhar et al., 2019, p. 3).



# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT



**A Lack of Willingness of Employers to Hire PwDs**

**Limited Accommodations in the Workplace**

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt and implement *Moving Forward Together: A Canadian Strategy for Disability and Work*, which includes developing disability-inclusive workplaces and providing comprehensive support for PwDs. Tailor action plans to address local needs such as sector, size, and location of businesses in consultation with PwDs, community members and business partners.

Create a resource hub to support employers through the employment cycle, with a focus on building disability inclusive workplaces.

Incentivize the participation of employers in job matching tools such as Jobs Ability AI (<https://jobsability.ca>).

Provide flexible, customizable resources and support for employers and employment service agencies to support recruitment, training, on-boarding, and accommodations throughout the employment cycle.

Increase awareness of incentives for employers as well as the value of diverse and inclusive workplaces and workforces through focused campaigns.

Establish a comprehensive outcomes framework to assess progress and determine the achievement of the Accessible Employment Standard (AES), and the objectives of becoming a disability confident and inclusive workplace and providing comprehensive support to PwDs.

Manitoba Economic  
Development,  
Investment & Trade  
Department of  
Families Business  
Partners

Manitoba  
Economic  
Development,  
Investment &  
Trade

Manitoba  
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Trade

Manitoba  
Economic  
Development,  
Investment &  
Trade

# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT



#### **Limited Employment Opportunities**

#### **Claw Backs to Financial and Programmatic Supports When Employment is Obtained**

#### **Lack of Transportation**



# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide a stable, reliable living wage. Include access to health, dental health, and mental health supports, especially when these are not offered by the employer.

Provincial  
Government  
Manitoba Economic  
Development,  
Investment & Trade  
Business Partners

Ensure that the Employment and Income Assistance Program (EIA) promotes its employment first/ pro-work focus, such that employment is prioritized and PwDs are not penalized through claw backs for being employed.

Unbundle income benefits and employment support. Eliminate conflicting eligibility criteria.

Provide flexible support tailored to the individual needs and circumstance of PwDs.

Provincial  
Government

Provide resources to support the implementation of the Accessible Transportation Standard (ATS), particularly in rural areas, including the expansion of the infrastructure of accessible transportation options that exist in these areas.

Increase transportation support for PwDs to and from work.

Provincial  
Government

## Barriers to Independent Living

Open-ended survey responses and interview data about the barriers to independent living are summarized thematically below and they include:

1. Lack of safe, affordable, and accessible housing
2. The need for crisis classification to access housing
3. Inadequate preparation to live independently
4. Insufficient income to live independently
5. Rigid eligibility criteria for supported independent living and rental requirements

### Lack of Safe, Affordable and Accessible Housing

PwDs, caregivers, and service providers described a lack of safe, affordable, and accessible housing as a barrier to independent living, exacerbated in rural areas.



There isn't enough assisted living, and he has been on the waiting list since he was 18 years old.

**Caregiver**



I wish that there were better housing supports and services for people like himself. Because I mean, I love him. He's my child and I care for him no matter what. But sometimes I feel like he's going to live in my basement forever.

**Caregiver**



Lack of residential resources through CLdS. For those who do not meet CLdS criteria - they may not be able to live alone without support for fear of safety (using knives, leaving stove on, leaving doors unlocked), supports may be needed with activities of daily living (grocery shopping, knowing what foods go in fridge, cleaning etc.) - without this support or training, their safety is in jeopardy. Where do they find adequate housing when their EIA rent budget is \$600? Areas of the city that are not safe.

**Service Provider**



I've been on a waiting list for a barrier free apt. at [name of apartment] for over six years. I can't find anything affordable that's safe, accessible, and large enough to meet my needs. So, I'm in limbo at my parents'. They're awesome, but I'm 25 and would like to have my own place.

