

# Canadians Speak Up: Consultation Results on Proposed Accessibility Legislation in Canada



## Les Canadiens prennent la parole : Résultats des consultations pour la loi prévue sur l'accessibilité au Canada

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**Social Development Participation Program – Disability**

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# BACKGROUND

## Alliance Members and Partners

The **Alliance for an Inclusive and Accessible Canada** (the Alliance) is made up of 12 member organizations and 3 partner organizations from Canada’s disability community. Together, we are consulting Canadians about the Government of Canada’s new accessibility law. The Alliance is collecting the comments, concerns and suggestions of Canadians with disabilities and their families. We are also gathering input from other stakeholders such as service providers, unions, industry representatives, and associations. This project is funded by the Government of Canada’s Social Development Partnerships Program - Disability Component.

## Our Member Organizations:

AEBC - Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians	
ASC - Alzheimer Society of Canada	
CACL - Canadian Association of Community Living	
CASDA - Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance	
CCD - Council of Canadians with Disabilities	
CMHA - Canadian Mental Health Association	
CNIB - Canadian National Institute for the Blind	
DAWN - DisAbled Women’s Network Canada	
MODC- March of Dimes Canada	

<p>NNMH - National Network for Mental Health</p>	
<p>People First of Canada</p>	
<p>Realize – (formerly Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation)</p>	

**Our Partner Organizations:**

<p>DeafBlind Ontario Services</p>	
<p>Muscular Dystrophy Canada</p>	
<p>NEADS – National Educational Association of Disabled Students</p>	
<p>Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalous Association Canada</p>	

## **TERMINOLOGY**

The language used in this report to refer to disability reflects two popular choices among disabled persons' organizations (DPOs): "People with disabilities" and "Disabled people". These terms are used interchangeably along with people and citizens throughout the report to acknowledge both preferences.

For the purpose of the survey, the public sessions, and the discussion groups the "Alliance defines barriers as anything that prevents a person with a disability from being fully included in society and from accessing services, goods and opportunities that are available to others. Barriers can take many forms. For example, they can be architectural (ex. stairs), technological (ex. inaccessible websites) or attitudinal (ex. negative stereotypes and discrimination)."

In this report we will ensure to use plain language as citizens across the country spoke out about having to overcome multiple barriers in accessing information; for instance the use of technical jargon, and the use of complicated wording. As a result of that feedback, please request a plain language copy of this report if required.\*

## **PHASE TWO ACTIVITIES**

### **Planning and Development**

During the initial planning of the project, the Alliance members formed five committees and each developed their terms of reference. The Hiring Committee hired the Project Managers. The Administration Committee oversaw the project's work plan and budget. The Stakeholder Committee planned the consultation activities and materials, including a detailed Facilitation Guide. The Communications Committee developed the project's outreach and consultation materials, including the Alliance's logo, website, and social media accounts. The Evaluation Committee developed an evaluation strategy and hired a consultant to evaluate the collective impact of the Alliance.

All materials from Phase 1 were updated to reflect the activities of Phase 2. A face to face meeting took place in Toronto on April 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 2017 to plan for the activities of phase two for the project.

Results from the phase one evaluation and surveys informed the thematic and geographic areas not covered during the consultations held by the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities. These pilot sessions resulted in insights that helped to refine our consultation method. The data generated showed that many groups within the disability community were not reached during Phase One and that there were many issues that required a more dedicated discussion.

Based on these results the Alliance committed to hold the following consultation activities: hosting 25 public sessions, 25 discussion groups, 15 online or telephone discussion groups, and interviews with 100 experts and introducing a revised online survey.

### **Survey**

In Phase 2, the Alliance launched its second online survey. The survey asked Canadians to identify the main barriers they face in several priority areas within federal jurisdiction: the built environment, transportation (rail, air, and sea), communications (including broadcasting and telecommunications), program and service delivery, and employment. The survey also included open-ended questions that allowed participants to identify accessibility issues and concerns outside of these key areas. The Alliance received a total of 417 responses to the second online survey.

### **Demographic Data**

Two-hundred-and-eighty-eight survey respondents identified themselves as having a disability. Sixty-eight were caregivers and 97 were family members of persons with disabilities. Sixty-four respondents identified themselves as service providers and 65 identified as organizations of and for persons with disabilities. Over half of respondents (244) were women. The most common types of disabilities reported by respondents were mobility (161), vision (70), mental health (71), auditory (38), intellectual (22), and “other please specify” (69) with answers that ranged from Crohn’s disease, Multiple Sclerosis, chronic pain, severe environmental allergies, acquired brain injury, and a variety of other disabilities which would be classified as invisible and/or episodic disabilities. Twenty respondents self-identified as belonging to racialized communities. Sixteen respondents were immigrants or refugees. Five respondents were Status Indians under the *Indian Act*, and sixteen were non-status Indigenous persons. Twenty-two respondents identified as being LGBTQ2S.

## Demographic Tables

### General Population

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b># OF ENTRIES</b>
Person with a Disability	288
Caregiver	68
Family Member	97
Service Provider	64
Organization	65
Women	244

### Types of Disability

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b># OF ENTRIES</b>
Mobility	161
Vision	70
Mental Health	71
Auditory	38
Intellectual	22
Other (Including deafblind)	69

### Self-Identified Racialized Groups

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b># OF ENTRIES</b>
Immigrant/refugee	16
Status Indigenous	5
Non-status Indigenous	16
LGBTQ2S	22

The majority of respondents (290) were willing to identify their age range. The table below gives a detailed breakdown of the respondents' age groups.

### Age of Respondents

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b># OF ENTRIES</b>
Age 18-34	43
Age 35 to 49	97
Age 50-54	37
Age 55-64	77
Age 65 and over	36
No Answer	127
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>417</b>

## **PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS**

In Phase 2, the Alliance held 25 public consultations in different regions across the country. To allow for a greater number of Canadians to provide input into the proposed legislation, the Alliance targeted geographic areas that were not included in the federal government's consultation process or the Phase 1 pilot consultations.

The public consultations were organized and facilitated by Alliance member and partner organizations, taking place between May 23<sup>rd</sup> and July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Each location hosted a public session and a by-invitation discussion group, focused on a specific topic. Lasting 2 to 3 hours each the participants were recruited through the networks of Alliance organizations, the Alliance website and social media, and local media.

The Public Session participants were presented with the following questions:

- 1) What are the factors that prevent you or affect your ability to participate in society?
- 2) What is the most important thing the Federal Government could do to improve the situation?

