National Employment Equity Council
Conseil national de l'équité en matière d'emploi

NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT EQUITY FORUM



Modernizing Employment Equity:
Building Canada Together

Report of the National Employment Equity Forum

September 24, 2026 | Parliamentary Precinct, Ottawa

National Employment Equity Council

Patron: The Honourable Dr. Jean Augustine, P.C., C.M., O.Ont., C.B.E.

Land Acknowledgement

The National Employment Equity Forum was held in Ottawa, on the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation. The National Employment Equity Council acknowledges the enduring presence, rights and contributions of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation and recognizes the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples whose histories, experiences and perspectives are integral to the future of employment equity in Canada.

Executive Summary

On September 24, 2026, the National Employment Equity Council convened the National Employment Equity Forum in the Parliamentary Precinct in Ottawa under the theme “Modernizing Employment Equity: Building Canada Together”. The Forum formed part of the Council’s work to advance, monitor and protect employment equity in Canada. Senator Dr. Kristopher Wells and Senator Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard served as Parliamentary Sponsors.

The Forum also announced the appointment of the Honourable Dr. Jean Augustine as the inaugural Patron of the National Employment Equity Council, recognizing her decades of public service and her contribution to the advancement of employment equity, including her work related to the 1995 Employment Equity Act.

The Forum marked 40 years since Canada’s first Employment Equity Act was adopted in 1986 and focused on the 187 recommendations of the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force. The Forum brought together 150 participants in person and 200 online, including leaders representing more than 600,000 workers across Canada. Twenty-four speakers contributed, including parliamentarians, former Cabinet ministers, Task Force members, senior public servants, federally regulated employers, labour representatives, academics and civil society leaders.

Speakers addressed recognition of Black and 2SLGBTQI+ workers, Indigenous employment and data sovereignty, disability inclusion, disaggregated data, recruitment and advancement, enforcement and accountability, safe avenues for recourse, and the growing use of artificial intelligence in employment decisions.

The Forum took place at a time when modernization of the Act remained outstanding. As of September 24, 2026, modernization legislation had not been introduced.

The National Employment Equity Council is calling for an implementation plan that sets out the Government’s response to the Task Force’s 187 recommendations, identifies the measures that will proceed through legislation, regulation, policy or other action, and provides an anticipated timeline for legislative action and implementation.

In Memory of Samuel Lowe

Samuel Lowe was a co-founder of the Black Undergraduate Coalition, a founding participating organization of the National Employment Equity Council, and a member of the Steering Committee for the National Employment Equity Forum.

Samuel passed away on September 8, 2026, during the planning of the Forum. At the time of his passing, he had been contributing to the Steering Committee's work in preparation for the Forum.

The National Employment Equity Council records with appreciation Samuel's contribution to the Forum and acknowledges his work to strengthen the representation of Black students in national policy discussions.

1. Purpose and Scope of this Report

This report records the central issues raised at the National Employment Equity Forum and situates them within the legislative and policy work already underway to modernize the Employment Equity Act.

This is not a transcript and the report does not attribute a collective position to every participant. Statements identified with individual speakers reflect their interventions at the Forum. Legislative history, government commitments and recruitment evidence are drawn from the official sources listed in the references. The conclusions and recommendations in this report are those of the National Employment Equity Council.

2. Forty Years of Employment Equity

Canada's first Employment Equity Act received Royal Assent on June 27, 1986. It followed the work of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment, led by Justice Rosalie Silberman Abella, and established a federal legislative framework aimed at addressing systemic barriers in employment.

Parliament revisited the framework in the 1990s. The current Employment Equity Act received Royal Assent on December 15, 1995 and came into force on October 24, 1996. The Act applies an employment equity framework to federally regulated workplaces and identifies four designated groups in its present text: women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities.

Employment equity has been part of federal law since 1986. The current statute dates from 1995 and took effect in 1996.

3. The Employment Equity Act Review

2021 — The Government launched the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force, chaired by Professor Adelle Blackett, to review the Act and advise on its modernization.

