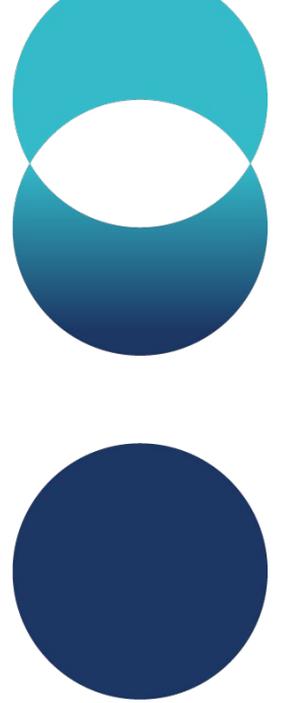


# Bridging the Gap: Supporting Neurodivergent Learners from Campus to Career

BCcampus webinar

Jennifer Fane, PhD, Lead Research Associate, Education and Skills

February 19, 2026



# About us

Over the next 50 years, the noise in our systems will grow—amplified by reactive decisions, environmental disruption, and shifting political and economic realities. These pressures will come from within and beyond our borders. Making decisions based on hard evidence has become the imperative of our times.

With approximately 100 economists and researchers, Signal49 Research provides Canadians with the accurate data and rigorous unbiased research they need to navigate complex issues across eight critical arenas—Economics, Education and Skills, Health, Human Resources, Indigenous and Northern Communities, Innovation and Technology, Immigration, and Sustainability. As Canada's leading applied research organization, we publish over 500 research outputs a year, helping to advance education on the critical issues facing our communities, our organizations, and our country. Our Executive Councils bring leaders together to share real-world insights and support evidence-based decision-making. All in service of a stronger, more prosperous Canada.

For more than 70 years, Signal49 Research is where Canada has turned for applied, independent research and meaningful connections. Leaders trust us because we stand apart: objective, credible, and connected.



# About me

Dr. Jennifer Fane is the Lead Research Associate in the Education and Skills Knowledge area at the Conference Board of Canada. She holds an interdisciplinary PhD in education, public health, and social policy from Flinders University, South Australia.

She started her career as a classroom teacher and has worked as a teacher, professor, and educational researcher in the birth-to-five, K-12, and post-secondary systems in Canada and Australia for over 18 years.

Jennifer brings a passion for advocacy and research in the areas of neurodiversity, disability, and inclusion to her work at the Board.



# Neurodiversity research at Signal49

## Research and the Future Skills Centre

- Neurodivergent Canadians have poor employment and labour market outcomes than their neurotypical peers.
- Research on neurodiversity and barriers to employment for neurodivergent Canadians is needed to identify systemic barriers and opportunities for systems change
- The Conference Board has/is conducting research on neurodiversity and neuroinclusivity in areas including:
  - Workplaces
  - Post-secondary education
  - Entrepreneurial activity and self-employment
  - Work-integrated learning (upcoming, 2026-2027)



# Reports & Resources

## Neuroinclusive Post-secondary Education

**The Conference Board of Canada**

In partnership with **Future Skills Centre** and **Centre for Competencies in the Future**

**Making the Invisible Visible**  
Neurodivergent Students' Experiences in Canadian Higher Education

Issue Briefing | November 12, 2024

**The Conference Board of Canada**

In partnership with **Future Skills Centre** and **Centre for Competencies in the Future**

**Creating Inclusive Campuses**  
The Policies and Practices in Post-Secondary Education

**The Conference Board of Canada**

In partnership with **Future Skills Centre** and **Centre for Competencies in the Future**

**Navigating Higher Education**  
A Neurodivergent Student's Guide

As a neurodivergent learner, your success at university or college starts with knowing the tips and tricks to help you succeed.

**1. Find out your own strengths and accessibility services**  
Accessibility services are there for students who need them. They include help with adapting to your environment, learning needs, and access to disability programs, tutoring, and academic technology. Check out accessibility services before you start to see what support is available when you need it.

**2. Be informed about the disclosure process**  
This report explains how your school's accessibility services work before you start to learn. It also provides information on how to disclose your disability to your school's accessibility services.

**3. Prepare for your accommodation experience**  
This will be required to communicate effectively with many different teaching methods, classroom settings, and peers. It also includes information on how to prepare for your experience. You may need to adjust your expectations to high school. Challenges may include:

- navigating how learning needs to meet individual needs
- communicating or communicating before deadlines
- navigating support
- understanding how to ask for help

Issue Briefing | January 7, 2025

**The Conference Board of Canada**

In partnership with **Future Skills Centre** and **Centre for Competencies in the Future**

**Supporting Inclusive Work-Integrated Learning as an Employer**

Issue Briefing | January 7, 2025

## 3-part Workforce Inclusion Resource

**The Conference Board of Canada**

In partnership with **Future Skills Centre** and **Centre for Competencies in the Future**

**Career Development Strategies to Support Neurodivergent Students**

Issue Briefing | January 7, 2025

**The Conference Board of Canada**

In partnership with **Future Skills Centre** and **Centre for Competencies in the Future**

**Preparing for the Workforce as a Neurodivergent Student**

**The Conference Board of Canada**

In partnership with **Future Skills Centre** and **Centre for Competencies in the Future**

**Supporting Inclusive Work-Integrated Learning as an Employer**

Issue Briefing | January 7, 2025

## Neuroinclusive Workforce Pathways

**Signal49 RESEARCH**

In partnership with **Future Skills Centre** and **Centre for Competencies in the Future**

