

**BMO Study: Four in 10 Small Business Owners Hiring People With Disabilities**  
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TORONTO, ONTARIO--(Marketwired - Oct 7, 2014) - BMO Financial Group today released a study which found that four in 10 (39 per cent) Canadian small business owners indicated they had hired someone with a disability. This represents a significant increase - up 34 per cent - from 2013, when only three in 10 (29 per cent) small business owners had hired someone with a disability.

In Canada, Persons with Disabilities are defined as those who have a long-term or recurring physical, mental, sensory, psychiatric or learning disability.

"It's really encouraging to see that more and more small businesses not only understand the business case for hiring people with disabilities, but are taking measurable action by tapping into this very skilled, capable and motivated talent pool," said Sonya Kunkel, Chief Diversity Officer & Vice President Talent Strategies, BMO Financial Group. "Research shows that more diverse and inclusive workplaces drive stronger performance, create more successful and engaged employees and build competitive advantage. Collectively, we're making good progress in building understanding and awareness. But businesses of all sizes in Canada still have work to do to translate this knowledge into programs that will effectively reduce the disproportionate number of people with disabilities in Canada who remain unemployed."

According to the study, the majority (86 per cent) of small business owners agree that workplace diversity is an asset. However, only 36 per cent say their company has a formal program in place to promote diversity and inclusion.

Ms. Kunkel added, "Having a program in place sets the stage - and a standard - for everyone to talk openly about their differences. It can also help reduce stigma, break down barriers and ensure employees have the support they need to perform at their best."

Several years ago, BMO introduced *Count Me In* - a program that encourages employees with disabilities, including those in executive leadership positions, to self-identify with their colleagues; to talk about their experiences, challenges and successes; and to stand as role models for others within the organization.

Since the creation of *Count Me In*, the number of employees with disabilities in the Greater Toronto Division alone has doubled. By raising awareness and opening the conversation, this national campaign has helped dispel the myths that have perpetuated misconceptions and bias surrounding Persons with Disabilities. These conversations and awareness foster a more inclusive and accessible workplace for employees with disabilities and all employees.

*Results cited above come from a Pollara telephone survey of 502 Canadian business owners, conducted between August 11<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014. 2013 results come from a Pollara telephone survey of 301 Canadian business owners, conducted between August 22<sup>nd</sup> and September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013.*

**About BMO Financial Group**

Established in 1817 as Bank of Montreal, BMO Financial Group is a highly diversified financial services organization based in North America. The bank offers a broad range of retail banking, wealth management and investment banking products and services to more than 12 million customers. BMO Financial Group had more than \$586 billion in total assets and approximately 47,000 employees at July 31, 2014.

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