**PwD**

“

Unable to receive the funding to live alone with a full-time support worker (therefore I have to live in a group home) unable to live in the town I grew up in, went to school in, and worked in while I was still living with my parents. I had to move into a group home away from my community because there isn't any in my community.

PwD

## The Need for Crisis Classification to Access Housing

Caregivers and service providers reported challenges related to the need to be deemed to be in a crisis before becoming eligible for housing supports.

“

I don't think it should require a crisis on the part of the parent to have someone's need for alternative housing be considered.

Caregiver

“

I think it was a mental health crisis that got my son into consideration for housing.

Caregiver

“

Residential placements are based on whether or not a family is in crisis because there's not enough opportunities so they can only make them available to families that are in crisis. So when a family and an individual with a disability says, I'm ready to go, I want to be launched, I want to live on my own in the community, I want to get a job, I want to do all these things and they can't leave home because there isn't funding to give them the support that they would need to live in the community, which means that the family is limited and can't perhaps secure employment or participate in the community the way the average Canadian family can when their adult sons and daughters leave.

Service Provider

## Inadequate Preparation to Live Independently

Caregivers and service providers recognized inadequate education, training, and preparation to live independently as interfering with independent living success, which was particularly evident for youth aging out of the child welfare system.



In particular, from experience working with individuals that are aging out of CFS care many of these individuals have what appear to be a 'culture shock' transitioning into adult services. Often expecting the same services to be provided that they have been used to (i.e., expectations of staff doing things 'for' and not with), many lacking basic independent living skills that they historically are used to having someone complete for them.

**Service Provider**



Many folks struggle with complex needs resulting in lack of independent living skills and an inability to maintain a residence. This often results in multiple evictions, and inability to create a positive rental history. In turn, keeping them in the same pattern of instability and minimal options for housing. Despite most individuals being eligible for 'rental top ups' to assist with supporting a safe healthy living environment, individuals are unable to utilize this service as they ultimately need a good rental history or references to obtain safe housing.

**Service Provider**



He cannot find work that he can sustain, no budgeting skills, no income with which to budget, distance from me (his only support), inadequate personal management skills to look after his own place.

**Caregiver**

## Insufficient Income to Live Independently

PwDs and caregivers noted that insufficient income to live independently created a major barrier to moving out of the family home.

“

Financial independence is huge! He is unable to work, and EIA does not provide anything close to what is required. In addition, he needs assistance like a caseworker, to help him navigate some systems. Who will help him in the future when we are no longer here to help?

**Service Provider**

“

If my parents die tomorrow, I would have no idea where to go. I cannot take care of the entire house by myself, so I would have to move to an apartment or condo, but I do not make enough money yet to be able to sustain myself regarding rent, groceries, etc... I am stuck at home with my parents, coasting through life without making any advancements towards independent living.

**PwD**

“

The ability to earn a wage she can support herself - As if she can live anywhere safe on Manitoba's pathetic minimum wage.

**Caregiver**

“

I would like to live on my own, but I can't make enough money.

**PwD**

## Rigid Eligibility Criteria for Supported Independent Living and Rental Requirements

Service providers noted that the rigid eligibility criteria for supported independent living, as well as the requirements imposed by rental companies impeded vulnerable populations, including those with disabilities, from living independently.



Individuals who are only receiving EIA and EAPD don't qualify for Supported Independent Living Support.

**Service Provider**



Lack of eligibility for subsidized housing (such as addiction or family size (e.g., Single male), or low income, no guarantor or reference, etc.) [interferes with access to independent living].

**Service Provider**



Individuals that are transitioning from being a youth often do not have a rental history (or a positive one if they lived independently before). Many do not have supports (family or friends) in their lives that are able to sign a guarantor in order to obtain suitable housing. This results in many vulnerable individuals living in unsafe, inadequate housing conditions.