2023 — The Task Force delivered its final report with 187 recommendations. The Government subsequently committed to initial reforms, including recognizing Black and 2SLGBTQI+ people as designated groups and updating terminology and definitions under the Act.

2024 — Budget 2024 announced the Government's intention to propose legislative amendments to modernize the Employment Equity Act. Further consultations on modernization were completed in August 2024.

2025 — Employment and Social Development Canada's 2025–26 Departmental Plan stated that legislation would be introduced to modernize the Act.

2026 — The commitment to introduce modernization legislation was not listed in ESDC's 2026–27 Departmental Plan. As of the National Employment Equity Forum on September 24, 2026, no modernization legislation had been introduced.

The Forum recognized Professor Adelle Blackett and the members of the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force for their contribution to the review of the Act. Task Force members attending the Forum were invited to stand and were acknowledged for their work in developing the report and its recommendations.

Sources: Employment and Social Development Canada (2021, 2023, 2024), Employment Equity Act Review and modernization; Government of Canada, Budget 2024; Employment and Social Development Canada, Departmental Plans 2025–26 and 2026–27.

4. Key Themes from the Forum

Labour and federally regulated employers

Nathan Prier, National President of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, called for modernization to proceed without further delay. His intervention addressed stronger accountability, disaggregated data and meaningful enforcement.

Chantal Dugas, Chair of the Employment Equity Subcommittee of Federally Regulated Employers – Transportation and Communications (FETCO), spoke from the employer perspective. She told the Forum that FETCO has been calling for modernization, participated in the Task Force process and is prepared to work through implementation.

Indigenous employment

Kathleen Sawdo, Executive Director of Indigenous Works, addressed recruitment, retention and advancement of Indigenous workers, distinctions-based approaches and Indigenous data sovereignty. She cautioned against treating updated terminology as a substitute for changes to the framework itself: “A new word on an old framework is not reform.”

Black workers, disaggregated data and recruitment

Dr. Rachel Zellars addressed research on the experiences of Black employees in the federal public service and the limits of broad categories that can conceal different outcomes within racialized populations. Her intervention addressed advancement, workplace experience, better data and stronger oversight.

The Public Service Commission's 2021 audit of employment equity representation in recruitment examined outcomes across stages of the hiring process. In the audit sample, Black candidates' representation fell from 10.3 per cent at application to 6.6 per cent at appointment. The Commission reported that Black candidates experienced the largest overall drop among the visible-minority subgroups it examined. The audit did not conclude that discrimination caused the observed differences and noted limits in the information available to explain them.

Source: Public Service Commission of Canada, Audit of Employment Equity Representation in Recruitment (2021).

2SLGBTQI+ workers and intersectionality

Jade Pichette, Executive Director of Pride at Work Canada, and Tyler Boyce, Co-Chair of the National Employment Equity Council, addressed the experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ workers and the importance of examining how different forms of workplace exclusion intersect. They also addressed representation in leadership, accountability and safe ways for workers to raise concerns.

Senator Kristopher Wells addressed the history of exclusion experienced by 2SLGBTQI+ people, including the LGBT Purge, and asked who remains invisible within existing employment equity structures. He called for tangible commitments and action following the Forum.

Disability and barrier removal

Former Employment Minister Carla Qualtrough spoke from her experience as a person with a disability and from her work in government. She supported aligning the Act's definition of disability with the Accessible Canada Act and distinguished proactive removal of barriers from systems that depend on workers requesting individual accommodation. Referring to the reviews and consultations already undertaken, she told the Forum: “We don't have to study this anymore.”

Merit, hiring and artificial intelligence

Lawyer Mante Molepo, founder of Molepo Law, a firm focused on governance, enterprise risk and institutional investigations, addressed how concepts of merit and the use of artificial intelligence can affect employment equity. Drawing on the Public Service Commission's recruitment audit, she examined representation across the stages of hiring and the risk that automated systems can reproduce patterns embedded in historical employment decisions.

Molepo called for transparency when automated systems are used, human oversight, accessible avenues for recourse and clear disclosure. She also argued that recognition of Black and 2SLGBTQI+ workers should be entrenched in legislation rather than depend on administrative practice.

