

History of Employment Equity

1950s-1960s

- New employment statutes in most Canadian jurisdictions prohibited racial and religious discrimination and prescribed equal pay for men and women.
- 1960: The first Canadian Bill of Rights was introduced.
- Equal Opportunity: one of the first concepts commonly used to define equality in employment for all Canadians. Equal Opportunity was based on the notion that if discrimination in employment ended, all Canadians would have equal access to equal employment opportunities. However, Equal Opportunity programs did not result in any significant redistribution in the employment of disadvantaged group members in the Canadian workforce.

1970s

- Increased pressure from women and minority groups led federal, provincial and municipal governments to establish special programs to improve the employment situation of these groups.
- Human Rights Commissions were established in all provinces by the mid-1970s.
- 1977: Parliament enacted the Canadian Human Rights Act. It applied to federal and federally regulated bodies and aimed to protect Canadians from discrimination based on any of the 10 grounds: race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, marital status, family status, disability and conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted. Sexual orientation was added to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination in 1996.
- 1978: Province of Nova Scotia releases a policy statement outlining its position on “the employment and promotion of minority group persons and women in the Nova Scotia Public Service”. First Affirmative Action Officer hired at the Public Service Commission.
- The federal government launched a voluntary Affirmative Action Program aimed at private industry.
- 1979: Federal contractors and Crown corporations were included and the program was administered through the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission. The targeted groups were: Aboriginal peoples; Blacks in Nova Scotia; persons with disabilities; and women.

1980s

- 1980: A pilot Affirmative Action Program was established in three federal government departments (Canada Employment and Immigration Commission, Secretary

of State and Treasury Board Secretariat). In 1983, this initiative was extended to all departments within the federal public service. The groups targeted were: Aboriginal peoples; persons with disabilities; and women.

These voluntary affirmative action programs did not bring about significant changes in employment opportunities for disadvantaged group members.

- 1983: The Royal Commission on Equality in Employment was established to address the lack of progress experienced through voluntary affirmative action programs.

The Commission was instructed to "explore the most efficient, effective and equitable means of promoting equality in employment" for the four designated groups: women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and visible minority persons.

- 1984: Judge Rosalie Abella released the Commission's report and coined the term Employment Equity to describe the Canadian approach to dealing with employment disadvantage.

Also in 1984, Equality Now, the report of the Parliamentary Special Committee on Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society, set out that committee's recommendations on improving race relations in Canada.

- 1985: In June, the federal government responded to the Commission's report by introducing Bill 62: a Bill with respect to Employment Equity.

In addition, Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into effect, further strengthening the idea of workplace equality.

This "Equality Rights" section contains protection against discrimination and makes a provision for special affirmative action programs. Subsection 15(2) acknowledges that equality requires conditions of disadvantage to be addressed. This means that the argument that employment equity is 'reverse discrimination' is not legally valid. Employment equity does not target individuals or groups for exclusion, as does discrimination; rather, employment equity seeks to include groups that are proven to have been excluded in the past.

- 1986: The Employment Equity Act was passed. Its purpose was to:

"achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in the fulfillment of the goals, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and visible minority people by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences."

- 1989 PSC commences discussions with NSGEU on how to improve representation in Nova Scotia Public Service

1990s

- 1992 Mandatory Race Relations Training for Nova Scotia Public Servants following serious racial incidents in halifax and a march of concern.
- 1993 first voluntary self-identification survey for Nova Scotia Public Servants.
- 1994 Fair Hiring Policy adopted by Province of Nova Scotia. Addressed non-partison hiring and hiring of relatives.
- 1995 Province of Nova Scotia adopts an Affirmative Action Policy based on Employment Equity Principles.
- 1995: The second Employment Equity Act received royal assent in 1995 and came into force on October 24, 1996. Built on the framework provided by the earlier legislation, it focuses on clarifying and enforcing the employer obligations in the Act. The Act covers private sector employers under federal jurisdiction as well as almost all employees of the federal government.
- 1997 Province of Nova Scotia and Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission sign Affirmative Action Agreement based on the Affirmative Action Policy.
- 1999 Province of Nova Scotia adopts a Corporate Policy on provision of Sign Language Interpretor Services.

2000s

- 2001 Nova Scotia Affirmative Action Policy is reviewed and updated.
- 2005 Corporate Human Resource Plan released - one goal “to be a diverse workforce”.
- 2006 Affirmative Action Policy and Fair Hiring Policy is reviewed and focus group consultations held with Public Servants, community Stakeholders and the General Public.
- 2008 October 1 Employment Equity Policy replaces Affirmative Action Policy in Management Manual 500
- 2008 October 1 Improvements to Fair Hiring Policy come into effect with improved relationship and guidelines to Employment Equity Policy.
- 2008 October 1 Respectful Workplace Policy comes into effect.