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Federal legislation guide

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Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion

Contents

Introduction 3
Accessible Canada Act (ACA) 4
Canada Business Corporations Act diversity disclosure guidelines 5
Canada Labour Code: Part I – Industrial Relations 6
Canada Labour Code: Part II – Occupational Health and Safety 7
Canada Labour Code: Part III – Standard Hours, Wages, Vacations and Holidays 8
Canada Labour Code: Part IV – Administrative Monetary Penalties 9
Canadian Human Rights Act 10
Canadian Multiculturalism Act 12
Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Atlantic Accord Implementation Act 13
Canada Securities Association Rules for Disclosure on Board Diversity 14
Employment Equity Act 15
Federal Contractors Program 16
Foreign Workers Protection 17
National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace 18
Pay Equity Act 19
Pay Equity Regulations 20
Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act 21
Privacy Act 22

Introduction

This guide provides a brief overview of key federal employment, health and safety, privacy, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) legislation in Canada. For each piece of legislation, we outline why it is important to employers and how it relates to DEIA, who and what it applies to, the most recent date of amendment, the key requirements for employers (with attention to impacts on workplace practices), and the potential penalties for non-compliance. This guide is intended for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice.

We encourage organizations to use this guide as a starting point for understanding their obligations under federal law. However, this guide is not exhaustive. Federal legislation often includes exceptions, sector-specific applications, and regulatory details that require further review or consultation to fully understand and apply. In addition, while the information and links provided are accurate at the time of publication, this guide is not updated with every legislative change. Users should consult the relevant legislation and regulations to confirm current requirements.

While legal compliance represents the baseline, we also encourage organizations to go beyond compliance where possible, proactively building workplaces that prioritize safety, inclusion, accessibility, and equity in policies, practices, and organizational culture.

Note that this resource covers federal legislation only. Separate guides are available for provincial and territorial legislation.

Accessible Canada Act

Why this legislation matters

Federal accessibility laws work together to reduce barriers and create more equitable workplaces across Canada. By setting shared standards and requiring organizations to plan for accessibility, they help ensure that people with disabilities and accessibility needs can participate fully in employment and access services without discrimination.

Applies to

- Federally regulated entities, including the Government of Canada, banks, airlines, railways, marine transportation providers, the Canadian Forces, and the RCMP.

Latest amendment

- 2023-04-27

Requirements for employers

- Develop and implement accessibility plans covering employment, the built environment, and the design and delivery of programs and services.
- Ensure that web pages, mobile applications, and digital documents meet established accessibility standards.
- Establish feedback mechanisms to identify and address barriers experienced by individuals interacting with the organization.
- Provide training to staff on accessibility requirements.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Penalties may include but are not limited to notices of violation with warnings or fines (monetary penalty may in some cases go up to $250,000).
- If a notice of violation has been issued, regulated entities may enter a compliance agreement to address the violation and/or reduce the fine.

Further reading

- Accessible Canada Act
- Summary of the Accessible Canada Regulations, Government of Canada
- Accessible Canada Act responsibilities, Canadian Human Rights Commission
- Summary of the changes to the Accessible Canada Regulations about Digital Accessibility, Government of Canada

Canada Business Corporations Act diversity disclosure guidelines

Why this legislation matters

The Canada Business Corporations Act (CBCA) diversity disclosure requirements promote transparency and accountability in corporate leadership by requiring publicly traded companies to report representation of specific groups on boards and in senior management. This legislation encourages organizations to examine governance practices, consider equity in appointments, and set diversity-related goals or policies.

Applies to

- Federally incorporated distributing corporations, including publicly traded companies and other reporting issuers, not limited to those listed on major stock exchanges.

Requirements for employers

- Corporations must disclose, for each annual meeting, the representation of four designated groups: women, Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis), persons with disabilities, and visible minorities[1].
- They may also disclose additional groups they consider relevant to diversity in board or senior management.
- Disclosure must be provided to shareholders and filed with Corporations Canada.
- Employers are encouraged to report whether they have a written diversity policy, set targets for representation, consider diversity in nomination or appointment processes, and disclose any board renewal mechanisms or term limits, or explain if none exist.

