

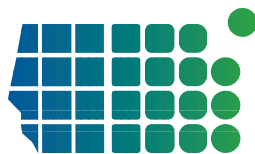
Alberta Disability Strategy

Summary Document

First of two Alberta Disability Strategy documents

A strategy prepared by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and presented to the Alberta Government for consideration.

2002



THE PREMIER'S COUNCIL
ON THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
Alberta



LOGO DESCRIPTION

The logo for the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities symbolizes the ultimate aim of the Council, which is to increase the status of Albertans with disabilities. The following is an explanation of each of the components of the logo.

Single Green Circle

Placed so that it symbolizes the elevated status of all consumers. The single circle portrays and affirms every consumer's individuality, rights and freedoms. Its vibrant colour suggests the life and vitality within each person.



"Map" of Alberta

The placid blue squares on the grid symbolize the structure and discipline inherent in government and other organizations affecting the lives of Albertans with disabilities.



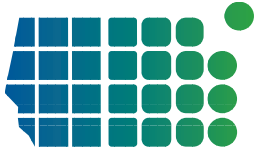
Softened and Varying Shapes

This block of fifteen varying shapes represents the numbers and the unity of the Council, as well as members' individual qualities and strengths. The changing shapes show a transition from formal structures to an increasing focus on individual consumers.



Diagonal Colour Gradation

The shading from cool blues to vibrant green shows the transition from the necessary formality of government and other organizations to the Council's concentration on the individual, its primary concern.



December, 2002

Honourable Gene Zwozdesky
Minister, Alberta Community Development
Government of Alberta

Dear Mr. Minister:

As Chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I am pleased to present to you the Alberta Disability Strategy.

As Minister responsible for the Premier's Council, you know that our legislated mandate is to "advise, report to and make recommendations to the Government on matters relating to the opportunity for full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in the life of the province." The Alberta Disability Strategy was developed by the Premier's Council following an extensive period of research, study and consultation with Albertans.

The Strategy has been printed in two documents: the summary and the appendices.

We look forward to the response of the Alberta Government to the Strategy and its recommendations.

Sincerely,

Rob Lougheed, MLA
Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan
Chair, Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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Please note: Appendices containing supplementary information and data in support of the Alberta Disability Strategy are available under separate cover by contacting the Premier's Council office.



Executive Summary

Equality for all citizens, regardless of their race, creed, background or abilities, is a fundamental right in Albertan and Canadian society. But equality doesn't exist for the half a million people in Alberta who have a disability.

Persons with disabilities are not free from intolerance and discrimination. They do not have adequate personal or financial supports to live a life of dignity. They cannot go everywhere in the province and have ready access to buildings, offices or public facilities. They are not treated equally when vying for employment and educational opportunities.

Full citizenship for persons with disabilities is possible. What's needed is a commitment to turn government policies into practice, to better enforce regulations, to set quality standards for services and programs across the province, and to ensure seamless delivery of those services and programs across regions and organizations. The Alberta Disability Strategy, developed in 2002, is a foundation for how this can be done.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The Premier's Council believes that, given the proper support and commitment, persons with disabilities will be able to participate in all aspects of Alberta society. The Alberta Disability Strategy contains recommended strategies for change that will enable this vision to become a reality. Major recommendations for immediate implementation are:

1. Albertans should be made more aware of the rights, needs and aspirations of persons with disabilities.
2. The Government of Alberta must ensure that the needs of persons with disabilities related to their daily living activities are met.
3. A commitment should be made to embrace the principles of universal accessibility and a process put in place to remove physical barriers from public spaces so that all Albertans can fully participate in all community, employment and business activities.
4. The Government of Alberta's current system of appeals should be governed by the rules of administrative law (quasi-judicial), and become more transparent and respectful of individual need.
5. The Government of Alberta should create a single, province-wide program that integrates current disability support programs and funding under one philosophy and set of criteria. This community supports model would provide individualized support, enabling persons with disabilities to have choice in the marketplace and independently make decisions about their needs and service providers.
6. The Government of Alberta should improve access to all levels of education by linking and integrating education resources, setting standards for special education programs, ensuring all education facilities are physically accessible, reviewing the enrolment appeal process at schools, expanding counselling support, and monitoring implementation of the recommendations of Alberta Learning's Review of Special Education in Alberta.
7. The Government of Alberta should separate income support programs from personal support programs so that individuals are not automatically penalized for earning an income and becoming part of the workforce.
8. Alberta employers and governments should provide long-term support and commitment to persons with disabilities attempting to enter the workforce and to participate on public boards, commissions or committees.

