

The Alliance for  
an Inclusive and  
Accessible Canada



L'Alliance pour  
un Canada inclusif  
et accessible

## **Phase 1 Report**

**Prepared for the Government of Canada**

**March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

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# Background

## Alliance Mandate 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:**

Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians  
Alzheimer Society of Canada  
Canadian Association of Community Living  
Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance  
Council of Canadians with Disabilities  
Canadian Mental Health Association  
Canadian National Institute for the Blind  
DisAbled Women's Network Canada  
March of Dimes Canada  
National Network for Mental Health  
People First of Canada  
Realize/Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation

### **Our Partner Organizations:**

DeafBlind Ontario Services  
Muscular Dystrophy Canada  
Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalous Association Canada







## **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 throughout the report to acknowledge both preferences.

## **Executive Summary**

The Alliance has been consulting Canadians about planned federal disability legislation. Over the past 2 months, we have hosted an online survey and six in-person consultations. The feedback we received points to the many pressing issues that disabled people are facing in Canada. Participants have called upon the Government of Canada to tackle these problems and create meaningful changes that will lead to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Canadian society. We have identified 10 priority areas that will help inform future action:

- Impacted Groups
- Communication and Access to information
- Poverty
- Housing
- Health and Pharmacare
- Employment
- Invisibility / Lack of Representation
- Existing Services and Supports
- Justice



- Freedom of Movement

These findings will also serve as the foundation for the next stage of the Alliance project. We will use the results to inform future consultations and to shape future discussions with Canadians. In particular, we will be reaching out to groups who were excluded from the initial stage of this project. Our goal is to work with diverse disability communities to incorporate a broad range of perspectives into our final report. Our work is just getting started.

## **Phase 1 Activities**

### **Planning and Development**

In the first fiscal year of the project, the Alliance focused on developing and testing its consultation strategies, methodologies, and materials. Alliance members consolidated their partnership through a Collaborative Agreement. The Alliance held twelve bi-weekly teleconference calls and one full-day in-person meeting in Toronto on January 10, 2017. The Alliance formed five committees and developed their Terms of Reference. The Hiring Committee recruited and hired the Project Manager. 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. The Committees each met by teleconference on a bi-weekly basis. A student intern from the University of Winnipeg helped compile and summarize sources for a literature review on the topic of federal accessibility legislation. In February, the Alliance launched its bilingual website and social media accounts.

### **Survey**

On February 17, 2017, the Alliance launched its first online survey. The survey asked Canadians to identify the main barriers they face in several priority areas within federal jurisdiction: the built environment, transportation (by rail, air, and sea), communications (including broadcasting and telecommunications), program and service delivery, employment, income security, elections and voting, immigration and access to justice. 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 214 responses to the online survey.



## Demographic Data

One-hundred-and-twenty-two survey respondents identified themselves as having disability. Thirty-four were caregivers and 46 were family members of persons with disabilities. Eleven respondents identified themselves as service providers and 16 identified as organizations of and for persons with disabilities. The most common types of disabilities among respondents were mobility (75), vision (32), mental health (29), auditory (25), intellectual (23), chronic pain (5), developmental (3) and learning disabilities (2). Forty-three respondents reported having multiple disabilities. Half of respondents (107) were women. Seven respondents self-identified as belonging to racialized minority groups. Eight respondents were immigrants or refugees. Four respondents were Status Indians under the *Indian Act*, and five were non-status Indigenous persons. Twelve respondents identified as being LGBTQ. The majority of respondents were over the age of 34. Forty-nine respondents were between the ages of 35 and 49, and forty-five respondents were between the ages of 55 and 64. The table below gives a detailed breakdown of the respondents' age groups.

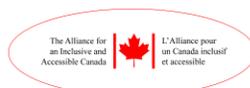
### Age of Respondents

CATEGORY	# OF ENTRIES
Age 18-34	31
Age 35 to 49	49
Age 50-54	26
Age 55-64	45
Age 65 and over	27
No Answer	36
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>214</b>

## Pilot Consultations

In Phase 1, the Alliance held six pilot consultations in three different regions of the country. To allow for a greater number of Canadians to provide input into the development of the new accessibility legislation, the Alliance targeted geographic areas that were not included in the federal government's consultation process.

The pilot consultations were organized and facilitated by Alliance member and partner organizations. The consultations took place on March 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Saint John (New Brunswick), North Bay (Ontario) and Brandon (Manitoba). Each location hosted a Public



Session and a by-invitation Discussion Group focused on a specific topic or stakeholder group. Each consultation lasted 2 to 3 hours. Participants were recruited through the networks of Alliance organizations, through the Alliance website and social media, and through local media. A total of 103 people participated in the pilot consultations.

