

Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Responses

1. Economic Recovery and Growth

Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?

Part of any economic recovery plan must include cost savings for both the provincial and Federal governments. The Canadian Government has an opportunity to reduce the cost of vision loss in Canada through a National Vision Health Plan. The cost of vision loss in Canada was \$15.8 billion dollars in 2007. Eight billion of this results from direct provincial and territorial health care costs. The federal government loses \$2.4 billion annually in lost taxation revenue, lost productivity and social transfers. When this number is compared with other disease categories in The Public Health Agency of Canada's Economic Burden of Illness in Canada Study, vision loss has the highest health care cost of any disease in Canada. One in four people over the age of 75 will experience vision loss through Age Related Macular Degeneration, the leading cause of vision loss among seniors. As the Canadian population ages the cost of vision loss to government will increase dramatically. The number of Canadians experiencing vision loss is projected to double in the next 25 years. In 2032, the cost of vision loss could be \$30 billion dollars annually. Seventy-five percent of vision loss is avoidable. A National Vision Health Plan is needed to address vision health awareness, treatment accessibility, rehabilitation and research to manage the number of Canadians who experience vision loss.

2. Job Creation

As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?

As the population ages and begins to leave the workforce employers will have to look to new pools of talent to fill positions. The employment rate for Canadians who are blind or partially sighted is 35% compared to 56% for Canadians with disabilities. The cost to the Federal government of the 35% employment rate is approximately \$2.4 billion annually in lost tax revenue, social transfer payment and lost productivity. Changes need to be made to the infrastructure of employment programs to facilitate skills training and job readiness skills for Canadians with disabilities. A National Action Plan is needed to increase the employment rate for Canadians who are blind or partially sighted within the next 10 years through the provincial Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities. A National Action Plan needs to include:

- Access to information (e.g., accessible website and employment services)
- Access to work place accommodations (e.g., access to technology and assistive technology, social and business integration, etc.)
- Awareness and outreach programs to employees and employers on the abilities of Canadians who are blind or partially sighted.
- Employer and employee skills training and job support.

Full integration of employment services for Canadians who are blind or partially sighted across Canada. The Federal government also needs to ensure the implementation of Article 27 "Work and Employment" of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

3. Demographic Change

What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?

• Aging population
o In 2007, the cost of vision loss in Canada was \$15.8 billion. The cost to the Federal government was \$2.4 billion million due to social transfers, lost taxation revenue and lost productivity.
o In addition, the cost of direct health care costs for the provinces due to vision loss is \$8.6 billion.
o One in four Canadians over the age of 75 will have Age Related Macular Degeneration, the leading cause of vision loss among seniors.
o In the next 25 years the number of Canadians with vision loss is expected to double. In 2032, the cost of vision loss is projected to be \$30 (in 2007 dollars) billion annually.
o The Federal government needs to provide guidance to the provinces to reduce health care costs related to vision loss through a National Vision Health Plan. The plan should include the following pillars: Research, Accessibility, Vision Rehab, International Collaboration, Education and Awareness. A National Vision Health plan is needed to ensure that vision rehabilitation services are available to all Canadian seniors experiencing vision loss in accordance with articles 25 “Health” and 26 “Habitation and Rehabilitation” of the UN Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities.

• Skills Shortage
o As mentioned in question 2, a National Action Plan is needed to increase the employment rate of Canadians who are blind or partially sighted. Post Secondary students who are blind or partially sighted need increased support to succeed in their academic studies of skills training programs.
o Paid co-op positions are needed through post secondary programs to provide students who are blind or partially sighted meaningful work experience and provide employers exposure working with Canadians who are blind or partially sighted. Studies in the US have shown that employers who provide a person with disabilities a paid internship are 70% more likely to hire a person with a disability into a permanent position.
o E learning initiatives are also an important tool to provide skills training and education to rural and remote communities.

4. Productivity

With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada’s population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?

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• Full integration of employment services for Canadians who are blind or partially sighted across Canada. The Federal government also needs to ensure the implementation of Article 27 “Work and Employment” of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

5. Other Challenges

With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?

Canadians with Print Disabilities face challenges in equitable accesses to information in the digital age. a. Approximately 10% of Canadians have a print disability. The Copy Right Act defines print disabilities as: those who are blind, those with learning or cognitive disabilities and those who have an inability to hold a book. b. Only 7% of print material in Canada is made in accessible formats. c. Through extensive consultation with stakeholders including public libraries, consumers and consumer groups and publishers, CNIB developed a Business Plan for a National Digital Hub. d. The Federal government can support the National Digital HUB that will produce, acquire and distribute accessible print materials to Canadians with disabilities.