IMPLEMENTATION

Creating an environment within which all Albertans can enjoy full citizenship requires significant personal, learning, financial and employment supports. Full citizenship cannot be achieved without these **core supports** because they provide the tangible elements needed for persons with disabilities to become independent, make choices, and access opportunities that evens the playing field and enables individuals to contribute to society.

To begin the process of achieving full citizenship for all Albertans, the Premier's Council recommends government develop an action plan to implement this Strategy and its recommendations. In addition, government should actively encourage various stakeholders to support the Strategy.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Premier's Council has developed an Accountability Framework to help ensure personal, learning, financial and employment supports are well coordinated and responsive to the needs of Albertans. The framework includes a Disability Lens that would better ensure inclusion of the interests of persons with disabilities in the development of government services, programs, legislation and policies.

ACCEPTANCE OF STRATEGY

It is recommended that the Alberta Government accept the Alberta Disability Strategy, develop an implementation plan, and establish the Strategy as the foundation for future legislation, government policy and direction concerning persons with disabilities.



Alberta Disability Strategy

Citizenship gives every person the right to be included and actively involved in all aspects of Canadian society. Many Albertans with a disability still do not enjoy full citizenship. A commitment in recent years by the Alberta government to ensure equal opportunities for all Albertans has not significantly changed this reality.

The Alberta Disability Strategy, developed in 2002, provides a foundation for attaining full citizenship for the one in six Albertans (about 500,000) who have a disability. Full citizenship means being treated fairly and without discrimination by individuals, companies, organizations and governments. It means having adequate supports to live a life of safety, security and dignity. It means having the chance to pursue educational and employment opportunities. And it means having the opportunity, choice and ability to participate in all aspects of Alberta society.

Currently, 11 provincial government Ministries administer 34 disability related programs for persons with disabilities at a cost of about \$1.7 billion per year. These programs, and funding to support them, are channelled through a myriad of government departments and agencies, and governance organizations. This fragmentation of delivery means inconsistency in policy and program development, wide variations in services and supports, unnecessary bureaucracy and expense, and lack of coordination across programs, regions and organizations.

The result is that Albertans with disabilities continue to experience large inequities and fragmentation in service and support. They encounter inaccessible work and learning environments and have difficulty finding affordable, suitable housing. Adaptive technology and assistive devices required by persons with disabilities to be active are available but difficult to obtain and for many, impossible to afford. Access and inequity issues are much worse for Aboriginal people, as they have nearly double the disability rate of other Albertans.

The overarching change being recommended within this Strategy is for government and other service providers to take a more inclusive, holistic approach to disability issues, needs and services. This requires ensuring that all Albertans have the opportunity to exercise their right to make decisions about their own lives, to provide them with choice, and to enable them to live as independently as possible in the community. It also requires a commitment to provide the on-going support persons with disabilities may need in order to reach their full potential.

Fundamental to this on-going support is satisfying basic living, safety and security needs that allow individuals to be healthy, secure, mobile, active and involved in their communities.

The pressing need for a more coordinated approach by government for disability supports and policy in Alberta was affirmed during the Premier's Council's discussions with stakeholders in 2000.

Development of the Alberta Disability Strategy involved a series of open houses and focused discussions with individuals with disabilities, stakeholder led organizations such as the Alberta Disabilities Forum, a number of government departments, and Council subcommittees. The subcommittees studied and provided recommendations on each core support. An Aboriginal Advisory Committee was also formed to study and provide input on disability issues affecting First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples.

Of concern to Council in drafting this Strategy was the lack of up-to-date data on persons with disabilities. There is a significant planning need in Alberta for more research on the needs and activities of persons with disabilities. The last full study on health, activity and involvement levels, called the Health and Activity Limitation Survey, was done in 1991 by the federal government. This national survey has been repeated and updated data is expected in 2003.



A Vision of Full Citizenship

The Premier's Council believes that, given the proper support and commitment, persons with disabilities will be a part of all aspects of Alberta society. This includes:

- All persons with disabilities, including First Nations, Metis, Inuit, and other Aboriginals with disabilities, are valued as full citizens in all aspects of Alberta society – fully participating in the social, economic and political life of Alberta communities.
- Albertans with disabilities receive the support they require to achieve a standard of living and quality of life that ensures health, safety, comfort and dignity.
- Albertans with disabilities have the rights, freedoms and responsibilities to make choices and determine their own destinies.
- Education and employment rates are similar to those of the general population – every Albertan with a disability is encouraged to reach for his or her full potential.
- Albertans with disabilities are respected as partners and valuable assets in the process of crafting and owning the new Alberta prosperity.