**Service Provider**

## Discussion

The *National Housing Strategy Act* (2019) recognizes that “the right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right affirmed in international law” and further “that housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities” (4a, 4b). Despite the federal government’s recognition of housing as a human right, a lack of access to safe, affordable, and accessible housing for PwDs was a pervasive barrier reported by many participants in this study. Affirming the scope of the housing crisis in Manitoba, in 2020 there were 9049 individuals on the waitlist for subsidized Manitoba Housing, an increase of 2200 people from 2019. During the same period, a further 1770 Manitoba Housing units were reported to be vacant due to issues such as ill-repair (Froese, 2020). To address these housing shortfalls, Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation (2020) has developed a three-year action plan as a part its participation in the 40-billion-dollar National Housing Strategy (NHS). While the action plan generally outlines the province’s objectives to increase and improve access to affordable and accessible housing for those in need, a more robust plan to address the housing crisis is required.

There is a critical need to significantly increase the housing supply through construction, conversion, and repair of accessible, safe, and affordable social housing. This should also include exploring innovative approaches to the provision of social housing such as containers or modular housing. Manitoba's current three-year action plan to modernize the community housing sector involves an aggressive plan to continue to divest social housing to the private sector and transfer the management of social housing to both non-profit and for-profit organizations (Mackinnon, 2020). This plan is concerning because according to MacKinnon (2020), "in the absence of robust subsidies and income support, the private sector has demonstrated an inability to supply safe, well-maintained housing at the affordable threshold of less than 30 per cent of total before-tax household income" (para 7). A further reason for expanding social housing, particularly housing in Manitoba, is that Manitoba Housing receives dedicated funding for social support programs, which include staffing for tenant resource coordinators or tenant service coordinators on site, which may be more difficult for non-profit housing providers to obtain. According to Smirl (2019):

Despite the importance of supporting vulnerable tenants, funding for social support positions is not consistently available for many non-profit housing providers. This means that non-profits must apply for piecemeal funding from the health authorities, or from other organizations, to fund social support staff and programming. (p. 1)

On-site, wraparound supports are invaluable for individuals who face multiple barriers as they facilitate access to services, employment, recreation, and natural and social support networks. A housing approach with health and social supports, including the co-location of services to support targeted service delivery must be prioritized, and at present, these supports are only cursorily referenced as being "explored" in the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation (2020) *Three-Year Action Plan*.

Some participants in this study also reported that PwDs lacked the skills to live independently during the post-school transition. This finding reinforces the need to conduct transition assessments and provide comprehensive transition education as outlined in the ITP. Participants also described that supports to further develop independent living skills were not always provided in the post-school period. Adopting a life course approach and continuing to assess and develop independent living skills during the post-school period, through day programming, as well as education and training opportunities, is also recommended. This must include increased access to supported independent living and supported living resources that are tailored to the individual's profile of strengths, needs, and personal preferences. To provide seamless access to independent living, the application process for supported independent living and supported living should also be streamlined in a centralized application, and housing policies should be integrated across government systems to reduce bureaucratic delays and eliminate competing and contradictory eligibility criteria.

# SUMMARY

## KEY FINDINGS

### Transition Barriers

#### BARRIERS TO INDEPENDENT LIVING



**A Lack of Safe, Affordable, Accessible Housing**

**The Need to be Moved to Crisis to Access Supported Housing**

**Inadequate Preparation to Live Independently**



# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Significantly increase the supply of accessible housing through construction and conversion, with a focus on social housing.

Explore innovative approaches to the provision of social housing such as containers or modular housing.

Repair and renovate vacant housing to reduce waitlists.

Ensure affordability of housing by increasing rent supplements and allowances, and ensuring rent is less than 30% of total before tax household income.

Provincial  
Government  
Manitoba Housing  
and Renewal  
Corporation

Ensure independent living skills are developed and assessed as a part of the ITP process. This relates to an in-school transition process but was identified as a barrier during the post- school period.

Continue to develop and assess independent living skills into adulthood, such as through day programming, and education or training opportunities, aligning with a life course approach.

