



# Employment Advocacy

## 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.


## Advocacy & Awareness in the Workplace

At present, facial difference is not recognized as a specific category in Canadian human rights legislation. Recognizing that only one-third of individuals with 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. 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.

For those members of the facial difference community in Canada who do identify as disabled, they are afforded protection through various pieces of legislation. Members of the facial difference community in Canada may identify as disabled in one of the following ways:

- Disabled under the traditional definition of disability
- Disabled *and* facially different, noting the intersectionality of two separate identities
- Disabled as defined by the social model of disability.<sup>i</sup>

<sup>i</sup> The Social Model of Disability notes that people are disadvantaged not by a 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.



Working alongside the facial difference community in Canada, one of our key priorities at AboutFace has been supporting advocacy and awareness-building in the workplace. Advocacy and awareness-building in your workplace to support members of the facial difference community can take on many forms, and may include the following:

- Reviewing and updating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies to explicitly cover facial difference as a stand-alone category alongside other equity-seeking groups. **Our most recent community survey noted that only 30% of respondents felt that their workplace sufficiently covered facial difference in their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies.** Acknowledging and providing specific workplace protection and support for the facial difference community is a direct and clear way to build an inclusive workplace for people with a facial difference.
- Incorporating facial difference, alongside other equity-seeking groups, in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training, manuals, and other supporting materials.
- Providing continuing education and learning opportunities focusing on facial differences in the workplace to members of the organization responsible for the delivery of human resources and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion support. AboutFace provides several education and learning opportunities for employers each year in various formats, including lunch and learns, panel discussions, and lectures. Reach out to the AboutFace Team to learn more about how we can best support your organization.

- Ensuring inclusivity and diversity through representation of facial difference community members in training materials, photos on websites and social media, in posters, or other promotional materials for your organization.
- Supporting new employees who are members of the facial difference community through workplace mentorships or “buddy-systems” to support and assist with workplace orientation and integration.
- Publicly recognize, support, promote, and celebrate key awareness events in your calendar of recognition days, including:

### **Craniofacial Acceptance Month**

- o Recognized each September in Canada, this month raises awareness about facial differences and promotes public acceptance and understanding through education and sharing of stories.

### **Face Equality Week**

- o AboutFace is a founding member of Face Equality International and we recognize the global face equality movement during one week in May. The week raises awareness about the discrimination experienced by people with facial differences.

Various disability-focused recognition events such as **Disability Pride Month** (July), which is a growing global recognition month, and **National AccessAbility Week** (NAAW) which takes place in the spring in Canada, both of which focus on building a more inclusive country for the disability community and celebrating the contributions of people in Canada with disabilities.

- Supporting employees in their advocacy and awareness-building goals in the workplace, which may include:
  - o Allowing employees to share information about facial differences with Human Resources and Senior Leadership Teams to help build understanding and acceptance either through 1:1 meetings and discussions or through representation on workplace committees and working groups that support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the workplace.
  - o Actively listening to employees from the facial difference community, and actioning the information shared to build awareness and acceptance of facial differences in the workplace.
  - o Recognizing the efforts of employees who contribute time to building awareness and share their stories and experiences to help create a more inclusive workplace.
  - o Ensuring that employees are aware of mental health and other wellness supports offered by your organization and support employee use of these services. Additionally, it is important to review these service offerings to ensure they offer the necessary supports for all employee groups within your organization, including those within the facial difference community.

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](https://aboutface.ca).

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