

**Written Submission for the  
Pre-Budget Consultations  
in Advance of the  
Upcoming 2021 Federal Budget**

**By:**

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## **Introduction:**

# **1 HEALTH CARE ISSUES**

## **ACCESS TO VACCINATIONS IN THE HOME**

It is recommended that the Minister of Health mandate provincial governments to create and implement programs designed for these most vulnerable groups that will allow for the delivery of flu shots and, when available, a vaccine for COVID-19 to them in their homes.

# **2 EMPLOYMENT ISSUES**

It is recommended that advice on how to access government funding to offset their loss in income be provided through an accessible website and that this link be provided by communication from government and patient groups.

It's recommended that the government provide financial support in the form of a subsidy for the acquisition of accessible technology for those who have self-financed their requirements.

It is recommended that the government in collaboration with stakeholders investigate the creation of an affirmative action program to investigate the potential of this suggestion and to audit the effectiveness of present employment programs.

It is recommended that subsidies be available for people who are also retired and who are in financial difficulty due to the COVID-19 pandemic and who represent almost half of the population of people with vision loss.

### **3 ONLINE COMMUNICATION AND ACCESSIBILITY**

It's recommended that all online communication on COVID-19 be accessible and that the federal government tag all documents available online as being accessible for those with seeing disabilities.

It's recommended that websites at all levels of government meet the four pillars of accessibility: that they're perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. It's further recommended that these same governments ensure that their websites meet the highest recognized international (European) standard of accessibility. Furthermore, it's recommended that now may be the best time to create new accessibility standards. National communication strategy

It's recommended that at this time there be an immediate, nationally co-ordinated strategy implemented to accomplish the dissemination of information for people with disabilities and, in this case, for people with vision loss.

It's recommended that the federal government take the lead role in providing the guidance and financial support to provinces. This could then be designed to each specific circumstance outlined above, allowing them to oversee the assistance necessary for Canada's municipalities and to provide quality programs, solutions, and functionality to their residents with disabilities.

We support the Emergency Coalition of Canadian Charities in its letter of March 25, 2020<sup>1</sup>, and those subsequent, to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Ministers "requesting urgent financial aid and federal action to prevent our organizations from suffering irreparable damage amid the COVID-19 pandemic."

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<sup>1</sup> Emergency Coalition of Canadian Charities. Emergency charity letter to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Ministers. March 25, 2020.

The coalition of over 230 leaders from Canadian charities provides invaluable ongoing support to the 6.2 million Canadians living with disabilities. The resulting economic fallout from the COVID-19 crisis is a threat to Canada's vital charitable sector and its ability to provide critical services to those who are most vulnerable. It's recommended that the government support the efforts of Canada's charities to help us be there for those who need us most.

### **Recommendation 1:**

The ATP program should be established as a permanent program. The need for proactive intervention to ensure that emerging technologies are accessible to people with disabilities does not end. Technology is advancing exponentially. The incidence of vision loss is also increasing. The ATP is essential to support Canada's human right commitments, but also the economic welfare of Canada.

### **Recommendation 2:**

Invest in forecasting efforts and research to determine technology trends and proactively intervene to ensure that emerging technologies and their associated practices are built accessibly from the start and that the needs of people with disabilities are included in the emerging designs. That the ATP be expanded in scope, recognizing that the program has the potential to play an important leadership role in cross-departmental government collaboration and meeting Canada's accessibility commitments. The ATP can assist and inform CASDO standards as they relate to technology.

### **Recommendation 3:**

Recognizing that socio-economic barriers and cost are major factors, that the Government initiate the creation of a complimentary national Assistive Device Program, consistent with Ontario's, dedicated to ensuring the availability of accessible and assistive technology and access to the digital economy for low-income, economically-stressed people with disabilities. This program could, for example, encourage/enable vision care professionals (i.e. optometrists, ophthalmologists, and vision rehabilitation, education, and training organizations) to prescribe accessible and assistive technologies to people with disabilities as deemed necessary, in consideration of the enormous cost barriers that assistive technologies can pose for people with disabilities, specifically those with vision loss. This measure could act as a practical method for disseminating the innovative technologies supported by the ATP and others, allowing

them to reach the highest number of Canadians who are living with blindness and vision loss and have a positive impact on their quality of life.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

That the ATP, in cross-departmental cooperation with the departments identified in the above Recommendation 14, advocate for the Government of Canada, an essential partner, in consultation with the seeing disability community and its stakeholders, to develop and implement a national vision health plan, as recommended by the Canadian Association of Optometrists, the Canadian Council of the Blind, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, and Fighting Blindness Canada in their 2017 document, *The Federal Role in Eye Health and Vision Care*,<sup>6</sup> with the goal of providing the best possible outcomes and quality of care and rehabilitation for Canadians who are blind and partially-sighted.

#### **Recommendation 5:**

Advocate for a pan-Canadian population health study on the prevalence and causation of vision loss in Canada in order to have solid data on which to base planning for the ATP.

#### **Recommendation 6:**

In collaboration with other Departments, undertake a survey of people with seeing disabilities on employment in the vision loss community, which should include, for example, questions on: job search, barriers, accessibility, inclusion, the use of assistive technology, devices, entering the digital economy, employment standards, education and training, equal opportunity, workplace bias, and more.

#### **Recommendation 7:**

Initiate implementation of one of the Liberal Party of Canada's 2019 federal election platform commitments: More Accessible Workplaces and Schools through a new \$40 million per year national workplace accessibility fund (page 13 of the Liberal Platform). The ATP must be part of the implementation of this commitment, given the common objective of connecting disabled Canadians to the workforce and the digital economy.

#### **Recommendation 8:**

Work with people with seeing disabilities to establish their real needs. Very often, people with seeing disabilities don't know what could be available until they meet with device or software developers who can open up the technological world for them. Only fund the development of technology that employs people who are blind or visually-

impaired as part of the development team, as their knowledge would be very useful to the ATP.

### **Recommendation 9:**

Consult organizations such as the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) in the development of new technology. The *Canadian Survey on Disability 2017* clearly identifies the growing number of aging people with a seeing disability. New technologies need to take into account that many older people may not be as savvy with respect to the use of technology.

### **SUPPLEMENTARY:**

- The Canadian Council of the Blind supports and reiterates the recommendations of Fighting Blindness Canada's written submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in advance of the upcoming 2021 Federal Budget dated August 6, 2020.
- The Canadian Council of the Blind would be pleased to appear before the committee to expand on the recommendations made herein.