



CNIB Pre-Budget Consultation Submission to the House of Commons Finance Committee

About CNIB

CNIB passionately provides community-based support, knowledge and a national voice to ensure Canadians who are blind or partially sighted have the confidence, skills and opportunities to fully participate in life. Founded in 1918, we're entering our 100th year of operation – and celebrating a century of changing individual lives and society as a whole.

Our work – and our impact – takes many forms. Through Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada, a new health services organization operated by CNIB, we provide personalized rehabilitation services designed to enhance independence, safety and mobility after a loss of sight. Meanwhile, CNIB's other community-based services empower Canadians who are blind or partially sighted to lead rich, full lives, and move us toward a more inclusive world.

Response to FINA Pre-Budget Consultation Questions

1. What federal measures would help Canadians to be more productive?

For Canadians to be more productive federal measures need to be enacted so that all Canadians have equal access to opportunities. For Canadians to be productive in any scenario, be it in the workplace, at home, or in cultural or recreational experiences, fundamental rights must be ensured. This includes the right to read and access to literature, something that blind, partially sighted and print-disabled Canadians have difficulties accessing. For sighted individuals, local libraries and book stores provide easy access to literature. This is not the case for blind, partially sighted and print disabled Canadians. Access to literature is essential to living full and satisfying lives. For those who cannot access published content, it makes it harder to succeed in education, to experience culture with the rest of society, and to enter the job market.

Canadians who are blind, partially sighted or have a print disability rely on alternative-format materials in order to read. These may be braille, DAISY audio books on CD, or accessible electronic text. In Canada, there are an estimated three million people who are blind, partially sighted or living with a

print disability, but only a fraction of printed material is available in alternative formats. This creates an unfair disadvantage for Canadians who cannot access conventional print. More than 5,000 new trade fiction and non-fiction books are published in Canada each year – but Canadian publishers are not required by law to make these books available in alternative formats. Every year, the gap between what is available in conventional print and what is available in alternative formats widens and current grant-based funding and charitable production models are limiting the ability to close this gap. A better solution must be created to allow Canadians to access literature, no matter the format.

In June 2016, Bill C-11, An Act to Amend the Copyright Act, received Royal Assent. Bill C-11 ratified the Marrakesh Treaty which seeks to provide integrated access to international accessible publications. Canada, the 20th ratifying country, pushed the Marrakesh Treaty into international law. As such, Canada now has an obligation, to ensure that accessible literature continues to be produced in Canada, in both official languages.

For Canada to truly realize the obligations of the Marrakesh Treaty would be beneficial not only to Canadians who are blind, partially sighted and print disabled but for those across the world and for the Canadian government. For Canadians, the Marrakesh Treaty helps to increase the number of new books and publications in formats they can read. The integrated access to international accessible publications allows for individuals to read accessible books and publications in a language other than English or French. For readers worldwide, the Marrakesh Treaty offers access to thousands of accessible books published by Canadian authors in both official languages. For the Government of Canada, implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty shows international leadership in responding to the "book famine". This action particularly helps those in developing and least developed countries, who are Marrakesh Treaty signatories. Finally, for the Government of Canada, implementation supports the desire to "strengthen the creation, discovery and export of Canadian content" and "increase the inclusion and participation of Canadians who have disabilities or functional limitations".

Currently, CNIB, a charity, is the largest producer of accessible books in the country. While the federal government has provided federal grants to continue the production of accessible books, this has not been predictable and thus unsustainable. As a charity with limited resources, CNIB cannot subsidize the full cost of accessible book production. A long-term, sustainable solution must be created in order to ensure that the federal government plays a role

in ensuring access to literature for all. CNIB continues to recommend that the federal government create a task force of community stakeholders to develop the long-term vision for this essential service, with the goal of creating true equity for print-disabled Canadians.

2. What federal measures would help Canadian businesses to be more productive and competitive?

Canadian businesses can become more productive and competitive by making businesses accessible and ensuring that that new and different ways of thinking are heard and expressed. One way of doing this is by hiring persons with disabilities, especially Canadians who are blind or partially sighted. According to the Canadian Survey on Disability there are over 470,000 working age Canadians with visual impairments. However, Canadians with visual impairments have an employment rate of 37% compared to 79% for those without a disability. This low employment rate indicates that there is a small representation of Canadians who are blind or partially sighted in all workplace industries.

The federal government can play a role in helping to break down barriers to employment for blind or partially sighted Canadians. The federal government should promote hiring blind or partially sighted Canadians. Working with CNIB, the federal government can dispel myths about employee's who have a disability, such as: accommodation costs, health and safety and absentee rates. One of the major barriers to employment is employer's attitudes and lack of understanding of the abilities of people who are blind or partially sighted. A recent Ipsos Reid survey found that one-third of Canadians don't know how to interact appropriately with someone who is blind or partially sighted in a workplace setting. In addition, 70% of Canadian employers say that presented with two fully qualified job candidates, they would hire the sighted candidate over the blind candidate. An attitudinal shift needs to happen and the federal government can help to lead this change.

CNIB has launched a Career Support Program that seeks to increase the number of employed blind or partially sighted Canadians. The program will enable participants to develop the pre-employment and job retention skills required by employees who are blind and partially sighted to be successful at work. CNIB will partner with community organizations that are subject matter experts in areas such as resume writing and job search skills, while addressing "in house" those skills or issues that are blindness specific such as self-advocacy and disclosure. The program will work with employers to create

an employer education program to demonstrate that the knowledge, skills and abilities brought to the table by people with sight loss can not only be equal to their sighted colleagues, but can enhance a work team. The federal government could help to make this program a success by teaming up with CNIB as a partner. In addition, any public outreach on this program would be a benefit.

Ultimately, blind or partially sighted Canadians, when employed, bring new and different perspectives to a business or employer. Different ways of thinking and operating can help to improve and innovate systems and processes. The best part of hiring persons with disabilities is that accessibility tools and practices not only help one employee but all employees.