

**GETTING IN ON THE GROUND FLOOR:  
PRIORITIZING ACCESSIBLE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITIES TO PROMOTE INCLUSION AND NATIONAL  
COMPETITIVENESS**

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in  
Advance of the 2019 Budget

**March of Dimes Canada**



## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1: All new homes built through the National Housing Strategy must meet minimum accessibility standards developed in consultation with people with disabilities, Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs), accessibility experts and other relevant stakeholders**

- One of the key commitments of the National Housing Strategy is to create 100,000 new housing units to meet the needs of vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities. Current accessibility requirements applying to private residences are limited and vary by jurisdiction. A framework ensuring the accessibility of all dwellings made possible through the National Housing Strategy should be developed and include measurable goals, dedicated financial resources, and accountability mechanisms.

**Recommendation 2: That the government invest in the development of a National Home Modification program to meet the growing number of Canadians with disabilities and support them to live in their communities independently** - Home modifications support aging-in-place and also relieve the burden of care on the family of a person of any age with a disability.

Estimated cost of a National Home Modification Program is \$100 million annually, and will likely reduce the need for high cost institutional care and support people to be discharged from the acute care setting.

**Recommendation 3: Identification of the housing needs among people with disabilities is prioritized within the National Housing Strategy Research Agenda** – Invest \$10 million of the \$241 million the federal government has committed to the National Housing Strategy Research Agenda to research related to the housing needs of people with disabilities.

## March of Dimes Canada

March of Dimes Canada (MODC) is Canada's largest organization for people with physical disabilities, and offers a wide array of programs and services to Canadians with disabilities, their families and communities. MODC delivers services and supports under four core program areas. Programs available through AccessAbility Services® improve mobility and community accessibility for persons with disabilities. Within Community Engagement and Integration Services programs include peer and volunteer support services for stroke and polio survivors, and life skills and transitional services to provide skill development and socialization to young adults with complex disabilities. Employment Services help people with employment barriers to obtain and retain employment. Independent Living Services enable people to live in their communities through attendant services.

## Why Housing for People with Disabilities is Essential to Ensure Inclusion and National Competitiveness

While The National Housing Strategy<sup>1</sup> emphasizes that housing rights are human rights, there is limited detail on how housing drives the Canadian economy to ensure national competitiveness. Adequate housing is necessary to achieve optimal health outcomes and promote inclusion allowing people to participate in their communities, as well as the Canadian economy. Countries such as Ireland<sup>2</sup>, Australia<sup>3</sup> and the United Kingdom<sup>4</sup> are also beginning to recognize why affordable housing is important to the economy. For example, many skilled workers are unable to access areas of economic activity, the location of the majority of employment opportunities, due to high housing costs.

While housing affordability is essential to the National Housing Strategy, it is not sufficient. 14% of Canadians have a disability<sup>5</sup> and due to population aging the number of Canadians with disabilities is expected to increase. Accessibility must be a key component of the *National Housing Strategy* to ensure people with disabilities can live and participate in their communities. Ensuring accessible and affordable housing is available within communities will support inclusion and help to reduce social isolation amongst vulnerable populations, particularly older adults.

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<sup>1</sup> Canada. *Canada's National Housing Strategy: A place to call home*, 2017. Retrieved from:

<https://www.placetocallhome.ca/pdfs/Canada-National-Housing-Strategy.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> White, Dan. "Housing costs damaging our competitiveness again", *Irish Independent*, December 17, 2017,

<https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2017/12/17/926741-national-competitiveness-council/>

<sup>3</sup> Australia Housing and Urban Research Institute. *Housing markets, economic productivity and risk: International evidence and policy implications for Australia*, 2015. Retrieved from:

[https://www.ahuri.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/5675/AHURI\\_Final\\_Report\\_No254\\_Housing\\_markets\\_economic\\_productivity\\_and\\_risk\\_international\\_evidence\\_and\\_policy\\_implications\\_for\\_Australia-Volume\\_1.pdf](https://www.ahuri.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/5675/AHURI_Final_Report_No254_Housing_markets_economic_productivity_and_risk_international_evidence_and_policy_implications_for_Australia-Volume_1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Archer, Peter, Murie, Alan, Turkington, Richard & Watson, Christopher. *Good Housing, Better Health*, 2016.

