



Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario

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“Together We Are Stronger”

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**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget
Consultations in Advance of the 2020 Budget
to the Minister of Finance and The House of
Commons Standing Committee on Finance**

<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/FINA/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=10877390>

from

Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario (CWDO)

August 5, 2020

Recommendations - Summary

Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario (CWDO) recommends that the Federal Government:

1. Stay the course regarding previously announced accessibility commitments, namely:

- a) Accessibility - \$290 million over six years, starting in 2018–19, to implement the Accessible Canada Act
- b) Employment – \$13.7 million over five years, starting in 2019–20, with \$2.9 million per year ongoing, to help address technological barriers in federal government workplaces, \$12 million over three years, starting in 2019–20, for the “Ready, Willing and Able” program and \$1.0 million, in 2019–20, if not already expended, to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind
- c) Accessible Reading Materials – \$3.0 million in 2019–20 to produce new accessible reading materials that will be available through public libraries across Canada and \$22.8 million over five years, starting in 2019–20, to assist Canada’s independent book publishing industry in increasing their production of accessible books for persons with print disabilities
- d) Technology - \$0.5 million in 2019–20, if not already expended, towards finding ways to improve the accessibility of electronic payment terminals
- e) R.D.S.P. – Improvements to the Registered Disability Savings Plan will benefit those with episodic disabilities and offer new, limited protections from bankruptcy seizures.
- f) National Dementia Strategy – \$50 million over five years, starting in 2019–20, to support the strategy
- g) Medicine –\$500 million per year, starting in 2022-23, to help cover the cost of drugs for rare diseases
- h) G.I.S. – \$1.8 billion over four years to enhance the guaranteed income supplement for low-income seniors. Low-income working seniors will be able to earn more without giving up GIS benefits.

- i) Connectivity – Promise of high-speed internet for all Canadians by 2030.

2. Invest in new measures to help address the devastating and disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has brought to people with disabilities namely:

- a) Look at all government spending through an accessibility lens
- b) Address the need for national health strategies as soon as possible including Pharma-Care and rare diseases, dental and physiotherapy
- c) Address the need for increased mental health interventions due to depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation brought about by a prolonged period of isolation
- d) Address disproportionate disadvantages brought about by COVID-19 such as income disparities, the need for persons with disabilities and/or family members to purchase personal protective equipment and hire health support workers

Introduction

Citizens With Disabilities - Ontario (CWDO) is committed to the rights of all persons to participate fully in the civil, cultural, economic, political and social life of their communities.

We actively promote the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of persons with disabilities through community development, social action, and member support and referral. Our primary activity is public education and awareness about the social and physical barriers that prevent the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in Ontario.

We are a cross-disability organization who act in the interests of the 1.85 million Ontarians who live with one or more disabilities. Our registered members reside in almost every electoral district in the province.

Our recommendations will not only benefit persons with disabilities, but by extension, will benefit Ontario society.

The recommendations set out below will outline key budget initiatives we believe will make accessibility a reality for persons with disabilities

and address the devastating impact and legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic which hit early in 2020.

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Canada has been hit hard by COVID-19. It is time to help our nation rebuild. People with disabilities can be part of the solution once some basic accessibility investments are in play.

We haven't forgotten that in June 2010, the Martin Prosperity Institute released a study, *"Releasing Constraints: Projecting the Economic Impacts of Increased Accessibility in Ontario."* It was commissioned by the Government of Ontario, to examine the potential economic impact of achieving substantially higher levels of accessibility. See <http://martinprosperity.org/content/releasing-constraints-projecting-the-economic-impacts-of-increased-accessibility-in-ontario/>.

The Martin Prosperity Institute confirmed through this study that there are opportunities for economic gains when we enable a higher proportion of Ontarians to participate fully in the province's economy – particularly in workplaces and schools.

When people with disabilities are able to participate in the workforce in greater numbers, not only will they have more personal spending power, but the Martin Prosperity Institute projects that it could increase Ontario's GDP per capita by up to \$600 annually.

To recover from COVID-19 financially, we need to enable *all* Canadians to achieve their economic goals. It will benefit the economy to have people with disabilities working and doing our part to boost revenue.

Because people with disabilities are still lagging behind our non-disabled cohort, we have even more road to make up. It is not acceptable to allow the gaps between people with disabilities and their non-disabled cohort continue to widen. Government intervention is critical now.

The Martin Prosperity Institute reviewed research on the costs of social exclusion and found that exclusion exacts significant costs from the entire province through increased health care demands and poverty-related social problems. These costs impact not only persons with

disabilities but have a significant impact on their families and communities.

Social exclusion has been exacerbated for everyone, but people with disabilities who often have smaller circles of friends, family and colleagues experience it more deeply.

Recommendations

Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario (CWDO) is aware of the tremendous financial pressure the government is under an effort to stimulate the economy and ensure that all Canadians have a minimum level of income, particularly if they have been laid off due to COVID-19. These concerns were top of mind as we make the following recommendations to the federal government.

