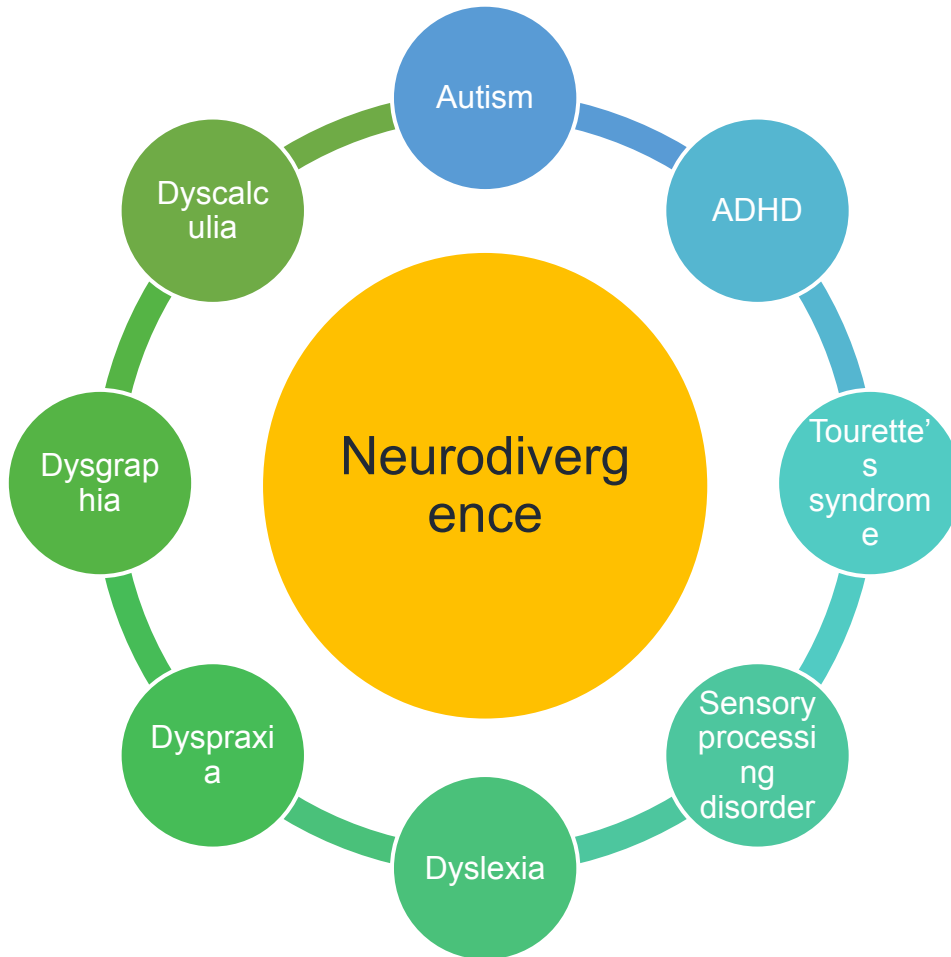




Introduction to the Government of Canada's network for neurodivergent employees

Neurodiversity (1 of 2)



“...a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation.”

(National Symposium on Neurodiversity, 2011)

Neurodiversity is both...

- A **paradigm** to reframe thinking around neurodivergent conditions
- A **movement** seeking greater acceptance for ND people.

Neurodiversity (2 of 2)

Defining key terms

Neurodivergent (ND): Someone with cognitive functions different from dominant standards of “normal”, such as those with autism, ADHD, and dyslexia.

Neurotypical (NT): Someone with cognitive functions that align with what is considered ‘normal’ within society.

Neurodiverse: An umbrella term that describes the whole spectrum of cognitive differences, including both ND and NT people.

Neurodivergence in Canada's federal public service



Measuring neurodivergence

- **Government of Canada does not directly collect workforce data on neurodivergence among employees.**
- Neurodivergent people are captured indirectly in data about persons with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities are a designated group for employment equity (EE) under Canada's *Employment Equity Act*.
- EE data is collected through various sources:
 - › Employee self-declaration forms (completed upon hiring)
 - › annual Public Service Employee Survey (PSES)
 - As of 2020, PSES includes expanded subcategories such as cognitive, mental health, environmental sensitivities, intellectual, and other that closely align with neurodivergence

The latest numbers

Note: Current data on neurodivergent public servants is incomplete but is most aligned with 'cognitive disability'. This metric may not offer a precise account as not all neurodivergent public servants self-identify as disabled or having a cognitive disability.