**The Discussion Group conversations included topics identified out of the phase one consultations. Participants responded to the same questions asked in the public sessions with a focus on one specific topic area.**

The following table lists the topics and the location of the consultations

### **Topics of Discussion groups at Public Consultations**

<b>City</b>	<b>Prov.</b>	<b>Topic</b>
Charlottetown	PEI	Leisure
Montreal	QU	LGTBQ2S+ community
Peterborough	ON	Poverty
London	ON	DeafBlind Services
Burlington	ON	Electoral Process
Hamilton	ON	Employment/Labour
Thompson	MB	Northern Issues
Lethbridge	AB	Housing
Grande Prairie	AB	Travel
Banff	AB	People with Downs Syndrome and Family
Kelowna	BC	Banking and Financial
Victoria	BC	Communications and Access to Information

## Geographic Analysis

Communities chosen for Phase 2 of the consultations are based on the data gathered from the Phase 1 report, and a review of the Government consultations to explore the regions that were not included or sufficiently consulted. Committing to host 25 public sessions and 25 focus groups across the country consultations were completed at the end of June 2017.

A Geographic review of the data shows that the populations consulted varied from 5,515 in The Pas, Manitoba to 2.809 million Toronto, Ontario. The face to face and the invitational focus group consultations were held in both large urban centers, small urban communities, rural urban communities, rural remote, and urban remote communities across the country.

## Impacted groups

The accounts from participants clearly inform us that the Government of Canada ought to be creating this new Accessibility and Inclusion Legislation through an intersectional lens. It is not enough to only be considering the disability of a person, but understanding how social and economic issues cause additional discrimination, further impacting their lives. The government must look beyond the label of disability and consider how all factors play a significant role in the intersectional discrimination of people with disabilities. Particularly those groups most marginalized by the existing policies and legislative frameworks.

## Blind Persons, Partially Sighted and Deafblind

Access to information in braille was identified most frequently as a barrier for blind people as it seems that documentation is rare in either English or French braille. An example of this is banking documents are usually available in braille for chequing accounts while banking institutions often leave out savings accounts, investments, and mortgage information. Additionally, participants stated when opening a bank account, a person requires assistance in reading the paperwork often by a stranger. This involves an element of trust that may not be present with a stranger. Participants identified that these barriers prevent them from accessing information in a fair way, often forcing them to ask for assistance.

Also, public places such as, restaurants, museums and other attractions open to the public, do not always have signs in braille to indicate washrooms, exit signs, elevators and stairs, which makes independent navigation less safe and less independent. Participants also stated that television shows do not always have descriptive video for their programming nor is descriptive video available at the movie theatres.

Individuals who are deafblind experience **barriers to: communication**; access to information; the environment; and, mobility. They require intervenor services to provide visual and auditory information so they can communicate with others and understand the world around them. Intervenors serve as a **communication bridge** that enables a person who is deafblind to interact with the world around them.

Individuals who are deafblind have preferences for how they want to engage in communication and it is important to appreciate that they may want to engage in a method of communication of their choice.

It is important to acknowledge the challenges that the person living with deafblindness may face and then work with the individual to create solutions that are person-centred and follow principles of fairness, equality and respect. Each individual who is living with deafblindness will have their own unique needs and preferences – all approaches need to be tailored to a specific person's requirements.

### **Deaf Persons**

People representing the Deaf community advised that they face many barriers including access to interpreters. They claimed that this is because sign language is not widely offered outside the Deaf community and with limited access to lessons for hearing people more barriers are created further excluding and isolating people who are Deaf. Participants said that access to interpreters would be the best and immediate solution to language barriers, enabling people who are deaf to attend appointments, go to school and have representation when needed.

Often Deaf students are hesitant to attend a hearing school without proper supports. One participant advised that there is one Canadian university where Deaf students can study for free however, there is speculation that the program has never been used because people do not know that the program exists.

Participants and advocates at the consultations identified that the Disability Community must urge the Government of Canada to designate American Sign Language (ASL) and Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) as official languages of Canada.

Providing ASL and LSQ for students and for adults, interested in learning sign language, would make sign language more accessible to the Deaf Community. Participants stated that this support would reduce barriers and work to ensure a more inclusive community, enhance social life, and access to health care, employment opportunities and banking needs of people who are Deaf.

Interpreters are currently expensive and difficult to access. They need to be booked well in advance and sometimes are only available through a video chat service, which is not the same as having an actual person there with you to translate.

***One participant shared his story about his encounter with the law. He was denied an interpreter when he was taken to jail for a minor offence. The situation escalated because of the lack of interpreters.***

Access to emergency services has only recently become available with the ability to text 911 services. One user of this service mentioned that texting 911 has a poor response time, and can take up to two minutes for a reply.

Often media and technology, as well as radio, are not available in live feed transcripts. Closed captioning is not always available and at times the captions are very different from the intention of what is actually being said. Technology is expensive and there are limits to its use for people who are deaf, hard of hearing and Deaf. The necessity for access to inexpensive technology applications and programs being made available through mobile devices, and tablets can increase access to information that could make daily living easier for people with disabilities.

### **Hard of Hearing**

People who are hard of hearing are not completely deaf, but they have some degree of difficulty hearing. Some people who are hard of hearing wear hearing aids and can utilize an audio technology called a LOOP system. Participants advised that the LOOP system removes barriers for the hard of hearing. This system broadcasts sounds within a certain distance directly into the hearing aid that helps cut out background noise. These systems are not readily available in most public places but would be incredibly beneficial for the inclusion of the hard of hearing.

Banking is a prime example of where this would be beneficial. Customers who are hard of hearing either have their information stated loudly in front of others or need to request a private room to conduct their business in private. LOOP systems in banks would eliminate privacy concerns for the hard of hearing.

### **Indigenous People with Disabilities**

Participants from the Indigenous communities were among those who were consulted, and advised that jurisdictional issues compound the lives of people with disabilities such as in areas of social services, health, and education, both on and off the reserves. For example, provincial standards vary in both budget and quality of education and because of this children are sent away to attend school, off the reserve, away from their family, their community, and their culture.

Many Indigenous people are living with complex issues and co-occurring illness like, mental health and addictions, FASD. This is compounded with, historic trauma, abuse and violence, head injury, chronic illness, and physical disabilities.

Indigenous people with disabilities are more likely to suffer poverty, be homeless, isolated, and experience higher rates of suicide. Additionally, the stereotyping and the intersectional discrimination they experience further marginalizes them and the Indigenous community as a whole.

## **Invisible or Episodic Disabilities**

When there is no obvious physical sign that a person has a disability it is often classified as invisible Disabilities that are not immediately apparent are often judged by society as, “those people who are not really disabled, but abusing disability accommodations or making false claims for personal gain”. Some examples of invisible disabilities include psychosocial disabilities and intellectual disabilities.

This marginalizing of people with invisible disabilities creates a lot of anxiety and stress that further impacts their symptoms. People advised that at times they are afraid to say that they have a disability for fear of being treated differently.

Feelings that they will be treated differently, make them feel they are being shunned, feared, excluded and isolated.