Platform of Equality and Inclusion

Creating an environment of equality of worth and embracing the principle of comprehensive inclusion is the foundation upon which all Albertans can enjoy full citizenship. For many, this requires significant personal, learning, financial and employment supports. Like building pillars, these core supports add much needed balance, strength and stability to a policy platform that guarantees equality and inclusion for all.

Full citizenship cannot be achieved without core supports because they provide the tangible elements needed for individuals to become independent, make choices, access opportunities and contribute to society. In short, to do all the things most Albertans take for granted as basic rights; rights the Premier's Council believe can be obtained for persons with disabilities if the strategies and recommendations within personal, learning, financial and employment support areas are implemented.

There are many challenges and opportunities outlined within each core support that are closely linked to each other. Recognizing the interrelationship of the supports is important since pursuing

improvements within only one or two areas will not achieve the Premier's Council's vision. Similarly, the success of implementing strategies recommended within one support area is often co-dependent on moving forward with strategies in other core supports.

The success of the Alberta Disability Strategy depends on improvements occurring on a number of fronts concurrently. A synopsis of support concerns and issues is provided in this section. See the companion document *Alberta Disability Strategy Core Supports and Appendices* for a full discussion on issues relevant to each core support, and Council's recommendations within these areas.



FULL CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship implies presence of a collective identity and sense of agreement amongst individuals about the rights and responsibilities that are necessary for diverse populations to cohabitate. Persons with needs or interests that are considered to be different from the general population often require the support of government to ensure that their diverse needs are met. Some laws and agreements that support the rights of Albertans to experience full citizenship include the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and Alberta's *Human Rights, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism Act*.

The existence of these legal/constitutional guarantees notwithstanding, some of the potential threats to citizenship for many Albertans include laws and policies that are too narrow in scope and neglect the interests of persons with disabilities, and education programs that fail to accommodate the learning needs of all students.

Historically, it was not anticipated that persons with disabilities would graduate from an accredited education program, live independently or work in a career that would provide a salary comparable to non-disabled persons. Consequently, during the creation of existing laws, persons with disabilities were often not fully considered within the scope of interests represented by politicians.

For Aboriginal persons this has been even more problematic. Three levels of government are involved in providing services and programs for Aboriginal people, and the activities of these three levels are often not coordinated. The overall result is Aboriginal people with disabilities,

in addition to the common issues, frequently face unique barriers to achieving full citizenship.

Albertans with disabilities are beginning to claim their citizenship rights. However, full reclamation of citizenship rights for all Albertans will require using relevant legislation as a foundation for social change.

Implementation of the Alberta Disability Strategy should result in the following specific outcomes related to Full Citizenship:

1. Civil, constitutional and human rights will be assured for all Albertans.
2. Alberta's communities will be barrier free and physically accessible. All Albertans will be able to access the buildings, spaces, services and programs that they require.
3. All Albertans will have the opportunity to participate in and provide leadership to public policy processes, and to activities and associations that define their community.



PERSONAL SUPPORTS

Personal supports, also known as disability supports, refer to a range of goods and services, technical aids and equipment, personal services and assistance required to offset a disability. There are three types of personal supports: personal care services; technical aids, assistive devices and equipment; transportation and housing. Depending on the type and severity of impairment, persons with disabilities may need one or more of these elements to be provided.

Personal supports are fundamental to helping individuals achieve the personal safety and security they need to be involved and active in everyday life. Safety and security speaks to the need for individuals to have personal care to help them with basic needs (eating, dressing, etc.) and to get ready for the day; to have housing that is safe, affordable and physically accessible; to have transportation to go to work, school or recreational activities; and to have living and communication aids to provide mobility and contact with the community at large.

This area of support is the most critical of all the core supports. Only after these needs are met and secured can someone move forward to embrace independence and full community inclusion.

The 1991 Health and Activity Limitation Survey showed almost 170,000 technical supports were required by Albertans with disabilities at that time. The survey also showed the use of personal assistants was significantly higher than the other categories of personal support named by respondents. There is no reason to believe this has changed since this data was collected.

Alberta has recognized for some time the need for personal supports in order for some Albertans to overcome barriers and live in the community. More than 20 programs currently exist to aid individuals with disabilities to live, learn and work in their communities.