5764

public servants identify as having a cognitive disability (e.g., autism, ADHD)

Source: Public Service Employee Survey, 2022



3.03%

of the federal workforce identifies as having a cognitive disability

Source: Public Service Employee Survey, 2022

At work, neurodivergent employees are...

Neurodivergent employees

Neurotypical employees

-10%

65%

75%

Less likely to feel valued at work

+15%

32%

17%

More likely to report very high / high stress at work

+20%

46%

26%

More likely to feel emotionally drained after work

Neurodivergent employees

Neurotypical employees

+12%

21%

9%

More likely to be harassed at work

+13%

19%

7%

More likely to experience discrimination at work

-15%

56%

71%

Less likely to feel their workplace is psychologically safe

The challenge

Neurodivergent people bring extraordinary talents and skills to the workforce, but face unique barriers in entering, staying in, and advancing in the workforce compared to neurotypical people.

- Only 33% of autistic Canadians reported being employed, compared to 79% of Canadians without a disability (Canadian Survey on Disability 2017)
- 56% of autistic employees in Canada feel treated differently once others learn of their autism (Deloitte 2021)
- 86% of the neurodivergent people globally are unemployed or underemployed (EY Canada 2022)

Data gaps on neurodivergence

- **Not all neurodivergent people will identify as a person with disabilities**
- **Inconsistency between data sources**
 - Employee self-identification form filters neurodivergence into 'Other'
 - PSES uses updated categories aligned with the *Accessible Canada Act*
- **Significant overlap between disability subtypes—up to respondent's interpretation**
 - e.g. One autistic may feel they have a 'cognitive disability', another may feel they have an 'intellectual disability'
- **No data standard for neurodivergence in workforce data**

Challenges faced by neurodivergent employees at work

Hiring

Barriers

- Job descriptions not easy to understand
- Interviews often designed to measure sociability / culture fit
- Focus on years of 'experience', rather than skills

Solutions

- Use plain language and examples of job responsibilities
- Provide an interview guide in advance to allow the candidate to familiarize themselves with the questions.
- Do not factor in non-verbal cues (e.g., body language, fidgeting, eye contact) or speaking style into scoring

Challenges faced by neurodivergent employees at work

Onboarding

Barriers

- Neurodivergent candidates may not receive accommodations upon arrival
- Second language evaluations (SLEs) may not be designed with needs of neurodivergent employees in mind.
- 'Work culture' in federal public service can be difficult to adjust to

Solutions

- Ask the employee what their accommodation needs during onboarding and ensure they are in place at their start date
- Work with candidates to find learning solutions or teaching methods that accommodate their needs
- Prepare an onboarding guide that walks candidates through the workplace culture

Challenges faced by neurodivergent employees at work

On the job

Barriers

- Hostile attitudes from managers and co-workers
- Lack of access to accommodations
- Excessive administrative burden to obtain accommodations
- In-person workplaces can present challenges for neurodivergent employees

Solutions

- Incorporate neurodiversity training into organizational learning
- Make accommodations easily accessible with clear policies and swift implementation.
- Reduce administrative hurdles by simplifying processes and providing dedicated support.
- Offer flexible work options, including remote or hybrid arrangements, to lessen sensory stress.

Challenges faced by neurodivergent employees at work

In focus GC Workplace Accessibility Passport

What is it?