Ensure ongoing access to supported independent living including assistance to secure housing, develop or recover independent living skills, pay rent, perform budgeting and housekeeping, and mental health, physical health, social, recreation, employment, and peer support.

Ensure ongoing access to supported living resources.

School  
Divisions

Department  
of Families

Provincial  
Government  
Manitoba Housing  
and Renewal  
Corporation  
Department of  
Families

# SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

## Transition Barriers

### BARRIERS TO INDEPENDENT LIVING



**Insufficient Income**

**Rigid Eligibility Criteria for Supported Independent Living**

**Rigid Rental Requirements**

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide stable, reliable, and sufficient income to PwDs to offset the cost of living including rent, accessing nutritious food, transportation costs, and medical and dental expenses outside of those covered by Manitoba Health.

Provincial  
Government

Streamline the application process for supported independent living, supported living and other options that may be available to CLdS clients. This may be accomplished with a centralized application process.

Develop policies in partnership with other government systems so that supported independent living and supported living can be accessed seamlessly without bureaucratic delays and competing and contradictory eligibility criteria.

Provincial  
Government  
Human Services  
Departments

## Barriers due to COVID-19

While specific questions about the COVID-19 pandemic were not posed, given that this research was conducted during the pandemic, its impacts on the post-school transition were referenced in open-ended survey responses and interviews. Participants' descriptions of the barriers due to COVID-19 are summarized thematically below and they include:

1. Reductions in essential supports, in particular, day programs
2. Increased caregiving responsibilities and caregiver strain

### Reductions in Essential Supports

All participant groups described how the lack of access to supports, including the closure of day programs, limited therapeutic supports, and minimal information or communication from service providers contributed to social isolation and regression in abilities.

“

COVID has me out of program for almost 2 years and I've had no supports other than my family for that time.

**PwD**

“

Right now, because of COVID, ridiculously so - I have grads from 2020 who are just getting into their programs and have been at home for this entire time. Most of my 2021 grads are still not in the program, so availability is an issue. But even before COVID, there really were only a handful of options, and it's fairly well known that some programs are a lot stronger than others.

**Educator**

“

I believe there is a shortage of available spaces in day programs for individuals. This was a problem prior to the pandemic, and it is now worse than ever.

**Service Provider**

“

Files [for therapy] will have to be re-opened, and our kid put back on a waiting list, when she finally returns to the day programs, and it is determined that she has lost much of what she had gained during the last almost two years of pandemic.

**Caregiver**

“

We have received ONE email from the government regarding day programs opening this whole time.

Caregiver

## Increased Caregiving Responsibilities and Caregiver Strain

Caregivers emphasized how increased caregiving responsibilities during COVID-19 in many cases involved 24-hour care, particularly when caregivers' adult age children were immunocompromised and/or they felt their child was regressing.

“

I invite you try caring for a person 24 hours a day with no programs, no services, and trying to hold down a full-time job remotely because you have to be at home to care for her. She was very social and misses the stimulation of others and her physical condition is deteriorating without the therapies, equipment, and exercises she did at the two programs she attended. I can only imagine what this does to her emotional and mental health, but she cannot communicate this to us. It breaks my heart - but better to be alive than dead from COVID, all the burden for everything is now on her family 24 hours a day.

Caregiver

“

All day she is under my care and a little bit my husband's. She cannot plan, implement, clean up any activity at all (except 80% of the time to use the washroom). I am responsible for her well-being. All components.

Caregiver



I work part time and have had to reduce my hours further to accommodate caring for our son for which there is no respite or day programming available currently.

Caregiver



Relationship is strained, especially during COVID, due to no options available. So, she is permanently home with no other stimuli. And I am not able to work or do anything without her.

