



**Council of Canadians
with Disabilities**

A VOICE OF OUR OWN

**Conseil des Canadiens
avec déficiences**

CETTE VOIX QUI EST LA NOTRE

Media Release

We'll Be Voting for An Accessible Canada

For Immediate Release

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An accessible Canada is a goal that is within reach, if the political will exists to address socially constructed barriers limiting the participation of people with disabilities. Accessibility enables people with all types of disabilities to go to school, get jobs, pay taxes, raise families and participate in political and community life. Accessibility can fuel economic growth.ⁱ When Canada ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), it committed to progressively improving accessibility (Article 9). The Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) has challenged the leaders of Canada's federal political parties to implement the CRPD and to share their plans for improving accessibility.

"At some time in their life, most Canadians will experience either a permanent or temporary disability; thus an accessible Canada benefits everyone," explains Tony Dolan, CCD Chairperson. "CCD is polling Canada's Federal Parties about their plans regarding some important measures to improve accessibility in Canada and our community will be thinking about Parties' responses, as ballots are cast." CCD will share the Parties' plans on disability issues in October.

The Government of Canada already has the authority to create mandatory **accessibility regulations** for telecommunications, the building code and modes of transportation in federal jurisdiction. "Forty years of experience with voluntary measures has shown CCD that relying on goodwill only results in prolonged inaccessibility. Mandatory regulations create access," says Dolan. "For example, transportation is more accessible in the US, which has the Americans with Disabilities Act and regulatory standards. If a Canadians with Disabilities Act, which has been called for during this Federal Election, delivered mandatory accessibility regulations with teeth, it would be something to applaud."

"You have to look no further than the Federal Election, itself, to find barriers to participation, where remedies are available but long overdue. For example, a person with a vision impairment cannot independently and privately verify if his/her paper ballot has been marked correctly. Some jurisdictions have adopted electronic or telephone voting, which, if done right, can improve access. An immediate priority is obtaining commitments from the Federal Parties to a fully **accessible electoral process**, where persons with disabilities can participate equitably in electoral campaigns and vote independently and secretly," states James Hicks, CCD's National Coordinator. "In an instance like this, where a government is responsible for perpetuating a barrier, litigation may be the only recourse for improving accessibility, which is why CCD has been calling for the restoration of the Court Challenges Program, which funded test case litigation advancing equality rights arguments under Section 15 of the

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Charter of Rights and Freedoms," explains Hicks. "The disability community expects the CRPD to make a tangible difference in our lives and a functioning Court Challenges Program would provide **access to justice** for Canada's equality seeking communities."

For Deaf Canadians to participate equitably in Canadian society, **access to Sign Language** (ASL/LSQ) is essential. "CCD has urged the leaders of the Federal Parties to take a stand on recognizing ASL/LSQ as an official language," says Dolan.

Access to disability-related supports is essential for community participation by people with disabilities. Disability-related supports are goods or services used to assist a person with a disability to overcome barriers and live independently. "CCD has called upon the Federal Parties to commit to building the capacity of the disability community to work collaboratively with all levels of government on such issues as disability-related supports and to support effective access to palliative care for persons with disabilities, providing options at end-of-life other than assisted suicide," reports Dolan.

"We remind both the Federal Parties and Canadian voters, accessibility benefits everyone and creates a significant force for economic growth," states Hicks.

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About CCD - CCD is a national organization of people with disabilities that works for an accessible and inclusive Canada.

ⁱ Martin Prosperity Institute. *Releasing Constraints: Projecting the Economic Impacts of Improved Accessibility in Ontario*. <http://idrc.ocadu.ca/index.php/policy/idrc-and-aoda/454>