Penalties for non-compliance

- The regime operates under a "comply-or-explain" framework: corporations must either provide the required disclosure or explain why they do not.
- Non-compliance may lead to shareholder or public scrutiny but does not trigger formal monetary penalties.

Further reading

- Canada Business Corporations Act
- Diversity disclosure guidelines, Government of Canada

[1] Although "visible minorities" is still used in legislation, it is considered outdated in other contexts. The terms "racialized groups" or "people of colour" better reflect the social construction of race and systemic inequities.

Canada Labour Code: Part I – Industrial Relations

Why this legislation matters

Part I of the Canada Labour Code establishes the framework for fair and effective workplace relations in federally regulated sectors. By protecting employee rights to organize, join unions, and engage in collective bargaining, the Code ensures that employers and unions can negotiate working conditions in a structured and legally recognized manner.

Applies to

- Federally regulated private sectors.
- Federally regulated public sectors.
- Private-sector firms and municipalities in Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Latest amendment

- 2025-12-12

Requirements for employers

- Recognize and respect employees' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining.
- Comply with provisions related to dispute resolution, strikes, and lockouts.
- Uphold labour relations rights and responsibilities outlined for employers, trade unions, and employees to maintain good working conditions and sound industrial relations.

Penalties for non-compliance

- See Part IV of the Canada Labour Code, which outlines fines, administrative actions, and potential prosecution for violations.

Further reading

- Canada Labour Code
- Overview of the parts of the Canada Labour Code and how they apply to your workplace, Government of Canada
- Collective Bargaining - Labour Program, Government of Canada

Canada Labour Code: Part II – Occupational Health and Safety

Why this legislation matters

Part II of the Canada Labour Code protects employees and other individuals who enter federally regulated workplaces from occupational injuries, diseases, harassment, and violence. By establishing clear health and safety duties for employers, employees, and health and safety committees, the Code helps prevent accidents and promotes safe, respectful, and inclusive workplaces.

Applies to

- Federally regulated private sectors (e.g., banks, airlines, railways, telecommunications).
- Federally regulated public sectors.
- Workplaces under federal jurisdiction in Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut.

Latest amendment

- 2025-12-12

Requirements for employers

- Protect the health and safety of employees and other individuals (e.g., contractors, visitors) at the workplace.
- Collaborate with employees, health and safety committees, or health and safety representatives to prevent workplace accidents, injuries, and occupational diseases.
- Workplace Harassment & Violence Prevention Regulations: Implement and maintain a written policy, conduct risk assessments, provide training, establish complaint and resolution procedures, and maintain records of incidents and investigations to prevent harassment and violence in federally regulated workplaces.

Penalties for non-compliance

- See Part IV of the Canada Labour Code, which outlines fines, administrative actions, and potential prosecution for violations, including failure to comply with health and safety obligations or harassment and violence prevention requirements.

Further reading

- Canada Labour Code
- Workplace health and safety, Government of Canada
- Summary of Part II of the Canada Labour Code, Government of Canada

Canada Labour Code: Part III – Standard Hours, Wages, Vacations and Holidays

Why this legislation matters

Part III of the Canada Labour Code ensures that employees in federally regulated private sectors have access to fair and equitable working conditions. By establishing minimum standards for wages, hours, leave, and other employment conditions, it protects workers from exploitation and promotes a consistent, fair employment framework across industries.

Applies to

- Federally regulated private sectors (e.g., banks, airlines, railways, telecommunications).

Latest amendment

- 2025-12-12

Requirements for employers

- Provide employees with minimum labour standards, including:
  - Hours of work and overtime entitlements
  - Minimum wages
  - Statutory holidays
  - Annual vacation and vacation pay
  - Various types of leave (sick leave, bereavement leave, parental leave, etc.)
- Ensure all employees receive these minimum entitlements to maintain fair and equitable treatment.