The Public Session participants discussed the following questions:

- 1) What are the main accessibility and inclusion barriers you face?
- 2) How could these barriers be prevented or removed?

The Discussion Group participants discussed the following questions:

- 1) What are the main accessibility and inclusion barriers you face?
- 2) How could these barriers be prevented or removed?
- 3) What is the most important thing the Government could do in this area?
- 4) What programs or policies are working well in this area? (i.e. best practices)
- 5) How can we go from talking about these solutions to making them happen?

### **Discussion Groups**

<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>FACILITATOR / ORGANIZER</b>	<b># OF PARTICIPANTS</b>
Brandon	Intellectual Disabilities	People First of Canada (PFC) and Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD)	6
North Bay	Transportation	National Network for Mental Health (NNMH), Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC)	9
Saint John	Youth	Muscular Dystrophy Canada (MDC)	10

### **Summary of Consultation Participants:**

- 215 survey respondents



- **103 participants in the pilot consultations:**
  - **78 participants at the Public Sessions**
    - 35 in Saint John
    - 30 in North Bay
    - 13 in Brandon
  - **25 participants at the Discussion Groups**
    - 10 in Saint John
    - 9 in North Bay
    - 6 in Brandon

## Analysis

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

Several key issues emerged through the Public Sessions and Discussion Groups. Many of these issues were reinforced by survey respondents. The analysis presented in this report reflects a holistic approach to data-coding that combines participant feedback from the Public Sessions, Discussion Groups, and Survey Responses.

This report presents key issues through thematic and sub-thematic clusters. Each cluster contains issues that overlap in intricate and complex ways. Most issues extend across multiple policy domains. The following thematic clusters were identified:

1. Impacted Groups
2. Communication and Access to information
3. Poverty
4. Housing

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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.

5. Health and Pharmacare
6. Employment
7. Invisibility / Lack of Representation
8. Existing Services and Supports
9. Justice
10. Freedom of Movement

Each of these clusters contains several sub-themes:

- **Impacted Groups**
  - Aboriginal People with Disabilities
  - People with Intellectual Disabilities
  - Families of People with Disabilities
  - People with Invisible, Intermittent, and Unrecognized Disabilities
  - Unrecognized Disabilities
  - Disability Support Staff
  
- **Communication and Access to information**
  - Plain Language
  - Multiple Formats
  - Assistive Technology
  - Mail Delivery
  
- **Poverty**
  - Income
  - Unfunded Disability Expenses
  - Tax Credits
  - Forced Reliance on Family
  
- **Housing**
  - Institutionalization
  - Affordable Housing
  - Accessible Housing
  
- **Healthcare and Pharmacare**
  - Barriers within Medical Systems



- Affordability of Treatment
- **Employment**
  - Discrimination
  - Unpaid Work
  - Flexibility and Paid Leave
  - Disability Supports and Environmental Barriers
  - Civil Service
  - WSIB and EI
  - Post-Secondary Education
- **Invisibility / Lack of Representation**
  - Political Participation and Leadership
  - DPO (Disabled Persons' Organizations) Leadership
  - Cultural Representations and Activities
- **Existing Services and Supports**
  - Availability of Services and Supports
  - Eligibility Standards
  - Quality and Appropriateness of Services and Supports
  - Disability Leadership in Designing and Delivering Services and Supports
- **Justice**
  - Legal Capacity
  - Abuse and Violence
  - Access to Justice
- **Freedom of Movement**
  - Immigration
  - Moving to a New Province
  - Transportation
  - Environmental Barriers

## **Overview**

The analysis section of this report is based upon an interpretation of 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 is divided into ten sections to reflect the thematic clusters. Each section begins with a discussion of key issues arising within the thematic cluster. Sections are divided into sub-themes that interpret and summarize participants' feedback. Participants' recommendations and anonymized quotations are interspersed throughout the report.

The key issues and sub-themes overlap and reinforce each other in important ways. For example, institutionalization is a segregating practice that reinforces the social invisibility of people with intellectual disabilities. Social invisibility reinforces the fear associated with disability and the stigma associated with disability support work. This stigma leads to lower wages for support workers and reduced funding for these services. This results in a lack of support programs or poor-quality programs, which sustains social isolation, segregation and invisibility.

To take another example, poverty and the lack of funding for assistive technologies create communication barriers. These barriers prevent people with disabilities from learning about employment opportunities and participating in job interviews. The lack of access to employment opportunities sustains poverty and unemployment.