Their legal capacity and their right to self-determination is undermined or removed and often subjected to segregation in institutions. They have disproportionately high rates of poverty and receive subminimum wages. The stigma associated with invisible disability, intellectual and psychosocial disability in particular must be combatted through targeted public awareness campaigns.

“Episodic disabilities” are often also invisible and are characterized by periods of good health interrupted by periods of illness or disability. These periods may vary in severity, length and predictability from one person to another. Some common examples of episodic disabilities include multiple sclerosis, arthritis, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, chronic fatigue syndrome, migraines, chronic pain, some forms of cancer and mental illness.

The unpredictability of living with an episodic disability makes participating in employment very challenging. As well, most income security programs in Canada use definitions of disability that require that symptoms to be both “severe and prolonged”. A person living with MS always has MS but their symptoms may be severe only part of the time. This means that while employment is very difficult, people living with episodic disabilities also may not qualify as ‘disabled’ for the purposes of income security programs either.

Stigma also negatively impacts people with episodic disabilities, like HIV/AIDS and mental illnesses, and is a wide-spread barrier to community participation and employment.

# **APPROACH TO ANALYSIS**

## **Summary<sup>1</sup>**

This report presents several key issues that emerged out of the Phase 1 Survey, the Public Sessions, and the Discussion Groups. The information presented in this report combines a qualitative approach to the data analysis and participant feedback from the Survey, Public Sessions, and the Discussion Groups.

The key issues are grouped alphabetically into categories then further divided into subcategories with most issues crossing multiple policy domains. Each category introduces issues brought forward by participants describing the complex intersections of the accessibility and inclusion needs for people with disabilities.

The following categories, identified by participants contain several sub-categories:

- |                         |                                   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>1) Architectural</b> | <b>9) Immigration</b>             |
| <b>2) Attitudinal</b>   | <b>10) Justice System</b>         |
| <b>3) Banking</b>       | <b>11) Poverty and Funding</b>    |
| <b>4) Canada Post</b>   | <b>12) Recreation and Leisure</b> |
| <b>5) Education</b>     | <b>13) Service Animals</b>        |
| <b>6) Elections</b>     | <b>14) Social Services</b>        |
| <b>7) Employment</b>    | <b>15) Technology and Media</b>   |
| <b>8) Housing</b>       | <b>16) Transportation</b>         |

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<sup>1</sup> The findings discussed in this report are based upon an analysis of the participant feedback. The conclusions drawn throughout this discussion reflect what was said during the consultations.

## Summary of Sub categories

<b>Main Category</b>	<b>Sub Category</b>
Architectural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Physical environment</li> <li>○ Inconsistent and sub-standard building code standards</li> </ul>
Attitudinal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Discriminatory Policy and Legislation</li> <li>○ Media Representation</li> <li>○ Over studied and under heard</li> </ul>
Banking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Physical environment - wickets</li> <li>○ Access to information – RDSP</li> <li>○ Customer service</li> <li>○ Point of sale devices</li> <li>○ Privacy - signatory</li> </ul>
Canada Post	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Community mailboxes</li> <li>○ Identification and documents</li> <li>○ Reduction in service</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lack of funding</li> <li>○ Federal Provincial equity</li> </ul>
Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Access to information</li> <li>○ Lack of privacy</li> </ul>
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Stigma - Tokenism</li> <li>○ Employee accommodations</li> <li>○ Undervalued and education and skills</li> <li>○ Federal employment and procurement policies</li> </ul>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Low availability</li> <li>○ Unaffordability</li> <li>○ Unreliable standards</li> </ul>
Immigrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Discriminatory polices</li> <li>○ Separating families</li> </ul>
Justice System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Criminalization of mental illness</li> <li>○ Lack of knowledge, about mental illness, brain injury, FASD</li> <li>○ Lack of medication and medical assistance in correctional facilities</li> <li>○ Level of segregation and isolation</li> </ul>
Leisure and Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Inclusion in sports and recreation</li> <li>○ Equipment</li> <li>○ Facilities and training</li> <li>○ Cultural activities and heritage sites</li> <li>○ National parks and public activities</li> </ul>

## Summary of Sub categories, cont'd

<b>Main Category</b>	<b>Sub Category</b>
Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Inconsistent policy between provincial and federal income programs</li> <li>○ Provincial and territorial social programs hinders interprovincial relocation</li> <li>○ Yearly eligibility requirements no standard forms</li> <li>○ Social safety economic security is a myth</li> </ul>
Social Service Animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provincial Territorial standards differ</li> <li>○ Access</li> </ul>
Social Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Insufficient agencies and social programs</li> <li>○ Employee training and professional development</li> <li>○ Lack of information and access</li> <li>○ Statistics are not being collected</li> </ul>
Technology Media and Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cultural representation across media</li> <li>○ Discriminatory language and treatment in the media</li> <li>○ Lack of information and access</li> <li>○ Costs of captioning and descriptive video services</li> <li>○ Access to intervenor services</li> </ul>
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Airlines</li> <li>○ Railroads</li> <li>○ Public Transit</li> </ul>

## Overview

The analysis section of this report is based on participant feedback. The statements expressed in the analysis are the personal views of participants. These statements have not been substantiated by research and are not intended to reflect the views of the Alliance.

The analysis of the categories is divided into 16 sections to reflect the categories listed above followed by a geographical analysis of the issues and the recommendations which are not specific to any category. Each section begins with a discussion of key issues arising within the category. Sections are divided into sub-categories that interpret and summarize participants' feedback. Participant's recommendations and anonymized quotations have been added throughout the report.

The key issues and sub-categories overlap and reinforce each other in important ways. Poverty overlaps and reinforces many other categories. Low-income prevents disabled people from obtaining transportation leaving them reliant on para-transit. Para-transit is underfunded and over booked so paratransit providers require making transportation arrangements days in advance which creates a barrier to employment, services, and leisure activities lowering the overall quality of life.

# ANALYSIS

## Architectural

### Physical Environment

Architectural barriers existing within the physical environment, are not always considered during the design phase or even after the fact. Regardless of building codes that vary within provinces and territories many aspects of the built environment do not conform to the principles of universal design standards. These design principals are to ensure that the structure of an environment is built so that it can be accessed, understood and used by all people regardless of their age, or ability.

***“Refits are not being required. Older businesses and building did not have to accommodate. What about changing to accommodate disabled employees. Things that will actually change life as a person with a disability.” –Charlottetown, PEI***

Retrofitting can be costly and time consuming and many establishments choose not to do so or, they do the absolute minimum required. Often, they fall short of meeting standards, they neglect to consult or involve disabled people, resulting in poor design choices creating more barriers.

### Inconsistent and sub-standard building code standards

Participants voiced their concerns and the disappointment about traveling because building codes are different across the country. This makes it hard for people to plan vacations which hinders leisure opportunities for them.