Penalties for non-compliance

- See Part IV of the Canada Labour Code, which outlines fines, administrative actions, and potential prosecution for violations of labour standards.

Further reading

- Canada Labour Code
- Canada Labour Standards Regulations
- Federal labour standards, Government of Canada

Canada Labour Code: Part IV – Administrative Monetary Penalties

Why this legislation matters

Part IV of the Canada Labour Code strengthens enforcement of workplace rights and safety by introducing administrative monetary penalties (AMPs) for non-compliance with labour standards, occupational health and safety requirements, and harassment/violence prevention obligations.

Applies to

- Federally regulated private sectors and federally regulated public sectors.

Latest amendment

- 2025-12-12

Requirements for employers

- Comply with obligations under Part II (Occupational Health & Safety), Part III (Labour Standards), and related regulations.
- Be aware that violations may trigger Administrative Monetary Penalties (AMPs) and public disclosure of non-compliance.
- Understand procedures for review and appeal under the AMP framework.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Maximum penalty for a single violation is $250,000.
- Penalty amounts are calculated based on the type/classification of the violation, the size of the business, and any history of prior violations (which can increase the penalty).
- The Labour Program may publicly name employers who have been issued AMPs or other enforcement orders.
- If non-compliance is serious or willful and not corrected, inspectors may recommend prosecution instead of or in addition to administrative penalties.

Further reading

- Canada Labour Code
- Labour Program administrative monetary penalties (AMP), Government of Canada

Canadian Human Rights Act

Why this legislation matters

The Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA) is essential for promoting equitable treatment and preventing discrimination in federally regulated workplaces and services. By prohibiting adverse treatment on grounds such as race, gender, disability, or Indigenous identity, it ensures that employees, clients, and the public can participate fully and fairly in employment, housing, and access to services.

Applies to

- The federal government and federal departments, agencies, and Crown corporations.
- Federally regulated private-sector organizations, such as banks, airlines, railways, telecommunications, broadcasting, and interprovincial/international trucking.
- Individuals affected by federal laws or policies, including those related to employment, services, accommodation, and matters involving Indigenous peoples and federal programs (since 2017).

Latest amendment

- 2024-08-19

Requirements for employers

- Employers cannot discriminate in employment, including hiring, promotion, training, discipline, termination, or any other term or condition of employment on the prohibited grounds listed in the Act.
- Employers must:
  - Provide reasonable accommodation for employee needs related to protected grounds (e.g., disability, religion, family status) to the point of undue hardship.
  - Maintain a workplace free from harassment.
  - Ensure pay practices are non-discriminatory.
  - Cooperate with investigations by the Canadian Human Rights Commission and comply with decisions or remedies ordered by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Individuals can file a complaint with the Human Rights Commission/Tribunal; if discrimination is found, the Tribunal may order corrective measures (e.g. stop discriminatory practices, provide lost opportunities or wages, compensate for pain and suffering, or require accommodations).

- Tribunal orders are enforceable as Federal Court orders, and failure to comply can lead to further legal consequences.

Further reading

- Canadian Human Rights Act
- Discrimination complaint rules, Canadian Human Rights Commission
- For organizations, Canadian Human Rights Commission
- For individuals, Canadian Human Rights Commission

Canadian Multiculturalism Act

Why this legislation matters

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act affirms that all Canadians are equal and that diversity, including cultural, racial, and religious differences, should be recognized, respected, and celebrated. For employers, this law underlines the importance of creating inclusive workplaces where employees from all backgrounds can participate fully, and where policies, programs, and practices do not discriminate on the basis of culture, ethnicity, or religion.

Applies to

- All federal institutions and organizations operating under federal jurisdiction.

Latest amendment

- 2014-04-01

Requirements for employers

- Respect and promote the principles of multiculturalism in employment practices, policies, and programs.
- Ensure employees are able to practice their culture, language, and religion without facing discrimination.
- Encourage representation and participation of diverse cultural communities within workplaces.