## **Thematic Analysis**

### **1. Impacted Groups**

This section sets the stage for interpreting the rest of the report by describing participants' understandings of the breadth and depth of disability-related issues. Participants urged the Government of Canada to consider the following groups within the disability community and to prioritize groups that are particularly marginalized by the existing policy and legislative framework:

- Aboriginal People with Disabilities
- People with Intellectual Disabilities
- Families of People with Disabilities
- Invisible, Intermittent, and Unrecognized Disabilities
- Disability Support Staff

### **Aboriginal People with Disabilities**



“Traditional distrust of the government system and the lack of consideration for Aboriginal culture and teachings has led people to not properly access services if they are available. The conditions of many reserves have led to poor quality of life”.

Survey Respondent

Participants explained that disabled people who are also Aboriginal face double discrimination and intense marginalization. Participants explained that Aboriginal people with disabilities have unique needs. Given that Aboriginal communities tend to experience higher rates of disability, the new federal accessibility legislation must specifically address the needs of these communities. Outreach about existing services and supports for Aboriginal people with disabilities must be improved.

### **People with Intellectual Disabilities**

“People with intellectual disabilities are amongst the most marginalized. People with intellectual disabilities are devalued. They are in poverty. Most have to live with 2 or 3 other people. There is a guiding principle: we have to work the hardest for the most marginalized. The legislation needs to bend over backwards to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities are represented at every level in ways that makes a difference”.

Brandon, MB

People with intellectual disabilities face ongoing discrimination and inadequate supports. They are not viewed as full citizens. Their legal capacity and their right to self-determination is undermined or removed. They are subjected to segregation in institutions. They have disproportionately high rates of poverty and receive subminimum wages. The stigma associated with intellectual disability must be combatted through targeted public awareness campaigns.

### **Families of People with Disabilities**

Family members and households are negatively affected by gaps in disability policy and supports. They face low incomes, unemployment and missed opportunities for career and educational advancement, as well as health issues and impairments acquired through life-long support and advocacy work.

Parents and spouses of disabled individuals often perform unpaid work to fill support voids. In many cases, this work is a life-long commitment. Dual-income status can be impossible to achieve or maintain because one adult member of the household must stay home to perform support work. Family members are unable to pursue a ‘typical Canadian family life’ due to unmet support needs.



Parents face pressure to continue providing support to their adult children with intellectual disabilities. They link this ongoing reliance on family to the lack of supports and the failure to recognize adults with intellectual disabilities as full citizens.

### **People with Invisible, Intermittent, and Unrecognized Disabilities**

Not all impairments are equally recognized as legitimate grounds for accommodation requests. People with invisible disabilities, including those with mental health issues, are sometimes denied services. Similarly, many people with intermittent disabilities and undiagnosed impairments face service denial. People with disabilities can be accused of ‘malingering’ or falsifying their disability identity. This points to broader issues around ‘what counts’ as disability and ‘who counts’ as disabled.

### **Support Staff**

The quality of life of persons with disabilities is affected by the quality of support they receive. However, the stigma related to disability and support work results in low wages for support workers and high staff turnover for service agencies. Support work should be professionalized and support workers must be better compensated.

## **2. Communication and Access to Information**

Participants identified barriers that prevent them from accessing information in an equitable manner. These barriers also impinge on their ability to vote in elections and to safely navigate public places. The issues in this area are grouped under the following themes:

- Plain Language
- Multiple Formats
- ASL and LSQ
- Assistive Technology
- Mail Delivery

“Society thinks it’s okay for someone with a disability to have 70% of what other people have”.

St John, NB

### **Plain Language**

Participants with diverse types of impairments emphasized the importance of providing services and materials in plain language. Government websites, program descriptions,



application forms and other documents are currently inaccessible to people with disabilities since they don't use plain language.

### **Multiple Formats**

"I can't mark my own ballot. This violates my right to privacy while voting".

St John, NB

Participants with diverse types of impairments also emphasized the importance of providing services and materials in multiple formats including audio, visual, large print and Braille. Visual and written formats must be provided for people with hearing impairments, and audio formats must be provided for people with visual impairments. Travel terminals, trains and airplanes should provide information in multiple formats to ensure the safety, dignity and equality rights of people with disabilities. Signs in public places should use large print and should contain Braille. Graphics should be used along with plain language descriptions to facilitate access to information.

Government agencies should offer multiple modes of communication. Participants encountered barriers in communicating with federal agencies due to the failure to offer clients an email option. Some participants experienced 'sensory overload' when attempting to communicate with the government by telephone and therefore prefer to communicate via email.

In the federal elections, the reliance on a single communication platform such as the marked ballot prevents many people with disabilities from exercising their right to vote.