**Creating Their Own Path**  
Unlocking Self-Employment for Neurodivergent Canadians

IMPACT REPORT | January 28, 2025  
Partners: Neurodivergent Canada, Signal49 Research

**Signal49 RESEARCH**

In partnership with **Future Skills Centre** and **Centre for Competencies in the Future**

**Advancing Pathways to Neurodivergent Self-Employment**  
A Resource for Supported Employment Providers

Issue Briefing | February 10, 2025  
Partners: Neurodivergent Canada, Signal49 Research

List of resources available

- Hybrid (physical and online)
- Online only
- Physical location

Select all

- Canada
- USA

Select all

- Alberta
- British Columbia
- California
- Colorado
- Manitoba
- New Brunswick
- Newfoundland and L.A.
- Northwest Territories
- Nova Scotia
- Nunavut
- Ohio
- Ontario
- Prince Edward Island
- Quebec
- Saskatchewan
- Yukon

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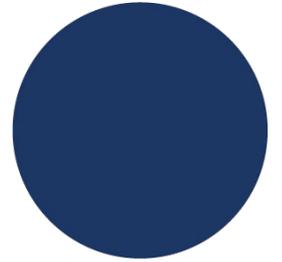
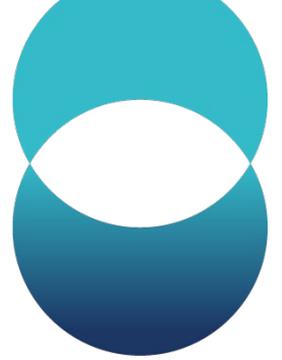


## Neurodivergence and workforce transitions

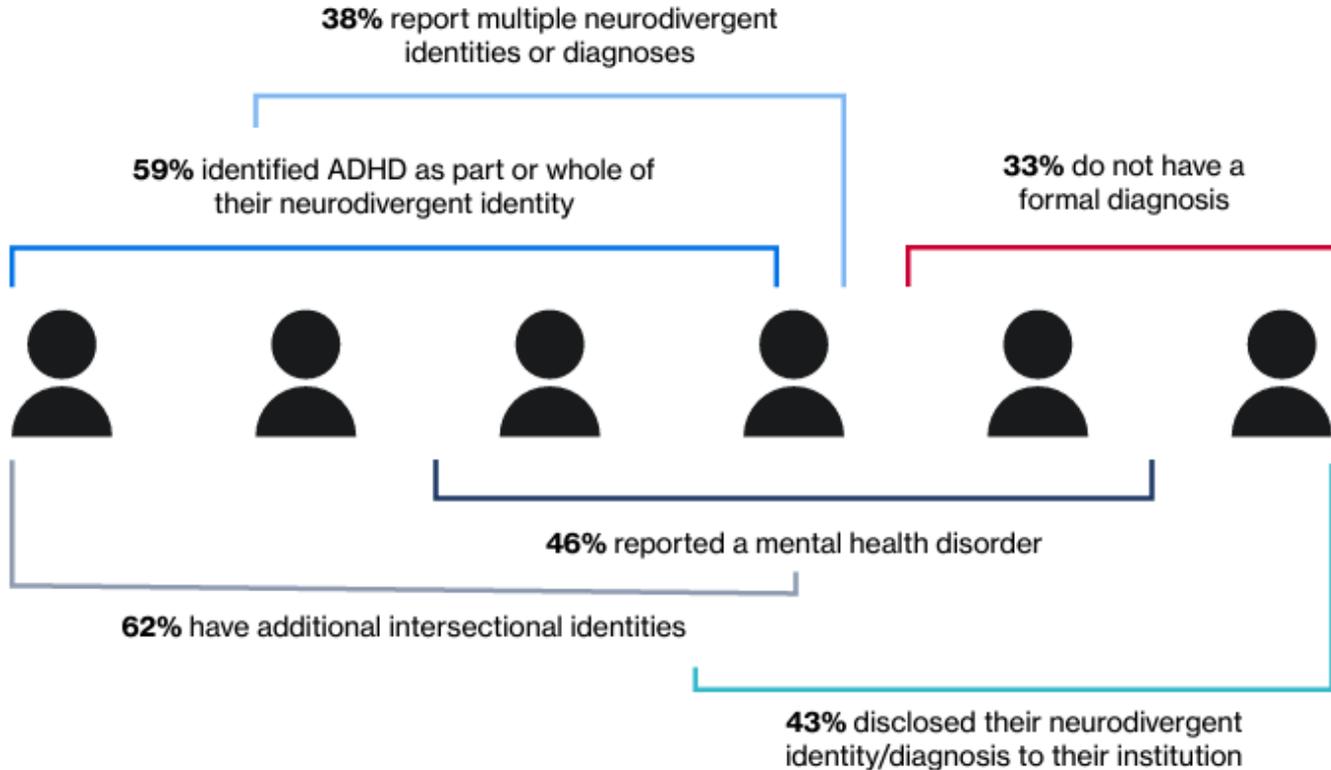
- More students than ever identify as neurodivergent in post-secondary education (PSE), reflecting advances in diagnosis, awareness, and accessibility.
- Despite this progress, neurodivergent students are less likely to graduate and experience lower employment rates than their neurotypical peers.
- Limited understanding of neurodiversity in both education and workplaces means many do not receive targeted, strengths-based supports that build on their abilities and address functional challenges.
- Successful workforce transitions require both individual self-awareness—understanding cognitive profiles, strengths, and strategies—and workplaces that are neuroinclusive.



