

WRITTEN SUBMISSION FOR THE PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS IN ADVANCE OF THE UPCOMING FEDERAL BUDGET

BY:
**VECOVA CENTRE FOR DISABILITY SERVICES AND
RESEARCH**



LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation #1:

The Government of Canada work with the provinces, territories, municipalities and the disability community to address the unique short- and long-term challenges faced by persons with disabilities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond to support their successful recovery.

Recommendation #2:

The Government of Canada through capital stimulus funding, create a specific stream through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program dedicated to Canada's disability population with the federal government covering up to 65% of eligible project costs.

Recommendation #3:

The Government of Canada include a capital investment of \$50 million for the new Vecova Centre for All Abilities in the 2021 capital plan to allow Vecova to proceed with its \$81.5 million project which will address the needs of persons with disabilities in Alberta.



SUBMISSION

INTRODUCTION TO VECOVA

For more than half a century, Vecova has been a Canadian leader in serving persons with disabilities. We are a leader in Canada's abilities community. We believe that everyone should have an active and engaged quality of life that enables meaningful connections and contribution to the world. We support people with progressive practices that integrate our programs and services, social research and innovation, and enterprises to achieve: good health and wellbeing; inclusive, appropriate, safe and affordable housing; and inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for Albertans of all abilities.

Vecova's origins were rooted in a desire to create an innovative organization giving persons with disabilities the opportunity to lead fulfilling lives and become part of the broader community. Vecova emerged in the 1960s-era movement to recognize the rights of all people – including those living with disabilities – to live and participate in community. Our current facility opened in 1969, and for the past 50+ years, Vecova has served as a point of connection for all Calgarians.

A disability can affect anyone at any time – making it one of the most unique minority groups in Canada. People from communities across Calgary and surrounding areas come to Vecova to engage in our programs and services. People with physical disabilities, those with complex medical and behavioral needs, children and youth experiencing mental health challenges, and people recovering from life-altering injuries engage in our programs and services.

The demand for our work has grown by more than 50% in the past five years as more people seek supports to meet increasingly complex social and economic challenges. Today, 1 in 7 Albertans identify as experiencing a disability. That number is predicted to grow to 1 in 5 within the next 5 years. As such, our 50+ year old facility is no longer viable to the increasing level of demand we are experiencing. The building requires widespread mechanical, electrical and envelope upgrades to meet current building codes and a complete redesign is required to meet the changing needs of people who depend on us. Extensive analysis has confirmed the costs of renovations would far outstrip that of a new building and still not meet the future needs of persons with disabilities. A new purpose-built centre is the only solution.

To deliver on this vision Vecova has developed a comprehensive capital plan to build a new facility. The Vecova Centre for All Abilities will be one of the largest purpose built centres for people with disabilities in Canada encompassing approximately 160,000 square feet, it will support our goals by:

- Building a more inclusive workforce through the creation of a new Employment Centre with expanded programs and services for persons with barriers to employment that focus on youth transition, work experience, and job skills and social entrepreneurship.
- Champion health and wellness and create opportunities for individuals to improve their physical, mental and social wellbeing through the creation of a state-of-the-art Wellness Centre that includes warm water therapy pools, adaptable fitness centre, physiotherapy and mental health counselling
- Foster an environment of inclusion and a sense of belonging for Calgarians through safe and inviting spaces that provide a variety of amenities to enhance their experience and interaction. A new centre for small businesses and social enterprise initiatives who are actively engaged in social interaction and research will develop new ideas to support persons with disabilities.
- Grow and broaden existing and new revenue-generating social enterprises to ensure Vecova's continued sustainability. Our robust financial model has been peer reviewed and shows a sustainable organization now and into the future.



The new Vecova Centre for All Abilities will be the heart of our operations focusing on the needs of persons with disabilities in a place that welcomes all abilities. When we open new doors, we will have a profound opportunity to engage Calgarians from all walks of life and every neighbourhood.

RECOMMENDATION #1: ADDRESS UNIQUE CHALLENGES FACING THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY

The COVID-19 pandemic has been hard on all Canadians, but we know that vulnerable people are impacted most severely. The Public Health Agency of Canada has identified that certain people, like those with disabilities, are at an increased risk of infection and are likely to see more negative impacts of social isolation measures. 2017 data from Statistics Canada shows that 42% of Canadians aged 70 and older living in private dwellings have one or more disabilities. Data also shows that nearly half of people living with disabilities require assistance for daily activities because of their condition. Canada's disability population will need significant support from all orders of government as we look towards our collective recovery from this public health crisis.