1. **Stay the course regarding previously announced accessibility commitments.** We do not want the government to lose sight of previously announced an initiative to assist people with disabilities, to benefit from accessibility initiative. As announced in last year's budget, we recommend the federal government honour its previous commitments, namely:
 - a) **Accessibility** - \$290 million over six years, starting in 2018–19, to implement the Accessible Canada Act. This is a key commitment which will ensure Canadians live in an accessible country and able to benefit from all it has to offer. Canadians with disabilities will be able to participate in the economy as barriers continue to be removed or prevented, thereby assisting all Canadians to recover from losses due to COVID-19.
 - b) **Employment** – \$13.7 million over five years, starting in 2019–20, with \$2.9 million per year ongoing, to help address technological barriers in federal government workplaces, \$12 million over three years, starting in 2019–20, for the "Ready, Willing and Able" program and \$1.0 million, in 2019–20, if not already expended, to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. Restart and continue these initiatives as needed.
 - c) **Accessible Reading Materials** – \$3.0 million in 2019–20 to produce new accessible reading materials that will be available through public libraries across Canada and \$22.8 million over five years, starting in 2019–20, to assist

Canada's independent book publishing industry in increasing their production of accessible books for persons with print disabilities. Accessible reading materials will assist students and employees with disabilities to benefit from educational materials.

- d) **Technology** - \$0.5 million in 2019–20, if not already expended, towards finding ways to improve the accessibility of electronic payment terminals. When this barrier to people with disabilities making purchases is addressed, it is likely to increase spending on the part of people with disabilities, which will help stimulate the economy.
- e) **R.D.S.P.** – Improvements to the Registered Disability Savings Plan will benefit those with episodic disabilities and offer new, limited protections from bankruptcy seizures. This will provide additional protection and incentives to people with disabilities to save money for their future.
- f) **National Dementia Strategy** – \$50 million over five years, starting in 2019–20, to support the strategy. This focused initiative will not only help people living with dementia but will help support their families and caregivers as well.
- g) **Medicine** –\$500 million per year, starting in 2022-23, to help cover the cost of drugs for rare diseases. With the cost of many new pharmaceutical therapies being out of reach, assistance with medicines to support those living with rare diseases is important.
- h) **G.I.S.** – \$1.8 billion over four years to enhance the guaranteed income supplement for low-income seniors. Low-income working seniors will be able to earn more without giving up GIS benefits. The incidence of disability increases with age and so benefits to increase income for seniors also benefits people with disabilities. These much-needed dollars will go promote additional spending on necessities like food and shelter.
- i) **Connectivity** – Promise of high-speed internet for all Canadians by 2030. The Internet is vital to participation in today's society as it is being used by all sectors to connect us to each other for business, pleasure, medical care and advocacy.

2. Invest in new measures to help address the devastating and disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has brought to

people with disabilities. We have seen how vulnerable Canadians with disabilities are as their support systems quickly eroded due to COVID-19. Therefore, we recommend:

- a) **Look at all government spending through an accessibility lens.** This means making sure that government dollars are not spent on anything that will create or perpetuate accessibility barriers to people with disabilities. Before spending government money, decision-making should ensure that people with disabilities will be included because each purchase or expenditure has built into its purchase criteria a detailed checklist specifying how accessibility is to be addressed. This could be for a website, a building, bank, not-for-profit organization or charity, etc.
- b) **Address the need for national health strategies as soon as possible** including Pharma-Care and rare diseases, dental and physiotherapy. People with disabilities are historically unemployed or precariously employed and therefore are with the half of Canadians who do not have health benefits associated with employment. Many Canadians with disabilities have reported they cannot afford to look after their health because the costs of medications, particularly those for rare diseases, dental care and physiotherapy are beyond reach. With this appropriate support, many people with disabilities will be able to contribute directly to the economy – likely to a greater extent than the cost of their benefits under a national health strategy.
- c) **Address the need for increased mental health interventions** due to depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation brought about by a prolonged period of isolation. Report after report is describing the mental health impacts on Canadians following the “lockdown” necessitated to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The need for increased access to mental health interventions is acute, particularly for 18-30 -year-olds and must be addressed. If neglected, this cohort may become reliant on public assistance for life, joining the swelling ranks of people with disabilities.
- d) **Address disproportionate disadvantages brought about by COVID-19** such as income disparities, the need for persons with disabilities and/or family members to purchase personal protective equipment and hire health

support workers. To distance themselves, many people with disabilities shop online, have groceries delivered and try to do things independently. However, the cost of these “conveniences” is higher when delivered to your home. People with disabilities will benefit from one-time income support such as the \$600 recently announced. Additional infusions like the \$600 will help people with disabilities get needed supplies. We also encourage discussions about a “Basic Income” strategy to further insulate people with disabilities against poverty.

CONCLUSION

We urge you to give our recommendations your sincere and serious consideration.

With budget initiatives to address the needs of persons with disabilities, Canada can help ensure its citizens with disabilities will recover from the devastating and lingering aftermath of COVID-19 and contribute to the rebuilding the economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tracy Odell".

Tracy Odell
President