# Neurodivergent Learner Profiles

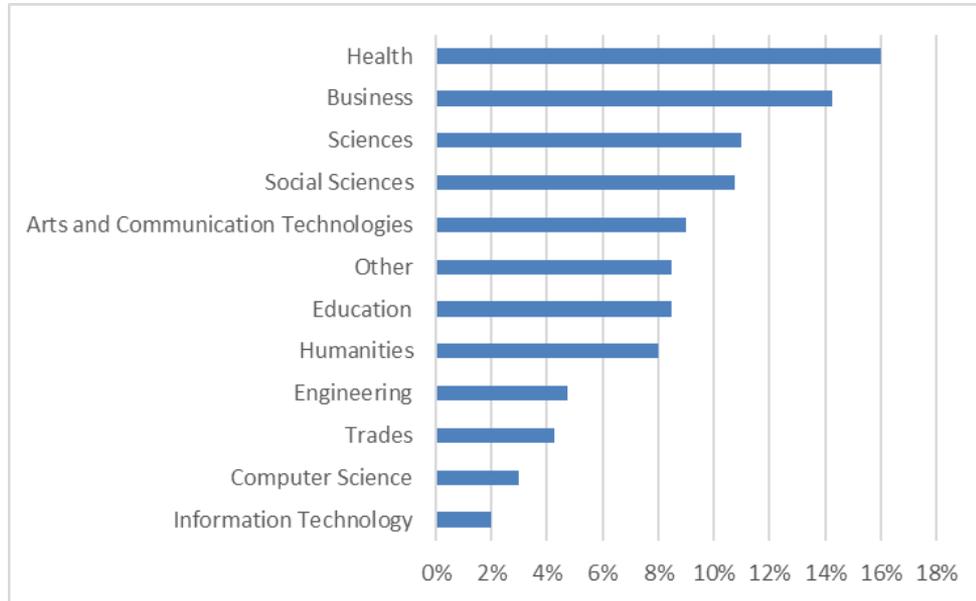


# Diverse Identities and Experiences



# Neurodivergent student profile continued

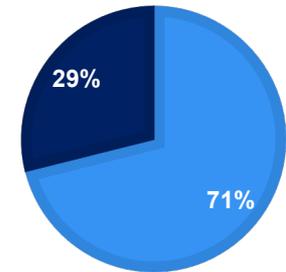
Area of study



Source: The Conference Board of Canada. n=400

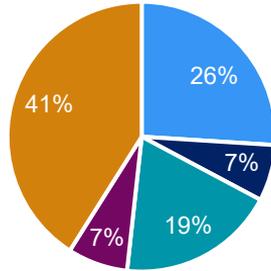
Institution Type

■ University ■ College/Polytechnic



# Neurodivergent profiles continued

## Post-secondary students by identity/diagnosis



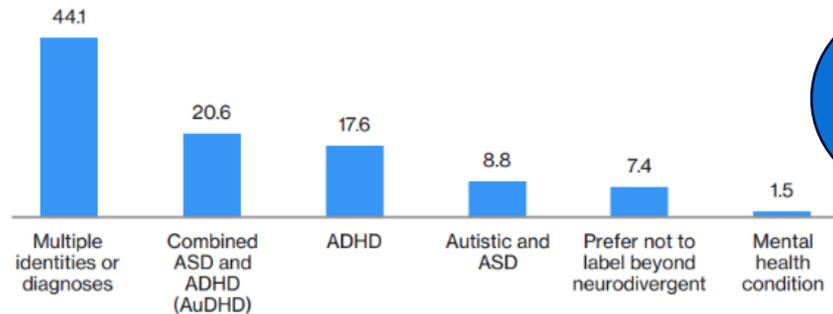
- ADHD only
- Autism only
- Mental health only
- Single other identity/diagnosis
- Multiple identities/diagnoses

Source: Signal49 Research. n=400

## Self-employed neurodivergent workers by identity/diagnosis

Chart 1

Almost half of participants reported multiple neurodivergent identities or diagnoses (n = 66; per cent)



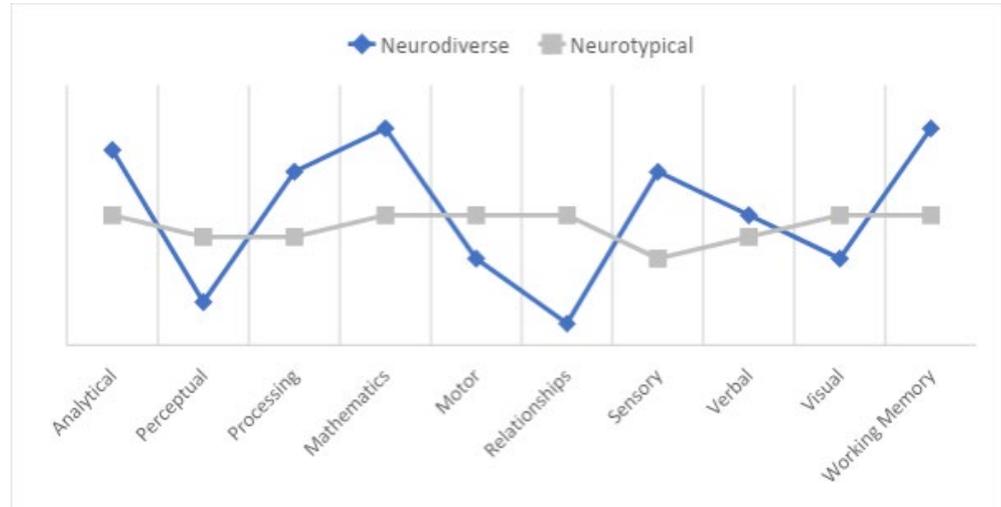
29%  
self-identify

Notes: ASD (autism spectrum disorder); ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).  
Source: Signal49 Research.