Personal supports programs are delivered by several government departments and government funded organizations like Regional Health Authorities, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Boards, Child and Family Regional Authorities, and a host of non-profit agencies who receive provincial grants.

Some of the major programs in Alberta include Home Care, Resources for Children with Disabilities (formerly known as Handicapped Children's Services), Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program, Personal Care Services, Alberta Aids to Daily Living, Special Opportunities Grant, and the Special Needs Program.

Adequate personal supports enable persons with disabilities to:

- Enjoy a standard of life comparable to non-disabled citizens.
- Increase their level of independence and decrease the emotional and financial stress of care giving on their families.
- Facilitate independent living in their community of choice.
- Enable individuals to live outside of hospitals, institutions or group homes.

These outcomes are not always possible for all individuals under these existing programs because they are largely uncoordinated, often inadequate and difficult to access. Commitments by funders and service providers in recent years to improve collaboration and reduce service inadequacies have not had any significant impact.

Complicating improvements to service delivery is an ongoing debate over who is responsible for the cost of personal supports. Some providers argue the cost of disability supports is the responsibility of the individual with the disability and his or her family, unless the individual does not have the necessary resources. Even so, many suggest support should be limited to medical expenses. Persons with disabilities, their families and advocates argue that disability supports are expensive and are not incurred by persons without disabilities. Such costs place Albertans with disabilities at an inherent financial disadvantage and promote dependence on government programs and support through a “welfare” lens.

It is the position of the Premier’s Council that personal supports funded by government should relieve financial stress on families and support persons, encourage participation in the community and job market, and help create an environment for Albertans that is inclusive and promotes equal opportunity. Eliminating funding and support uncertainty would have the added benefit of enabling individuals to focus on developing their abilities and contributing to the communities in which they live, rather than a focus on simply surviving.

Implementation of the Alberta Disability Strategy should result in the following specific outcomes related to Personal Supports:

1. Affordable, appropriate technical and personal supports for independent community living is available at home, school, work and play.
2. All Albertans will have choices and the right to determine the type of support required, including where and how that support is provided.
3. The Alberta government and municipalities provide funding for accessible housing and transportation that meet the needs of all persons.
4. Families and others receive the support and funding they need to provide effective and appropriate care for persons with disabilities.



EDUCATION AND LEARNING SUPPORTS

Education and Learning supports refer to the personal, technological, and accessibility needs that may be required by students with disabilities to fully participate in a learning environment. Education supports for students with disabilities may include, for example, multi-sensory learning programs and personal care support.

The Alberta School Act guarantees that all children residing in Alberta will have access to the education system and educational programming that meets a child's learning needs. For Albertans with disabilities, this means satisfying four core learning elements:

- The learning system is responsive to the education needs of all students.
- The learning system is flexible by providing a wide scope of programs through various learning modalities.
- All Albertans can access and participate in the learning environment.
- The learning system is affordable to all Alberta students regardless of learning needs. Cost will not be a barrier to inclusive learning environments.

Given the demographics of disability amongst Alberta's children and adults, the Alberta government has attempted to respond to the learning interests and needs of Albertans by supporting a lifespan of education programs. These include early childhood services, primary, secondary, and post-secondary integrated and specialized classrooms.

However, the current range and scope of special needs programs and supports varies significantly among schools. Although a student's assessment dictates the amount of funding provided to schools, the student's school and school board ultimately determine how the special needs funding is collectively utilized for the special needs population registered at the school and throughout the school jurisdiction. As a result, program and service levels vary greatly from student to student independent of need.

Education supports among Alberta's post-secondary institutions also varies. They have a duty to accommodate students with disabilities - unless the institution can establish that it would experience undue hardship. Post-secondary students have access to funding grants to help offset needed education supports but this is often inadequate to ensure equitable access.

The availability of education supports in Alberta for students with disabilities depends on many factors including the nature and severity of the disability, level of support from governments and education

institutions to finance education aids, and the physical accessibility of the learning environment. The physical accessibility of the learning environment is essential to a student's participation.

There are a number of barriers that restrict the availability of education supports and therefore full and equitable access to lifelong learning opportunities. Examples include budget restraint programs that have reduced support for children and adults with special needs, and inconsistencies as individual school boards independently interpret regulations, allocate funding and determine the type of service provided.

