



Employment Accommodations

The Workplace & Facial Difference

More than two million people in Canada are living with a facial difference.

A person with a facial difference refers to anyone whose appearance, from the neck or above, has been affected by a congenital (from birth), acquired (after birth), or episodic (comes and goes) condition or syndrome.

The facial difference community is made up of individuals from every province and territory and includes people from many equity-seeking groups. The intersectionality of the facial difference community includes Black people, Indigenous peoples, people from racialized communities, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, refugees, and other diverse and underrepresented populations. Our 2022 community survey revealed that one-third of individuals with facial differences identify as a person with a disability, while two-thirds do not. Recognizing the unique and intersectional needs of the community is critical to building safe, inclusive workspaces where individuals feel valued, respected, and equally supported.

Accommodations, Disability & Facial Difference

At present, facial difference is not recognized as a specific category in Canadian human rights legislation. Recognizing that only one-third of individuals with a facial difference identify as a person with a disability, that leaves two-thirds of individuals, or approximately 1.3 million Canadians, without entrenched, specific rights and safeguards, and key protections in the workplace, including the duty to accommodate. Some people with a facial difference do not identify as having a disability due to the societal stigma associated with identifying as disabled or because their condition does not impact their abilities.

The duty to accommodate is a legal obligation in Canada. Employers and service providers have an obligation to adjust policies and practices to enable full participation and promote inclusion. The purpose of the duty to accommodate is to ensure that people who are otherwise fit to work are not unfairly excluded where working conditions can be adjusted without undue hardship.

To achieve equity and inclusion, employers and service providers must work to identify and remove barriers and biases that have negative impacts on employees and job applicants. Employers are also required to provide the tools and resources to support an employee in undertaking their duties to the best of their abilities.

Each person's needs are unique and must be considered individually when an accommodation request is made. Some facial differences impact hearing, speech, vision, mobility, as well as other areas that create unique barriers. **Accommodation considerations for employees with a facial difference may include, but are not limited to:**

- Providing adaptive technology, including but not limited to: screen magnifiers, screen reader software, voice-to-text software, adapted keyboards, telephone typewriters, handheld amplifiers, and closed captioning.
- Accessible cubicles, ramps, ample space in corridors to support wheelchairs and other mobility devices.
- Work schedule adjustments or support for time-off due to ongoing medical and/or dental appointments, surgery or treatment recovery, mental health and wellness, or other appointments related to a facial difference. This may include providing for longer or more frequent breaks or providing modified work opportunities.
- Arranging for retraining or adjusting job standards or duties, often needed in the case of a facial difference that is newly acquired. This may include transitional work opportunities or lateral moves.
- Checking with job candidates to see if any accommodations are required to participate in the recruitment and interview process.
- Making virtual meetings camera-optimal. The mental health impact of using virtual meeting tools like Zoom or Teams is significant and may exacerbate challenges encountered by the facial difference community. Providing camera-optimal meetings creates a more safe and inclusive space for everyone.

- Other accommodations such as ergonomic assessments and provision of ergonomic devices, lighting or sound level adjustments in the workplace, redirecting cooling and/or heating, and fragrance-free environments.

Facial Difference, the Social Model of Disability, and Building Opportunity

The social model of disability notes that people are disadvantaged not by the person's impairment or difference, but rather by society's response and barriers. This can include people's attitudes to differences, like assuming a person with a facial difference cannot do certain things, as well as society's failure to accommodate differences.

Members of the facial difference community in Canada may identify as:

- Disabled under the traditional definition of disability
- Facialy different, but not disabled
- Disabled and facially different, noting the intersectionality of two separate identities
- Disabled as defined by the social model of disability.

Regardless of how they identify, each person with a facial difference has unique experiences, but people with a facial difference are often confronted with systemic and societal barriers rooted in negative stereotypes and misconceptions.

The social model of disability helps us address some of these barriers, and helps build equality.

Accommodations to consider to help with removing barriers for those with facial differences include:

- Recognize the social model of disability and how it may be affecting employees with a facial difference. This may mean challenging long-held internal biases and learning more about internal bias and how stereotypes and misconceptions affect the development of policies, procedures, personal interactions, and workplace culture.

- Ensure your organization's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies clearly include facial difference as a unique category. By doing this, you will ensure that facial difference community members can avail of the protections available under these policies and procedures and feel equally supported.
- Include facial difference in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training with employees and management. This includes providing updated training for existing employees, if facial difference has not been included previously.
- Provide support to management in addressing and supporting accommodation requests.
- Address mistreatment, microaggressions, and abuse in the workplace.

Ensure your workplace has protections, policies, and procedures in place to focus on the below listed areas of concern that were highlighted by facial difference community members in AboutFace's last community survey:



Staring/gaping from co-workers

Reported by 51% of respondents

Uncomfortable/unwelcome experiences in recruitment

Reported by 50% of respondents

Lack of opportunities for career progression

Reported by 43% of respondents

Bullying or harassment

Reported by 36% of respondents

Erasure (denial of facial difference)

Reported by 35% of respondents

Not feeling seen or heard

Reported by 31% of respondents

- Include facial difference in your job application diversity-focused questions. Some facial difference community members find it beneficial to identify a facial difference in advance of an interview. By having facial difference as a diversity option, alongside other options like race, gender, or disability, you will signal to the community that people with a facial difference are encouraged to apply, will be treated respectfully during the recruitment process, and will be given equitable opportunities to succeed in the process.
- Recognize awareness months like Craniofacial Acceptance Month (September in Canada) or Face Equality Week (internationally, each May). Recognizing these awareness events demonstrates your commitment to building safe, inclusive spaces where people with facial differences are valued, respected, and supported.

This resource was made possible through the generous support of [Anchor HR](#).



A B O U T F A C E®

Who We Are

AboutFace is a national charity and our mission is to cultivate equity and opportunity for individuals with a facial difference through supportive programming, advocacy, and education.

If you would like more information or support, please contact us or visit aboutface.ca.

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