Source: Signal49 Research. n=75

# Spikey Skill Profiles

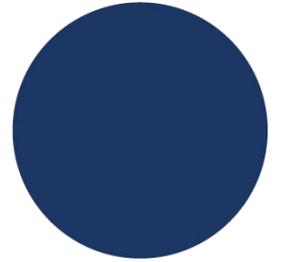
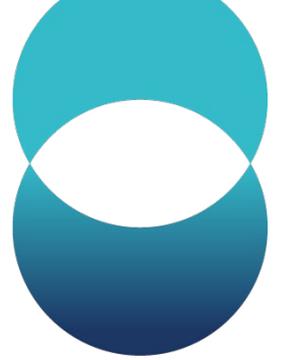
- “Spikey” skill profiles can be a strength for education and workforce success—turning standout strengths into innovation, even when some tasks are harder.
- Yet learning environments and workplaces often expect consistent performance across many tasks, while entrepreneurial environments allow strengths to drive innovation and unconventional problem-solving.



Because of that spiky skill set, a lot of us can pass as neurotypical, it's an invisible challenge. There's judgment, people don't understand that, 'yes, **I know I'm very capable, but also, I still need help**'.

-neurodivergent career advisor

# Barriers to workforce transition for neurodivergent post-secondary students



# From Systems to Systems: The Challenge of Change

## Transition to Post-Secondary Education

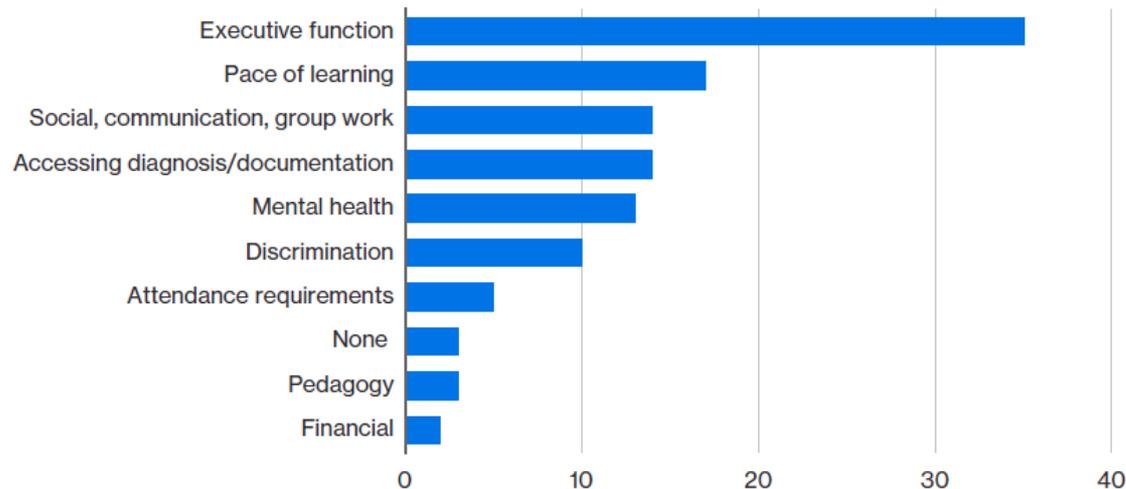
- Adjusting to a new system with significantly greater independence and responsibility
- Aging out of pediatric care and navigating changes in health-care providers
- Managing complex disclosure processes, forms, and institutional paperwork independently
- Facing higher documentation requirements for accommodations and clinical assessments
- Meeting increased expectations for self-advocacy with limited guidance
- Encountering stigma or misunderstandings about learning and accommodation needs

## Transition to the Workforce

- Learning a new workplace system with implicit norms and unclear expectations
- Navigating disclosure decisions in employment settings
- Managing accommodation requests and documentation requirements
- Balancing performance expectations with executive functioning demands
- Self-advocating in environments that may lack neurodiversity awareness
- Facing stigma or misinterpretation of communication and work styles

# Challenges reported by neurodivergent students

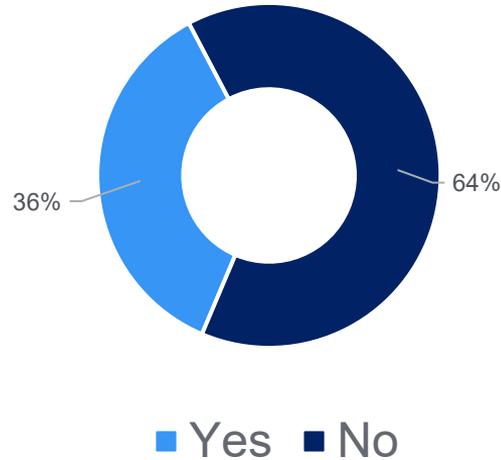
Q: In just a few words, what are the biggest barriers (challenges) you've faced as a neurodivergent student in post-secondary education? (thematically coded responses)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada. N=370