Penalties for non-compliance

- The Act does not create individual employee complaint rights or direct penalties; however, failure to uphold multiculturalism principles can lead to reputational risks, complaints under the Canadian Human Rights Act, or scrutiny from federal oversight bodies.

Further reading

- Canadian Multiculturalism Act
- About the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, Government of Canada

Canada – Newfoundland and Labrador Atlantic Accord Implementation Act

Why this legislation matters

The Atlantic Accord promotes equitable participation in offshore resource developments in Newfoundland and Labrador. By requiring Operators to include Diversity Plans within their Benefits Plans, the legislation ensures that historically disadvantaged groups have meaningful access to training, employment, and business opportunities.

Applies to

- The Government of Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Operators undertaking offshore petroleum and renewable energy projects in the province's offshore area.

Latest amendment

- 2025-06-02

Requirements for employers

- Include provisions in a Benefits Plan to ensure disadvantaged groups have access to training, employment, and participation in the supply of goods and services.
- Develop and implement a Diversity Plan.
- Operators must obtain regulatory approval from the Canada–Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Energy Regulator before proceeding with development activities.

Penalties for non-compliance

- The Act does not set specific monetary fines for failure to include a Diversity Plan.
- Non-compliance may result in regulatory refusal to approve the Benefits Plan, preventing the Operator from proceeding with the project.
- Other statutory offences under the Act (e.g., submitting false information, unauthorized development) may carry penalties up to $100,000 (summary) or $1,000,000 (indictment), and/or imprisonment, depending on the nature of the violation.

Further reading

- Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Atlantic Accord Implementation Act

Canada Securities Association Rules for Disclosure on Board Diversity

Why this legislation matters

Board and executive diversity disclosure rules help increase transparency and accountability in corporate governance by showing whether women are represented in leadership positions.

Applies to

- "Non-venture issuers" listed on the TSX (and other comparable Canadian exchanges), excluding certain categories (such as exchange-traded funds, closed-end funds, foreign issuers, etc.).

Latest amendment

- Originally effective as of December 31, 2014.

Requirements for employers

- Disclose the number and percentage of women on the board of directors and among executive officers.
- Disclose whether they have a written policy for identification and nomination of women directors.
- Disclose whether they consider the representation of women when nominating directors and appointing executive officers.
- Disclose whether the company has director term limits or other board renewal mechanisms (or explain why not).
- Disclose any targets for women's representation on the board and among executive officers (or explain why none).

Penalties for non-compliance

- No statutory fines specified for failure to make the disclosure. Non-compliance entails that issuers must provide explanations, and may attract reputational, investor or shareholder scrutiny.

Further reading

- Diversity of boards of directors and senior management, Government of Canada
- Canadian securities regulators propose changes to corporate governance disclosure practices and guidelines, Canadian Securities Administrators

Employment Equity Act

Why this legislation matters

The Employment Equity Act promotes fair and inclusive workplaces in federally regulated organizations by ensuring historically disadvantaged groups have equitable access to employment opportunities.

Applies to

- Federal public service and federally regulated employers with 100 or more employees.

Latest amendment

- 2021-01-01

Requirements for employers

- Review employment systems, policies, and practices to identify barriers affecting members of the four designated groups.
- Collect and analyze workforce data to determine the representation of designated groups across occupational groups and levels.
- Prepare an employment equity plan that sets short- and long-term goals to correct underrepresentation, includes positive policies and practices (which cannot include quotas), and outlines measures, timelines, and accountability.
- Submit an annual employment equity report, which is reviewed by the Minister of Labour and enforced by the Labour Program.
- Regularly review employment policies, practices, and workforce data.

Penalties for non-compliance

- If an employer fails to comply, the Minister of Labour can issue a notice of non-compliance, require the employer to develop or revise an employment equity plan, and et timelines and actions to remedy deficiencies.
- Specific reporting violations may lead to monetary penalties up to $10,000 for a single violation and $50,000 for repeated or continued violations.