Retrieved from: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/SPSW/Housing/2016/good-housing-better-health-2016.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada. *A profile of persons with disabilities among Canadians aged 15 years or older, 2012*. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.htm>

Accessible, affordable housing is also a key element for fulfilling Canada's commitment to promoting inclusion for people with disabilities. Articles 19 and 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which Canada ratified in 2010, recognize the right of people with disabilities to live independently and be included in their community, and have access to public housing programmes. Viewed through this lens, housing policy should enable people with disabilities to live where they want, with whom they want, and in the form of housing they desire. This implies choice and options, a vastly different scenario from the few alternatives and long wait lists which currently confront people with disabilities. There is limited data on the number of people with disabilities currently requiring housing, but over 500,000 Canadians with a disability were in core housing need in 2001<sup>6</sup>.

The National Housing Strategy has committed to focusing on the most vulnerable Canadians, yet there have been no specific commitments on how the strategy will be inclusive of people with disabilities. Our recommendations relate to how the National Housing Strategy and related initiatives can enable the economic and broader participation of Canadians with disabilities within our communities, as well as maximize their independence and reduce the burden of care for their families.

## RECOMMENDATIONS EXPLAINED

**Recommendation 1. All new homes built through the National Housing Strategy must meet minimum accessibility standards developed in consultation with people with disabilities, Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs), accessibility experts and other relevant stakeholders**

The National Housing Strategy states that up to 100,000 new affordable homes will be built, yet no commitment has been made to confirm how many of these new homes will be accessible. Canadians with disabilities account for a growing proportion of the Canadian population and an even larger percentage of people requiring affordable housing; therefore it is essential that all new homes built through the National Housing Strategy meet minimum accessibility standards. While several provinces require a percentage of units in apartment buildings to be constructed as barrier-free or accessible, the standard requirements of provincial building codes vary and generally only apply to large multi-unit apartment buildings<sup>7</sup>. While the National Housing Strategy does state that it will apply the principles of universal design and visitability, minimum accessibility standards of all new dwellings should be determined through consultations with people with disabilities, disabled persons' organizations (DPOs), accessibility experts, as well as with insights from Canadian Home Builders' Association and Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation. Additionally, a framework ensuring the accessibility of all dwellings made possible through the National Housing Strategy should be developed and include measurable goals, dedicated financial resources and accountability mechanisms.

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<sup>6</sup> Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. *Persons with disabilities in core housing need by age and sex, 2001*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/data-and-research/data-tables/persons-with-disabilities-core-housing-need-age-by-sex>

<sup>7</sup> Moyes, Rowena. *Housing accessibility regulation in Canada, 2011*. Retrieved from: [http://www.cmhi.ca/sites/default/files/2011-06\\_CHBA\\_Housing%20Accessibility%20Regulation.pdf](http://www.cmhi.ca/sites/default/files/2011-06_CHBA_Housing%20Accessibility%20Regulation.pdf)

## **Recommendation 2: That the government invest in the development of a National Home Modification program to meet the growing number of Canadians with disabilities and enable them to live in their communities independently**

As the number of Canadians with disabilities increases, existing housing must be adapted to meet the needs of older adults and people with disabilities. Home modifications encompass the adaptation of an existing home to make tasks easier, to create a safer space and to be more supportive of independent living. Home modifications allow people to live where they choose and in their communities by ensuring their homes are liveable based on their unique needs. They also relieve the burden of care on the family of a person of any age with a disability. Modifications can be as simple as adding grab bars and wall rails, or as complicated as removing stairs and adding ramps, or modifying kitchens and bathrooms.