### **Assistive Technology**

Participants explained the importance of technology to their everyday lives. For many people with disabilities, technology such as the internet, smart phones and assistive devices can facilitate access to basic information as well employment and educational opportunities. However, many people with disabilities cannot afford the technology they require to navigate their environments. Assistive technology is not readily available or adequately funded.

### **ASL and LSQ**

Participants urged the Government of Canada to recognize ASL and LSQ as official languages.

### **Mail Delivery**

"People with disabilities would have major issues going to a community mailbox".



Participants identified door-to-door mail delivery as an important accommodation for people with disabilities.

### 3. Poverty

Poverty is a cross-cutting problem that impacts all aspects of a disabled person's life. Poverty also impacts households and reduces the overall income of families of disabled persons.

Participants located the root causes of poverty within the disability social assistance programs that are managed by the Provinces. The high costs associated with disability supports reduce overall incomes, and tax credits fail to compensate people with disabilities for services that are essential to their daily life. Poverty prevents people with disabilities from benefiting from existing accessibility provisions and from participating in their communities. It diminishes inclusion and enforces a reliance on family members. This can result in coercive or abusive situations.

These effects are summarized through the following themes:

- Income
- Unfunded Disability Expenses
- Tax Credits
- Forced Reliance on Family

#### **Income**

"Pain prevents fulltime work. How about a universal income? Poverty and homelessness are a huge, huge fear".

Survey Respondent

Participants called for a guaranteed annual income. Many people with disabilities are living below the poverty line because their impairments prevent them from working full-time. As a result, they receive social assistance through disability support programs. However, assistance rates fall well below the poverty line.

Participants highlighted the income gap between people with intellectual disabilities and people with other types of disabilities. Families that include a member with an intellectual disability are at a higher risk of living in poverty.

## Unfunded Disability Expenses

“Considering that a power wheelchair can cost upwards of \$25000 and attendant services can be thousands of dollars annually, not to mention homemaking and other essential services for quality of life. To say that we can only claim a non-refundable credit of just over \$8000, taking these facts into account, is laughable”.

Survey Respondent

Disabled people and their families identified expenses related to disability supports as a main cause of poverty. Little to no funding is available for many essential services and equipment.

## Tax Credits

Participants described how the existing disability tax credit does not benefit them, while others stated that this credit should be made refundable.

The relationship between CPP and irregular unemployment was also signaled out as problematic. Participants explained how frequent interruptions to employment, due to disability and health, exclude them from benefitting from CPP. Participants expressed concern that employment can result in the loss of disability benefits. They ask that these ineligibility criteria be abolished.

Participants also recommend the creation of a separate benefit for respite for relatives performing support work, in addition to existing child tax benefits.

## Forced Reliance on Family

Participants explained that people with disabilities cannot choose to live on their own, due to low assistance rates. People with disabilities may be forced to rely on relatives and remain in households where they do not wish to be.

## 4. HOUSING

Poverty prevents people with disabilities from living in their own homes, while disability support systems reinforce undesirable and harmful housing situations.

Participants described their housing challenges through the following themes:

- Institutionalization



- Affordable Housing
- Accessible Housing

## **Institutionalization**

“We still have individuals living in large institutions in this country. If you look at the Indigenous community and the residential schools, there is clear leadership and statements on that from the federal government. There is a need for that at the federal level when we are talking about what is permitted and what isn't permitted for in supporting people with intellectual disabilities”.

Brandon, MB

Participants are outraged at the existence of institutions for people with intellectual disabilities. They urged the Government of Canada to provide leadership around deinstitutionalization.

Provincial governments currently fund supports for people with intellectual disabilities through congregate care facilities. These institutions serve a warehousing function and support a severe level of segregation.

## **Affordable Housing**

“We would love to see a renewal of federal programming for social housing with an earmarked amount for accessible units”.

Brandon, MB

People with disabilities do not have access to safe, dignified, and affordable housing and this prevents them from fully participating in society.

People with disabilities who receive social assistance cannot afford monthly rental fees. Participants explained that social assistance payments do not cover the cost of rent. Similarly, parents of children with disabilities fear that their children will never be able to live independently due to the high cost of housing and low social assistance rates. Single adults with disabilities are often forced to live with their relatives or rely upon group housing models.

Participants welcome the Government of Canada’s renewed role in social housing and urge them to target people with disabilities through these initiatives.

## **Accessible Housing**



“There is not enough housing for those in wheelchairs. We need things like elevators and accessible housing that accommodates the wheelchair without having to make special arrangements”.

North Bay, ON

Participants face inaccessible housing options. Architectural barriers include stairs, sinks that are too low, and hallways that are too narrow. These problems occur when plans for housing take place without people with disabilities. Participants insist that disabled people become part of the planning process. They urge the Government of Canada to adopt universal design standards.