On average, Albertans with disabilities are reported to have lower education levels than their non-disabled peers. This can be directly linked to a lack of education supports, which has been identified as a significant risk factor for early school drop out and subsequently increases the challenges an individual with a disability faces in obtaining meaningful employment.

Program evaluations and research studies that concentrate on school expenditures and funding codes are only a part of the information that is required for identifying and planning an equitable learning environment in Alberta. More understanding of the type and range of education supports people with disabilities require to be successful students is also needed.

Implementation of the Alberta Disability Strategy should result in the following specific outcomes related to Education and Learning Supports:

1. All persons will have the support they need to participate in education at all levels and throughout their lives.
2. All persons will enjoy choice and self-determination in planning for their primary, secondary, post-secondary and lifelong education needs.
3. Alberta's education system will be responsive, accountable, inclusive and accessible.
4. Alberta's education programs will be culturally sensitive and respect diversity.



FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

Financial Supports refer to a variety of monetary supports available to Albertans who are not able to finance their basic needs due to temporary or permanent unemployment or to insufficient earnings from existing employment. Programs that provide financial supports to Albertans with disabilities include, for example, AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) and Workers Compensation Board Benefits. The availability of financial supports is dependent on the age of onset and the cause of the disability.

Persons with disabilities are over represented in the group of Albertans that don't have enough income to provide "the basics" – food, shelter, clothing, health care and the ability to care for their children. Some are able to achieve a minimal standard of living most of the time, but run into difficulty when the unexpected happens. In addition, persons with disabilities have on-going expenses specific to their disability that Canadians without a disability do not have. This, in effect, increases the inherent cost of living for ALL persons with a disability.

Not all individuals with disabilities require financial supports. Many individuals with disabilities are able to cover disability-related expenditures because they either have a reasonably well paying job and/or their costs are minimal. Labour force participation studies indicate the majority of Canadian adults with disabilities do not access financial supports to fund disability costs or support their basic needs. Of the approximately 10% of Canadians with disabilities who have no personal income at

all, family and friends are viewed as the primary sources of financial support.

Individuals with disabilities who seek financial supports do so because their basic and disability related costs exceed their available resources. In an average year it is estimated that a person with disabilities will have from \$1,000 to \$25,000 in disability related expenditures over and above basic living expenses. Consequently, a person with a disability needs to generate substantially more revenue to have the same purchasing capacity and comparable quality of life as a non-disabled person.

Numerous attempts have been made by governments to rectify this inequity and increase the economic power of persons with disabilities. This has largely been done through supportive programs aimed at increasing levels of education and employment. While these initiatives are important, it is equally important that these programs actually produce employment that can sufficiently offset the costs of a disability as well as basic living expenses.

In overcoming deficits in financial supports for persons with disabilities, program funders must accurately identify needs, identify who is responsible for meeting these needs and to what extent. Persons with disabilities or their family/support persons must continue to justify and explain to funding bodies that many Albertans live in poverty because of marginal employment options, inflexible employment laws, poor supports for families caring for children with disabilities, and high expenditures for disability supports.

Persons with disabilities, like all Albertans, value independence. However, they are often concerned that their attempts to take part in training, education and the competitive workforce will lead to their loss of “disability” status and the invaluable additional supports it often provides. For many, this is a significant work disincentive. Support recipients often reluctantly carry the label of “permanently unemployable” just so they can maintain the valuable supports they need to get by.

Existing financial support programs must be more flexible. They must respond to the diverse and changing needs of Albertans with disabilities. Programs need to be individualized and actively involve such individuals in the determination of their needs.

Implementation of the Alberta Disability Strategy should result in the following specific outcomes related to Financial Supports:

1. The government of Alberta’s programs and policies will address the impact of disability, not the presence of disability.
2. The government of Alberta will involve persons with disabilities in the development and design of Alberta Human Resources and Employment policies and programs.
3. All Albertans will have financial security sufficient to meet basic living and safety and security needs.
4. Financial supports will be seen as an investment, not a handout that carries the stigma of welfare.
5. Financial supports will enable all Albertans to make informed choices, and to participate in and be included in all aspects of Canadian citizenship. The strengths, needs and preferences of all people will be respected.
6. Financial supports will reflect the real cost of living with a disability.
7. Financial supports will treat persons with disabilities with respect by giving them the option to self-declare, as all Canadians do in the taxation system.
8. Financial supports will be designed to provide an incentive to seek employment options. Currently, many Albertans are afraid that getting a job or taking job training could cause them to lose their “disability status.”