Caregiver

## Discussion

In Manitoba significant gaps in services and supports for PwDs were brought to light during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic surfaced vulnerabilities and fragilities within communities, widening the divide between groups, with vulnerable populations including PwDs being most at risk of being left behind. Given these inequities, the United Nations (2020) has called for a *Disability Inclusive Response to COVID-19*, which prioritizes the perspectives of PwDs in identifying barriers and developing inclusive and strategic improvements to policies and practices that align with the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006). More recently, the *United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2020) identified the pre-conditions for a disability-inclusive COVID-19 response that includes equality and non-discrimination, service delivery, accessibility, participation of PwDs, CRPD-compliant budgeting and financial management, accountability, and governance. This framework could also be applied in Manitoba to assess past practices and to develop a more disability-inclusive response and recovery plan.

During the pandemic, many day programs in Manitoba were closed, and did not begin to re-open to those deemed to be in “critical need” until February 1, 2022 (Manitoba Department of Families, 2022). The prolonged closure of day programs was a key theme in this research that illuminated several pre-pandemic disparities, including a lack of emergency preparedness for the provision of support for PwDs, and a critical shortage of direct support providers. An article from CBC News (Donnelly, 2022) revealed that some direct support providers from day programs had to be reassigned to work in group homes due to chronic staffing shortages, which prevented some day programs from re-opening. The shortage of direct support providers, which existed prior to COVID-19, affirms the urgent need for a strategic approach to increase the supply of this workforce, which should include increasing training, professionalization, and wages, as per recommendations in the *Barriers to Accessing Services* subsection.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on caregivers of PwDs, which included social, emotional, physical, and economic hardships, was also a central theme. Caregivers frequently described high levels of stress and worry about their child's present and future needs, pressure to advocate, financial hardships, and adverse impacts on their employment status as significantly impacting their overall QOL and well-being. A lack of communication, inconsistent messaging, and prolonged delays in communication from government and agencies during the pandemic were also cited as compounding feelings of isolation and uncertainty experienced by both caregivers and their adult children. Similar concerns about communication gaps and caregiver strain during COVID-19 were also found in the *Pandemic and Disabilities Issue Survey Disability Report* (2021) that was conducted by Disability Matters Vote, Abilities Manitoba, and Barrier Free Manitoba.

The needs of caregivers and the complex psychosocial impacts of caregiving for PwDs must be prioritized and addressed in the province of Manitoba. In 2011, Manitoba passed the much-anticipated *Caregiver Recognition Act* (2011). The spirit of this act was to acknowledge the valuable, yet often invisible support provided by caregivers, and to lay the groundwork for a policy framework that would outline concrete actions to enhance support for caregivers. However, a policy framework for *The Caregiver Recognition Act* (2011) has not been developed. Funk and Obedzinski (2019) described how the act has fallen through the cracks and not led to substantive changes in policy or practice through, for example, the provision of caregiver needs assessments or significant financial supports. They state,

Supporting caregivers' economic well-being (another principle of the act) could suggest moving beyond annual caregiver tax credits toward a more substantial monthly caregiver benefit, extending the approach currently adopted in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and provide social and economic supports. (para 10)

*The Caregiver Recognition Act* (2011) holds much potential and a framework to operationalize the intent of the act is long overdue.

# SUMMARY

## KEY FINDINGS

Transition  
Barriers

### IMPACTS OF COVID-19



**Limited Access to Essential Supports, Particularly Day Programs**

**Increased Caregiving Responsibilities**



# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt a Disability Inclusive Response and Recovery Plan to COVID-19 informed by the pre-conditions outlined by the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD).

Ensure continuity of care-giving support for PwDs.

Increase the number and scope of available day programs.

Increase availability of highly trained direct support staff, the professionalism of the workforce and their wages .

Provincial  
Government  
Human Services  
Departments

Provincial  
Government  
Department of  
Families

Develop a policy framework in consultation with caregivers that includes economic and social supports, to support the implementation of *The Caregiver Recognition Act* (2011).