## **5. HEALTHCARE AND PHARMACARE**

People with disabilities do not have equal or adequate access to healthcare.

Participants provided 2 main reasons for these health inequities:

- Barriers within the Medical System
- Affordability of Treatment

### **Barriers within the Medical System**

« Nous avons l'impression de ne pas être entendu. Nous mentionnons nos besoins et il n'y a pas de suite ».

Survey Respondent

People with disabilities continue to face barriers in the medical system.

Medical equipment, such as examination tables, are not accessible. Meanwhile, staff are not trained to use lifts and other assistive devices. Participants reported that medical staff are unprepared to work with people with disabilities. There is an absence of staff trained in plain language, ASL, LSQ, and other communication methods that are used by many people with disabilities.

Communicating with people with disabilities may require extra time. Yet, the workflow of medical practitioners is structured around short appointment times. The average appointment time is insufficient for many people with disabilities.

People with disabilities have been prevented from accessing medical services due to a lack of transportation, especially strong in rural areas.



“In areas like Timmins and South Porcupine it's next to impossible to secure transportation to medical appointments outside of an emergency”.

North Bay, ON

### **Affordability of Treatment**

Access to medication is a growing problem due to increasing treatment costs. Many people with disabilities cannot afford medication. For example, a person with an intellectual disability who experiences life threatening seizures was unable to access seizure medication due to cost barriers.

## **6. EMPLOYMENT**

People with disabilities and their families are deeply concerned with their employment situation and the employment situation of the disability community.

Employment issues are grouped under the following themes:

- Discrimination
- Unpaid Work
- Flexibility and Paid Leave
- Disability Supports and Environmental Barriers
- Civil Service
- WSIB and EI
- Post-Secondary Education

### **Discrimination**

People with disabilities experience discrimination in hiring situations and face high rates of unemployment. Participants reported attending many interviews that did not lead to employment. They feel that employers do not want to hire people with disabilities.

Participants recommend increased disability training for employers. They insist that these training programs are designed and led by disabled people. Participants also recommend a subsidized wage program for people with disabilities.

### **Unpaid Work**

“No one wants to pay people with disabilities. They expect people with disabilities to volunteer or work for less than minimum wage. That's sophisticated slavery”.



## Survey Respondent

Participants pointed out that people with disabilities are expected to volunteer or work for less than minimum wage. They stated that people with disabilities need better options for their futures.

Participants urge the Government of Canada to address practices that violate the rights of people with disabilities. These practices include sheltered workshops that target people with intellectual disabilities. Government programs such as The Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities support sheltered workshops.

Participants reported that parents, spouses, and other members of households that include a person with a disability perform unpaid support work in the home. Participants recommend remuneration for this work.

### **Flexibility and Paid Leave**

“I am employed and the biggest barrier I face in staying healthy and employed is the stigma. I can feel very ostracized at times due to time off needed for my disabilities”.

## Survey Respondent

People with disabilities require greater flexibility and understanding from their employers. Job retention is a challenge for many people with disabilities who require reduced hours or time off work. Many people with disabilities have been penalized for taking time off work for health-related reasons.

Flexible work schedules and paid medical leave would allow many people with disabilities to remain fully employed. Participants recommend that people with disabilities be placed in management roles that allow them to shape workplace policies and cultures.

Participants urge the Government of Canada to legislate employment protection and paid leave for people with disabilities, their parents, and spouses. Parents, spouses, and members of households that include a disabled person may require time off work to support the disabled member of their household. Many parents and spouses have been penalized by employers for performing this support work.

### **Disability Supports and Environmental Barriers**

« Il n'y a pas assez de postes pour les personnes ayant des déficiences intellectuelles. Surtout pour ceux et celles qui vivent en situation linguistique minoritaire ».

## Survey Respondent



For many people with disabilities, the ability to work depends upon the availability of funding for attendants and other support workers. Employment for people with disabilities is therefore closely tied to the funding of disability supports.

People with disabilities also face environmental barriers in the workplace. Participants described architectural barriers that prevent them from attending interviews and pursuing employment opportunities.

## **Civil Service**

“The Government of Canada is the largest employer in Canada, but it has no focus on hiring people with disabilities. A dedicated hiring program would be really important”.

St John, NB

Participants urge the Government of Canada to hire more people with disabilities. They recommend the development of hiring processes that target people with disabilities for jobs in the civil service. Since a large percentage of the Canadian population has a disability, there should be an equally large number of people with disabilities working for the federal government.

