

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

By: Rick Hansen Foundation



Breaking down barriers. Transforming lives.

Recommendation 1: Government mandate that all owned or leased buildings as well as all federally managed parks and public spaces meet or exceed the CAN/CSA B651 Accessibility Standard, be rated, and seek certification using the RHF Accessibility Certification program.

Recommendation 2: Government mandate that all projects funded under the Infrastructure Canada Plan meet or exceed the CAN/CSA B651 Accessibility Standard and be certified under the RHF Accessibility Certification program regardless of which level of government ultimately spends the money.

Recommendation 3: Government work with provincial, territorial, municipal and indigenous governments as well as the private sector to adopt both the RHF Accessibility Certification program and CAN/CSA B651 Accessibility Standard (as updated from time-to-time) as the national, uniform standard of measurement.

Recommendation 4: Government provide \$25M to help underwrite the cost for federal Departments, Crown corporations and Public Agencies to comply with recommendation 1. The funding will allow for training and accrediting assessors to conduct 5,000 ratings across Canada.

Recommendation 5: Government provide \$10M toward research and national initiatives to educate and engage Canadian communities, corporations and citizens about the importance of building an accessible and inclusive country.

Recommendation 6: Government provide \$100M to establish an Accessibility Fund for approximately 2,000 accessibility improvements grants of up to \$50,000 each.

In June 2018, the Government of Canada tabled the *Accessible Canada Act*, along with an ambitious plan to eliminate barriers, promote equality of opportunity, and increase the inclusion and participation of Canadians with disabilities – in areas of federal jurisdiction.

Doing accessibility and inclusivity well for all citizens is, at its core, an exercise in nation-building that also represents the best of Canadian values on the world stage. In the built environment, this will drive change in space design culture that could make Canada a world leader in the application of universal and inclusive design principles. As such, it not only delivers important benefits to those living with disabilities, their families and communities, but represents a decisive policy direction that contributes to ensuring Canada's global competitiveness.

For over 30 years, Rick and the Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) have been dedicated to creating an inclusive world where people with disabilities are living to their full potential. RHF's enduring mission is "To create and deliver innovative solutions that lead to a global movement to remove barriers and liberate the potential of people with disabilities." As a national catalyst for transformational social change, the Foundation develops and delivers programs that raise awareness, change attitudes and break down barriers for people living with disabilities.

Every day and in every province and territory across Canada, people are prevented from living their best lives and making their greatest contribution to society simply because the world around them isn't fully accessible – most notably in the built environment. A 2018 study by the Conference Board of Canada found the impact of improved workplace accessibility for individuals with disabilities would be overwhelmingly positive allowing 550,000 Canadians with disabilities to work more, adding \$16.8 billion to GDP by 2030. As well, this boost to labour income would facilitate a \$10-billion increase in consumer spending and revenue gains of about \$2.6 billion for the federal government and \$1.8 billion for provincial governments. Improved accessibility is not just a human right, but an economic imperative.

Between June 2016 and February 2017, the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, then-Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, undertook the largest and most accessible consultation on disability issues that Canada has ever seen. Participants in the consultations noted, "*The new legislation should lead to more consistent experiences of accessibility across Canada...with all levels of government working together to improve accessibility in all areas. New legislation should build on existing standards that are already working well.*"

During the last three years, the Rick Hansen Foundation has invested in the development and national launch of a unique social innovation system called the RHF Accessibility Certification program - a LEED-style rating and recognition system, including a professional training course. It is the first program of its kind globally that:

- **Measures the level of meaningful access of buildings.** RHFAC complements building codes by rating the entire facility from a holistic user perspective with a numeric rating scale;

- **Professionally trains individuals**, including those with disabilities, to gain valuable skills, conduct ratings and become accredited accessibility assessors; and
- **Recognizes an organization's commitment to accessibility** through formal certification and building labelling.

Once rated, buildings may be certified as 'RHF Accessibility Certified' or 'RHF Accessibility Certified Gold,' and can be listed on the RHFAC Registry hosted by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). Certification and labelling publicly showcases building owners' commitment to accessibility in a similar way that LEED rated buildings showcase their commitment to sustainability.

The RHF Accessibility Certification program uses the National Building Code and the accessibility guidelines of the CSA called B651. Together, these two instruments deliver a powerful, unifying platform to help all sectors responsible for accessibility in the built environment move forward positively – including the federal government.

In 2017, the RHF Accessibility Certification program received \$9M in funding and the endorsement of the BC government. Through this funding, RHF is completing approximately 1,100 complimentary registrations and ratings in British Columbia. Once rated, organizations may qualify to apply for up to \$20,000 in grants for accessibility improvements.

In March 2018, an additional \$10M in funding was provided by the BC government to support RHF's accessibility awareness efforts and to help scale the certification program nationally leveraging support and investment with other levels of government and the private sector. Other provinces, including Nova Scotia and Manitoba, are considering using the RHF program with B651. This shows a growing willingness to harmonize around a common national approach to accessibility extended from new federal leadership.