***“Going into one place and I want to visit just because I’m from out of town, you have to go up one big step and a ramp. What’s the point of the ramp [...] if you have to go up a step? Things like that really frustrate me and I feel like I cannot go to that place, I’m not allowed there because I cannot access it. My anxiety builds up and I go and sit in the car.” –Grande Prairie, AB***

## ATTITUDINAL

The attitudes of society towards groups or individuals with disabilities can make a big difference in people's lives. There are many factors that can impact how society perceives people with disabilities. The stigmatizing of people with physical, psychosocial, intellectual, and cognitive disabilities is not only demoralizing but their lives are further complicated by the intersectional discrimination that exists for people with disabilities.

A woman relayed a story of just such an incident involving her and her husband.

***“we were in a fire situation and there’s no way for him to go down the stair unless I physically carried him and then I wouldn’t have his chair either. So him being heavier than I, I carried him down four flights of stairs and that was extremely difficult with no help and really degrading for my husband the person with the disability.” Grande Prairie, AB.***

### Discriminatory policies

Policies and legislation at all levels of government have been identified as discriminatory, and in some cases they are in contravention of the [Canadian Human Rights Act](#), the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) and/or the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

Many examples of economic discrimination presented by participants described issues with provincial /territorial transfer support payments that conflict with federal programs, resulting in claw backs on their minimum disability payments or pensions.

Discriminatory policies and legislation contributes to the wider social attitude towards people with a disability. There was consensus that governing bodies that marginalize people with disabilities further perpetuates the stigma and discrimination of people with disabilities.

Participants urge the Government of Canada to address practices that violate the rights of people with disabilities. They recommended that it is necessary to ensure that the legislation includes a mechanism for enforcement when and where there are violations.

### **Over studied/under heard**

Participants advised that people with disabilities are marginalized and are low on the government's priority list. If the government does not make people with disabilities a priority, then neither will the rest of the society.

*"It's nice to see they're finally consulting us/doing something."*

*"Why are they studying us again instead of using all the studies they've already done"*

### **Media Representation**

The media (television, radio, print etc.) with the biggest influences on public opinion often will portray people with disabilities unfavorably. There is no coverage in the news about unsafe crosswalks or other barriers that hinder people with disabilities in their daily lives.

Some facilitators reported that attempts to get coverage for the public consultations from local media was a challenge, because there was little interest. This made it difficult to spread the word about the events.

Participants at consultations in multiple regions stated that if media were to give disabled people equal and equitable coverage in all formats it would give them a voice. It would reduce their isolation and frustration. It would improve public opinion, and increase empathy and understanding for people with disabilities.

## **BANKING**

Banking was one of the topics chosen for a Discussion Group and was also a topic of discussion at many of the Public Consultations. The Federal Government has jurisdiction over banking and sets the regulations that banks must follow. People shared difficulties they experience within the banking industry. They advised us of policies that affect many people with disabilities, as well as the customer service experience at various banks across Canada.

### **Low wicket accommodations**

Participants advised that banks across Canada have lowered wickets and often provide a chair to accommodate people who cannot stand for long periods or who use a wheelchair. In practice when customers arrive at the bank they all enter the same line to be served on a first come first serve basis. Banks should be implementing lower wickets so that they can be used by those that require/request a lowered wicket or seat when they need it without having to wait.

***"I went to the bank for my daughter but I've still had a great deal of difficulty setting that [RDSP] up. I set up a bank account for her first and she is on ODSP as well. So she's registered with ODSP and now she needs a bank account and they said that she can't set up a bank account because she can't sign her name. So we've been having such a hard time with this because I'm Deaf as well and so I'm going there and I want to sign for her but they say that I have a disability so I can't sign for her." -Burlington, ON***

### **Customer Services**

Participants spoke of many negative experiences with bank employees. The general consensus was that employees lacked training in how to assist people with disabilities. One story which repeated was about employees addressing the person who accompanied the disabled person, despite the person with a disability being perfectly competent to answer all questions independently. Participants suggested the solution is training. Staff training about accommodations for customers with disabilities would be a first start in rectifying the situations that occur for people with disabilities

### **Signing authority for the physically disabled**

According to participants, it is mandated that to open a bank account or make changes a client needs to sign a large amount of paperwork. Caregivers expressed difficulty getting the account holder to the bank. One Caregiver advised that there needs to be an easy way to sign as a power of attorney, without the other party being present. The person with a disability still needs to do their banking just like everyone else, but they've delegated that work to a trusted individual and authorized them to sign on their behalf which should be enough.

## **CANADA POST**

Canada Post is a federal service which is essential to all. Keeping citizens connected for business and pleasure nationally and internationally is an important task. Postal service was a Discussion Group topic and mentioned at many Public sessions.

### **Community mailboxes**

As door to door delivery has been increasingly replaced by community mailboxes one of the main barriers for service has become inaccessible community mailboxes. According to participants, some mailboxes are poorly located to allow access for those with a mobility device. Others advised that community mailboxes are poorly maintained during the winter causing unnecessary hazards for citizens of all abilities. Further, problems

accessing community mailboxes make those with mobility issues dependent upon others to retrieve mail.

### **Service reductions**

Reductions to services from Canada Post were mentioned by many participants. Difficulty picking up large parcels because they did not fit into community mailboxes was addressed by more than one group of people for many reasons. People delivering the mail no longer ring apartment buzzers for oversized envelopes, such as braille documents therefore ending up back at the post office along with parcels too large to deliver. This is an issue that is very inconvenient for many people with disabilities. Once a pick up is arranged to the post office a person with a mobility issue, they need a plan as to how to carry the parcel back home.

### **Difficulty picking up passports due to ID requirements**

When picking up passports at the post office citizens are required to produce identification. Problems exist in proving valid identification to secure new passports. This is not only a disability issue. Some attendees who are blind expressed being most affected, since identification issued through the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) was also deemed as invalid for picking up a passport.

***“The problem is, to then go to the post office takes five minutes to walk in the door, go to the post office, and get this braille statement. It takes me 50 minutes pressing redial to get through to transit to book a ride to get there, to get in there five minutes to wait half an hour, 45 minutes to get a ride back to get this one braille statement because they won’t buzz me when I’m home.” –London ON***

## **EDUCATION**

Colleges and universities were largely commended by participants for their ability to accommodate students with disabilities with the exception of the lack of post-secondary educational opportunities.

***“Education, because we need more specialized teachers aids in the communities. In First Nations communities if we’re not able to access [services] or leave the community, we need to bring in those services into the community and to offer that to the families so the child can continue [his/her] education. And to offer that support to the family and also the staff in the education system.”-Thompson MB***

### **Lack of funding**

Insufficient funding was the root cause identified by participants for issues within the grade school systems across the nation. Children from rural families are being forced

into urban centres. Indigenous children on reserve are often separated from their family and sense of community to access the opportunity for an education. As a result of the federal - provincial conflict those who choose to remain experience a poor quality education from educators.