Participants recommend the creation of a disability component for every federal department. These sections would be staffed and managed by people with disabilities.

Participants caution the Government of Canada about relying on disability organizations that are run by non-disabled people. They urge the Government of Canada to work closely with disability organizations that are run by people with disabilities.

## **WSIB and EI**

“I have been informed that many Government programs use various definitions of Disabilities. Have spent the last 10 years fighting WSIB for fair and just compensation, I have a feeling it'll take this long with CPPD”.

Survey Respondent

Participants receiving WSIB report that their Compensation amounts are inadequate.



Many participants also experience difficulty qualifying for EI due to the intermittent nature of their employment history. People with disabilities who experience interruptions to work continuity are excluded from this program.

### **Post-Secondary Education**

Many students with disabilities lack employment options when they graduate from post-secondary education. Youth with disabilities will require additional support to enter the labour market.

Employment opportunities for youth with disabilities are also linked to educational opportunities and to the availability of disability supports.

Participants explained that the Canada Student Grant for Services and Equipment for Students with Disabilities “does not go a long way”. The maximum available funding is \$8000 per year. This amount falls short of addressing key needs and does not cover the cost of many assistive technologies or support worker fees.

## **7. INVISIBILITY/ LACK OF REPRESENTATION**

People with disabilities are excluded from political participation and leadership. They are also excluded from cultural activities and social opportunities. Participants feel that people with disabilities are largely invisible in Canadian society.

“The biggest barriers are the ones that keep you locked in your home”.

Survey Respondent

These issues are presented through the following themes:

- Political Participation and Leadership
- DPO (Disabled Persons’ Organizations) Leadership
- Cultural Representations and Activities

### **Political Participation and Leadership**

Many people with disabilities cannot exercise their right to vote in federal elections. This is due to the absence of multiple voting platforms and ID requirements that unfairly exclude people with disabilities who do not have a drivers’ license.

People with disabilities also face barriers that prevent them from running for elected positions. Participants ask the Government of Canada to support people with disabilities who wish to run for political office.



## Leadership by DPOs

“All of these groups of people with disabilities need to cultivate a partnership and work together to help each other out”.

North Bay, ON

Participants insisted that leadership on disability issues come from disabled persons' organizations (DPOs). They distinguished between organizations that are led by disabled people (DPOs) and organizations that are run by non-disabled people on behalf of disabled people. Leadership by DPOs will result in more effective public campaigns to raise awareness around disability issues. Conferences and media campaigns are important types of initiatives.

Participants urge the Government of Canada to increase funding for disability research that is led by people with disabilities and their organizations (DPOs).

## Cultural Representations and Activities

“The waterfront especially should be more accessible, especially to those in wheelchairs so they can have the chance to stick their feet in the water”.

North Bay, ON

People with disabilities are either absent or misrepresented in the news media and in cultural products. There are very few people with disabilities appearing on television as newscasters. There is also a tendency for non-disabled people to represent disability by performing as disabled characters in film and television.

People with disabilities are also excluded from cultural activities. Participants described the barriers they face at heritage sites and in national parks.

## 8. EXISTING SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

There are many problems within existing programs and services for people with disabilities. The inadequacy of existing programs leads to a poor quality of life, unemployment, poverty, and social isolation for many people with disabilities.

These issues are grouped under the following themes:

- Availability of Services and Supports
- Eligibility Standards
- Quality and Appropriateness of Services and Supports
- Disability Leadership in Designing and Delivering Services and Supports



## Availability of Services and Supports

“There is almost the view that you are lucky if you get access to services. It is not normal practice to provide services”.

Brandon, MB

The availability of services and supports for people with disabilities varies across the country. Reserves and rural regions often have less access to programs. Other gaps relate to age groups. Many services and supports are absent following transition to adulthood.

Participants explained that supports are often only available on a voluntary basis. They urge the Government of Canada to reframe these supports as entitlements.

Participants indicated that much progress towards inclusion has been reversed due to the lack of ongoing support. Participants link the absence of services and supports for people with disabilities to the government’s failure to invest in people with disabilities. This lack of investment reinforces negative stereotypes that devalue people with disabilities. Participants urge the Government of Canada to invest in people with disabilities.

## Eligibility Standards

“There are just so many hoops to jump through to gain access to services for Autism”.

North Bay, ON

People with disabilities face barriers in applying to services and supports. Eligibility processes and standards vary across the country. Application processes for programs are inaccessible, confusing, and time-consuming. Participants explained that they are “jumping through hoops” to access services and supports. Eligibility reassessments also cause difficulties and create additional costs for programs.

Many people with disabilities who are not considered “disabled enough” to be considered eligible for services and supports. These eligibility standards vary dramatically across programs and regions.

