



# Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultation in Advance of the 2021 Budget

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**Recommendation 1:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$3 million in Budget 2021 for the production of accessible format materials to be distributed through public libraries by the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA).

**Recommendation 2:** That the government commit to multi-year funding of a minimum \$4,000,000 annually to NNELS (National Network for Equitable Library Service) and CELA (Centre for Equitable Library Access) on a permanent and sustained basis to support accessible reading for people in Canada with print disabilities through public libraries in Canada.

**Recommendation 3:** That the government provide funding on an urgent basis to CELA in Budget 2020 to ensure accessible reading material can be provided to vulnerable populations.

## **About CELA**

The Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) is a national non-profit organization founded on the principal of publicly funded support for equitable public library service to people with print disabilities in Canada. As of March 31, 2020, users have borrowed more than 12.3 million books and other media in accessible formats offered by CELA through Canada's public libraries since CELA launched in 2014.

CELA enjoys support across Canada, receiving funding from governments of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, Northwest Territories, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Yukon. CELA also has an in-kind agreement with the national library of Quebec.

In the two provinces currently not funding CELA, individual libraries have opted to subscribe to CELA: 24 libraries in British Columbia covering 82% of the population, and 5 libraries in Manitoba covering 62% of the population. CELA is also in discussions with Manitoba for possible province-wide support. In all, CELA is funded to serve 96% of the Canadian population; in areas not funded, a digital-only version of the service is offered.

## **CELA-CNIB Partnership**

Prior to CELA, the CNIB Library was the predominant supplier of materials for the visually impaired since 1906. In 2012, at the request of the Government of Canada, CNIB developed a service model/business plan proposing a publicly funded national not-for-profit digital hub, separate from CNIB and broadening to include all people with print disabilities. Public libraries were the natural distribution network identified.

In 2013, the federal government provided \$2 million in funding for an incubation period to help establish CELA. That same year, with funding assistance from the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) member libraries and the CNIB, CELA was federally incorporated.

CELA continues to partner with the CNIB, contracting with them to produce books for the CELA collection that are otherwise unavailable in accessible formats. CNIB has been funded primarily by the Government of Canada for this work from CELA's inception. CELA has now assumed responsibility for the request for funding for accessible format production and administration of any funding received. CELA is committed to working with CNIB, public

libraries, and other organizations to make the goal of equitable public library service in Canada a reality.

## **Public Libraries and the Need for CELA**

It is estimated that more than 3 million Canadians have print disabilities.<sup>1</sup> According to Statistics Canada's Survey on Disability in 2017, of those with print disabilities approximately 39% experience varying degrees of visual impairment, 28% have learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia, brain injuries) and the remaining 33% have challenges with dexterity - the ability to handle a book (e.g. arthritis, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's)<sup>2</sup>.

While public libraries provide broad physical and digital collections to their communities, most of the standard formats, discovery tools and reading devices available to access those collections are not suitable for people with print disabilities.

CELA directly addresses these challenges by enabling public libraries to offer an ever-expanding collection of more than 800,000 books and other materials in both digital and physical alternate formats. By centralizing acquisitions, partnering with the largest producer of accessible material in Canada (CNIB) and the largest in the United States (Bookshare) and other content partners, CELA has demonstrated the capacity to offer Canadians with print disabilities local access to an equitable library service, utilizing economies of scale to create efficiencies and minimize costs.

There are 3 key aspects of equitable library access: accessible formats, accessible discovery, and accessible means to read.

First, material must be available in an accessible format. Many Canadians with print disabilities rely on accessible formats for reading, including braille, DAISY audio, and accessible electronic text such as DAISY Text or ePub<sup>3</sup>. With only 7% of printed material available in alternative formats, an unfair disadvantage exists for those who cannot access conventional print<sup>3</sup>.

Second, an accessible entry point to the accessible materials is necessary – a tool to readily discover available content. In libraries, most catalogues and

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/iela/index-e.html>

<sup>2</sup><https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2018002-eng.htm>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/064.nsf/eng/08172.html>

discovery tools for digital collections are not accessible. This was the impetus behind the creation of CELA's new digital platform that is fully accessible and combines the CELA collection with that of Bookshare – a US-based database of over 700,000 accessible titles – into one discovery tool for Canadian public libraries and their eligible patrons.

Third, there must be an accessible means to read the materials. Again, most applications supplied by libraries and library vendors are not accessible. Apps that are specifically for reading books in accessible formats exist and CELA partners with several of the organizations responsible for their development, but many of the commercial digital titles available through libraries cannot be read with these apps.

CELA looks forward to the day when equitable library service will be delivered through the conventional channels that libraries use to support other members of their communities. Until then - until the format, discovery, and means of reading issues are resolved - CELA will continue to seek support for providing service to Canadians with print disabilities through member libraries.