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Providing employment supports is essential to the establishment of full citizenship amongst Albertans. In 1991, the labour participation rate for Albertans with disabilities was reported to be 66% compared to a rate of 84% for the general population. Persons with disabilities also earned approximately 35% less than their non-disabled peers that year. These ratios have remained relatively unchanged.

Employment supports for an employee with disabilities may include, for example, altering the work schedule (modified or reduced hours) or restructuring the job. The majority of employment supports identified as necessary for work by Albertans with disabilities are job redesign, modified or reduced hours, and accessible washrooms. It has been estimated that 80% of job-related accommodations for persons with disabilities cost less than \$500.

Provincial programs such as the Disability Related Employment Supports (DRES) program, and federal/provincial partnerships like the Employment Assistance for People with Disabilities (EAPD) initiative and In Unison disability strategy have attempted to bridge systemic and physical barriers in the workplace faced by persons with disabilities. They have had limited success.

Human rights statistics and labour market figures demonstrate that persons with disabilities still encounter discrimination and inequities. Employers still struggle with balancing the accommodation of a person with a disability against potential and/or perceived financial and operational hardships to the organization.

Persons planning to or already employing persons with disabilities say having employment supports significantly impacts their decision to employ such individuals. It also contributes to the subsequent success of

a work arrangement. Some of the employment supports identified as significant to employers included funding, information about disability supports, and affordable and accessible public transportation.

Without the assistance of employment supports, persons with disabilities will continue to be under-represented in the workforce, earn less income than their non-disabled peers, and require ongoing government assistance for funding basic and disability supports required for daily living.

Implementation of the Alberta Disability Strategy should result in the following specific outcomes related to Employment Supports:

1. Persons with disabilities will have the same opportunity as non-disabled Albertans to choose from employment options.
2. All Albertans will have the support they require (e.g. personal care, mobility aids) to prepare for and be engaged in employment.
3. All Albertans will have the support and information required to access and make informed choices from a range of employment opportunities and to fully progress along a chosen career path.
4. Persons with disabilities will be valued members of Alberta's workforce.



Major Recommendations

The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities has made 168 recommendations concerning policies, programs and initiatives affecting the lives of persons with disabilities. A complete list of these recommendations is contained in the companion document *Alberta Disability Strategy Core Supports and Appendices*.

The Premier's Council believes that implementation of these recommendations will enable all Albertans to fully participate in all aspects of Alberta society. There are, however, several major recommendations that the Premier's Council believes are priorities for action.

A common element within all the recommendations is the need for government to better coordinate and

enforce policies and programs impacting persons with disabilities. Lack of overall coordination and interdepartmental cooperation results in many departments and agencies offering services that are not complementary, overlap or are in conflict with each other. The government has legislation in place now that was created to remove many access and involvement barriers but poor enforcement of policies and regulations, such as Building Code standards, means persons with disabilities continue to face major restrictions, challenges and frustrations in their daily lives.



1. AWARENESS

Albertans should be made more aware of the rights, needs and aspirations of persons with disabilities.

Attitudinal and systemic barriers add significantly to the daily challenges faced by Albertans with disabilities. Preconceived attitudes, inappropriate behaviours, and limited expectations among the general public and service providers prevent persons with disabilities from achieving their full potential. Aboriginals are particularly hard hit by such barriers as they also face other systemic impediments related to their heritage and culture.

Social marketing programs in health promotion, such as AADAC's anti-drug campaign, have proven effective. It is recommended a similar approach be introduced across the province to emphasize the abilities and untapped potential of persons with disabilities. This general public awareness should be supported by communications and promotion targeting key audiences such as employers, government workers, the hospitality industry and others.

2. SUPPORTS FOR DAILY LIVING

The Government of Alberta must ensure that the needs of persons with disabilities related to their daily living activities are met.

Personal care, communication, shelter, and mobility are fundamental needs most Albertans take for granted. But Albertans with disabilities need daily living supports in order for them to participate in recreational, social, employment, or learning activities. Without basic support, and the assurance that this support will be provided, many disabled Albertans cannot be a part of the community.

Alberta has a wide variety of programs in place to help Albertans overcome barriers and be more independent. However, these

programs are largely uncoordinated, often inadequate and usually difficult to access. Services available privately are expensive and beyond the reach of most individuals and their families.

Access to adequate, affordable technical aids and equipment, personal services such as home care and other aids to daily living, transportation and accessible housing must be assured if persons with disabilities are to develop their abilities and have equal opportunities to be involved in everyday life.

