

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of Budget 2026

The Disability Agenda

Submitted by the National Disability Network:

- Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
- Association pour la santé
environnementale du Québec /
Environmental Health Association of
Quebec
- Autism Alliance of Canada
- Canadian Association of the Deaf
- Canadian Council on Rehabilitation
and Work
- Canadian Down Syndrome Society
- Council of Canadians with Disabilities
- CNIB
- COPHAN
- Disability Alliance BC
- Disabled Women's Network of Canada
(DAWN)
- Easter Seals Canada
- Inclusion Canada
- Independent Living Canada
- Indigenous Disability Canada
- L'Arche Canada
- March of Dimes Canada
- Muscular Dystrophy Canada
- People First of Canada
- Plan Institute
- Realize
- Rick Hansen Foundation
- Spinal Cord Injury Canada
- Wavefront Centre for Communication
Accessibility

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation #1 - Legislate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) into Canadian law to establish a clear, enforceable rights framework across federal jurisdiction and provide a durable foundation for coordinated federal investment in accessibility and disability inclusion.

Recommendation #2 - Fund a comprehensive reform of disability eligibility processes and implement a modernized federal disability eligibility system by creating a centralized, accessible, and portable disability determination process and status, independent of the tax system, reducing administrative inefficiencies and enabling more effective and targeted program spending across government.

Recommendation #3 – Provide resources to develop, implement, and enforce a Government of Canada Disability Inclusion Policy across all departments and agencies that require a disability inclusion lens across all federal decision-making and prevents the creation of new barriers, ensuring that federal investments deliver inclusive outcomes and maximize economic and social returns.

Recommendation #4 - Strengthen the Canada Disability Benefit by committing to increase the value of the benefit amount over the government’s mandate, improve benefit eligibility, and coordinate benefits with the provinces and territories to reduce poverty-related costs, support labour market participation, and improve long-term economic outcomes.

Recommendation #5 – Require accessibility and disability inclusion as a core condition of funding across all federally funded housing, infrastructure and procurement programs and investments - supported by targeted funding for inclusive housing and built environment accessibility initiatives, to improve access to inclusive housing, enhance community participation, and increase the long-term value and sustainability of public infrastructure investments.

Recommendation #6 - Increase and stabilize funding for employment programs for persons with disabilities, including the Opportunities Fund, as part of a broader labour market strategy to strengthen labour force participation and productivity, and to ensure inclusive economic growth.

Overview

Canada has established a strong foundation for disability inclusion through the Accessible Canada Act (ACA) and the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP). These frameworks recognize accessibility as a human right and commit Canada to a barrier-free country by 2040, creating a foundation for sustained public investment in inclusive systems and infrastructure.

Significant systemic gaps remain in Government of Canada policy, program delivery, and service provision. As a result, persons with disabilities continue to face barriers that impose both human and economic costs that constrain participation and increase long-term public expenditures. These include:

- Persistent poverty
- Fragmented and burdensome eligibility systems
- Limited access to affordable, accessible housing
- Ongoing labour market exclusion

Addressing these barriers is both a human rights obligation and a strategic economic investment. Increased inclusion strengthens labour force participation, improves productivity, reduces reliance on income supports over time, and supports long-term economic growth. Budget 2026 is a critical opportunity to align federal spending with these objectives and shift from commitments to measurable outcomes.

The six recommendations in this submission are drawn from the National Disability Network's identified priority actions for the Government of Canada to advance disability rights, inclusion, and economic security, as set out in *The Disability Agenda: National Advocacy Priorities for the Government of Canada (2026–2029)*.

Guiding Principles

Federal investments and policy actions should be guided by:

- **Nothing Without Us** – Persons with disabilities must be meaningfully involved in and inform the design, implementation, and monitoring of laws, policies, and programs.
- **Rights-Based and Disability Justice-Informed Approach** – Disability policy must be rooted in human rights and address the systemic barriers that drive exclusion.

- **Intersectionality** – Disability intersects with race, gender, Indigeneity, age, and socio-economic status, requiring inclusive and responsive policy design.
- **Accessibility by Default** – Accessibility must be designed into systems from the outset, removing the burden on individuals to seek or justify accommodations.
- **Accountability** – Commitments must be accompanied by clear responsibility, transparent public reporting, and evaluation based on real-world outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Detailed Recommendations:

Legislate the CRPD into Canadian Law

Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) sixteen years ago, yet the Convention has not been expressly incorporated into domestic law. With 2026 being the 20th anniversary of the CRPD, the Government of Canada has a timely opportunity to affirm Canada’s commitment to disability rights.

Recommendation #1 - Allocate funding to develop and implement legislation incorporating the CRPD into Canadian law.

This legislation should:

- Affirm the CRPD as binding in federal jurisdiction
- Require alignment of federal laws and policies with the Convention
- Establish mechanisms for monitoring, reporting, and accountability
- Formalize consultation requirements with persons with disabilities

Embedding the CRPD into domestic law will strengthen policy coherence and provide a clear framework for federal investment decisions, ensuring that funding across departments aligns with a consistent rights-based approach.

Impact: Establishes a durable legal foundation for disability rights, strengthens policy alignment, and supports more effective and coordinated federal investment.

A New Approach to Federal Disability Eligibility

Current eligibility rules for federal disability programs, services, and benefits are fragmented, inconsistent, and often experienced as burdensome, stigmatizing and exclusionary. Disability policy is too frequently driven by tax policy, and the Disability Tax

Credit (DTC) has become an inappropriate and access-limiting gatekeeper for a growing number of programs, including the Canada Disability Benefit.

Recommendation #2 - Fund a comprehensive reform of disability eligibility processes and implement a modernized federal disability eligibility system.