Perspectives from Employment Equity Act Review Task Force Members

Marie Clarke Walker, speaking in her individual capacity, advised that employment equity must move beyond representation and reporting to measurable changes in workplace outcomes. She highlighted the need for disaggregated and intersectional data, stronger enforcement and oversight, accountability for senior leadership, adequate resources and clear implementation timelines, and cautioned that changes in terminology or the addition of new designated groups would not, on their own, amount to transformation. She told the Forum: "In my view, consultation cannot become a substitute for action."

Professor Tony Fang participated in his individual capacity. He emphasized that aggregate data can mask significantly different outcomes within broader groups, including for Black workers and people facing multiple and intersecting barriers. He highlighted the need for reliable, disaggregated data, meaningful consultation and stronger engagement by employers, labour organizations and senior leadership, and argued that employment equity must move beyond reporting requirements toward measurable action and results.

Responsibility and Collective Action

Former Labour Minister Seamus O'Regan reflected on the commitments made when he received the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force report in 2023. He acknowledged that significant work remains and encouraged Forum participants to continue pressing forward so that the modernization of the Act and the Task Force recommendations are implemented.

Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard drew on her experience with employment equity at Dalhousie University and spoke about the results that intentional measures can produce. She questioned why modernization had not yet been prioritized following the Task Force report and subsequent consultation.

The Honourable Dr. Jean Augustine reflected on changes in Canada's workforce since employment equity legislation was first adopted. She addressed recognition of Black and 2SLGBTQI+ workers, the terminology used for racialized workers, intersectionality and the implications of artificial intelligence for employment decisions. She cautioned: "We cannot allow innovation to automate discrimination."

Nicholas Marcus Thompson, Co-Chair of the National Employment Equity Council, spoke about bringing people together with different backgrounds, experiences, responsibilities and perspectives on employment equity. He described the Forum as an opportunity for a serious conversation about what comes next and called on participants to work together to advance the implementation of the legislation.

5. Government Response

The Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Jobs and Families, was invited to address the Forum and provide an update on the Government's work to modernize the Employment Equity Act. While the

Minister was unable to attend, her office provided a written statement thanking participants for their continued commitment to creating more inclusive workplaces and stronger communities across the country.

The Minister also recognized The Honourable Rosalie Silberman Abella, whose Royal Commission on Equality in Employment laid the groundwork for the Employment Equity Act, and Professor Adelle Blackett, who chaired the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force and led the development of recommendations that, as the Minister noted, “continue to inform the Government's work today.”

Robert Wright, Deputy Minister of Labour, was also invited to address the Forum. The invitation was declined. The Minister's statement did not provide an update on the status of the modernization of the Employment Equity Act or a timeline for the Government's next steps.

6. Recommendations of the National Employment Equity Council

The National Employment Equity Council recommends that the Government of Canada publish an implementation plan for modernization of the Employment Equity Act. The plan should:

- Respond to each of the Task Force's 187 recommendations, stating the government’s position and the action it will take;
- Identify which recommendations will proceed through legislation, regulation, policy or other measures;
- Commit to dated milestones for legislative action and implementation;
- Identify who will be responsible for delivery of implementation and public reporting across the federal employment equity framework; and
- Set out how workers, employers, labour, Indigenous peoples, affected communities and employment equity organizations will participate as implementation proceeds.

The Council also recommends that implementation preserve the Task Force report as a comprehensive framework rather than treating its recommendations as unrelated measures. Where the Government does not intend to proceed with a recommendation, its response should state that position and provide the rationale. Implementing 187 recommendations will take sustained effort, and a published plan is what allows workers, employers and communities to see the Government's commitment and measure progress against it. The Council is ready to support the Government as that work proceeds.

7. Forum Speakers

The National Employment Equity Council extends its sincere thanks to all speakers for generously sharing their time, expertise and perspectives. Their contributions helped advance this important national conversation on the future of employment equity in Canada.