Further reading

- Employment Equity Act
- Employment Equity Act responsibilities, Canadian Human Rights Commission

Federal Contractors Program

Why this legislation matters

The FCP ensures that employers seeking major federal contracts contribute to a fair and inclusive workforce by actively implementing employment equity practices.

Applies to

- Organizations with a combined workforce in Canada of 100 or more permanent full-time or permanent part-time employees, and that have received an initial federal government goods or services contract valued at $1 million or more (including applicable taxes).
- The FCP does not apply to contracts for the purchase or leasing of real property, or for construction or legal services.

Requirements for employers

- Certify that they will implement employment equity measures when bidding on federal contracts valued at $1 million or more.
- Develop and maintain employment equity practices in their workforce, aligned with federal expectations for designated groups.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Contractors found not to honor their commitment to employment equity may lose the right to bid on future federal government contracts or standing offers over $25,000 (including taxes).

Further reading

- Federal Contractors Program, Government of Canada

Foreign Workers Protection

Why this legislation matters

Protecting temporary foreign workers ensures that all employees in Canada, regardless of immigration status, have access to safe and fair working conditions.

Applies to

- Temporary foreign workers (TFWs) hired under the program.

Requirements for employers

- Provide TFWs with information about their rights under the program.
- Have a formal signed employment agreement, consistent with the original job offer.
- Pay at least the wages agreed to in the employment agreement and comply with both federal and applicable provincial/territorial labour standards.
- Provide a workplace free from harassment, violence, and unsafe working conditions.
- Not charge TFWs any recruitment or placement fees (or attempt to recover those fees).
- Keep proper records related to the TFW's employment.
- Notify authorities promptly of any changes to the employment conditions, or if there are changes/errors in the Labour Market Impact Assessment decision.
- Employers must comply with inspection requests, including unannounced inspections, and provide documentation and access for inspectors.
- Employers must not retaliate against workers for reporting abuse or unsafe conditions.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Administrative monetary penalties ranging from $500 up to $100,000 per violation, with a total annual cap of $1,000,000.
- Employers may also receive a temporary or permanent ban from hiring temporary foreign workers, have their Labour Market Impact Assessments suspended or revoked, and be publicly listed on the government's non-compliant employer registry.
- Additionally, they may be required to compensate workers for unpaid wages or benefits, and serious violations can result in both reputational damage and loss of eligibility to bid on government contracts.

Further reading

- Temporary foreign workers: Your rights are protected, Government of Canada

National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

Why this legislation matters

The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace provides a framework for employers to proactively protect employees' mental health and well-being.

Applies to

- Implementing the standard is voluntary for employers in the public and private sectors across Canada.

Requirements for employers

- Take measures to prevent and protect workers from psychological harm.
- Provide training and education to promote psychological health and safety.
- Involve a diversity of workers in identifying problems and solutions.
- Develop a clear process for reporting investigating, and monitoring health and safety concerns.
- Collect data and develop a plan to control risks related to the 13 factors affecting psychological health and safety in the workplace.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Voluntary standard; no legal penalties, but organizations may face reputational risk, decreased employee well-being, and potential regulatory scrutiny if risks are not managed.

Further reading

- National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace
- Implementing the Standard, Mental Health Commission of Canada

Pay Equity Act

Why this legislation matters

The Pay Equity Act ensures that federally regulated workplaces provide fair compensation regardless of gender, eliminating systemic underpayment of women in comparable roles. By requiring employers to evaluate job classes, compare compensation, and implement corrective adjustments, the Act promotes workplace equity and inclusion.

Applies to

- Federally regulated employers (public, private, and parliamentary workplaces) with 10 or more employees.