- A record of an employee's workplace barriers and solutions that travels with the employee across their career
- Supports conversations between employees and managers about optimal workplace conditions

Benefits

- ✓ Prevents employees from needing to renegotiate accommodations when they change workplaces
- ✓ Gives managers information they need to address workplace barriers
- ✓ Serves as an evergreen record of an employee's accommodation needs as they evolve

Challenges faced by neurodivergent employees at work

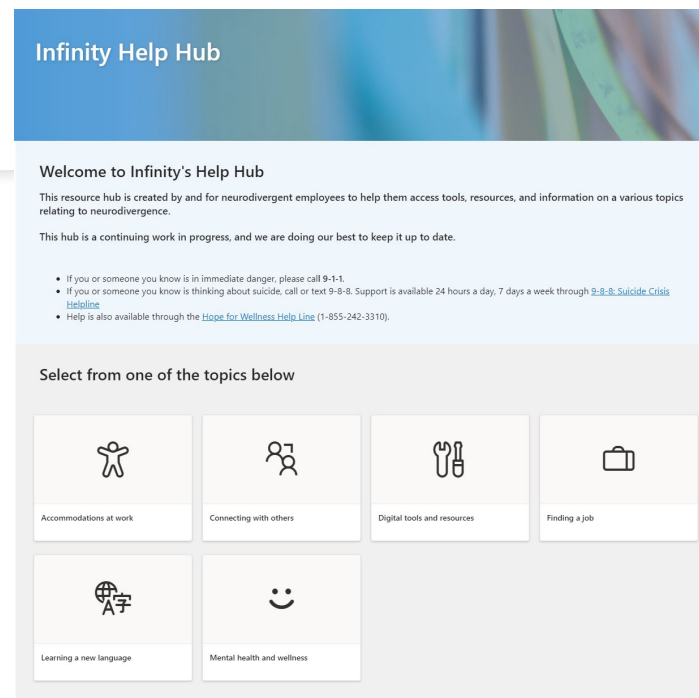
In focus Infinity Help Hub

What is it?

- Hub with various external tools, resources, and information for neurodivergent employees to thrive in the workplace
- Hosted on GCxchange (GC internal SharePoint)

Features

- ✓ Topics covered: Accommodations, connecting with others, digital tools, finding a job, learning a new language, mental health and wellness
- ✓ List of workplace strengths, barriers, and solutions for various neurodivergent conditions
- ✓ Database of workplace barriers and potential solutions



Challenges faced by neurodivergent employees at work

Advancement

Barriers

- Some neurodivergent employees report managers using performance management agreements (PMAs) against them for being neurodivergent
- Neurodivergent employees often less likely to receive talent management plans, or otherwise flagged for progression
- Hiring for management and executive positions often use quantitative 'models' to determine suitability (e.g., Ivey Leader Character Framework).

Solutions

- Implement clear guidelines for PMAs focusing on objective work outcomes and provide training for managers on supporting neurodivergent employees fairly and effectively.
- Establish transparent, inclusive talent management processes that proactively identify and develop neurodivergent employees
- Adapt or augment leadership frameworks to be more inclusive

Introducing Infinity – The Network for Neurodivergent Public Servants



in·fin·i·ty

that which is
boundless,
endless, or larger
than any natural
number

INFINITY

THE NETWORK FOR
NEURODIVERGENT
PUBLIC SERVANTS



INFINITÉ

LE RÉSEAU POUR LES
FONCTIONNAIRES
NEURODIVERGENTS

The infinity
symbol is a
common symbol
for
neurodiversity,
celebrating a
varied spectrum
of experiences



MISSION

To connect, empower, and
advance neurodivergent
public servants throughout
their careers



VISION

An inclusive federal public service that
empowers neurodivergent employees
with the right tools and support to
succeed throughout their careers