- Hon. Dr. Jean Augustine - Patron, National Employment Equity Council; former Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister
- Hon. Seamus O'Regan - Former Minister of Labour
- Hon. Carla Qualtrough - Former Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion
- Senator Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard - Deputy Chair, Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights
- Senator Dr. Kristopher Wells - Co-Chair, Canadian Pride Caucus
- Hon. Lyne Chantal Boudreau - New Brunswick Minister of Seniors; Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity

- Kevin Chief - SpiritWolf Singers
- Marie Clarke Walker - Member, Employment Equity Act Review Task Force
- Professor Tony Fang - Member, Employment Equity Act Review Task Force
- Nathan Prier - National President, Canadian Association of Professional Employees
- Kathleen Sawdo - Executive Director, Indigenous Works
- Chantal Dugas - Chair, Employment Equity Subcommittee, FETCO; Air Canada
- Dr. Rachel Zellars - Researcher and scholar
- Mante Molepo - Lawyer, governance and technology
- Jade Pichette - Executive Director, Pride at Work Canada
- Dr. Nadia Ferrara - Ombuds, Privy Council Office
- Nicholas Marcus Thompson - Co-Chair, National Employment Equity Council
- Phylomène Zangio - Co-Chair, National Employment Equity Council; former Chief Commissioner, New Brunswick Human Rights Commission
- Tyler Boyce - Co-Chair, National Employment Equity Council
- Allison Smith - Director, National Employment Equity Council Secretariat
- Todd Kuiack - Special Advisor, Indigenous Relations and Public Policy, National Employment Equity Council; former Director of Operations, Privy Council Office
- Lerato Chondoma - Associate Vice-President, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism, Acadia University; Commissioner, Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission
- Ginella Massa - Forum Co-Emcee
- Sarah Onyango - Forum Co-Emcee and panel moderator

8. Steering Committee

The National Employment Equity Council acknowledges the members of the Steering Committee who contributed to the planning and delivery of the National Employment Equity Forum.

- Nicole Waldron - Chair
- Nicholas Marcus Thompson - Co-Chair, National Employment Equity Council
- Phylomène Zangio - Co-Chair, National Employment Equity Council
- Tyler Boyce - Co-Chair, National Employment Equity Council
- Todd Kuiack - Special Advisor, Indigenous Relations and Public Policy, National Employment Equity Council; former Director of Operations, Privy Council Office
- Avion Campbell - Researcher, Anti-Black Racism Educator, Workplace Development Consultant
- Samuel Lowe - Black Undergraduate Coalition
- Lerato Chondoma - Acadia University
- Harini Sivalingam - Canadian Civil Liberties Association
- Melak Mengistab Gebresilassie - Amnesty International
- Craig Wellington - Black Opportunity Fund

• DeRico Symonds - Canadian Race Relations Foundation

• Almeera Khalid - Canadian Race Relations Foundation

• Robin Liu Hopson - Canadian Race Relations Foundation

• Fred Sherman - Hill Solutions

• Ayooluwa Orebiyi - Hill Solutions

• Louis Butt - Hill Solutions

• Denise Siele - Hill Solutions

9. Parliamentary Sponsors

The National Employment Equity Council extends its sincere appreciation to Senator Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard and Senator Dr. Kristopher Wells for serving as Parliamentary Sponsors of the National Employment Equity Forum.

Their sponsorship made it possible to convene the Forum in the Parliamentary Precinct, and the Council gratefully acknowledges the support of their offices and staff in coordinating the venue and assisting with the arrangements required to host the gathering on Parliament Hill.

10. Sponsors

The National Employment Equity Council extends its appreciation to the organizations whose support helped make the National Employment Equity Forum possible. Their contributions extended beyond sponsorship. Representatives from these organizations worked alongside the Council in planning the Forum, providing advice, supporting outreach and communications, and contributing to its delivery. The Council thanks each organization for the time, expertise and resources they contributed to bringing the Forum together.

Canadian Race Relations Foundation

Black Opportunity Fund

Canadian Association of Professional Employees

Hill Solutions

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ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES LIBERTES CIVILES

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© 2026 National Employment Equity Council
Ottawa, Canada
Published October 5, 2026
Suggested citation: National Employment Equity Council. (2026). *Report of the National Employment Equity Forum: Modernizing Employment Equity — Building Canada Together*. Ottawa: National Employment Equity Council.