3. PHYSICAL ACCESS

A commitment should be made to embrace the principles of universal accessibility and a process put in place to remove physical barriers from public spaces so that all Albertans can fully participate in all community, employment and business activities.

For many, the inability to gain access to buildings and other environmental spaces, and/or move about with reasonable ease often limits their ability to equitably participate in activities related to citizen engagement, employment, and other activities of business and commerce. Current building codes are often inadequate to guard against developers, builders, employers, and even government from seeking exclusions and ducking their responsibilities to proactively address access issues.

To participate fully, persons with disabilities need to be able to get to and move about the community as freely and unencumbered as any citizen. It is understood that there are reasonable limits to access but these should be defined by the nature of the environment,

not by a property owner or manager. Not every environment can be made accessible to a wheelchair or made safe for a person with a visual impairment to navigate alone, but it must be done wherever and whenever such access is possible.

Government alone could go a long way in achieving and demonstrating the value of inclusion by incorporating accessibility as a basic principle in the design and construction of public spaces. A commitment by government to assess, plan and respond to the issue of access in all public spaces – as a provider of services and as a prospective employer – would send a strong message to the public regarding the importance of enabling all Albertans to fully participate in a broad spectrum of activities.

4. APPEALS SYSTEM

The Government of Alberta's current system of appeals should be governed by the rules of administrative law (quasi-judicial), and become more transparent and respectful of the needs of persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities have concerns about the effectiveness and fairness of the appeal process in a number of government departments, agencies, commissions and authorities. Although Canadian and Alberta laws guarantee equality and protection from discrimination, many Albertans often cannot obtain support or services without going through complex and drawn out appeals.

The appeal systems fail to recognize the additional difficulties individuals face in understanding the issues, accessing the systems and working effectively through the processes. It is important that government programs for persons with disabilities have speedy, objective, independent, transparent and advocate-supported appeal processes.

5. COMMUNITY SUPPORTS MODEL

The Government of Alberta should create a single, province-wide program that integrates current disability support programs and funding under one philosophy and set of criteria. This community supports model would provide individualized support, enabling persons with disabilities to have choice in the marketplace and independently make decisions about their needs and service providers.

All three levels of government have a responsibility to develop, organize, fund and deliver programs for persons with disabilities. There is a pressing need for better coordination, a more comprehensive approach, and a model that ensures safety and security, self-determination, individualized funding and community inclusion for all Albertans.

Users need more involvement in designing programs and services, and deciding what can best meet their individual needs.

Transition from one part of the province to another, or from one government program to another, should be seamless. The community supports model would help to fill gaps and inadequacies in existing service arrangements.

This model, which is similar to one recommended by the Premier's Council in a 1990 action plan, would envelope all government departments and regional authorities that provide services to persons with disabilities.

6. LEARNING

The Government of Alberta should improve access for persons with disabilities to education by linking and integrating education resources, setting standards for special education programs, ensuring all education facilities are physically accessible, reviewing the enrolment appeal process at schools, expanding counselling support, and monitoring implementation of the recommendations of Alberta Learning's Review of Special Education in Alberta.

The Alberta School Act guarantees that all children in Alberta will have access to an education system that addresses their unique needs. Despite this legislated right, students with disabilities continue to face fragmented and uncoordinated services, funding issues, unfair appeal processes, and inadequate staff training and support. These barriers block efforts to obtain a suitable primary, secondary or post-secondary education.

Studies have shown a clear link between a person's level of education and the likelihood of finding employment or living in poverty. And education levels for Albertans with disabilities are lower than population norms. Improving learning opportunities for all Albertans and providing adequate learning supports and resources will enable individuals with disabilities to fulfil their potential and increase their economic and social independence.

7. INCOME SUPPORT

The Government of Alberta should separate income support programs from personal support programs so that persons with disabilities are not automatically penalized for earning an income and becoming part of the workforce.

Currently, eligibility for personal supports like home care, living aids and access to transportation are tied to income status. Government income support programs such as Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) are connected to services that help provide for basic living needs but these are lost once a person becomes employed or otherwise ineligible for an income support program. Personal supports, therefore, are often viewed as charity for impoverished people rather than a support for independent living.

The ability to pay for one's own basic needs does not take into account that a person with a disability still needs personal supports to maintain work status or continue to participate in community life. Nor does it recognize that the cost for a person with a disability to maintain a standard of living comparable to a non-disabled Albertan is substantially higher.