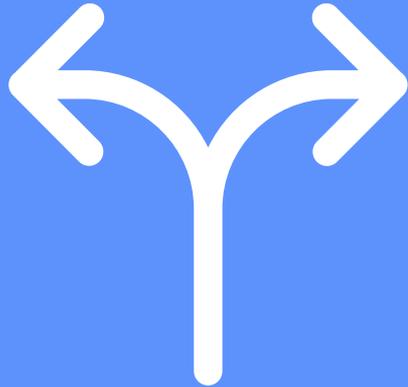
# Approximately 1/3 of neurodivergent students accessed supports

**Q: Have you accessed supports or opportunities for neurodivergent students?**



Source: Signal49 Research. N=400

# The disclosure dilemma

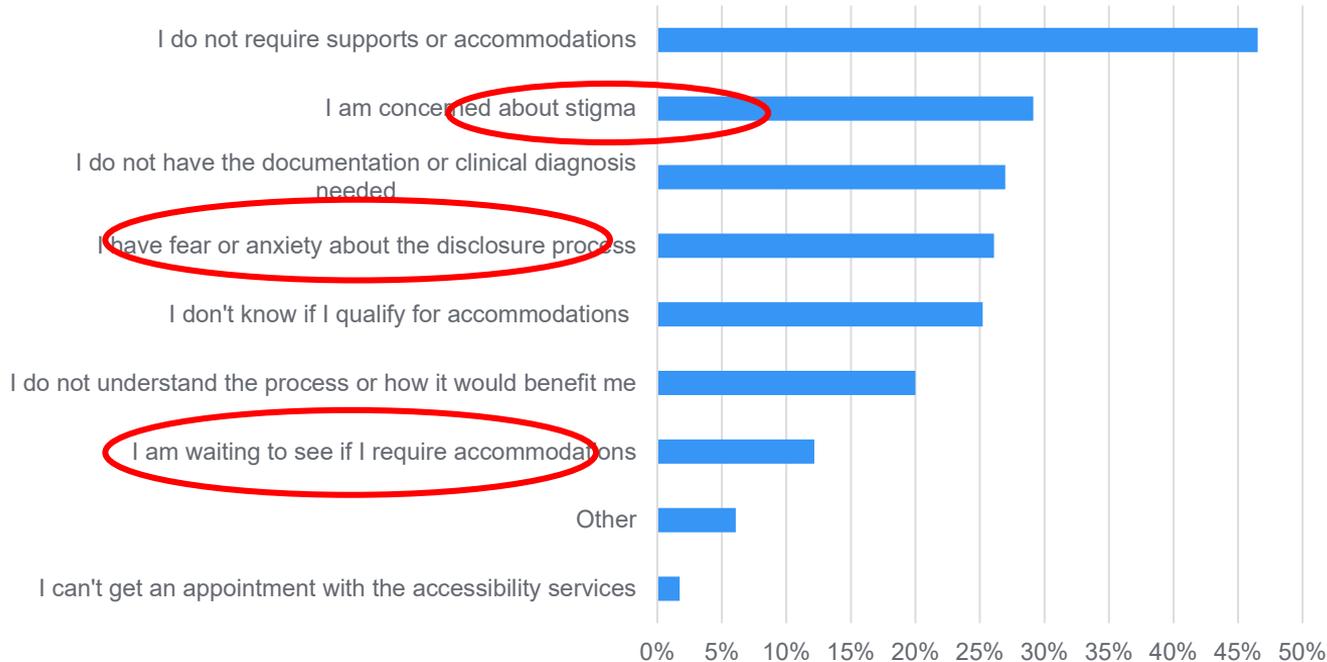


For many neurodivergent students, the decision to disclose (or not) is a challenging decision.

- **43%** neurodivergent students disclose to their post-secondary institution compared to **50%** in Canadian workplaces
- In post-secondary education, navigating the disclosure process goes beyond accessibility services, requiring strong self-advocacy skills when working with faculty/instructors, administrative staff, and other campus members.
- In workplaces or during application processes, challenges are compounded by a lack of transparency, available policy, and workplace culture.
- Fear, stigma, and anxiety about the disclosure process and negative repercussions are significant facts impacting disclosure in both settings.

# Less than half of neurodivergent students choose to disclose their neurodivergent status

**Q. Why did you choose not to disclose? Check all that apply:**



While less than half disclose, 73% of those who did not disclose identified at least one barrier to disclosure

Source: Signal49 Research. n=230

# Experiences of navigating disclosure and accommodations in post-secondary

My greatest challenge so far is, what's been really frustrating for me is just **navigating the system. It's actually very non-inclusive.** It takes a lot of time to get registered with Accessibility Services. That took me a solid five, six months...to get this psychiatric evaluation, go back to the doctor, two, three times, and then finally I got registered. And then it was like a four, five, six week wait until I could get the appointment.