People with disabilities also face difficult decisions around disclosure. Due to the widespread stigma associated with disability, many participants feel that the



consequences of disclosing their impairment may outweigh the benefits of receiving services and supports.

### **Quality and Appropriateness of Services and Supports**

“Across all the various agencies, programs, and services, there is no consistency with the approach to accommodating disability. Please, just ensure some amount of continuity and predictability. Is that too much to ask?”

Survey Respondent

The quality of disability services and supports varies across the country and between rural and urban areas. Many services and supports fall short of supporting dignity and self-determination. Participants attributed these disparities to an overall absence of standards. Participants urge the Government of Canada to create and enforce standards so that people with disabilities can expect the same quality of life regardless of where they live.

Participants described significant problems with services and programs for people with intellectual disabilities. Support workers lack of accreditation and are often unqualified and untrained, while programs lack quality assurance measures. These issues result in discriminatory treatment that violates the rights of people with intellectual disabilities, for example, when support staff fail to recognize their client’s right to self-determination and legal capacity.

Many participants prefer direct funding over indirect funding for disability services. Direct funding flows straight to disabled people and presents a more efficient model of service delivery.

### **Disability Leadership in Designing and Delivering Services and Supports**

Participants recommend that people with disabilities be put in charge of designing and implementing disability services and supports. There is a lack of stakeholder engagement in developing current practices. These practices fall short of meeting the needs of people with disabilities.

## **9. JUSTICE**

Many people with disabilities experience injustice and unfair treatment. Participants described human rights violations and practices that support unjust and harmful



treatment. They explained that many people with disabilities face barriers in accessing legal remedies and legal supports.

These issues can be summarized through the following themes:

- Legal Capacity
- Abuse and Violence
- Access to Justice

### **Legal Capacity**

“People with intellectual disabilities lack control in their own lives. The accessibility legislation should deliver control to people with intellectual disabilities”.

Brandon, MB

People with disabilities are not treated as full citizens before the law. Many people with intellectual disabilities are assumed to be incompetent. They are placed under the authority of a substitute decision maker, such as a Public Trustee, who controls their money and medical decisions. Participants also described how the claims and testimonies of people with disabilities, such as people with psychiatric labels and, are discounted by the justice system.

### **Abuse and Violence**

There is a widespread assumption that people with disabilities are ‘dangerous’. However, people with disabilities are disproportionately the victims of crimes. Participants described several examples of systemic abuse and violence against people with disabilities. These examples included the treatment of people with intellectual disabilities and people with psychiatric labels.

The human rights of people with intellectual disabilities are frequently violated. According to participants, many people with intellectual disabilities are forcibly restrained, segregated, and isolated. People with intellectual disabilities also work in sheltered workshops for less than minimum wage.

People with psychiatric labels are subjected to involuntary medical treatment. This form of treatment takes place either without their consent or against their expressed wishes.

### **Access to Justice**

“All Canadian legislation should live up to the standards set in the CRPD”.

Brandon, MB



The Canadian justice system as inaccessible. The system contains barriers that prevent people with disabilities from appearing in court and participating in judicial processes. People with disabilities also experience barriers in accessing legal supports. Participants reported an absence of adequate legal aid services in the disability community.

Participants expressed frustration at complaint-driven enforcement mechanisms, such as Human Rights Tribunals. These processes are highly individualized, time-consuming, and tedious. Participants urge the Government of Canada to take a proactive approach to justice and uphold the CRPD. All Canadian legislation should be guided by the CRPD.

## **10. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT**

The freedom of movement of people with disabilities is restricted by existing policies and practices. Canadian immigration laws prevent people with disabilities from moving to Canada. Services, support programs, and travel costs prevent people with disabilities from moving between the provinces. There are also barriers within transit systems and the built environment that result in unequal access and physical injury.

These issues are grouped under the following themes:

- Immigration
- Moving to a New Province
- Transportation
- Built Environments

### **Immigration**

“Eliminate blatant discrimination from immigration laws”.

St John, NB

Canadian immigration laws frame people with disabilities as burdens. Medical inadmissibility criteria are used to exclude people with disabilities from the country. Participants urge the Government of Canada to stop preventing people with disabilities from immigrating to Canada. They shared concerns around practices that ask disabled immigrants to agree to pay out of pocket for their own services and supports. Many participants noted that families are separated as a result of discriminatory immigration laws.

### **Moving to a New Province**



There are barriers that prevent or discourage people with disabilities from relocating to a different province. Many services and supports are provincially-funded and operate without consistency across the country. This makes it difficult for people with disabilities to relocate.