BY THE NUMBERS

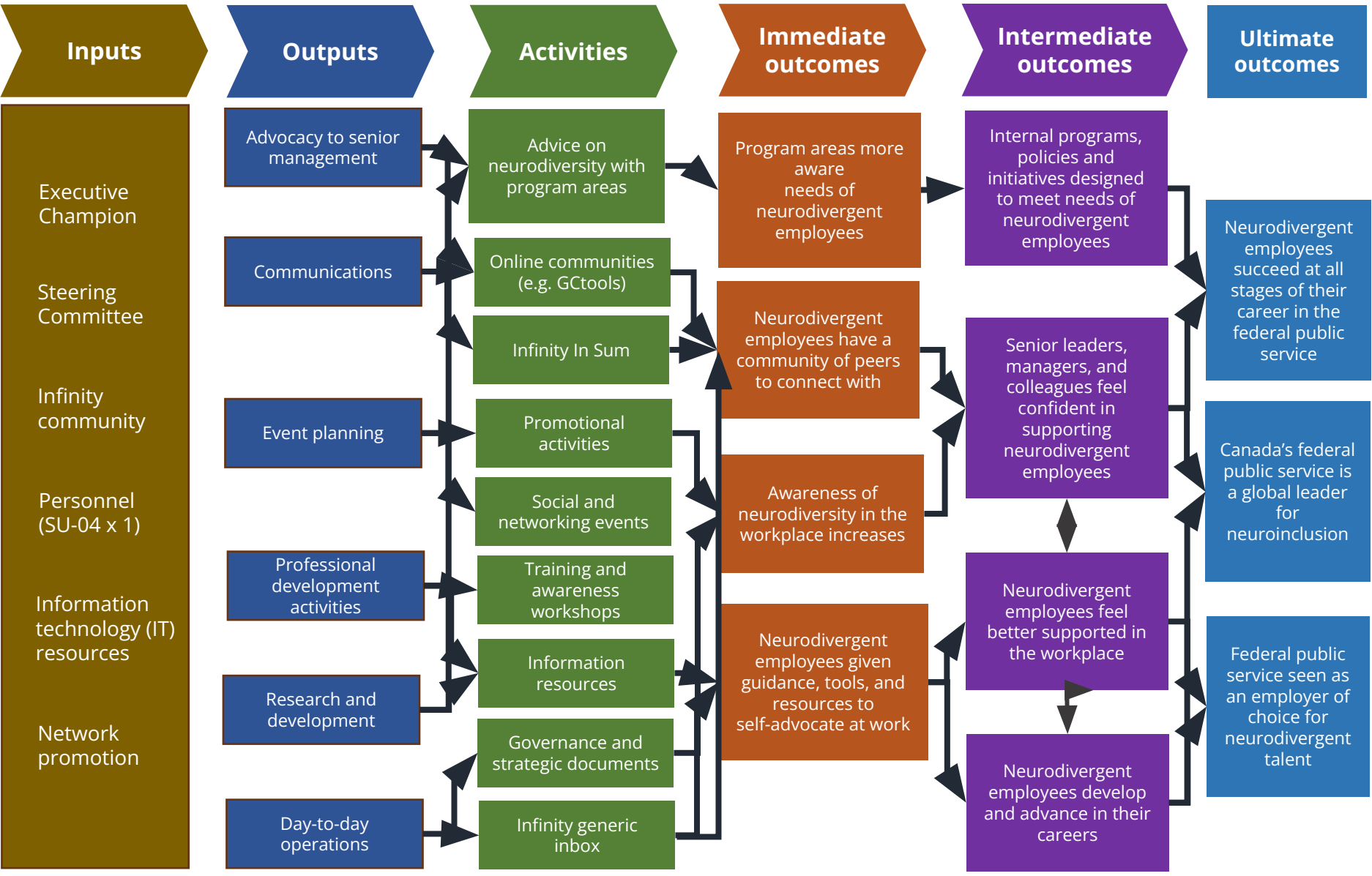
- **2,800+ members** as of February 2024
- **95 institutions** represented
- Members residing in **every province and territory**



ACTIVITIES

- Virtual and in-person networking
- Professional development activities
- Mentorship
- GCtools groups
- Discord server
- Collaboration with other GC networks and external partners

Infinity's logic model (1 of 2)



Infinity's logic model (2 of 2)

Governance

- Infinity is championed by an Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) and led by a Steering Committee, who assist with carrying out the network's day-to-day operations through a team at the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat

Assumptions

- Neurodivergent people face unique challenges to entering, staying in, and advancing in the workforce compared to their neurotypical colleagues.
- Neurodivergent people do not always feel supported by existing supports and initiatives for persons with disabilities
- Neurodivergent people do not feel that support mechanisms (e.g., Ombuds, Informal Conflict Management Systems) will understand their conditions and differences

Risks

- Support needs and / or mechanisms may not be the same across federal organizations
- Burnout / overextension by Network leaders could impact Network's operations in the long-term
- Changes to Network leaders' jobs / career paths could take away their ability to contribute to the Network's mission
- Program areas may find it difficult to apply cognitive accessibility to their programs, policies, and initiatives
- Lack of funding and dedicated personnel can make Network more difficult