– Neurodivergent graduate student

We're looking at the registration process that requires documentation and filling out certain forms and doing it within a timeline. And it requires a heavy degree of executive function, which when we're talking about a student with an ADHD, presents as challenge. So, we're **looking at ways of removing all of that, so that the student can do the intake with ways that make sense to them.**

– Manager, University accessibility services



# Experiences of navigating disclosure and accommodations in the workplace

“I loved my job. I’d see 200 families a year and do presentations. A posting to deliver all training came up. Everyone in my office said to me, “You’re going to apply for it, right?” because I always received great feedback. But I was so anxious about having to validate my abilities in a panel interview. **I requested accommodation.** I told them that it is best practice in many situations to do a demonstration task, to show I can do the job, but **it was refused.**”

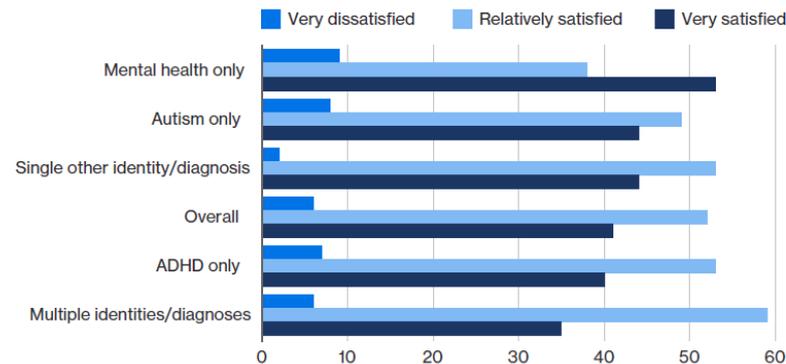
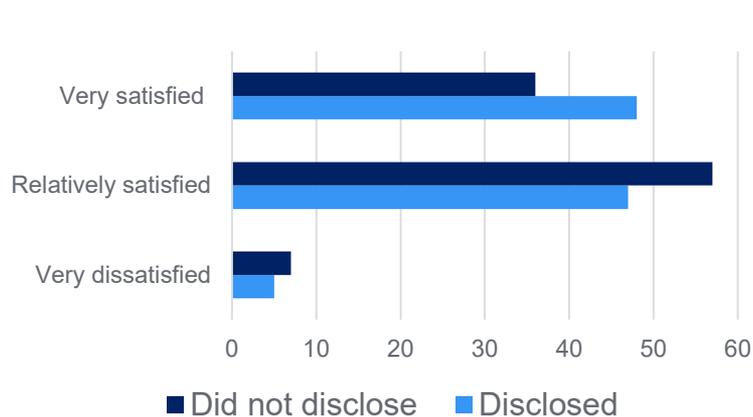
Neurodivergent self-employed consultant

“I became an entrepreneur out of necessity. I was fired for pushing for accommodation for myself and others after my diagnosis. Then my son who is autistic and non-speaking was kicked out of his daycare a few months later. **So that’s why I started my business, to survive.**”

Neurodivergent sole proprietor

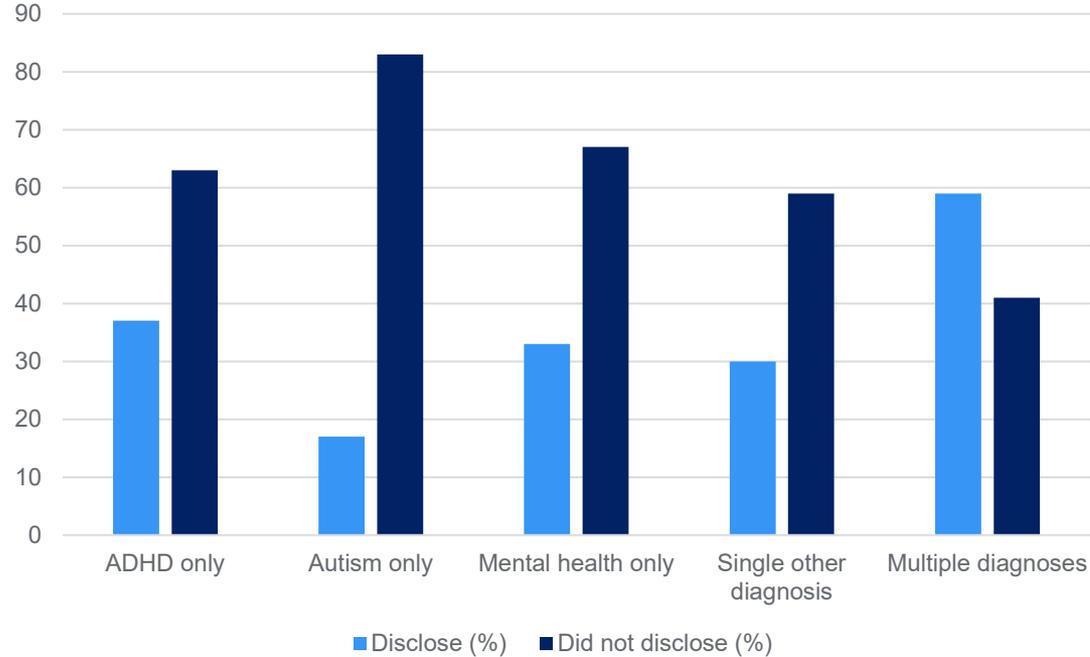
# Satisfaction with post-secondary institution by respondent disclosure status

Q: On a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied), indicate your level of overall satisfaction with your post-secondary institution?