The federal government should invest in a financing mechanism to enable individuals to undertake home modifications. In Ontario, MODC administers the Home and Vehicle Modification Program (HVMP) on behalf of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. The average cost of these home modifications is \$11,000 and often results in health system savings by delaying institutionalization or facilitating earlier hospital discharge. In 2014, a study tracked and interviewed individuals who had accessed the program six years earlier and evaluated the long-term benefits of home modifications funded by the Home and Vehicle Modification Program<sup>8</sup>. It was found that the median cost per day of modifications was \$7.95, which is substantially more cost-effective than daily grants for hospital and long-term care beds (\$135 to \$158).

A comprehensive strategy should be developed to address the barriers and challenges preventing home modifications. This might include a built-in-Canada system to allow people who would benefit from home modifications to access the experts they need to carry out home modifications and learn of the possibilities available to them. For people who have just acquired a disability, a triage program while in hospital could facilitate earlier discharge, saving the health care system money and freeing acute care beds. Ontario's program grants \$9.2 million annually and has demand closer to \$35-40 million. Based on this, we estimate the annual cost of a National Home Modification Program is \$100 million annually. Investing in a National Home Modification Program will support aging-in-place and reduce or delay the need for expensive institutional care, like long-term care.

## **Recommendation 3: Identification of the housing needs among people with disabilities prioritized within the National Housing Strategy Research Agenda**

As an organization valuing evidence-based policy and practice, MODC commends the federal government's commitment of \$241 million to enhance housing research and data. Currently, limited information is available on the housing needs of people with disabilities and funds from the National Housing Strategy Research Agenda must be designated to understand the unique

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<sup>8</sup> Fitzgerald, John. *Long-term outcomes of home modifications*, 2004. Retrieved from: [https://www.marchofdimes.ca/EN/programs/hvmp/Documents/HVMP\\_Long-term\\_Outcomes\\_Survey\\_Report\\_2014.pdf](https://www.marchofdimes.ca/EN/programs/hvmp/Documents/HVMP_Long-term_Outcomes_Survey_Report_2014.pdf)

needs of people with disabilities, particularly adults with early-onset disabilities. Individuals aging with disabilities, such as cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis, are living longer<sup>9</sup> and many of these adults continue to live with their families throughout their adult years<sup>10</sup>. As caregivers age they may be unable to provide support due to poor health or the increasingly complex needs of their aging child<sup>11</sup>, therefore there is a need to identify long-term housing options for adults with early-onset disabilities. Using a “*nothing about us, without us*” approach, research must be conducted with people with disabilities to identify innovative housing models.

Today, parents of young people with disabilities are placing their children on wait lists for services fearing that it will be decades before access and service is available. The problem is critical, so study of the issue should not be used to delay Canada’s investment in this critical service.

### **Looking Forward: Ensuring Appropriate Housing for People with Disabilities within and beyond the National Housing Strategy**

Accessible and affordable housing is a key enabler for people with disabilities to access employment and contribute their diverse talents and skills to the Canadian economy to support national competitiveness. The growing aging population also demands investment in affordable and accessible housing to support aging-in-place. Given MODC’s knowledge of how to adapt the physical environment where one lives, works and plays we look forward to working with the federal government towards sustainable housing solutions that are accessible and affordable housing for people with disabilities.

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<sup>9</sup> LaPlante, Mitchell P. “Key Goals and Indicators for Successful Aging of Adults with Early-onset Disability”. *Disability and Health Journal* 7(10). (2014): S44–S50.

<sup>10</sup> Lakin, K. Charlie and Stancliffe, Roger J. “Residential supports for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities”. *Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews* 13(2). (2007): 151-159.

<sup>11</sup> Woodman, Ashley C., Mailick, Marsha R., Anderson, Kristy A., and Esbensen, Anna J. “Residential transitions among adults with intellectual disability across 20 years”. *Am J Intellect Dev Disabil* 119(6). 2014: 496-515.