Participants suggested the provincial government could better regulate education by increasing funding. An increase in funding could allow for smaller class sizes, more teaching assistants, more improved programs for students with disabilities, and more development opportunities and training for educators.

More funding would bring better programming to rural areas and urban areas. Schools for the Deaf have largely been closed due to lack of funding. Teachers have large class sizes with less funding for teacher assistants for students with special needs.

## **ELECTIONS**

There were a number of accessibility issues that were voiced about the election process. Participants believe the Federal Government has a duty to ensure that elections at all level of government are accessible and maintain privacy regardless of the voter's ability. As one person so eloquently worded it:

***“There’s no provision under the accessibility regulations, the Elections Canada regulations that everybody has the same right to vote. Now, that’s wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong. Elections Canada must, must, must be a part of this legislation and everybody has the opportunity. If they can vote in a municipal election with confidentiality and privacy the same as everybody else and we can do it in a provincial election, then they should be able to do it in a [federal] election as well. The feds have to catch up with our Ontario Government and our municipalities.”***

### **Lack of Privacy**

Consultation attendees noted that there is a lack of privacy for disabled people when voting. Most Canadians are able to take their ballot behind a privacy screen of some sort, select their candidates, and return their ballot without anyone knowing their choices. People who are blind, partially-sighted or deafblind and others who may require accommodation are often forced to ask for assistance. They have to sacrifice their privacy and have no way of confirming their vote was cast for the candidate they wanted.

Participants also described a machine that can be used at voting stations such as the ones used in municipal and provincial elections. To use this machine, people plug their headphones in to hear the choices and push a button to mark their ballot which is printed. They then put their ballot into the ballot box just like everyone else without any privacy breach.

### Access to Information

Deaf participants brought forward their concerns about no access to interpreters, at polling stations, to be able to ask questions or communicate with election staff. Access to information and communication is also a barrier for people living with deafblindness. Another concern is that brochures are not being made available in large print, in audio format, or printed in braille. Those who did not have access to the internet are also limited in getting their information. Participants stated access to, applications, informational brochures, should be available in accessible formats.

## EMPLOYMENT

Employment, education, and poverty are highly intertwined categories. Education and training are key to getting a job, which will keep individuals out of poverty. It is difficult to accurately represent the unemployment amongst the disability community because of the lack of statistics collection. Employment was mentioned at every single public session held. Some of the barriers that people with disabilities have faced trying to find employment are as follows.

### Employee Accommodations

Citizens who participated in Phase Two across Canada feel that employers are unwilling to hire people with disabilities because of a fear that costly accommodations might be required by employers. It was noted by participants that it can be expensive to have special equipment installed or retrofit a building to make it accessible. It was felt that it would be less time consuming and more cost effective to hire a person who does not require accommodations. There are programs available for employers to help with the cost of accommodating employees, however, it was noted that these programs do not cover repairs or maintenance of equipment. It was also believed that these programs are often not known by employers. Participants advised that more awareness, and funding programs are needed to make employment with accommodations affordable and sustainable.

***“One thing that’s difficult too as an employer if you’re applying for federal funding, some of the application forms are phenomenally difficult to fill out and they might help you a little bit with that, but I think they might be more user friendly. And by setting the example I think then they’ll spread the word that it’s possible to do that in just about every type of business in every community. There shouldn’t be any limitations about if someone wants to work they should design a job for them to be able to work.”-Bathurst MB***

### **Stigma: Undervalued education and skills**

Stigma is a complex social issue that was discussed by many attendees and during Phase Two. Education and training as it relates to employment is identified as a barrier. Many participants seem to believe it is a lack of education causes barriers to employment.

***“I was laid off from my job a year ago and not offered a different position, and I have a degree in higher education, post-secondary, and lots of skills and abilities and haven’t been able to find a job since. And I see lots of hearing people which is how we define non-Deaf people, I see them doing a lot of jobs that I could be doing.”-Burnaby BC***

There are many citizens who have college diplomas, university degrees and multiple, post-graduate degrees are still unable to find employment. Participants noted that even hands-on practical experience is not enough of an edge to compete with able bodied citizens in the job market and participants believe it is due to social stigma.

Participants also noted that stigma is a barrier to advancement opportunities for disabled people. One of the open-ended questions posed in the online survey asked respondents about their biggest barrier to employment. Respondents answered that the built environment, transportation, the lack of accommodations, and the attitudes and the in the workplace towards people with disabilities. One person wrote;

***As a Canadian we like to think this kind of discrimination doesn’t happen in our nation but the cold hard truth is that it does because there were countless others just like her struggling to find employment and being judged based on personal attributes that are beyond one’s control.***

***“For me, especially as a woman, and part Native, I find work to be a four-letter word that hurts, because of all the harm done to me. Some of it includes false or unknown true race matters, yes, the "N" word has been used against me, slurs against Natives and mostly slurs against women.”***

### **Federal employment & procurement policies**

Participants at the public sessions spoke out about assumed policies that are used by the Federal Governments for hiring: a quota system. These policies call for a specific number of people with disabilities, and diverse multicultural heritage to be hired.

The problem identified by participants is there is no consideration given to that person's credentials or skills. When hired they are placed in which ever department needs extra numbers to meet their quotas when they could actually be making a bigger impact in one of the other departments. Procurement policies for vendors also proved problematic as there is little or no stipulation for those vendors to hire people with disabilities.

Participants advised that the Federal Government not only hire people based on their skills and qualifications but also create meaning-full work and jobs for those who have intellectual disabilities. Participants suggested that job creation based on ability and hiring policies that are inclusive would work to create a national environment of inclusion.

## **HOUSING**

Housing and shelter is a universal need. Many Canadians are without shelter or adequate housing. Participants advised that issues in regard to housing and poverty need to be brought forward and addressed within the new Accessibility and Inclusion legislation.

### **Low availability**

One of the concerns brought forward with housing is the lack of accessible housing. First Nations reservations are of particular concern. People who became disabled later in life and people who were born with a disability have experienced difficulties finding housing. This also includes the right to purchase a home. Rental properties that are accessible are few and far between. New buildings do not tend to be built following the principles of Universal design and therefore new units do no accommodate persons with disabilities.

Participants described changing the building code to include fully accessible units in new buildings that having building code legislation in regards to the number of accessible units per new building could address the issues. Currently building codes require one accessible unit per twelve units. Unfortunately, accessible units are not always being rented to those who require accommodations making availability even lower for those in need.

### **Unaffordable**

Participants often found that accessible properties were not always affordable. There are many barriers to income, fixed income and a lack of income security. Participants stated that they are left to make do with what they can find, and sometimes become isolated, living away from supports of services, family and friends. In these situations, safety becomes a real concern.

### **Not accessible but to standard**

People advised that some buildings that claim to be accessible have met provincial standards, however they are not necessarily functional or accessible for all people with disabilities. Participants recommended that housing and building codes should be properly consulted with people with disabilities, contractors, architects and policy makers to make necessary changes so full accessibility is met.