## **Format Choice**

As a service that reflects the values of Canadian public libraries, CELA believes format choice based on the needs of the individual is an essential component of its commitment to patrons. That choice may be related to the content of the material or the specific nature of a person's print disability. Often physical options are chosen due to a lack of equipment needed to use digital options, or lack of comfort using online services. In addition, internet connectivity for those in rural areas or with limited financial means remains an obstacle to a full shift to digital collections.

CELA's collection is entirely digital, but through its contract and partnership with CNIB, DAISY CDs and embossed braille are provided for those patrons who prefer physical formats. These books are delivered using the Literature for the Blind service offered by Canada Post. CELA is also preparing for a digital future, making efforts to support and encourage patrons to shift to digital collections wherever possible.

## **Canada's Commitment to the Marrakesh Treaty and CELA**

In 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.

Canada's commitment to the Marrakesh Treaty benefits Canadians with print disabilities, people with disabilities across the world, and the Canadian government. For people with print disabilities in Canada, the Marrakesh Treaty increases the number of publications available in accessible formats and in a variety of languages. For readers worldwide, the Marrakesh Treaty can allow access to thousands of accessible books published by Canadian authors in both official languages; this particularly helps those in developing and least developed countries, who are Marrakesh Treaty signatories. For the Government of Canada, implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty shows international leadership in responding to the "book famine".

CELA is already delivering on Canada's commitment to the Marrakesh Treaty as a member of the Accessible Books Consortium's Global Book Service. The Service, administered by United Nations' World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), was designed to allow organizations authorized to produce alternative formats from around the world to share files. CELA's collection is currently the most heavily sought after on the Service, with 19,097 titles downloaded by entities in other countries since its launch – 61% of the total number shared and 5 times higher than the next most heavily exchanged entity.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendation 1: That the government provide funding in the amount of \$3 million in Budget 2021 for the production of accessible format materials to be distributed through public libraries by the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA).

This funding is sought primarily to:

- acquire source materials for production
- facilitate and coordinate production and delivery
- maintain the CELA website, catalogue and digital infrastructure
- support users and member libraries at a national level

This funding will allow CELA to create accessible formats of books otherwise unavailable to people with print disabilities, including award winners and

nominees, uniquely Canadian and Indigenous content. It also allows CELA to share this material with other eligible countries, fulfilling the Government of Canada's commitment to the Marrakesh Treaty.

**Recommendation 2:** That the government commit to multi-year funding of a minimum \$4,000,000 annually to NNELS (National Network for Equitable Library Service) and CELA (Centre for Equitable Library Access) on a permanent and sustained basis to support accessible reading for people in Canada with print disabilities through public libraries in Canada.

CELA and NNELS provide a level of access for people with print disabilities that would be unattainable if each individual library were responsible for providing the service within their existing capacity, particularly in the case of small, rural, and First Nations public libraries. Just as importantly, the implementation and nurturing of NNELS' and CELA's services in Canada's public libraries has elevated awareness among public library staff of the needs of people with print disabilities in Canada, inspiring an overall improvement in inclusive service and measurable steps towards reducing barriers and enabling our users to have greater participation in their communities.

It is imperative that the government commit to ongoing funding for both NNELS and CELA representing the accessible reading sector, to help support an equitable reading landscape in Canada for people with print disabilities.

NNELS is requesting ongoing \$1 million in funding to continue work in the following areas:

- Advancing the agenda of accessible publishing;
- Building capacity and offering quality employment opportunities to people with print disabilities;
- Offering on-demand production of books requested by library users, growing the collection of books in accessible formats for people with print disabilities in Canada through public libraries.

CELA is requesting ongoing \$3 million in federal funding to continue work in the following areas:

- Increasing accessible format production;
- Leveraging collaborations to increase the depth and breadth of materials available in accessible formats through public libraries across Canada;

- Offering format choice by distributing DAISY CDs and embossed Braille.

NNELS and CELA are committed to ensuring that all content purchased and produced with federal funds is made available to all Canadians with print disabilities. We will continue to support each other and work together through shared content purchasing agreements and other collective initiatives that will support the diverse reading needs of people with print disabilities in Canada.

Recommendation 3: That the government provide funding on an urgent basis to CELA in Budget 2020 to ensure accessible reading material can be provided to vulnerable populations.

Canadians with disabilities have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19; CELA has heard from users, their families and other supporters that CELA has been more important to them than ever during the pandemic. Without confirmation of federal funding for 2020-21, there will be a significant reduction to CELA's services in the coming months.

## **Conclusion**

The funds CELA is seeking from the Government of Canada will continue to support CELA's efforts to provide library access to reading materials for people with print disabilities that is inclusive, barrier-free and equitable. This, in turn, ensures people with print disabilities are more able to fully participate in their community and contribute to the social, cultural, and economic development and success of their local communities and Canada as a whole.