Latest amendment

- 2021-08-31

Requirements for employers

- Establish a Pay Equity Plan within three years of becoming subject to the Act.
- Identify all job classes, determine if they are "predominantly male" or "predominantly female".
- Assess the value of work for each job class and compare compensation across male- and female-dominated roles.
- Adjust pay to eliminate inequities where female-dominated job classes are underpaid.
- Post the Pay Equity Plan and notify employees.
- Update the plan at least every five years to maintain pay equity.
- Pay Equity Committee may be required for employers with 100+ employees, or 10–99 employees if unionized.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Employers who violate the Act may face administrative monetary penalties: up to $30,000 for employers with 10–99 employees and up to $50,000 for employers with 100+ employees, per violation.
- Enforcement includes inspections, compliance orders, and correction of pay inequities.

Further reading

- Pay Equity Act
- Pay Equity Act responsibilities, Canadian Human Rights Commission

Pay Equity Regulations

Why this legislation matters

The Pay Equity Regulations provide technical rules to implement the Pay Equity Act, ensuring that federally regulated employers proactively compare compensation fairly between male- and female-dominated job classes.

Applies to

- Federally regulated workplaces with 10 or more employees, including public and private sectors.

Requirements for employers

- Ensure that when comparing job classes, frozen compensation is not directly compared with active (non-frozen) compensation unless using the prescribed adjustment formula.
- If frozen compensation must be compared:
  - Use the highest salary in the job class plus an adjustment reflecting average increases in unionized positions; or
  - If a Pay Equity Committee exists, use an alternate method that minimizes differences caused solely by frozen pay.
- Maintain documentation of all comparisons and any alternate calculation methods used.
- Apply procedures consistently to ensure fair and accurate pay equity assessments across job classes.

Penalties for non-compliance

- The Regulations themselves do not impose direct fines; however, failure to comply may trigger enforcement under the Pay Equity Act, including compliance orders and remedial adjustments to pay.

Further reading

- Pay Equity Regulations

Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act

Why this legislation matters

Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) ensures that employers in the private sector handle personal information responsibly and transparently.

Applies to

- All private-sector organizations in Canada that collect, use, or disclose personal information during commercial activities.

Latest amendment

- 2025-03-04

Requirements for employers

- Designate an individual responsible for ensuring compliance with PIPEDA principles.
- Clearly state the purposes for collecting personal information at or before collection.
- Obtain informed consent from individuals before or at the time their personal information is collected.
- Only collect information necessary for the identified purposes, use personal information only for stated purposes, and retain it only as long as necessary.
- Ensure personal information is accurate, complete, and protected with appropriate security safeguards.
- Make policies available to individuals and provide access to personal information with a mechanism to correct inaccuracies.
- Report breaches posing real risk of significant harm to affected individuals and to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada and maintain records of all breaches.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Organizations may face fines of up to $100,000 per violation for willful failure to comply with breach-reporting or record-keeping obligations.

Further reading

- Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act
- The Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada

Privacy Act

Why this legislation matters

The Privacy Act protects personal information held by federal government institutions, ensuring transparency, accountability, and fair treatment of individuals.

Applies to

- Federal government institutions listed in the Privacy Act — i.e., the Act does not apply to private-sector employers.

Latest amendment

- 2025-06-02

Requirements for employers

- Limit collection of personal information to what is necessary for the specified, lawful purpose.
- Collect, use, or disclose personal information only for the purposes identified at or before collection, unless another permitted purpose under the Act applies.
- Provide individuals with the right to access personal information held about them, and to request correction if it is inaccurate or incomplete.
- Implement safeguards to protect personal information against unauthorized access, disclosure, copying, loss or theft, ensuring confidentiality and security in handling records.

Penalties for non-compliance

- The Act includes a narrow offence provision for obstruction: anyone who willfully obstructs the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (or their delegated investigator) may be convicted on summary conviction and fined up to $1,000.
- The Act does not establish broader fines or automatic monetary penalties for all privacy violations (e.g., improper collection or disclosure). Remedies more commonly consist of investigations, orders to correct practices, or decisions by the Commissioner.

Further reading

- Privacy Act
- Canada's Privacy Act, Government of Canada