The fear of losing invaluable personal supports once employed is a training or work disincentive for many Albertans. More people would be encouraged to seek economic independence if this fear was removed.

8. EMPLOYMENT

Alberta employers and governments should provide long-term support and commitment to persons with disabilities attempting to enter the workforce and to participate on public boards, commissions or committees.

A significant investment in time and effort is needed to create and sustain job opportunities for persons with disabilities and to make them "employment ready". An appropriate level of employment support does not currently exist in Alberta nor are existing programs well coordinated.

More on-going partnerships among people with disabilities, service organizations, corporations, and governments are required to achieve integrated employment supports.

In order to meet the holistic needs of persons with disabilities, government departments must work more closely together to integrate services like income support, home care, career counselling, and job training. Employment support programs must also move beyond job preparation/search and look to meeting basic workplace needs such as transportation, physical access, and on the job integration.



Implementation of the Alberta Disability Strategy

Much of the change needed to achieve the Premier's Council's vision of full citizenship requires the involvement and commitment of persons with disabilities and a host of government departments, public organizations, community groups, and the private sector. It is appreciated that such collaboration and cooperation does not occur naturally but takes time and strong facilitation.

That's why the Premier's Council recommends government develop as soon as possible an action plan to implement this Strategy and its recommendations. In addition, government should actively encourage various stakeholders to support the Strategy by incorporating applicable initiatives within their own organizations and communities.



KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The Alberta Disability Strategy requires key stakeholders to be involved in order for it to succeed:

- ✓ All three levels of government need to provide necessary legislative, policy and funding support.
- ✓ The private sector and public institutions like health and children service authorities, school boards, and post-secondary institutions need to ensure their policies, services and facilities are inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.
- ✓ The Government of Alberta, persons with disabilities, organizations and their community partners, including the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, need to continue to educate Albertans and demonstrate to others how systemic barriers can be removed.
- ✓ The general public needs to support persons with disabilities and their efforts to participate in all aspects of Alberta society.



Accountability Framework

The Premier Council's has developed an Accountability Framework to help ensure supports are coordinated and responsive to the needs of Albertans with disabilities. This Framework includes four core tools:

1. Inventory of Programs and Services for Albertans with Disabilities.

The Inventory is a policy analysis tool for identifying information about disability supports that are financed by the Alberta Government. The analysis includes scope of program, service delivery, user interests, financial challenges, quality control, barriers to inclusion, and family and caregiver interests.

2. Disability Lens

The Disability Lens is a program and policy analysis tool that assesses inclusion of the interests of persons with disabilities in government services, programs, legislation and policies. Use of the Lens would ensure persons with disabilities are included in the creation, implementation and evaluation of government activities.

3. Cross-Canada Scan

A scan of other Canadian provinces and territories would be done annually to compare policies, funding, supports and accountability affecting persons with disabilities in other jurisdictions with those in Alberta.

4. Status Tool

This tool will measure, through performance outcomes, indicators and measures, the status of persons with disabilities in Alberta on an annual or semi-annual basis. Initial application of the status tool will create a benchmark for subsequent evaluations in key areas such as employment, personal and financial support, education and learning, and citizenship.

Full application of the Accountability Framework will:

- Aid decision-makers in developing and analyzing policy and legislation that is inclusive of the interests of Albertans with disabilities.
- Evaluate the inclusion of provincial activities regarding persons with disabilities.
- Monitor Alberta's status of disability initiatives in relation to other provinces and territories.
- Report on the progress to improve programs and services for persons with disabilities.

See the companion document *Alberta Disability Strategy Core Supports and Appendices* for the complete Framework document.




About the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities was created in 1988 to champion significant improvements in the status of Albertans with disabilities. Its legislated mandate includes:

- Advise, report to and make recommendations to the Government on matters relating to the opportunity for full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in the life of the Province.
- Encourage public discussion through public consultation on all matters relating to the status of persons with disabilities.
- Prepare communication packages containing information respecting disabilities and persons with disabilities.
- Identify and review current and emerging issues and policies at all levels of government affecting and concerning the status of persons with disabilities.
- Review the provision of funding, services and programs for persons with disabilities.
- Make referrals and recommendations to, and consult and collaborate with, all levels of government, government agencies, volunteer associations, businesses, universities and other persons on matters affecting and concerning the status of persons with disabilities.

See the companion document *Alberta Disability Strategy Core Supports and Appendices* for a list of Premier's Council members.





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