Establish metrics and monitor the impact of the implementation of *The Caregiver Recognition Act* (2011) (MB).

Provincial  
Government  
Human Services  
Departments

Provincial  
Government

# CONCLUSIONS

The insider perspectives of PwDs, caregivers, educators, and service providers about their firsthand experiences with the transition to adulthood provided critical insights about how this process is experienced in the province of Manitoba. Applying the QI-2 as framework for examining reported transition practices in K-12+ schools provided a structured approach to assess the degree to which reported transition practices adhered to the seven overarching domains and selected key indicators of this instrument and allowed for the identification of targeted recommendations in each domain of transition planning.

Overall, participants reported a high degree of variability in transition planning among schools and school divisions. This included inconsistent approaches to determining who should receive an ITP, what it should entail, as well as a lack of timely plan development. There was also a high degree of variability reported regarding the use of transition assessments to determine students' strengths, interests and needs to guide transition planning. If transition assessments were used, they were often employed by clinicians to determine eligibility for services rather than to guide individualized transition planning.

When examining the use of transition-focused curriculum or education, unmet needs were reported in several key areas including, but not limited to, instruction in self-advocacy skills, opportunities for vocational or work experiences, and participation in career development courses. Inconsistent approaches and competing expectations regarding the instruction of independent living skills were also described.

Resource limitations such as a lack of educational assistants or job coaches and transportation were further described as interfering with the provision of appropriate educational programming, including access to community-based opportunities (e.g., work experience, volunteer positions) and as limiting course options for students with disabilities.

Interagency collaboration was characterized as challenging, with some participants describing poor communication and the absence or limited involvement of key service providers in the ITP process. Several aspects of the policy context or system-level infrastructure were also described as interfering with the provision of exemplary transition support. Outside of education, there was limited awareness of the provincial protocol, *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community*, and if there was awareness of this protocol, concerns were raised regarding the degree to which it was being implemented, an absence of accountability for adherence, and limited resources to provide the support that it describes. Inflexible transition timelines determined by chronological age were also described

as impeding the ability to provide person-centred supports, which was exacerbated by limited resources for students between the ages of 18 and 21 years. Moreover, many students with disabilities were not included in regular classrooms, with approximately half of the participants reporting that students with disabilities spent 50% or more of the school day outside of this setting during their kindergarten to grade 12+ years.

Areas of relative strength in transition planning included having access to a case manager in school and student participation or voice in the ITP process when an ITP was in place. Importantly, several examples of person-centred, innovative approaches to transition planning and support were identified, such as PATH, Project SEARCH, Project LIFE, and Remote Job Coach Applications, and examples of ITP processes adhering to the timelines outlined in *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community* were noted. Access to career and community experience teachers or personnel was also an area of strength that was described as enhancing opportunities for community-based experiences for students with disabilities.

Barriers identified during post-school transition included challenges with accessing services such as service navigation, long waitlists, and rigid eligibility criteria. Further education and training issues such as insufficient education or training to meet entrance criteria, limited post-secondary options for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and a lack of access to needed accommodations were also described. Employment concerns such as insufficient education and training to obtain desired employment, employers' unwillingness to hire PwDs, and a lack of accommodations in the workplace were noted. In the area of independent living, a lack of safe and affordable housing, not meeting eligibility criteria to receive needed supports, limited income, and insufficient education and training to live independently were identified as challenges.

Regardless of the transition phase, there is overwhelming evidence of an under-resourced system that is undermining the personal dignity, freedom of choice, and equitable access to support for PwDs and changes are urgently required. Canadian disability activist and scholar Raymond Lemay characterized the experiences of PwDs when interfacing with service systems as having to accept "the least/worst option" (Lemay, 2018). One of the most frequently noted sentiments from the dedicated educators and service providers who participated in this study was that they are doing the best they can with what they have. However, when the best being done involves the least/ worst option, or in some cases no option at all, we can and must do better.

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