

# PROVINCIAL employment equity NOW!

"...to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in the fulfillment of that goal, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences."

- Judge Rosalie Abella, 1986

## WHAT IS EMPLOYMENT EQUITY ?

Employment Equity is a systematic approach to identifying and eradicating barriers to fairness in employment. It has two main components:

1. **Numerical Representation** - comparing the diversity of the workforce in a particular organization with the diversity of the local population and trying to ensure that they are comparable;
2. **Workplace Environment** – evaluating policies and practices to ensure they do not create barriers for particular groups.

### Employment Equity aims to:

- ☑ eliminate employment barriers
- ☑ build more transparent and accountable hiring plans and structures
- ☑ improve access and distribution of opportunities to all groups
- ☑ create a culture of equity and inclusion in the workplace

### The statistics tell the story. Let's take a look:

- ☒ **Almost double the level of unemployment and half the level of income among adults with disabilities** - In 2001, the unemployment rate among adults with disabilities was 10.7%, compared with 5.9% of adults without disabilities. 47% have personal income below \$15,000, compared with 25% of adults without disabilities.
- ☒ **Aboriginal or First Peoples wage gaps not improving** - The median income of First Nations, Inuit & Metis people in 2005 was \$14,517, about \$11,000 lower than the figure for the non-Aboriginal population (\$25,955). This was similar to the gap in 2000.
- ☒ **Employment opportunities ever more colour-coded for people-of-colour** – In 2003, 33% of racialized workers overall and 51% of Black workers experienced racial discrimination. Racialized workers are also most likely to be in low-status jobs. They make up over 40% of workers in the sewing, textile and fabric industries, over 36% of taxi and limo drivers, and 42% of electronics assemblers; yet they make up only 3% of executives, and 1.7% of directors on boards of organizations.
- ☒ **Gender earnings gap persists** - Despite a dramatic 13% increase in the proportion of young women holding a university degree - from 21% to 34% - the earnings gap between young women and men only declined moderately – by 2% from 1991 to 2001.

\* these statistics are available through Statistics Canada at [www.statcan.gc.ca](http://www.statcan.gc.ca)

### Stories from the Front Line -

*"When you represent the communities you serve, I think the company is always seen in a much more favourable light"*

**Laura Formusa, CEO, Hydro One**

*"BMO reports diversity data both by hiring & promotional decisions. If we see that it's skewed or that there are missed opportunities, then we put in place action plans to address that....We've put in goals for 2010. We are renewing our focus & making sure that over the next couple of years we are aggressively improving our leadership on diversity"*

**April Taggart, Senior Vice President, Talent Management and Diversity, BMO Financial Group**

*"Canada arguably ranks as the most culturally diverse population among major industrialized nations. This means that Canada also has the greatest incentive to realize the benefits of cultural diversity. We also have the greatest potential for rewards from our success"* **Gordon Nixon, President & CEO, RBC Financial Group**

*"Failure to improve the advancement opportunities for our talented & diverse labour force not only threatens corporate*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Q: Does employment equity lead to hiring unqualified people?

A: No, the purpose of employment equity is to hire qualified candidates, not to hire unqualified workers simply to meet numerical goals. Employment equity promotes the 'merit principle' & encourages the selection, hiring, training, promotion & retention of qualified, but more diverse, individuals.

### Q: Isn't discrimination a thing of the past?

A: Statistics Canada continues to provide us with information that demonstrates unfair disadvantages for many groups in society (see stats on other page). In addition, there is also a demographic reality that makes employment equity critical to every workplace. By the year 2016, approximately two thirds of the Canadian population aged 15-64 will be made up of women, racialized people, Aboriginal persons & persons with disabilities. If government & employers do not plan ahead to incorporate these changes, they will be left behind.

### Q: Doesn't this benefit only special interest groups?

A: Studies have shown that equity efforts in the workplace facilitate the exchange of new perspectives, improve problem solving by inviting different ideas, & create a respectful, accepting work environment. Surveys have demonstrated a positive impact on high performance where leadership teams include a diversity of ages, ethno-racial backgrounds, & gender. A diverse workforce also can improve organizational productivity & creativity. The key for employers is to make diversity an asset within the organization.

### Q: Isn't this about quotas?

A: Quotas refer to the American approach. Both approaches share the goal of a workforce that reflects the pool of talent available in the labour market. While both programs rely on numerical representation to measure progress, the major difference between the two is that quotas must be achieved or employers face punitive consequences. In comparison, employment equity relies on flexible, rational targets (representation goals & timetables) that employers set themselves according to the reality of their business. Instead of quotas, employers set targets for measuring progress in hiring workers.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

- 1960's: **Canadian Bill of Rights** introduced, opens the door to the concept of equal opportunity
- 1970's: **Human Rights Commissions** established in all provinces and the federal government.
- 1980's: Judge Rosalie Abella releases a **Royal Commission** report. She coins the term "employment equity" to describe the Canadian approach (not the quota-style American approach) to dealing with employment disadvantage.
- 1986: **Employment Equity Act** passes at the Federal level.
- 1990's: In Ontario, employment equity legislation was enacted in 1993. It was repealed less than two years later by the Harris government.
- **2009:....let's get Employment Equity back on track in Ontario !!**



For further information and to get involved in the campaign -

[www.colourofpoverty.ca](http://www.colourofpoverty.ca)

email – [colourofpoverty@gmail.com](mailto:colourofpoverty@gmail.com)

From the **Employment Equity in Ontario – Community Strategy Roundtable** – with the help of – OPSEU, CAW-Canada, Urban Alliance on Race Relations, United Steel Workers, Social Planning Toronto, Labour Education Centre.