***“I really feel that the federal government should be making a mandate for more affordable housing in Canada. A lot of people that have disabilities here in PEI are living on income support, as was just mentioned, which is well under \$1,000 a month. So if you have to go out and spend that on, you know \$5-\$600 rent, you really did not have any money to pay any other bills you have or purchase groceries or anything like that.”- Charlottetown PEI***

## **IMMIGRATION**

There many reasons that immigration is good for the Canadian economy however participants stated the economy is identified and being more of a priority than the humans behind the immigration requests.

This creates barriers for people who want to become citizens in Canada where they have made their home. Their contribution to society cannot always be measured in dollars so they cannot become citizens.

***“It doesn’t affect me but it affects a very, very good friend who is not going to be able to get citizenship because of her disabilities. They have basically said for medical reasons, for the high costs of medical support, it’s not permitted, which she has lived here for four years and it’s her home.”***

### **Discriminatory policies**

Participants believe that using the immigration point system in Canada is discriminatory to those with disabilities. This system puts a disability before a person. How can someone prove their family member will not be a drain on the economy?

There was also discussion about visa students who come to Canada having issues to get insurance if they have a pre-existing condition. It is difficult to find the funding to study abroad so it is important to have insurance coverage while they are in Canada. Participants noted that international students add to our economy and that they will want to stay in Canada when they are finished the studies but often they are advised that their disability is too expensive for Canada, resulting in the separation of families. Arguments against disabled immigrants entering Canada only take into account the anticipated cost to the economy, but does not take into account the lost productivity that occurs when separating families. Participants pointed out that there is a toll on a person's mental health in these matters.

## **JUSTICE SYSTEM**

The justice system in Canada is another issue that crosses jurisdictions. There is a need across all levels of government to make the justice system accessible for everyone. Participants have stated that the justice system needs to be addressed in the new legislation.

***“There is a case I'm aware of where the person was not sent to trial because he was declared by the judge to be unfit to stand because of his communication disability. That was not properly accommodated at the time. So this is how it can affect the perpetrator as well.” – Burlington ON***

### **Lack of Knowledge in Mental Health & FASD**

Participants stated that there needs to be more support available for people with disabilities involved in the justice system. The lack of knowledge about Mental Health and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder issues, which result in higher rates of incarceration, were specifically mentioned during the consultations. These individuals need to be considered by a system that is fully informed on their condition and how it affects behavior.

***“I think that all the RCMP need basic survival signs because supposing they arrest a Deaf person. How do you communicate at the beginning? How do you know what you're under arrest for? They hastily arrest. They put them down on the ground. That person is deaf. They can't communicate. That poses a dangerous situation. I think that needs to be better. The RCMP need to understand the ways of the deaf and how to communicate with us to prevent further trouble and a worsening situation.”-Whitehorse YK***

### **No access to Interpreters**

Representatives of the Deaf community pointed out that arrest of Deaf people without the ability to communicate is inhumane. Interpreters need to be readily available, or officers trained in sign language, or some way to communicate that person's rights

upon arrest as is required by the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#). This also applies to Canadians who are deafblind who require intervenors.

***“The federal government also announced they were reinstating the federal court challenges program which deals with cases under the Charter. I would like to recommend that some additional funds under the court challenge program to enable cases that would address rights issues around persons with disabilities. It’s one thing to have rights through legislation, whether it’s provincial or federal, but it’s another if you don’t have the means to enforce that protection of your rights.”-Fredericton NB –***

## **RECREATION AND LEISURE**

There was a discussion group held regarding recreation and leisure and the topic also came up in survey answers as well as in the public sessions. It is important for people to get out and interact with others, as it builds a sense of belonging and eliminates isolation. People advised that recreation facilities and events should be architecturally accessible and also be accessible to everyone. People should be able to get there with accessible transportation. The use of the principals of Universal Design should be applied in all new recreational facilities. Participants felt that these issues must be addressed in the new legislation.

### **Equipment**

Participants pointed out, assistive equipment is already expensive especially without extended health coverage. Adaptive sports equipment is so expensive that most people and families cannot afford it. Getting access to equipment is a huge barrier to enjoying recreational sports for disabled people.

### **Facilities and training**

Persons with disabilities reported denial of access to recreational facilities. Some respondents reported, for example, being refused space in public recreation facilities for fear of liability concerns by facility managers. This same fear of liability was noted by participants as a barrier to finding trainers for disabled athletes. One participant explained that she was not allowed to take life guard or instructor training because she was Deaf. Facilities should be available to enable change tables and appropriate accessibility equipment should be available to enable individuals who are living with disabilities to safely enter and exit swimming pools.

### **Parks, celebrations, and festivals**

Participants believe that all parks should be accessible for everyone. Every child deserves a place to play; everybody deserves the ability to cool off at the water’s edge or a splash pad on a hot day. Universal Design should be used in the design to allow for

accessibility ramps and boardwalks leading to accessible playgrounds, beaches, and camping facilities to ensure all Canadians are able to enjoy the beauty our nation provides.

### **Family members of People with Disabilities**

Family members of people with disabilities are impacted in all areas of life and noted that when a member of the family is unable to participate in recreational activities or even go out to a restaurant the rest of the family stays home too. Sometimes there can be resentment towards the disabled person, despite love and logic, and these things are harmful for families. If recreation and leisure are inclusive under a Universal Design as the rest of the built environment should be, society in general would be accessible and inclusive.

***“When you’re mentioning staying at home, I know it’s not only for the person that’s disabled; it’s also for the caregiver there. I saw many situations, I can give the example of my parents and other people too when the one person doesn’t have access then the partner or caregiver or parent doesn’t have access either. It’s not just one person, it’s two, three, a family.”-Bathurst NB***

### **Accessible Reading Material**

People with disabilities brought up the fact that not all books are available in accessible formats. Reading is a beloved past time of many and an excellent way to spend leisure time. Books should be made available in accessible formats, so everyone can have the chance to enjoy them.

## **POVERTY AND FUNDING**

During the consultations across Canada, the survey, the public sessions, and the discussion groups the subject of poverty was cited 167 times was the topic most talked throughout the Phase 2 consultations. Lack of funding and poverty was mentioned as affecting every aspect of life for people with disabilities.

Participants advised that cause of poverty for people with disabilities stems from the disability social assistance programs managed by the Provinces and Territories. There are costly expenditures linked to disability that reduces the overall income of the family.

Access to tax credits fall short of the need for the services and supports that are necessary for daily life.