Importantly, Canadians care about accessibility and believe that governments should lead the way in making our nation accessible for people of all abilities. A 2016 Angus Reid Institute study found that:

- 92% believe accessibility is a human right, not a privilege
- 88% said Canada should be a world leader in ensuring universal access to public places
- 86% said a LEED-style program to rate building accessibility would be worthwhile

One in seven Canadian adults identify as having a disability (Statistics Canada Survey, 2012). This number will increase to as high as one in five over the next 20 years, especially due to aging baby boomers. As noted by the Conference Board, making Canada more accessible is not only an issue of human rights and equality, but it makes good business sense. Accessibility is key to unleashing the economic potential and independence of people with disabilities across Canada.

As the Government of Canada mobilizes behind the aspirations of the *Accessible Canada*

Act, RHF provides the government with a proven, industry-standard accessibility improvement system that, like LEED, will drive adoption and leading practice, nationally. It will allow the government to show immediate progress against its stated broad objectives of promoting equality of opportunity and removing barriers to people living with disabilities or functional limitations. The RHF Accessibility Certification program is a “shovel-ready” program that can effectively assist the government in meeting and exceeding its own accessibility obligations under the new legislation.

RHF has been a trusted government partner and reliable steward of funding for decades. The Foundation has a strong and vibrant brand across Canada including an ability to engage all levels of government and the private sector to create partnerships to leverage funds and generate positive public profile for the investments made. Rick and the Foundation have a track record of motivating and inspiring industry, communities, governments and individuals to support important national priorities.

By way of example, in the Fall of 2017, at an announcement in Toronto, Canadian Tire Corporation (CTC) President and CEO Stephen Wetmore recognized Rick by saying: “Rick is an inspiring and driving force – a true thought leader in the accessibility space – and helped to inspire Jumpstart’s “Play Finds A Way” movement, Canadian Tire Corporation’s \$50M commitment over five years to help give Canadian kids with disabilities access to sport and play.”

Recommendations

The six recommendations link under two groupings, namely: **A. Policy Leadership** (recommendations 1-3); and, **B. Program Funding** (recommendations 3-6).

A. Policy Leadership

Canada has a disparate patchwork of regulations and building codes which have evolved over many years. There is a compelling need to harmonize all levels of government in Canada around a common national approach to accessibility, complementing complex and varying provincial and municipal approaches.

The Federal Government will begin to lead the movement to a common approach by mandating that all federally owned, and/or managed buildings, park and public spaces be rated and, where eligible, be certified and labelled using the RHF Accessibility Certification program. This does not require a change in existing law.

Also, RHF is asking the Government of Canada to use all available policy instruments (e.g. procurement, contribution agreements, infrastructure spending, incentives etc.) to press all levels of government to meet or exceed CAN/CSA B651 and be certified by an accredited RHF assessor. This will enhance accessibility while providing government funders with a common method of measurement and attestation that a strong accessibility standard has been met.

B. Program Funding

In tabling the *Accessible Canada Act*, the Government of Canada stated that it will lead by example and become a model for accessibility.

RHF is asking the Government of Canada to join with BC and other levels of government and the private sector in the national scale-up of the RHF Accessibility Certification program by funding 5000 ratings over three years – including assisting federal departments and agencies to comply with carrying out a mandated rating of their building portfolios.

RHF is also seeking funding to pursue awareness efforts to amplify important programs like National AccessAbility Week as well as other opportunities to showcase the best of accessibility in Canada (e.g. RHF certified Gold buildings). In addition, this funding will go towards conducting critical research in partnership with others (e.g. Conference Board of Canada, Universities etc.) on the economic and social business case to support infrastructure investment (e.g. alternative financing vehicles) as well as the incentives to remove barriers (e.g. tax breaks).

Lastly, RHF is looking for the Government of Canada to model BC's infrastructure grant program to provide grants for organizations to get RHF Accessibility Certified if there are deficiencies. The fund will use the RHF certification methodology to determine eligibility and RHF will administer. As well, RHF will look to lever up this funding with private and other public sector sources (e.g. Infrastructure Bank, Social Impact Bonds).

Conclusion:

When we remove barriers for people with disabilities, we are creating a country where all Canadians everywhere have a real and fair chance at success. An accessible built environment accommodates all - small children, parents with strollers, older adults and seniors, and people with temporary and permanent disabilities - and is inclusive of people's needs across their lifespan. Making our public spaces universally accessible unleashes our collective economic and social power, creating a Canada that we can all be proud of.

The federal government can deliver critical leadership through implementing our six recommendations. RHF has invested in, and been supported to create proven solutions that readily complement pending legislation and infrastructure spending. In addition, RHF continues to work with private and public sector partners to raise awareness of this critical issue and secure resources needed to transform the built environment.

We commend the Government of Canada's commitment to broad, national accessibility. Breaking down barriers demands a "whole of government" approach beyond legislation that will raise awareness, engage people, incite action and shift attitudes in support of a long-term national and global movement.

While it involves a long-term undertaking, our six recommendations provide a roadmap for the systematic adoption of higher levels of universal and inclusive design while providing a platform for governments across Canada to work together. In unison, the recommendations when implemented, will be the catalyst for enduring, positive change – benefitting all Canadians.