*IN HEALTH EMERGENCIES, PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES MAY BE LESS LIKELY TO BE
PRIORITIZED IN RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND
PRIORITY SETTING.*

- COVID-19: CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES,
UNICEF

Across the country, we have seen various sector-specific responses at both the provincial and federal level, including for the disability community. Minister Qualtrough's **COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group** is a great first step towards recognizing that the experience of vulnerable Canadians is unique and requires consideration for a unique response. Developing a response that can address both the short and long-term challenges faced by the disability community will be critical to both the recovery of the individual as well as the country. Promoting the inclusion of the disability population in the workforce supports the well-being of the individual.

RECOMMENDATION #2: DISABILITY SPECIFIC ICIP STREAM THROUGH CAPITAL STIMULUS FUNDING

We are encouraged to see all orders of government commit to capital stimulus funding to ensure Canada's economic recovery from the COVID-19 health crisis. We are awaiting further details on what funding may be available from the Government of Canada. Based on the conversations we have had to date we understand funding will most likely come through an additional round of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP).

ICIP is a program that Vecova is familiar with having gone through the application process in 2019. Unfortunately, our most recent application was not selected by the Government of Alberta. While we were disappointed that our project was not selected, our team received positive feedback on the value and need for the project and have incorporated other feedback received into our recast capital plan.

Unfortunately, projects that would benefit people with a disability are in competition with many other worthy infrastructure projects through the ICIP program. Across the country there is a glaring absence of significant infrastructure investments that would directly contribute to the betterment of Canada's disability community. While the existing Enabling Accessibility Fund has demonstrated its value on a smaller scale, it has also highlighted an unnecessary ceiling on funding for infrastructure that is critical



to the disability community. This type of funding is not a nice-to-have addition to an existing building but rather shifts the perspective to create something from the beginning that reflects the accessibility needs of this population. Consideration should be given to expanding this existing program to include a large-scale stream.

ICIP currently has specific streams of funding for municipal projects, indigenous projects and other categories. Most recently the Government of Canada announced a \$3.3 billion COVID-19 resilience fund with the federal government covering up to 80% of eligible costs. This is a welcomed move and demonstrates that the federal government is prepared to step up and provide significant funding to key priority areas.

*OUR GOVERNMENT RECOGNIZES THAT WITH THE
HEALTH AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES
PRESENTED BY COVID-19, WE NEED TO SUPPORT
CANADIANS AND PROTECT THEIR HEALTH,
IMPROVE THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE, AND CREATE
JOBS.*

**- THE HONOURABLE CATHERINE MCKENNA, MINISTER OF INFRASTRUCTURE
AND COMMUNITIES – AUGUST 5, 2020**

The establishment of a unique stream to benefit those with disabilities could ensure these important investments are more likely to be selected by provincial governments. Given that accessibility requirements are costly, the creation of this stream could ensure a more consistent approach to disability inclusion that addresses the inequalities that are not currently addressed through infrastructure investments in the current process. We see the new Vecova Centre for All Abilities as a possible flagship investment, but smaller scale investments to improve accessibility of Canada's infrastructure footprint could also be in high demand and funded through such a stream.

The Government of Canada has made substantial commitments to the disability community, namely, to promote disability inclusion. Most notably is the initiative to improve the economic inclusion of persons with disabilities and specifically target barriers to full participation in the labour force. We would propose that the Government of Canada not only create a disability funding stream through ICIP, but also cover up to 65% of eligible construction costs. This would be comparable to the 75% covered through Indigenous projects and the 60% that could be covered for municipal projects. A commitment of this magnitude would send a strong signal to other orders of government that support for disability populations be a higher priority with key opportunities to leverage significant federal funding.

RECOMMENDATION #3: DIRECT FUNDING THROUGH 2021 GOVERNMENT OF CANADA CAPITAL PLAN

Our project can be shovel ready for the 2021 construction season, so timing will be critical. The long-term benefits of our project have been outlined above, and the construction of our facility could also act as a catalyst for job creation of 175 FTE and economic recovery over the next 24 months of construction.



As mentioned previously, our project has been rescaled to reflect feedback offered during our ICIP application. The first phase of our project is estimated at \$81.5 million. Should funding specific to people with disabilities not be available through a subsequent round of ICIP, we request that the Government of Canada include an investment of \$50 million for phase one of our project. This funding could be leveraged to bring on additional funding commitments from both the Government of Alberta and The City of Calgary. Our team has already undertaken important discussions with other orders of government to progress our capital plan.

Funding the project directly would forego some of the bureaucratic challenges that exist through bi-lateral agreements between the federal and provincial governments. A specific investment would also provide clarity on this government's attentiveness to the unique challenges facing Canada's disability population.