***On the financial side I represent my daughter who has an intellectual disability. She has Down syndrome, she’s also deaf. She has lots of challenges but one of her main barriers to participating in society without me is financial.”-Ottawa ON***

### **Variation between Provincial and Territorial Government Programs**

People shared concerns with assistance programs that are split between Federal and Provincial/Territorial jurisdictions depending on a person's qualifications. Some programs to assist disabled people are managed federally while others are managed by the Provinces and Territories. Participants stated that it can be difficult, frustrating, and time consuming to find out what program you qualify for; when you are unable to find or sustain employment for medical reasons. Participants believe that assistance programs should all be federally managed to ensure equitable assistive programs are administered fairly across the nation. There should be one easy point of entry to access assistance and that forms for all programs be unified, simplified and in multiple accessible formats.

### **Having to prove permanent disability yearly**

There are some programs described by participants that require individuals to show proof of a permanent disability on a yearly basis. When a disability is permanent there should not be any additional follow up. "Permanent disability" is self-explanatory and putting undue stress on people with permanent disabilities. Wasting time and resources reconfirming that there is still a disability.

### **Assistance claw backs discourage employment**

We heard from many participants that it is difficult to stop using social assistance direct transfer payment programs. Participants stated that when trying to transition back to work their funding and health care benefits are affected. This creates a financial hardship when earning minimum wage with no health benefits, which is crucial in maintaining health.

### **Provincial support programs impede interprovincial relocation**

Participants stated that as a result of programs being provincial it is difficult for Canadian citizens on assistance to move out of province. Long delays and extra paperwork hold up assistance. Some provincial and territorial programs supply equipment that is considered to be the property of the province or territory, and has to be returned if someone moves out of the province or territory.

Having to replace a wheelchair when moving out of the province or territory adds a large expense, leaving the person without the assistive equipment. This situation can be a traumatizing experience for someone who is independent and suddenly has to rely on others.

### **Social safety net for income**

Participants said the social safety net for people with a disability creates a situation that stigmatizes and marginalizes people with disabilities. All financial support programs in Canada have income testing. Citizens have to qualify in order to benefit. Respondents noted that historically Canada has separated the deserving poor from the undeserving in the name of accountability, leaving many people with disabilities to fall through the

cracks because they just did not qualify anywhere, but need temporary financial assistance.

### **Funding**

Participants advised that agencies and services crucial in the support of people with disabilities are constantly subject to funding cuts depending upon the government of the day. They noted that community service agencies that people rely on to navigate the system and help them to access to services and equipment, are primary targets of cutbacks. With an aging population many agencies will experience an increase in demand, doing more with less over the next several years.

Participants believe that there are needs for more funding for existing agencies to expand and new agencies to be established to fill gaps in services.

## **SERVICE ANIMALS**

Service animals are a provincial/territorial issue, but, not all provinces have legislation protecting the rights of service animals and their handlers. In some cases, participants have advised that the legislation can be detrimental to both the service animal and the handler.

### **Provincial Standards Vary**

A participant with a disability advised that legislation in British Columbia does not recognize service animals from any other province. People who use a service animal and are visiting from another province are not protected and as such end up being in situations where they are exposed to discrimination. Participants consider that standards should be federally mandated and service animals should be recognized regardless of they are visiting from.

### **Access**

Participants also advised that it is also important to ensure there is sufficient access to service animals. They need to be affordable and available.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES**

For the purposes of this analysis social services includes all government agency funded bodies that provide or fund service agencies. There was no distinction, for participants, between which level of government has jurisdiction because federal funds are either used directly or distributed to the provinces to be used for services. As such participants felt the federal government could mandate inclusion and accessibility across all jurisdictions.

### **Employee training**

Participants described that employee training on disability is necessary when working in public services supporting people with disabilities. Participants informed that negative attitudes from service providers, is a barrier to getting information and assistance. Employees also need up-to-date knowledge of services and programs that are available. There were many discussions about employees who are unaware of services available.

### **Fragmented Services and Access to Information**

Participants advised that services and supports are fragmented, and navigation is difficult for people with disabilities and their supports.

Participants have recommendations for the Ministry of Sports and Disability that include the development of a directory of services and information. This directory must be available in all accessible formats.

Access to information was reported as impacting many aspects of life for people with disabilities. There is a need for all publications, legislation, documents and forms to be made available in multiple formats so that people understand the legislation and other documents. Participants identified that lack of information prevents them from full participation in community. These barriers also impact their safety when navigating public places. Individuals who are deafblind experience limited and inconsistent access to intervenor services across Canada.

One participant pointed out there is no teletypewriter (TTY) at Parliament for those who have access to the TTY technology. Closed Captioning and Descriptive Video should also be available for all CPAC and televised government proceedings.

### **Statistics are not being collected**

There was concern that it is difficult to outline the needs of the disabled community because statistics were not being collected. These statistics provide information for decisions that need to be made. Participants stated that because the long form Census was discontinued mandatory the numbers on disability are not being captured. It becomes difficult to make changes and advocate for yourself when your voice is not heard.

## **TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA**

Technology and media provides information, and assistance, to people with various disabilities, connecting them to employment and education and other benefits. Any new legislation needs to ensure that technology and media are inclusive and accessible.

### **Closed captioning and descriptive video services cost**

Phase Two participants indicated that there are big concerns in the absence of closed captioning and descriptive video available. The ability to receive channels that are made accessible by satellite and cable companies are governed by the CRTC. All customers purchase the same basic package at the same price yet people with different abilities may only be using just a few of those channels. In many cases channels that are marketed as accessible were add-ons that cost extra money. There are no discounts in consideration of the fact that only a few channels are made available. Often this is one of the only entertainments and information outlets people have.

### **Overpriced for all**

Technology in all forms is expensive according to the participants. Many forms of technology are also inaccessible because of the cost. In most cases technology can be used to improve the daily lives of citizens, and the participants advised that various forms of technology are essential, providing opportunities of communicating, navigating, and connecting, making it a priority to ensure that all technology is accessible. Websites Participants advised that “not all websites are created equal”. Many websites cause issues for assistive technology that is meant make the websites accessible.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Canadian citizens have a variety of ways to travel including: airlines, railway, boat, coach, subway, and other local transit. Given the geography of our country, the ability to travel can present many barriers for people with disabilities. Many employment opportunities require travel and if a person is unable to travel for education individuals may also lose out on higher learning opportunities. Travelling for recreation is also important for a person’s wellbeing, whether it is a vacation abroad, or a trip to visit family. People are healthier when they did not feel isolated and have freedom of movement

### **Roads and Parking**

Crosswalks were identified as a barrier by participants with concern for wheelchair users, people from the blind and deafblind community. People have advised that crosswalks vary by province, municipalities, and even within city blocks. This becomes a potential hazard causing frustration for people trying to navigate while they are out in the community. One participant described a crosswalk with the call button for pedestrians at the top of a large incline too steep for wheelchair users. Another person advised that crosswalks they have encountered were poorly maintained with cracks and uneven pavement. Blind people expressed concerns about the placement of curbs at the crosswalks and the intersections. Without a curb to separate the sidewalk from the intersection it poses a hazard to those navigating by white cane.