## Transportation

“People are getting calls asking if they really want to go out. People are having to work around the transportation schedules and availability of vehicles”.

North Bay, ON

Participants described numerous barriers across existing transit systems, including air and rail travel.

There is no consistency in the accommodations or support provided by transit staff. Many people with disabilities are denied accommodations if their impairment is invisible or unrecognized by staff. Transit staff are either unable to assist properly or lack proper training. For example, transit staff use improper lifting methods that cause pain or injury to a disabled person. Participants described staff refusing to assist them place their overhead luggage.

There is an absence of staff at terminals who are willing to support people with disabilities in finding or reaching appropriate locations. Signs and other visual information are not accessible to people who require large print, Braille, plain language, or audio description. Similarly, the reliance on audio announcements excludes many passengers. Participants recommend that information be provided in multi formats.

Many people with disabilities experience difficulty during pre-boarding practices such as waiting in line. Waiting in line poses a barrier for many people with disabilities, such as people who are sensitive to loud noises and crowds. Participants recommend that transit providers allow for alternative boarding practices.

There are a limited number of accessible spots available on trains and airplanes. This forces people with disabilities to reschedule or cancel trips. Once on board the plane, many passengers are forced to abandon their own wheelchair and move to a chair provided by the airline. These chairs are often inappropriate and inaccessible. The process of moving to a different chair can also result in pain or injury.

There are no processes in place to enable people with disabilities to use the washroom during flight. Support staff are unavailable and airplane washrooms are inaccessible. These barriers force many people with disabilities to limit their travel destinations in order to reduce the length of their flight.



Many transit barriers result from the failure to enforce existing rules. Participants urge the Government of Canada to issue consequences for violations. Participants recommend that Crown Corporations such as VIA Rail be required to hire disabled people to design and implement accessibility measures.

The cost of travel prevents many people with disabilities from moving around the country. Participants recommend subsidies for low income people with disabilities.

## **Environmental Barriers**

Many aspects of the built environment do not adhere to the principles of universal design. Universal design standards help ensure equitable access and the inclusion of people with disabilities. These principles include such measures as using texture and colour-coding on curbs and placing Braille and high-contrast print on signs. To increase social participation and access to the built environment, participants also recommended funding to small business to invest in accessibility.

Recent modifications to the built environment that are geared towards accessibility fall short of meeting their goals. These changes have been implemented without the involvement of disabled people. The failure to consult disabled people has led to poor design choices that have resulted in further barriers. Examples include ramps that are too narrow, poorly situated elevators, and electric door openers that cannot be accessed by many people with disabilities. Participants urge the Government of Canada to hire people with disabilities to oversee the planning of universal design work.

Participants insisted that changes to the built go beyond architectural modifications. Maintaining scent-free environments and creating calm (quiet) spaces would allow many people with disabilities to access public spaces. Many environmental sensitivities can also be accommodated through the provision of calm (quiet) spaces.

Multiple solutions will be needed to make the built environment accessible. The needs of different people with disabilities sometimes conflict, but DPOs and people with disabilities are well positioned to address these differences.

## **Who Is Missing?**

The discussions that took place during Phase 1 of this project do not reflect the diversity of Canada's disability community. Future outreach by the Alliance will target groups who were not well represented in the initial Public Sessions, Discussion Groups, and Survey.



The Alliance will be seeking input from Indigenous people with disabilities, racialized people with disabilities, migrants with disabilities, and LGBTQ2S people with disabilities.

## What Comes Next?

In the project's second fiscal year, the Alliance will undertake a large number of consultation and research activities. We will complete our literature and legislative reviews early on in Phase 2. Our research findings will inform the development of our Phase 2 consultation materials. We will develop a second survey that will be posted on our website. We will host public sessions and discussion groups in all five regions of the country, as well as a series of discussion groups online or by telephone. Each discussion group will focus on a specific issue or stakeholder group. We will conduct interviews with a diverse group of stakeholders. We will hold an expert session on the new legislation's implementation and enforcement. We will conclude our consultation process by holding a national meeting to validate our findings. We will analyze our data and present a series of recommendations in our Phase 2 Report.

## Acknowledgements

This Phase 1 Report is the result of months of collaboration among Partner and Member organizations of the **Alliance for an Inclusive and Accessible Canada**.

The organizing partners would like to thank everyone who participated in the Public Sessions, Discussion Groups, and Survey. Special thanks go to People First of Canada (PFC), Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD), National Network for Mental Health (NNMH), Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC), and Muscular Dystrophy Canada for their coordinating role, and to our previous Project Manager, Melanie Benard, for her dedicated work in organizing Phase 1.

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