Key elements should include:

- Use of the *Accessible Canada Act* definition of disability
- A centralized disability status determination process outside the Canada Revenue Agency that is dignified, accessible and rights-based
- Processes grounded in dignity, with strong procedural protections and supported decision-making, and aligned with modern disability policy principles

The system should produce a portable disability status that:

- Applies across federal programs
- Eliminates repeated reassessments
- Reduces administrative burden

Impact: Improves access to benefits, reduces administrative inefficiencies and costs, and ensures federal investments are delivered fairly, consistently, and effectively.

A Government-Wide Disability Inclusion Policy

Despite existing commitments, disability inclusion is not yet consistently embedded across federal decision-making. As a result, new barriers continue to be created through policies, investments, services, and programs that are not designed with disability in mind.

Recommendation #3 - Budget 2026 should provide resources to develop, implement, and enforce a Government of Canada Disability Inclusion Policy across all departments and agencies.

This policy should:

- Require a disability inclusion lens in all federal decisions
- Prevent the creation of new barriers
- Apply across all departments and agencies
- Be supported by training, tools, and accountability mechanisms

Embedding disability inclusion into federal decision-making processes ensures that public investments—across infrastructure, programs, and services—are inclusive by design, reducing future costs associated with retrofits, exclusions, and program inefficiencies.

Impact: Ensures that federal spending delivers inclusive outcomes, prevents costly barriers, and maximizes the long-term return on public investment.

Strengthen the Canada Disability Benefit

The Canada Disability Benefit represents a historic milestone in addressing affordability issues (housing/food insecurity) and in reducing poverty among persons with disabilities. But current levels are insufficient to reduce disability poverty, and benefit eligibility is determined by tax analysts. Canada Disability Benefit payments are at risk of being clawed back by provinces and territories, the consequence being no additional income for recipients or putting pre-existing benefits in jeopardy.

Recommendation #4 - Strengthen the Canada Disability Benefit by committing to increase the value of the benefit amount over the government’s mandate, improve benefit eligibility, and coordinate benefits with the provinces and territories.

This includes:

- A multi-year plan to raise benefit levels to reduce poverty
- A new eligibility process outside of the CRA and DTC, as proposed in Recommendation #2
- Federal–provincial/territorial agreements to eliminate benefit claw backs
- Improved federal-provincial/territorial coordination of income supports

Strengthening the Canada Disability Benefit represents a strategic investment that reduces poverty-related costs, supports labour market participation, and improves long-term economic outcomes.

Impact: Addresses affordability (housing/food insecurity) pressures, strengthens economic security, lowers long-term social costs, and supports increased economic participation.

Invest in Accessible, Inclusive and Affordable Housing

Across Canada, people with disabilities face significantly reduced choice in where and how they live because housing—and the surrounding built environment of transportation, public

spaces, and community infrastructure—creates or perpetuates barriers. This is particularly so in Indigenous communities, where historic underinvestment has compounded barriers.

The Government of Canada is making historic investments in housing and infrastructure. But accessibility is not a core condition of federally funded infrastructure, housing, and procurement programs. Funding for inclusive housing is virtually non-existent, and the minimal funding available for accessibility retrofits is woefully inadequate.

Recommendation #5 - Require accessibility and disability inclusion as a core condition of funding across all federally funded housing, infrastructure and procurement programs and investments - supported by targeted funding for inclusive housing and built environment accessibility initiatives.

This includes:

- Embedding accessibility as a core funding condition
- Establishing a harmonized national framework for accessible and inclusive housing
- Supporting inclusive, community-based housing over segregated models
- Funding accessibility retrofits
- Investing in accessibility in Indigenous communities
- Strengthening coordination across federal housing initiatives

Impact: Expands access to inclusive housing, improves community participation, and enhances the long-term value and sustainability of public infrastructure investments.

Reduce Barriers to Employment

The Government of Canada has identified employment as a priority area in both the Accessible Canada Act and the Disability Inclusion Action Plan and has created an Employment Strategy for Canadians with disabilities. This is in recognition of the ongoing employment barriers, discrimination and exclusion faced by persons with disabilities across Canada. It also recognizes that employment of persons with disabilities strengthens the economic growth and sustainability of Canada by expanding the workforce, filling labour shortages, increasing GDP and productivity, driving innovation and business success, and boosting consumer spending.

The success of these initiatives depends on stable and adequate investment.

Recommendation #6 - Increase and stabilize funding for employment programs for persons with disabilities, including the Opportunities Fund, as part of a broader labour market strategy.

This should:

- Scale proven national initiatives
- Support disability-led organizations
- Ensure employment results in a net financial benefit
- Support collaboration with provinces and territories to expand employment pathways

Targeted investments in employment supports for persons with disabilities will expand Canada's labour force, address skills shortages, and increase productivity.

Impact: Increases labour force participation, strengthens inclusive economic growth, and generates long-term fiscal benefits through increased earnings and tax revenues.

Conclusion

The Government of Canada has committed to a barrier-free Canada by 2040. Budget 2026 is an opportunity to accelerate progress by aligning federal investments with this goal and ensuring that public spending delivers measurable improvements in accessibility, inclusion, and economic participation.

Investing in disability inclusion is both a human rights imperative and a sound economic strategy. Modernizing systems, strengthening income supports, and embedding accessibility across federal investments will reduce long-term costs, expand labour force participation, and improve overall economic resilience.

The National Disability Network is committed to working in partnership with the federal government to advance these priorities and ensure lasting impact.

About Us:

The National Disability Network is a collaborative coalition of national, regional, and community-based organizations representing persons with disabilities across Canada. It brings together disability-led organizations, advocacy organizations, and service providers to advance shared priorities on disability rights, accessibility, and inclusion, reflecting diverse lived experiences and working collectively to inform federal policy and drive systemic change.

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