Source: Signal49 Research. N=400. Note: Satisfaction with PSI was assessed on a scale from 1 to 10 and recoded as 'very dissatisfied' (scores from 1 to 3), 'relatively satisfied' (scored from 4 to 7), and 'very satisfied' (scores from 8 to 10)

# Disclosure Rates by Identity/Diagnosis Type

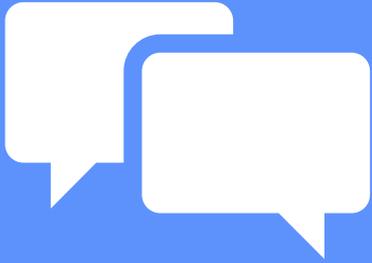


Source: Signal49 Research. N=400

# Supporting neurodivergent students with disclosure and self-advocacy

- Provide balanced guidance on disclosure, helping students make informed, confident decisions.
- Offer structured practice (mock disclosure conversations, scripting, email templates).
- Guide students through documentation and forms, building independence and reducing overwhelm.
- Frame self-advocacy as a professional skill, not just an accommodation step.
- Connect post-secondary disclosure practice to workplace readiness, including requesting accommodations and navigating HR processes.
- Ensure students understand their rights and where to seek support—on campus and in future workplaces.

# Changing communication expectations



Communication expectations increase in post-secondary—and increase again in the workplace.

- Both settings require proactive requests for support or accommodations, often before deadlines or performance issues arise.
- Professional email and written communication are assumed skills, with little explicit instruction.
- Participation expectations (speaking up, asking questions, contributing in meetings) are often implicit.
- Group work in post-secondary and teamwork in workplaces require navigating unclear social and collaboration norms.
- Social isolation can limit access to informal knowledge, networking, and advancement opportunities in both settings.



# Gatekeeping a roadblock to career transition

There is a dynamic where the teaching faculty assume a **gatekeeper role**. They say “I know my profession. I know what the worker looks like, sounds like. And if you don't fit that, then are you really ready for this profession?” **They look at accommodations running contrary to what the profession is, what's expected.** And then you've got an accessibility office saying, well, why aren't they just on board? Well, because you're not connecting the dots for them. We educate faculty on myths about accessibility. We help them understand that their role as faculty is not gatekeepers of their profession.

-Director, college accessibility services

# Strategies to Strengthen Communication Skills

- Explicitly teach communication norms and expectations in academic settings.
- Provide email templates, scripts, and examples of effective professional communication.
- Offer structured practice requesting supports and clarifying expectations.
- Clarify group roles and collaboration processes to reduce ambiguity.
- Create structured opportunities for peer connection and mentorship.
- Frame communication skill-building as career readiness, reinforcing transfer to workplace success



# Executive function skills



Neurodivergent students face challenges with executive function skills. This includes skills such as:

- working memory (remembering what you read/hear),
- attention and focus
- starting and completing tasks
- organization and planning
- self-regulation

The pace and complexity of both post-secondary education and the workplace demand strong executive functioning skills—or effective strategies to manage challenges such as:

- Sustaining focus during lectures, meetings, or long tasks
- Keeping up with assigned coursework or workload demands
- Initiating and completing work on time
- Managing competing priorities and maintaining work–life balance
- Proactively asking for clarification, support, or guidance

# Strengthening Executive Function

When intentionally leveraged, executive function supports not only enhance academic success but also build competencies that transfer directly to the workplace. These include:

- Workshops on focus, attention, and study strategies that mirror workplace productivity skills
- Access to learning strategists and executive-function/ADHD coaching to build planning and task-initiation strategies
- Study-skills courses and peer groups that strengthen accountability and follow-through
- Templates for task management and anti-procrastination strategies that translate to project management and deadline tracking
- Assistive technology that supports organization, workflow, and communication
- Educational resources that increase self-awareness of executive-function strengths and challenges
- By encouraging students to actively use these supports, institutions help them develop sustainable strategies that extend beyond graduation and into employment.