External factors

- Use of outside organizations by departments for training on neurodiversity / hiring of neurodivergent candidates could conflict with or duplicate work

Our activities (1 of 2)

Online communities

- Active communities on GCcollab, GCxchange, and Discord

Social & networking events

- Virtual and in-person opportunities for members to connect, make friends, and share ideas
- **Examples:** Infinity Meet and Greet, Lunch and Game, NeuroNiche workshops

Communications

- **Bi-weekly newsletter:** Infinity In Sum
- **Social media:** LinkedIn

Resources for neurodivergent employees

- Infinity has a Help Hub on its Gcxchange page that includes external resources tailored for neurodivergent employees in workplace success.

Our activities (2 of 2)

Neurodiversity presentations and workshops

Infinity delivers presentations and workshops to federal organizations about creating inclusive workplaces for neurodivergent employees

Engagement with unions and bargaining units

Infinity works with unions and bargaining units to ensure they are positioned to advocate for the needs of neurodivergent public servants

Collaboration with other employee networks

Infinity works with other GC employee networks for equity-seeking groups to advance shared goals and promote neuroinclusion across the federal public service.

Advocacy to senior management

We regularly meet with senior leaders in the federal public service to advocate for the needs of neurodivergent public servants.

Our impact

- Our network has hosted a variety of events: 6 network-wide meetings, 2 panel discussions, and 3 learning events with various departments
- Infinity is viewed as a key stakeholder by accessibility units across the federal government
- Infinity has grown into the largest government-wide neurodiversity network in the G7.
- Infinity sparked conversations about neurodiversity across the federal public service, including at executive tables



Who we work with

Infinity has become a valued stakeholder and global leader in advancing neuroinclusion in the public sector. Some of our partners include:

International

Australian Public Service
New Zealand Public Service

Non-profits

Apolitical (UK)
LiveWorkPlay
Canadian Accessibility Network (CAN)

Provincial / territorial

Neurodiverse Employee Resource Discussion (NERD) –
Ontario

Unions and bargaining agents

Association of Justice Counsel (AJC)
Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE)

Federal

Association of Professional Executives of the Public
Service of Canada (APEX)

Anti-Racism Ambassadors Network (ARAN)

National Managers' Community (NMC)

Public Service Pride Network (PSPN)

Various federal departments and agencies

Our plan (2023-25)

To set a clear direction for Infinity, and ensure its continued success advocating for neurodivergent employees, Infinity developed Our Plan, an 18-month strategy to lay out the network's work from 2023-25.

This plan consists of 3 prongs:

Building Neurodiversity at Work: Guide for Federal Public Service Managers

A resource to give managers and colleagues tips and strategies to effectively support neurodivergent people

Creating a Neurodiversity at Work self-paced online course with the Canada School of Public Service (CSPS)

A dedicated course that provides public servants with a comprehensive overview of neurodiversity in the workplace

Strengthening Infinity's infrastructure

Ensuring Infinity has the structures, processes, and supports in place to succeed in the long term.

Public Service Neurodiversity Week

Infinity organized the first-ever **Public Service Neurodiversity Week** from October 21 to 25, 2024 under the theme 'Future Ready'

This week::

- celebrate the talents and contributions of neurodivergent employees across Canada's federal public service
- raise awareness about the needs and experiences of neurodivergent people in the workplace, and
- explore how we can all make our workplaces more welcoming and inclusive toward neurodivergent employees.

Public Service
Neurodiversity
Week



Semaine de la
neurodiversité à la
fonction publique

Events and activities

- Kick-off event with senior officials
- Networking mixer (in-person)
- Panel discussions (virtual)

**Over 3,400 registrants to events
throughout the week!**

Learn more about our work

- Infinity membership is open to neurodivergent federal public servants and their allies in the Government of Canada
- For people outside the Government of Canada, Infinity is open to opportunities for collaboration and engagement

Stay in touch with us!

- Linktree (<https://linktr.ee/infinityinfinite>)
- Email: infinity-infinite@tbs-sct.gc.ca

Thank you for listening to our presentation!