***“I have a friend of mine who is blind and when I was talking about the corners, I said ‘oh, it’s great, the whole corner is flat.’ Her comment was “great, which direction am I supposed to go?”-Grande Prairie AB***

***“On the financial side I represent my daughter who has an intellectual disability. She has Down syndrome, she’s also deaf. She has lots of challenges but one of her main barriers to participating in society without me is financial.”-Ottawa ON***

***“There is an issue because my daughter’s wheelchair it goes in through the back, it’s quite a large wheelchair. Some people get really irritated because of the way I need to park just so I can have my car accessible to accommodate the wheelchair for my daughter. [...] It’s actually a big deal for me because I’m afraid of getting run over, because of being deaf. I can’t hear people driving behind me saying ‘get that wheelchair out of the way.’ I don’t know when I need to move quicker. It’s just difficult for me with the space provided for the spots. I think if they were roomier or if there was an accessible option from the rear door that would be a better plan.”-Burlington***

Participants addressed the issue of parking lots that are not always accommodating for accessible vehicles. A mother described the following:

## **Airlines**

Treatment of assistive devices/equipment was a big concern with participants who travel by airline. Reports of damaged equipment from employees mishandling them were discussed at many of the meetings.

Wheelchair users are required to use the regular airplane seats, leaving them to rely on staff for assistance and exiting the plane at the end of the flight. Leaving people in a seat that does not support their needs can cause discomfort that can last long after the flight is over.

Inconsistent boarding procedures were also brought forward as a concern. One individual described an airline which used a forklift to assist in boarding person with the wheelchair. Participants advised that all airports should be equipped with proper ramps to make airplane boarding accessible and dignified.

Service animals are a concern when it comes to airline travel. Some airlines will accommodate service animals allowing them to have a seat that is purchased at a special rate. According to participants some airlines do not offer this option and for some people their companion is left sitting or lying at their owner’s feet.

## **Boats**

The main concern brought forward about boats was the need for ramps. The ramps need to be made to accommodate the width of wheelchairs with a slope that can climb. Disabled persons reported ramps onto boats which were too narrow or so steep they could not access them safely.

*“I took a boat last year to go to Gaspé, it wasn’t adapted. I cried all the way to Magdalen Islands.”-Montreal QU*

### **Railroads**

Participants stated that it has only been in the last couple of years that services such as Via Rail have started supplying space for people in wheelchairs to ride the train. Often there is only one space available and limits the people traveling together. With automation blind people who need additional assistance may not be able to find the kiosk to ask for assistance. The layout of the platform also presents a problem.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Throughout the report many recommendations surfaced in relation to the categories described below:

### **Develop learning opportunities between organizations of persons with disabilities and the media to ensure an accurate portrayal of Canadians with disabilities in media**

- That media should give people living with disabilities equal and equitable coverage in all formats providing them with a voice, reducing isolation and frustration, while improving public opinion, and increase empathy and understanding.

### **Engage community disability organizations as information service delivery about available programs**

- The Canada Revenue Agency (and other federal departments) should be working with banks and community disability organizations when new programs are launched in order to ensure all citizens benefit (as intended) from government programs.

### **Mandatory training for all government employees on disability and human rights.**

- Participants said that the solution to customer service issues is more training. Training could be as simple as teaching employees to address people directly and to ask that person how he or she can be assisted.

### **Access to Information should be a right not a privilege**

- Participants stated that all government information, brochures, forms, etc., should be available in accessible formats.

### **Equitable access to independent voting for all Canadians through technology and visual supports**

- Participants described machines that are currently used at voting stations such as the ones used in municipal and provincial elections. The federal government should ensure equitable access to ensure that voting is possible and anonymous for all Canadians.

### Awareness training and access to funding for necessary supports for employment

- Participants believe that more awareness of employment funding programs and funding for maintenance and repair of accommodating equipment are needed to make employment with accommodations affordable and sustainable.

### Better access to accessible housing through Universal Design as a national standard

- Housing and building codes were the most frequently noted to be important to the greatest number of participants. It was recommended that building codes include more consultation with people with disabilities.

### Supports for federal inclusion of visual languages in all federal jurisdictions

- That Canada declares American Sign Language (ASL) and Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) as official languages.
- Participants noted that access to interpreters would be the best thing for the Deaf population to have an immediate solution to language barriers such as being able to attend appointments and go to school.
- That Canada provides support for education in visual languages for students in all grades. Courses should also be made available to adults who are interested in learning sign language.

### Funding to Address Human Rights Violations

- It was recommended that the Government of Canada consider providing additional funds under the Court Challenges program targeted specifically to enable cases that would address human rights issues for persons with disabilities.

### Federal/Provincial/Municipal cooperation

- Participants think that all levels of government need to be more cooperative and fluid. It would make transitioning between support programs and services easier if all levels of government communicated with one another and cooperated to do what is best for citizens not their budgets. The new legislation should ensure that people with disabilities can easily obtain what they need. According to participants reducing barriers to services will reduce the strain on the health care system that supports individuals until they can obtain what they need to be healthy physically and mentally. A nation working together to be inclusive and accessible for everyone. Participants advised that people from the disability community should be included in all planning and repeated at most consultations **“nothing about us without us.”**

### Poverty Eradication

- A guaranteed annual income would provide an adequate amount of money and would reduce poverty allowing citizens to better participate in the economy.

- Investing in employment strategies, mental health, and social services is what participants think will eradicate poverty when coupled with a guaranteed annual income.

### Enforceable legislation

- A recommendation that came from every public session and discussion group held was that the new legislation needs “teeth”. It was suggested that levying fines for noncompliance of the disability legislation could fund an incentive program for meeting compliance standards. An all-encompassing enforcement policy with negative and positive reinforcement should be monitored and would be most likely to achieve the change needed to make Canada accessible and inclusive.

## WHO IS MISSING?

The discussions that took place during Phase 2 of this project do not completely reflect the diversity of Canada’s disability community. The next phase of the Alliance Project will target groups who were not well represented in the Phase 2 Public Sessions, Discussion Groups, and the Survey. We will be seeking further input from Indigenous people with disabilities, racialized people with disabilities, migrants and refugees with disabilities, and LGBTQ2S people with disabilities. Women with disabilities also need to be consulted further on issues specific to women with disabilities.

## WHAT COMES NEXT?

In this next phase of the project:

- Online telephone discussions groups on specific priority issues and priority groups not consulted during phase two.
- Complete 100 interviews with experts from communities from across the country to include people who were not sufficiently consulted. These interviews will ensure issues that were not sufficiently explored are captured during this next phase.
- Reposting of the online survey.
- Planning a National Validation meeting to present our findings.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Phase 2 Report is the result of months of collaboration among Partner and Member organizations of the **Alliance for an Inclusive and Accessible Canada**.

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