## Experiential learning and transition supports

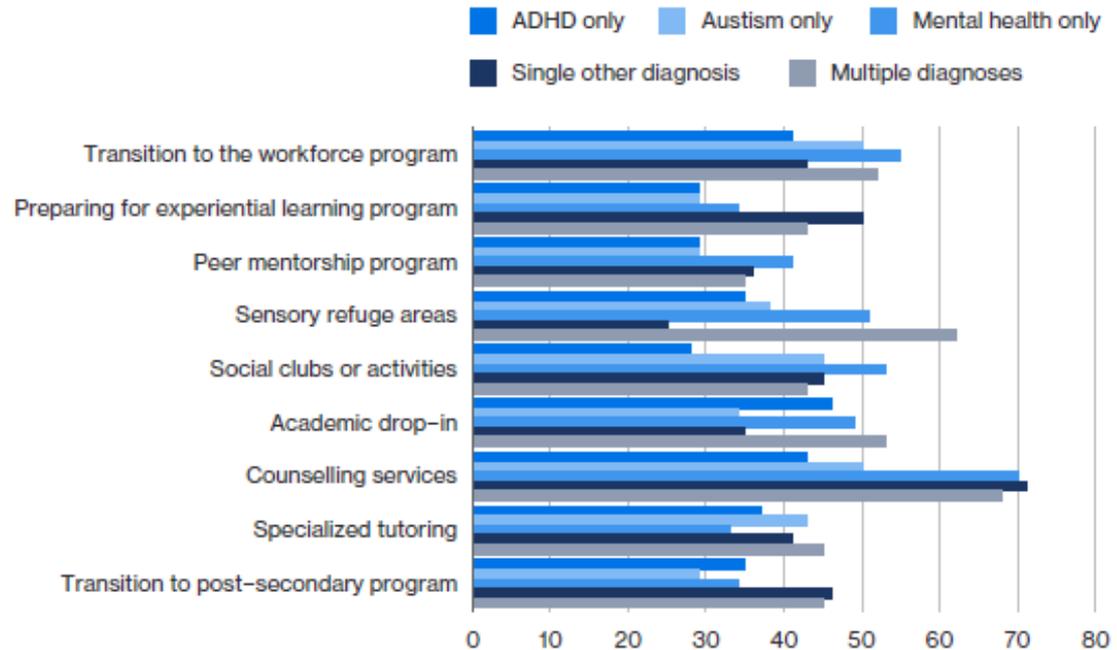


# Experiential Learning as a Critical Bridge to Work

- In-situ skill-building is especially important for neurodivergent learners, who face poorer employment outcomes than their neurotypical peers.
- These settings provide low-stakes opportunities to practice workplace communication, including disclosure (if desired) and requesting accommodations.
- However, some neurodivergent students may hesitate to engage, due to past negative academic or workplace experiences.
- Others may not fully understand the long-term career value of experiential learning.
- Intentional preparation and structured support can increase confidence, participation, and long-term career success.

# Transition to workforce program ranked highly as a desired support

**Q: Would you use or participate in the following opportunities for neurodivergent students if they were available at your institution?**



# Social Skill-Building as Workforce Preparation

Many neurodivergent students report challenges with social interaction in PSE, including group work, conflict resolution, and building community. These challenges mirror workplace expectations around teamwork, collaboration, and professional relationship-building.

**Post-secondary social and peer supports—when intentionally leveraged—help build transferable skills for employment**, including:

- Peer coaching and mentorship programs that strengthen communication and accountability
- Student leadership roles that build confidence and collaborative skills
- Wellness ambassadors and transition programs that normalize help-seeking
- Social clubs and peer-support groups (in-person and online) that reduce isolation and build networking skills
- Neurodiversity support groups that reinforce identity, self-awareness, and self-advocacy

“Social groups where you can just talk about your challenges. Where you can share strategies that are working with peers. I think that would be a great resource. It could help improve your sense of belonging at school because people can feel really lonely.”

- University undergraduate student



# Career exploration



## Prioritize Exploring Career Fit, Not Just Job Titles

- Start career exploration early, before students default to “safe” roles that may not reflect their strengths.
- Focus on sectors and work environments, not just specific job titles.
- Center conversations on fit — strengths, energy levels, pace, structure, and support needs.
- Plan workload intentionally, including part-time or phased placements when appropriate.
- Frame reduced load or flexibility as strategy—not limitation.
- Encourage low-risk experimentation through short-term, project-based, or structured experiential learning.



# Leveraging Neurodivergent Employability

## Talent neurodivergent workers bring:

1. Pattern recognition & deep focus: excel in roles like data analysis, programming, research, and design.
2. Systems thinking & efficiency: strengthen planning, process improvement, operations, and workflow optimization.
3. Problem-solving & persistence: contribute in innovation, product development, troubleshooting, and consulting.
4. Creativity & visual thinking: add value in communications, marketing, graphic design, multimedia, and product creation.

Use these questions to surface strengths and innovative thinking—both for supporting neurodivergent students to reflect on their strengths and support needs

1. Which work environments and types of tasks **help me perform at my best**—structured routines, creative variety, focused deep work, collaboration, or independent projects?
2. What unique perspective or lived experience do I bring to **understanding problems** and **imagining solutions**?
3. What **gaps or problems do I notice**—things I wish existed or worked differently, or that others accept as unsolvable but I feel motivated to improve?

# Neurodivergent learners benefit from targeted neuro-affirming transition programming.



Search UCalgary



Experiential Learning

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Experiential Learning

Undergraduate Research

Work-Integrated Learning

Future Skills

Our Strategy

Our Team

## Work-Integrated Learning for Neurodivergent Students

Transforming work-integrated learning for neuro-inclusion

### Sensory-Friendly Success Seminar: Enhance Your Study Strategies

Learn efficient and effective study strategies, including active learning techniques tailored to your discipline. Bring examples of content/classes you're working on!

**Date:** March 17, 2025

**Time:** 2:00 p.m. – 2:50 p.m.

**Location:** In-person - TFDL 355D

[Register now](#)

### STAR Program: Drop-in Peer Technology Assistance

This drop-in program helps students with adaptive technologies, offering tailored guidance and peer support.

**Date:** March 19, 2025

**Time:** 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. (Wednesdays)

**Location:** In-person - Check in at SAS (MSC 452)

[Register now](#)

### Graduate Students' Association Neurodiversity Celebration

Hosted by the GSA's Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA) Committee, this event is an opportunity for graduate students to discuss their experiences with neurodiversity and intersecting identities. Enjoy food, low-effort crafts, and tactile toolkits in a sensory-friendly environment. Open to all graduate students, regardless of neurotype!

**Date:** March 20, 2025

**Time:** 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

**Location:** In-person - Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning (TI 250)

[Register now](#)

### Sensory-Friendly Success Seminar: Creating Your Personalized Study Plan

Create a personalized study plan that works for you! This session will help with academic goal setting and time management for effective study.

**Date:** March 20, 2025

**Time:** 11:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

**Location:** In-person - TFDL 355D, Student Success Centre

[Register now](#)



# Where knowledge inspires action

Questions or wanting to connect post presentation about the research or neurodiversity/neuroinclusion?

Email – [fane@signal49.ca](mailto:fane@signal49.ca)

Or find me on LinkedIn – Jennifer Fane, PhD